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CLEAGE

A RHETORICAL STUDY OF BLACK RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Myran Elizabeth Lewis, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1974

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In my estimation, Cleage is a prophet. If you read the Old Testament, you will see good parallels. No, I find no problem with that notion at all. He is a prophet.

Reverend James H. Cone
Professor, Union Theological Seminary
New York.
February 24, 1974
CHAPTER I

CLEAGE

A RHETORICAL STUDY OF BLACK RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

Introduction

There is strong opposition in some groups to the fuss being made about Black Nationalist, Reverend Albert B. Cleage, and his brand of Christianity. The Reverend Wyatt T. Walker expressed this irritation in Christian Century magazine when he scoffed that Cleage is "almost over the edge," trumpeting his "ersatz Christianity."\(^1\) Of course, Walker is perfectly within his rights to chide Cleage if he honestly regards him as a misled prophet who is, in his turn, misleading his people into a wilderness rather than out of one. But if Walker is only expressing self-righteous indignation at a radical whose greatest crime, he judges, is ecclesiastical bad manners, then Walker's over-statements make him a kind of agent provocateur himself. While it is difficult, at this point, to reach a final judgment about Reverend Cleage, we are nevertheless challenged by Walker's judgment to fix our eyes on this "contemporary holy man" and to examine him and his work seriously.
Cleage rose to national prominence during the 1967 Detroit rebellion when he held great sway over a people in the midst of social upheaval. Feeling duped, confused and angry, black people swelled his church, drawn by the magnetism of his message and the power of his presence. In the aftermath of the Detroit rebellion, Cleage's book *The Black Messiah* became the published testament, incorporating some of the words spoken by the prophet during that civil strife. A short time later, under the scrutiny of a few reporters from national magazines, a wide audience came to think of Cleage as a prophet whose voice was raised to restore Christianity to its original identity, which he took to be a black identity. And recently, Cleage has begun to have a widespread influence as he continues to develop a Black Christian Nationalist Movement that is actively working to bind black churches and black people together under black theology and black power.

To appreciate what Cleage's gospel may mean to oppressed black people in their relationship to the larger society, we must confront Cleage eye-to-eye, pressing hard scrutiny upon him to understand his rhetorical force, both in the religious activism of the 1970's and in the long-range movement for total liberation of black people.
Statement of the Problem

Currently, Reverend Albert B. Cleage is responding to the need of that black movement by the formation of a revolutionary religious expression called Black Christian Nationalism. The ultimate aim of this ministry is the total liberation—physical, mental, and spiritual, of black people.

Now taking on major proportions in the religious arena, Black Christian Nationalism is propelled by its chief proponent, Cleage, and by a black nationalist theology that re-interpret Christianity in light of white racism and black oppression. The omnipresence and omnipotence of God are not questioned. But Jesus Christ is seen again—as Cleage believes He was originally seen—to be the revolutionary liberator of the poor and oppressed. Jesus, the Black Messiah, constitutes the basis of Cleage's ministry. Jesus is the revolutionary Zealot, whose life has provided a framework for black unity and a key for black liberation. As Cleage explains:

We do not feel that we must sit and wait for God to intervene and settle our problems for us. We waited for four hundred years and he didn't do much of anything, so for the next four hundred years we're going to be fighting to change conditions for ourselves. This is merely a new theological position . . .

Basic to our struggle and the revitalization of the Black Church is the simple fact that
we are building a totally new self-image. Our rediscovery of the Black Messiah is a part of our rediscovery of ourselves. We could not worship a Black Jesus until we had thrown off the shackles of self-hate.²

Reverend Cleage is pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit, Michigan and National Chairman of the Black Christian Nationalist Movement. A spirited, vigorous, impassioned man of the pulpit, Cleage has a speaking style largely reminiscent of that of Malcolm X. Just a brief exposure to one of his services points out the telling force of his skillful use of analogy, his sharp wit and humor, and his ability to teach in a manner that his congregation can understand.³ His words are sometimes gruff.⁴ But they are usually tailored in a pointed manner in order to shock, disturb and agitate—and at least, to persuade.

The problem of the present study is to analyze rhetorically and to evaluate the role and functions of Reverend Albert B. Cleage first within the context of the Detroit Rebellion (1967-1968), during which time he gained national attention and prominence, and second, as a noted, contemporary religious rhetor actively involving his ministry within the Black Power movement currently underway in America. Through this kind of assessment, we can additionally appreciate Cleage's talents and abilities as a skillful speaker who, in the wake of his increasing popularity, has added
impressive contributions to the body of the black rhetorical and religious tradition. Finally, this work is also about blacks and the ways in which they are learning and have learned consciously to place an activating value on their own survival and upgrading as a people, and about the means, for both their survival and their improvement, which is, by name, their national liberation.

Need for the Study

Increasingly, academic attention is turning toward black dialect, black protest rhetoric, dynamics of the black audience, black expression in poetry and music. No studies of these genres, however, have discussed the vexing communication problem of the black minister who endeavors to generate meaningful responses in his ministry which address the current needs of the black consciousness.

It is axiomatic that racism is the ontology of black life. Under that primary presupposition, some black preachers have made striking appeals to moral obligation and reliance upon God. For they are convinced that in this way, their audiences, sufficiently moved, will correct what has been since the commencement of slavery a constant weight upon their people. Others, after acknowledging the failure of moral suasion to effect a cure, have tried more stinging theological
remedies. But by far the majority of black ministers have over the years simply submitted to the conditions of the current social order and have withdrawn from the rhetorical battlefronts and formed their churches more on the order of social clubs than as voices which might become powerful in the fight for freedom.

Today, unquestionably, black liberation is still a goal to be attained, not a realized truth of daily life. Moreover, racism is found at deeper and deeper levels of interest and power in America. Thus, if the black church is willing to try to respond to racism as a moral evil, it is compelled to address the stark truths at the heart of American social conflict. As James Cone puts it:

Today we enter a new era, the era of black power. It is an age of rebellion and revolution. . . . It is time for the black churches to change their style and join the suffering of the black masses. . . .

Until now, black preachers and black churches have felt, and have seemed to be, placed in an untenable position, one from which they were unable to discover, define, and develop new approaches for encouraging black people to affirm themselves through faith to power. But in the last decade they have discovered within themselves a source of power, their own power--black power. The phenomenon conveniently identifiable by the label "Black Power"--which is at once the
slogan of a movement and also a nicely connotative phrase for black and white America alike—provides another rich vein of the black experience which has not yet been fully mined by scholars using the implements of rhetorical study.

A study of Albert Cleage is warranted in several ways. At present, there is little literature on Reverend Cleage as a rhetorician and/or on Black Christian Nationalism as his platform. Both are gaining popularity and prominence in the black expression. Therefore, this study could pioneer attention and insight into this treasury of black experience. Moreover, as Jack Daniel points out, "Scholarship in Black Communication and other black fields needs to have the rigor and dedication of a DuBois, especially the interdisciplinary aspect. . . .Black scholars should adopt an attitude of 'scholarship for national development.' This stance suggests that the black scholar must have a crystal clear understanding of the oppressed position of his people, and hence the need for applied research." In accordance with Daniel's prescriptions, the present study will cut across the departmental lines of rhetorical and cultural study to examine the speaking style of Reverend Cleage as his rhetorical strategies focus on mobilizing black power into a working concept of his ministry.
Such a study is worthwhile, for it can reveal important implications of the role of the black preacher in general and of Reverend Cleage in particular. I have tried, moreover, to highlight some of the social, psychological, political, and religious complexities which have had to be faced in this black man's struggle for liberation. Finally, I hope this study will add more testimony to the scholarly excavation now tunneling into the rich lode of black experience in America.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this present study is to analyze the rhetorical problems and speech approaches of the Reverend Albert B. Cleage as he applies black power in the work of his ministry (Black Christian Nationalism) by answering the following questions:

1. What is the larger historical and religious context from which Reverend Cleage emerged as a religious rhetor for the liberation of black people?

2. Who were some of the key religious rhetors who make up his rhetorical legacy?

3. What are the major issues of black religion and black oppression with which Cleage deals?

4. What major rhetorical strategies does he use in his addresses?

5. What is the nature of the audiences he addresses?
6. What are some key consequences of his message in terms of black liberation, and of the counterstructures he proposes to the traditional black church? How do they encourage and support black liberation?

Specific Research Questions

In addition to the six questions posed in the preceding section, this study will answer the following questions related to the purpose of the study.

II. Black Religion: A Perspective
What are some of the elements of traditional American black religion? How did they change and develop historically in America? What modifications were worked on black preachers and what they taught by the major events of American national development—the Revolution, the Civil War, the period of Reconstruction, and the modern movement for civil rights? What black men stand out as representatives or radicals in or outside of the black religious traditions in America? How does Albert Cleage fit into this long and varied tradition?

III. Cleage: Prophet in a Valley of Dry Bones
From what social context did Albert Cleage rise to national prominence? In what rhetorical context
did he face the problems of social liberation—that is, what needs did he confront, what audience did he address? How does Cleage use the rhetorical strategies already identified as typical of the rhetoric of revolution—namely, vilification, objectification, legitimation, and mythicization? How are these strategies related to his message as a radical black Christian preacher? In what ways, if any, is Cleage a critic? In what ways, if any, is he a constructive thinker for black people? How has his contribution—rhetorical and religious—changed the traditional black church in America? How effective has he been? How does his religion relate to the social context?

IV. Toward A Total Ministry

What are the ultimate goals of Cleage's ministry? In what specific ways does he hope to achieve those goals? What means is he using, and what progress has he made, toward black liberation through a black theology of black power? What problems does his ministry confront? What reactions has he faced—from within his own congregation and from the black community taken as
a whole? How does he reconcile black separatism with the notion of Christian unity—the central dilemma of his total ministry?

V. From Rhetoric to Resolution: Implications and Conclusions

What has this study established? Into what contexts is it appropriate to place the work and influence of Reverend Cleage? What are the implications of this study? And what is left to do? What are its implications for the continuing examination by scholars of the black experience?

Background Literature

Primary Source Material

I have investigated the context of Albert Cleage's developing religious influence and thought in primary accounts of his work published in newspapers and national magazines, as detailed in Procedures and Methodology below. But the major sources of primary materials for this study have been the speeches and writings of Reverend Cleage himself. This includes preeminently his two published books, Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church and The Black Messiah, the latter work being primarily a collection of his sermons and prayers. Three key sermons explicating
Cleage's thought are included in this latter collection, namely, "New-Time Religion," "The Grapes of Wrath," and "We Are God's Chosen People."

Some unique primary source material has been selected from taped conversations made by this writer during interviews with Reverend Cleage. In addition, interviews were conducted with three of Cleage's contemporaries. These were the Reverend James H. Cone, leading proponent of Black Theology and Black Power and Professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York; the Reverend Robert T. Newbold, Associate Director, Council on Administrative Services, United Presbyterian Church, New York; and the Reverend A. Wilson Wood, Pastor, Bethany Baptist Church, Columbus, Ohio.

Secondary Source Material

There is an abundance of secondary literature available to this study. Hiley H. Ward's *Prophet of The Black Nation* provides considerable biographical background for Cleage as well as insight into his concepts of black theology and black power. E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Church in America* as well as the collection of social essays and sermons available in *The Black Church in America* provided insight into Black traditional religion in America. *Confrontation: Black and White* by Lerone Bennett, Jr., served as a significant body of historical data to supplement these resources. *Black*
Preaching by Henry Mitchell and Grace Holt's "Stylin Outta the Black Pulpit" focus upon some of the distinctive features of black preaching historically and currently. Addressing the particular aspects of black power and black theology are James Cone's Black Theology and Black Power; Joseph R. Washington's The Politics of God; James Cone's A Black Theology of Liberation; and Lerone Bennett's The Challenge of Blackness. Articles that were especially helpful were: Alex Poinsett, "The Quest for a Black Christ"; William Serrin, "Cleage's Alternative"; "Black Prayer"; "Color God Black"; and, "'Black Power' Moves on Churches". Other articles which were helpful were: James Cone, "The Black Church and Black Power"; Hayward Henry, "Toward a Religion of Revolution"; Calvin B. Marshall, "The Black Church-Its Mission Is Liberation"; John Oliver Killens, "Wanted: Some Black Long Distance Runners"; S. E. Anderson, "Pitfalls of Black Intellectuals"; and Jack L. Daniel, "Black Academic Activism".

Procedures
I have reviewed various newspapers and periodicals that reported on Cleage and/or the development of Black Christian Nationalism. Newspaper articles from The New York Times were helpful as well as magazine articles from Newsweek, Ebony, The Reporter, and U.S. News and World Report. The article,
"Black Power Shakes The White Church," was particularly informative on various views and opinions of Cleage's ministry. The Ohio State University Library, The Ohio State University Black Studies Library, The Martin Luther King Library, and literature of the black power movement from the bookstore of the Shrine of the Black Madonna were used extensively to provide printed materials on Reverend Cleage and Black Christian Nationalism.

**Methodology**

My method in Chapter II is to isolate, describe, and evaluate rhetorical approaches and rhetorical strategies of various key black preachers as they worked within the movement of black people for civil and human rights in America.

In Chapter III the examination of Reverend Cleage focuses especially upon his rhetoric and rhetorical skills. Then, it is helpful to begin with a clear definition of the term "rhetoric." Golden and Rieke define it usefully in *Rhetoric of Black Americans*:

"rhetoric"... (means) the interaction between sources, black Americans, and receivers, white and black, American and otherwise, through the use of messages, written, spoken, and to a lesser extent, non-verbal, that refer to the particular goal of "freedom" or the "good life" for black Americans. 8
My method in Chapter III is to use the tools of rhetorical criticism to explore the rhetoric of Reverend Cleage from an "experiential perspective." Such a perspective, as outlined by Scott and Brock, involves criticism that has a critic's orientation, which these authors call the experiential perspective: "The critic's experience—the rhetorical standards he has established throughout the years of extensive reading and varied contacts—is drawn on creatively as a starting point for his rhetorical criticism."^9

A peculiar feature of the experiential perspective is the socio-cultural-psychological approach, typified by the critical decision to communicate an insight into a given rhetorical act through the use of nonrhetorical concept or theory as the organizing feature of the criticism."^10 Used with this decision is a distinctive critical tool called the analog by which we are enabled to move by a metaphor from the known to the unknown. In this way, extended analogy becomes for the critic a viable heuristic device. Further, then, my function within this framework is to define, interpret and evaluate the rhetoric of Reverend Cleage within the specific context out of which it emerged in order to understand more fully the power and influence of this revolutionary black prophet-preacher.
With Lloyd F. Bitzer's principle of gleaning the "rhetorical Situation," a better understanding of Cleage's context (or exigence, the need for a rhetor), his audience, and the constraints under which he worked can be reached. Of the "rhetorical situation" Bitzer states:

The rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. Prior to the creation and the presentation of discourse, there are three constituents of any rhetorical situation; the first is the exigence, the second and third are elements of the complex, namely the audience to be constrained in decision and action, and the constraints which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience.¹¹

And as a final part of the rhetorical analysis, Fotheringham's concept of symbols as they function to generate "meaning in the sense of conception, either denotation or connotation"¹² is employed. The rhetorical strategies of vilification, objectification, legitimation, and mythication as described by Arthur L. Smith¹³ have been applied in an examination of the rhetorical strategies of some of the sermons of Reverend Cleage.

My method in Chapter IV is primarily descriptive, the function of which is to relate in proper narrative some of
the effects of Reverend Cleage's ministry and pronouncements. I have also analyzed the goals of his ministry seen as a national force, and I have described some of the stultifying characteristics of present black consciousness that Cleage seeks to alleviate.

Chapter V is summary and conclusions.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter I


2Reverend Albert B. Cleage, Jr., The Black Messiah, pp. 6-7.

3Malcolm X, who was a close friend of Cleage and had strong influence upon him, states in his autobiography: "I had learned early one important thing, and that was to always teach in terms that the people could understand." For example, he says: "...where the Nationalist whom we had 'fished' were almost all men, among the storefront Christians, a heavy preponderance were women, and I had sense to offer something special for them. 'Beautiful black woman!' The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that the black man is going around saying he wants respect; well, the black man never will get anybody's respect until he first learns to respect his own women! The black man needs today to stand up and throw off the weaknesses imposed upon him by the slave-master white man! The black man needs to start today to shelter and protect and respect his black women!" See Alex Haley, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, p. 221.

4Hiley H. Ward, Prophet of the Black Nation, p. xi.


6Stokely Carmichael explains that the concept of black power "means proper representation and sharing of control. It means the creation of power bases, of strength, from which black people can press to change local or nation-wide patterns of oppression-instead of from weakness." Stokely Carmichael, Black Power, p. 46.


8James L. Golden and Richard D. Rieke, The Rhetoric of Black Americans, p. 34.

9Robert L. Scott and Bernard L. Brock, Methods of Rhetorical Criticism, p. 15.
Scott and Brock, *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism*, p. 127. Note: A very good example of effective use of the analog is found in Kenneth Burke's "Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle" in which the "medicine man" analogy is employed.


CHAPTER II
BLACK RELIGION: A PERSPECTIVE

The black church and the black preacher, its spokesman of long tenure, occupy a unique position in American society. They arose out of the unique experiences of the people who gave them birth. The morass of slavery and a web of Linnean etiologies defined that experience. As a result, the black church became not only the source of religious communion for black people, but also their social center, political platform and economic bulwark. It was at one and the same time the fuel of black consciousness and the engine of black life propelling the struggle of that people to a new and different level.

A major element of this force has been the black preacher. He was a man of distinctive verbal abilities who, through a successful combination of his religious appeal, dynamic delivery, buoyant style, and rhetorical persuasion, became for the black church, an effective man of words. Because of these skills, he became a man of many roles. He was, wrote DuBois, "(a) leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist--all these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in
number. The combination of a certain adroitness with deep-seated earnestness, of tact with consummate ability, gave him his preeminence, and helps him maintain it.1

What these superior verbal qualities suggest is that the black preacher was a man of considerable leadership and influence. He served to maintain cohesiveness, faith in God, and community among black people. He provided consolation against the misery of both slavery and second-class citizenship. Moreover, at times outspoken and uncompromising, he served to temper the black consciousness and hone the black church to become dynamic forces in the struggle for black liberation.

Owing to the power of his oratorical skills, he thrust again and again at racism and hatred in America. He spoke colorfully, angrily, joyfully through the rhetoric of agitation and revolution. Undaunted by setbacks, he continued to vivify the raw inconsistencies between the law of the land and the law of the Lord. And to the extent that he was effective, he hewed out of the religious elements of the new world a form nearer to the black man's own peculiar needs.

Therefore, the black church and the black preacher became the mitigating powers for the total survival of black people. "His religion," adds Lincoln summarily, "was his fellowship with man, his audience with God. It was the
peculiar sustaining force which gave him the strength to endure when endurance gave no promise, and the courage to be creative in the face of his own dehumanization." On the whole, through the militancy of black religion, black men and women struggled in God and in trust toward freedom and a better world. Their efforts declared in clear, unmistakable terms what it means to be a black person in America.

To understand the significance and relevance of contemporary religious organization, rhetorical themes, and philosophies of leadership, it is a necessary preliminary that we explore the experiences of black Americans from which these concepts emerged.

In the New World
From Hope to Despair

In the New World's infancy, about one million blacks made their way to the shores of American soil seeking greater opportunities and wider vistas. They came, like many whites, among the ranks of indentured servants. They carried no stigma of racial inferiority attached to them. And, in the manner customary for indentured servants, upon arrival they obliged themselves to established planters for a negotiated number of years of service to pay for the cost of their fares. During these years, the races commingled on a basis of
equality--their lives neatly settled in a stratified, but fluid society. Bennett puts it that "whites and Negroes worked in the same fields, lived in the same huts and fraternized during off-duty hours. And, predictably, they mated and married. There was widespread intermingling between Negroes and whites throughout the Colonial period." However, as the international demand for greater production of tobacco required increased man-power on plantation units, the 1660's took on menacing proportions for this fluid society. What this development held for black people was a portentous decision--terrifying in prophetic ambiance.

The Way Made Ready

The American economy was developing rapidly as a direct result of world-wide demand for tobacco. Thus, greater and greater pressures were exerted to augment the numbers of the existing labor force. Under this urgency, reality became harsh. Demand had to be met. Haltingly then, national attention focused on questions of race.

The Indian? He was tried but found unsuitable to solve the dilemma. Capturing him was troublesome. And once caught, he used his knowledge of the country to manage numerous, easy escapes. "Moreover," writes Quarles, "the enslavement of Indians tended to stir up resentment among the tribes, and
possibly to set them on the warpath."5 Whites? The idea was considered and abandoned, for their color allowed them to blend easily into the surrounding communities. Thus, escape for them too was assured. Clearly, America had a knotty problem, for demand was exacting an increasing cost. So attention turned. What of the black man? He was strong. He was visible. He was unprotected by sovereign laws. He was inexpensive and in great supply. The dark riddle unfolded, the solution of which led, in a spate, to the story of black cargoes and human chattel.

Exordium

History books are replete with pathetic epics of the black American genesis. These are the stories of some twenty million Africans—some who survived, and many who did not—under the brutal criteria of big business. For, slavetees assiduously poured a steady stream of dark littorals from the western coasts of Africa into the labor force of American society. A bottle of rum, a few baubles, bracelets, and other trinkets changing hands started the story for some. For others, their tales began with looting and burning, carnage and bedlam, as their villages fell and their families were murdered—themselves, shackled in coffles; contained in barracoons; rigged, in tow, for sail.
This story's denouement was the same for every American black man's ancestor held in the holds of those ships, if he survived the twist in plot of passage and of "seasoning." African ties were lost. Cultural values were destroyed. Family bonds, commonality through language, and social cohesion were obliterated. Oppression and degradation became a way of life. What was created in their place then was a lamentable legacy of human suffering and a new form of life called "bondage" that would insist, like propriety, to endure forever.

The Making of A Slave

...when they got them to a plantation, about the very first act was giving to them an anglicized name. And, for all practical purposes, that was the first step in the psychic dehumanization of an individual, or collectively, of a people.

Slaves newly-arrived in America found numerous occupations to absorb them. Some would be employed as cooks, laundresses, and nursemaids. Others would be employed as carpenters, tanners, and coachmen. Most, however, would become field hands, first for the production of tobacco, then for cotton.

Before they could be put to good advantage though, "old" things had to become "new." Thus, a dress was issued to each
woman, a shirt and trousers to each man—a pair of shoes and a new name to all. The next step in this pygmalion process was to transform their thinking into "slave-think." For this task, time and a sophisticated scheme were required. The slave-master was no fool. He understood that to master this African who brought "cultural traditions essentially heroic in nature," brute force was simply not equal to the task. Instead, he had to drive this black people to incredible depths of pain, hopelessness and indifference. Step by step, he had to drive them to a lower and lower threshold of contempt and rebellion. He had to drive them to a limbo in which their lives were alchemized solely by untamable white superiority and will. He had to control their minds.

The Africans were subjected to a process called "breaking-in." During this time, individual and collective self-conceptions were wrenched from them. Blacks became nonbeings. They were stripped of identity. They were stripped of language. And finally, in the force of this maelstrom that swallowed them whole, insofar as the social convention was concerned, black men, women and children became Uncle Toms, Aunt Jemimas, and "niggahs."

**Blacks-and-Body and Blood of Christ**

It was through this life experience—through slavery—that black religion in America was conceived. It was birthed
by a people whose daily life was a frightening encounter with a hostile white environment joined with a yearning for freedom.

To black people, religion became a means of survival and an adaptive mode of resistance to the dehumanizing forces of oppression, degradation, and suffering. It became a means of promoting self-worth and a viable identity. Wilmore puts it in the following manner: "Black religion served, in formal and informal ways, to order and interpret an existence that was characterized, on the one hand, by repression, self-abnegation and submissiveness, and on the other, by subterfuge, rebelliousness and the joyous affirmation of life in the face of tribulation." For some, religion became an "other worldly" reason to endure. For others who were not convinced that religion should be directed wholly to "other worldly" matters, it became a tool to repudiate their bondage.

At the same time, for most slaves, the particular religious form called Christianity was given only tardy recognition. The reasons this doctrine was unpalatable to the slave, Franklin suggests, lay in its inconsistency:

It was a strange religion, this Christianity, which taught equality and brotherhood and at the same time introduced on a large scale the practice of tearing natives from their homes and transporting them to a distant land to become slaves.
If the natives were slow to accept Christianity, it was not only because they were attached to their particular forms of tribal worship but also because they did not have the superhuman capacity to reconcile in their own minds the contradictory character of the new religion.  

However, faithful white Christians, swept up with missionary fervor, urged slaves under their power to accept the ecclesiastical prescriptions of their own white faith.  

This kind of contradiction and inconsistency marked the black experience in slavery, and, this experience in turn, molded the black church. The black church at one and the same time was both a symbol of black oppression and a tool for black liberation. Through the church, many black people acutely recognized the condition of their annihilation and refused to surrender to those brutalizing forces of white power that sought to reduce them to anonymity and debasement. It provided not only strength to go through another week, but also like the Underground Railroad, a passage to freedom.  

However, even before the institution of the black church from the religious assembly of slaves emerged the black preacher. He was often the most articulate and the most persuasive among the group. Known for his oratorical skills and literal knowledge of scriptures, the black preacher functioned to pacify his kinsmen and to provide their emotional pro- vender. Frequently embellishing his skill with virtuosity,
he spoke to defend black humanity, to agitate for human rights, to embolden the spirit of black community. Blending sermon and song in antiphonal mixtures, when he spoke and was truly "stylin' out," his voice compelled the Nommo the Word, which, as in the beginning, brought forth a new act of creation.

From Slavery's Pulpit

The black preacher during the period of slavery exercised considerable influence over his people, and because of that position, he, also exercised an appreciable influence upon the slavemaster. He could pacify and control the slaves, or he could organize and incite rebellion. However, where the black preacher was allowed to serve the slaves, the master's interests dominated his functions. He was more often than not an instrument of control by the slaveholder through whom the slaves were inured to their conditions and made pliant to their masters.

Using his oratorical skills, the black slave preacher sermonically defined a concept of religion that both controlled the slave and contributed to his survival. His text was Ephesians 6:5—"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters." By divine ordinance then, he justified their life experience and admonished them to be obedient. However,
it was not uncommon that this approach to audience was unpopular among the slaves. "Dey never said nothin' but you must be good," quipped ex-slave Leah Garrett, "don't talk back to your marsters, don't run away, don't do dis, and don't do dat." Nonetheless, the preacher colorfully dramatized the hellish fate of sinners who were derelict in duty to their masters. He had sacred scriptures as authority. Thus, the preacher insisted that the slaves' work was to be taken up vigorously and joyfully. Their reward was a compensatory idea, joys deferred in this life for a heavenly crown in the next world.

Furthermore, the black preacher's instruction was to mollify insurrectionist tendencies among the slaves. Their sermons commonly reflected the dominant views as typified by that of Reverend Charles C. Jones, religious teacher and Presbyterian minister of the nineteenth century. He said:

I am a firm believer in the efficacy of sound religious instruction, as a means to the end desires. . . . Its tendency, even when its transforming influence upon character is not realized, is to soften down and curb the passions of man; to make him more respectful of another's interests, and more solicitous of his favor; more obedient under authority, and patient under injuries. . . .

In addition to these goals, the religion of the white masters sought to promote a higher morality among slaves and if not to soothe their bodies, then at least to save their souls.
There were any number of black slave preachers who performed the function of pacification. Not a few excelled at the task. George Liele, born in Virginia before the Revolutionary War about 1750, was among that number. After listening to his white master preach for a number of years, Liele took what he saw and heard for his paradigm. He became outstanding and well-practised, for Matthew Moore was a liberal master and permitted Liele to preach on plantations all along the Savannah river. The key to his success, together with his unusual ministerial talents, was Liele's tact and diplomacy with regard to men. For example, he would not preach to slaves unless they had permission from their owners. When he did preach, he was so effective that, according to Woodson, "one of the masters, speaking of the wholesome influence of Liel's preaching, said that he did not need to employ an assistant nor to make use of the whip whether he was at home or elsewhere, as his slaves were industrious and obedient, and lived together in unity, brotherly love, and peace."16

Two other preachers, "Uncle Jack" and Black Harry, became famous for their work at pacification. "Uncle Jack" became so valuable to whites for his preaching that they purchased a farm for him in Virginia.17 Black Harry was another
keen speaker and preacher of that time. Said Woodson, "According to a contemporary, Harry was 'small, very black, keen-eyed, possessing great volubility of tongue; and, although illiterate so that he could not read,' was one of the most popular preachers of that age."¹⁸

Not all black preachers were preoccupied with this perspective of religion, however. For they were not convinced that religion should be directed wholly to "other worldly matters." Religion, for them, was not divorced from their oppression. Some historians have considered belief in the this-worldly implications of religion to be an "Africanism"—a carry-over of African views of life and religion in which religion, art, and life are all a part of each other.¹⁹ The religion of this kind of black preacher was an everyday religion that both directed daily existence and goaded action for freedom in this life.

In order to hear these preachers, who were regarded as incendiaries by the slavemasters, blacks slipped stealthily into the woods "whar deir racket wouldn't 'sturb de white folks, and dey would gather 'roun' dat fire and pray."²⁰ After the rich, generative expressions of their prayers, the religious mood was heightened by song:

Oh freedom. Oh freedom. Oh freedom
over me, over me.
And befo' I'd be a slave
I'd be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.²¹
They said, protesting slavery in score, that death was preferable to the misery of bondage. Then, singing and praying under the dark aegis of their ken, they punctuated their union with "ife to jina," deep and binding love. At that time, with the audience intent on "gettin' right with God," the preacher called his skills to task. Weaving the tapestry of his message, he intertwined the threads of trope and syntax. He crisscrossed and interlaced rhythm and cadence. He tied presence to plight, stitching point with counterpoint together to produce a rich religious fabric, signed by audience response, "Amen!" "Amen!" "Amen!"

Pre-Civil War Era

Revolutionary Sway

During the Revolutionary War, the fires of liberation were fanned brightly. America was going to war to defend the principles that all men are created equal and that their natural rights under God are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That thousands of black men fought and died for these freedoms impressed some as ironic. "It worried good men and women so much," writes Bennett, "that they made Negro freedom an 'inevitable corollary' of American freedom."22 During the same time, many missionaries, still attempting to correct the blemishes of "heathen and inferior"
black men, were proselytizing them to Christianity. Some may have realized that citing texts on the equality of human beings under God was only adding embers to the fires already stirring in the minds of many slaves. For when slaves subsequently struck for freedom, Christianity was often their brassard in battle. Wilmore explains that:

All in all, it is fair to assume that the opening up of the whole issue of human equality in the context of the Gospel and the moral right, under the Christian religion, of the slave to escape or to resist enslavement, was due in no small measure to the agitation of a few intrepid whites who transmitted the egalitarian spirit of the American Revolution and radical Christianity to the secret gathering of the plantation slaves.23

Thousands of slaves were freed owing to the spirit created by this revolutionary fervor. Many others escaped or were manumitted.

In the North, slavery ended as a part of the Rights of Man Movement. In the South, slavery's imminent demise was only checked. For the system was shot with life-giving plasma as a direct result of the cotton gin.

Revolutionary spirits cooled, and caste lines hardened. Free blacks were driven from the streets and racial hostility increased overall. Some slaves were overcome by this dilution of mood and accepted defeat. Others refused to succumb
and fought back. These blacks staged sit-downs, sabotaged farm machinery, stole animals, and destroyed crops; many ran away. Summing up the explosive mixture that threatened at this time, Bennett writes that "Revolts at home and abroad, the increase in the number of free Negroes, the invention of the cotton gin, fear, frustration and hostility: these gave birth to a new phenomenon in the history of man: the American Negro."  

In this climate of protest and disenchantment the organized black church emerged. And during this flush, black Americans "embarked upon the perilous journey of self-naming, self-legitimization, and self discovery." It was in this sensibility that the black preacher became strikingly verbal for the cause of black liberation. At this threshold then, these black religious rhetors, anchored in moral suasion, signalled, in protest and in order, a new form of religious body called the Black Church.

Rise of New Oniwasun Atata

During this time, blacks were admitted to white churches to worship, but they were confined to the upper galleries of the church called "Nigger Heaven." Many blacks protested this treatment as sacrilege in the Lord's House. But their protests were without avail. Then it happened. One Sunday
morning in 1787, two ex-slaves knelt in St. George's Metho­dist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia to pray. As they
prayed, a trustee of the church snatched them up saying, "You
must get up--you must not kneel here." They had forgotten
their place. To jog their memories was the purpose of this
trustee's crude reminder. Rankled and disbelieving, the
ruffled two stood up from their prayers and walked out of
St. George's. Behind them filed the other black parishioners.
These two men were Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, founders,
shortly after this incident, of the first organized black
church.

Allen and Jones founded the Free African Society. From
this body developed the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
Their experience was perhaps not preceded, but neither was
it singular. About the same time, other blacks were receiving
similar abuse from white parishioners and were consequently
withdrawing to form their own organizations. These acts
furthermore sparked a new act--the first black freedom move­ment--organized resistance against oppression and racism.
Thus, these men and this church body, together with this move­ment, asserted the unity of black people to act and to direct
their energies toward the black man's best interests. Further,
in setting up separate institutions for themselves, blacks
were encouraged to identify with their own images, their own interpretations of Christianity, and to aspire to self-help and self-legitimation.

Allen's founding of the AME Church was an effort to provide a more nearly adequate base for black people to worship in dignity and in peace. Also, Allen used the church as a platform from which to speak for and to black people. Eschewing violence, he was convinced that moral suasion was the proper course for Christian blacks. He felt that revolt would not bring about the abolition of slavery. Therefore, he spoke to persuade blacks to self-help and moral obligation. For example, in his address "To The People of Color" in 1793, he asserted:

Much depends upon us for the help of our color—more than many are aware. If we are lazy and idle, the enemies of freedom plead it as a cause why we ought not to be free, and say we are better in a state of servitude. . . . I entreat you to consider the obligations we lie under to help forward the cause of freedom. He who knows how bitter the cup is of which the slave hath to drink, O, how ought we to feel for those who yet remain in bondage! Will even our friends excuse—will God pardon us—for the part we act in making strong the hands of the enemies of our color?28

However, the significant pioneer efforts of these early black men of the cloth are not to be understated. Through the work of Liele, "Uncle Jack," Black Harry, Absalom Jones, and Richard Allen, as well as those who preceded them and
followed them, the black church came to be. Moreover, it came to be a symbol of black experience appreciably free from white domination and control.

Black Sounds in Abolition

Clearly, before the Civil War, black preachers and other religious rhetors involved themselves in efforts geared toward the abolition of slavery. Their superior oratorical skills and leadership abilities pushed them to the forefront. Some of them were especially influential in both abolitionist organs and black convention machines. Particularly though, since not just a few of them were ex-slaves, they concerted their efforts to aid runaway slaves escaping the South in the Underground Railroad.

Other religious rhetors involved themselves in the American Colonization Movement. This movement was dominated by the belief that emigration of blacks to Africa was the ultimate solution to human bondage in America. This venture, however, met with strong opposition and indignation from others who felt that this view only shaded the real issue. To them, this attempt dealt with black "inferiority" rather than the real issue—the dehumanizing system of slavery. One of the voices heard on this issue was not a black preacher. He was nonetheless an impassioned speaker of dynamic delivery,
and he added further impetus to the emerging black consciousness. He was David Walker who produced the famous "Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World." In this message, he urged black men to rebel, for that responsibility was their religious duty. They were to kill or be killed. They were to seize their liberty, to "put every thing before us to death, in order to gain our freedom which God has given us." Implacable sounds of this protest message rebounded throughout the American states. Then the preacher Nat Turner revolted and a climate of crisis was created. Fear gripped many whites, and in that fear they concluded that the black preacher was a disruptive influence upon the slaves. White backlash in the South was manifested in restrictive laws prohibiting ministerial activities and preaching unless a local religious body gave permission. But in the North, black preachers continued to speak boldly. For example, Reverend Nathaniel Paul of the First African Baptist Society in Albany, New York was a fiery speaker for abolition. His argument was based upon trust and reliance in God. Speaking on July 5, 1827, Reverend Paul declared:

The progress of emancipation, though slow, is nevertheless certain: It is certain, because that God who has made of one blood all nations of men, and who is said to be no respecter of persons, has so decreed; I therefore have no hesitation in declaring from
this sacred place, that not only throughout the United States of America, but throughout every part of the habitable world where slavery exists, it will be abolished. However great may be the opposition of those who are supported by the traffic, yet slavery will cease.31

Moreover, some of the major spokesmen of the black church were decrying the moral injustice of white America and raising serious doubts that integration was the proper avenue of black self-worth and dignity. Of this number was minister and abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet. He argued that assimilation was a philosophy of white control—a method of upending any sense of identity and inner experience of black power. Thus, he insisted that the slave take up the spirit of liberty which was a gift from God and destroy the means of his bondage.

Garnet, as described by Smith, was "a militant preacher (who) justified violence to his religious conscience by keeping the end, abolition, larger than the means. He opened the windows of his imagination to every conceivable solution for abolition of slavery, and concluded that violent resolution was both practical and essential."32 In an address to the slaves of the United States delivered in New York in August 1843, Garnet developed this idea. Tartly, he spoke: "The forlorn condition in which you are placed, does not destroy your moral obligation to God. You are not certain of
heaven, because you suffer yourselves to remain in a state of slavery." In opposition to others Garnet insisted that slavery was against God. He therefore prompted the slaves with their duty to themselves. He said, "it is your solemn and imperative duty to use every means, both moral and intellectual, and physical that promises success." Their freedom, he argued, must not wait for an act of beneficence from whites. He exhorted, "Brethren, the time has come when you must act for yourselves. It is an old true saying that, 'if hereditary bondsmen would be free, they must themselves strike the blow'! You can plead your own cause, and do the work of emancipation better than any others."  

Clearly, Turner, Garnet, Paul, Payne, and others left nameless in history were absolute in their belief that God was on the side of the oppressed and that their resistance against slavery and their efforts for their freedom were in harmony with the will of God. With this assurance, black abolitionist Reverend Daniel Payne uttered this feeling: "with God one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Trust in him, and he will bring slavery and all its outrages to an end."  

At the end of the Civil War, slavery ended, de jure. But the new self-consciousness of black people created among
both blacks and whites a promise and pleasure which sprung from their new freedom. The black preacher was part of the vanguard who stood ready to assure whoever would assert their freedom, de facto, that God was on their side.

These black preachers taught that to accept any form of slavery was to deny oneself, and that to deny oneself was to deny God. They insisted that the black man had the right to choose his own paths, that he had the right to become exactly what he felt himself capable of. Clearly this religion was based not in some intellectual or verbal formulations, but in the black man's total orientation to life. This was a religion of which the goal was total freedom.

Thus, the black man's religion in America was born in protest of self-denial and self-abnegation. However, by the exegesis of the black preacher, it developed to become an ecclesiastical form which affirmed black dignity and black self-worth. This religion then asserted black feeling, black mind, and black judgment. When the preacher said, "We're on the move church! Have you got good religion?" From the Amen Corner came, "Certainly! Certainly! Certainly! Lord!"
Post-Civil War Era

The Gilded Age

Never before had the blessings of freedom been so bountiful. This was a period in which black people headed many positions of high authority. Some of them were judges, generals, superintendents of education. A few of them were legislators in the House of Representatives. "Negroes and whites were going to school together, riding on street cars together and cohabitating, in and out of wedlock. An interracial board was running the University of South Carolina where a Negro professor, Richard T. Grenner, was teaching white and black youth metaphysics and logic." Black men, women, and children could dream and hope for the present, assured that blessings would flow. Thus the years between 1867 and 1877 were intoxicating. The war was over, with many other victories won. The fourteenth and fifteenth amendments provided blacks equal protection under the law and the right to vote. And when the Civil Rights Bill of 1875 was passed, equal rights flourished appreciably.

How long would this bounty last? Not long. Crisis began to pile upon crisis. Freedmen in the work force began to threaten the jobs of white employees. Then the Hayes Compromise happened. Social Darwinism rose again, the Civil Rights
Bill was reversed, separate but equal facilities were created, and Jim Crow laws were established. Black men were thrown out of office, and caste lines became impregnable.

During the plenty of Reconstruction, however, independent black churches sprang up in large numbers. Indeed, some of these churches began as a result of their members being expelled from white churches. Others were created from the belief by many of both races that there could be cooperation and interaction on the basis of mutuality and equality between churches, black and white.

From the pool of black preachers, visible at this time, many politicians arose. These were skilled "men of words" whose gifts of verbal dexterity and color had made them natural leaders of their people. And it was this group too that the strange malady called "Jim Crow" direly afflicted when the curtain came down on Reconstruction.

The flurry of black freedoms stunned the South. The political power assured by increased populations of free black people could unbalance the power of the South. Necessity imposed severe restraint! These liberties obliged a crafty expertise, and a new and vicious strategy took form. The Ku Klux Klan, the White Brotherhood, and the Camellias of Louisiana organized to intimidate and render impotent this
cheeky black man who sought social and political equality. Describing this phenomenon and the effects it had on many black preachers, Reverend James Cone wrote:

The "second-class citizen" is told that his oppression is due to his ignorance and his mental inferiority. At this point the oppressed is duped into believing that if only he were like the oppressor, he would no longer be ridiculed. A crash program of self-help is then devised to bridge the gap between the educated and the ignorant. This is largely the role of the black churches, the Booker T. Washingtons in the area of religion.42

So, "cast down your buckets where you are" not only became a social philosophy but a religious one as well. The black church then became a complement to white power, and white power found itself equal to the task. Sermons of many black preachers waned into innocuous homilies on the excesses of smoking, drinking, and adultery.

These preachers appeared, in contrast to their earlier counterparts, merely shadows of their former selves. They were whipped. They were powerless. They were co-opted. Their themes were reliance upon God, self-help, and future reward. Their songs were the songs of a people disenchanted and powerless to fight back:

We are tossed and driven
On this restless sea of time
Howling storm and raging tempest
Oft succeeds the bright sunshine;
And we wonder why the tests
When we try to do our best
But we'll understand it better
By and By.

By and by became 1915, and black people sought the mecca in the North. America was about to embark upon another war for democracy. Under this urgency, once again big business successfully marshalled large numbers to augment their labor force. They pasted the South with advertisements for jobs. At the same time, the Ku Klux Klan pasted the South with their own, different, terrifying advertisements. Blacks were caught in the crest of that power, languishing ineffectively in their own counterforce. So by and by became 1919 when 10,000 outraged blacks marched in a silent protest parade, which also proved ineffective in result. Burnings and lynchings erupted, and overcrowded housing, impoverished hope and paralyzing fear became a way of life. Finally, by and by became Marcus Garvey.

No Law But Strength; No Justice But Power

Marcus Garvey, clearly, was not a black preacher of traditional religious persuasion. One could not argue, nonetheless, that Garvey did not minister and did not preach. His gospel was a social gospel by which he pressed like Moses to part the seas that held his people captive and lead them home to freedom. Preaching solidarity to a race gripped by
fear, he said, "Up, you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will." He preached blackness. He preached unity. He preached faith in the God of the oppressed. Pointing the way to freedom, he thundered, "Go on! Go on! Climb ye the heights of liberty and cease not in well doing until you have planted the banner of the Red, the Black and the Green on the hilltop of Africa." 

Thousands of black people in America joined his congregation in an impressive display of blackness. In pagaentry and pleasure, they worshipped a black God, prayed to a black Jesus, canonized a black Madonna, and followed a black teacher, preacher and minister of the faith. This was the character of America's first mass black nationalist movement. Such, too, was the cameo of Garvey, holy man and keeper of the gates of black history and of the continuity of the race.

For black people throughout the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's, the new sense of black awareness was the signature for many black lives and experiences. But once again racial crisis swept the Nation. After the 1954 Brown vs. the Board of Education decision (Topeka, Kansas), the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council issued out of the South, bound to resist integration. Swirling currents of racial confrontation gushed afresh. The force of this recovered outpouring
once more gutted the weight and vigor of the black preacher. Then as a consequence of the weakness of the black church and its incapacity to act as a foil for the black community, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was formed. For the same reason, the Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee were formed. The black church was so debilitated as a body—so given to accommodationism—that it was powerless to effect change for black people in a political or social manner. Further, it was unable to strengthen in "gbogbo awon omo enia dudu," all black people. Thus, the period ended with the black church and the black preacher nearly impotent to make significant inroads into the dark struggle of black people for liberation.

The Modern Era

Black Christian Preacher with a Dream

Because of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, the black church and the black preacher regained their positions of power in the black community. Further, King reunited the church with the spirit of the social gospel. Through the electrifying drama of his career for freedom and equality under the law and the Lord, Martin Luther King, Jr.,
enjoined the black community with the invigorating spirit of a people inspired.

King was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. He attended Morehouse College, and later Boston University where he received his Ph.D. Ordained as a minister at Crozer Seminary near Philadelphia, King later moved to Atlanta where he organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. With this organ, he emerged as a charismatic leader effecting a persuasive campaign to achieve assimilation within American society for all black people. His strategies were passive resistance, mass demonstrations, boycotts and sit-ins—each playing a part in the total movement toward accomplishing the specific objectives of Freedom. King's rhetorical choice was moral suasion grounded in a social gospel and in reliance upon God. "There are some who still find the Cross a stumbling block, others consider it foolishness, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. So like the Apostle Paul I can now humbly, yet proudly, say, 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'" Thus, King was marked as an indisputable activist for human rights. Using the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he escalated the black struggle for integration
to a position of power and drama, the intensity and reality of which served to vivify the spirit of a people bound to battle for their humanity.

What his nonviolent protest brought to bear was his stubborn insistence to gain equality, redeem humanity, and claim rights to full participation for all black people in American society. "I have a dream" sounded his litany,

"that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. . . With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day."51

What the rhetorical style of Martin Luther King imposed upon this struggle was passion and power to provoke and prick "uncanny consciences caught up in their own contradictions."52

Further, what was altogether palpable was that owing to King in no small measure, the black church and the black liberation struggle were lifted to a new level.

A Black Religious Angry Man

The modern movement had other prophets than King, however. Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska. As the primary spokesman for the Nation of
Islam, he blistered denunciations of white racist society. He lectured on the need for black people in America to come together in unity, mustering strength to reorder national priorities according to their own needs. He used his rhetorical skills and religious platform to educate Black people about their past and their terrible need for pride. "We have got to change our own minds about each other. We have to see each other with new eyes. We have to see each other as brothers and sisters. We have to come together with warmth so we can develop unity and harmony that's necessary to get this problem solved ourselves."

In the Garvey tradition, Malcolm X articulated a strong, viable racial pride and identity; a workable consensus and understanding of black history and progress; and a fresh impetus toward racial solidarity and activation. Indeed, he provoked in many black people a new sense of black pride.

During this same period, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were passed. These pieces of legislation gave black people the right of free access to public accommodations under the law. However, as Yette pointed out, these bills did little to break down barriers for black people to get better jobs with higher pay, or to gain the vote. Subsequently, the "War on Poverty" was initiated. Not long after, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and
the Lowndes County Party were formed. These parties had as their purpose to urge and assist the development of black political power; the leadership of these efforts believed that black people must organize and obtain their own power base before forming coalitions with others. Thus, these organizations further marked the strides toward a new impetus for black Americans.

During the latter 1960's, the new contours of the struggle manifested in the concept of Black Power--pride and development of and for black people. The movement, then, focused upon restructuring the economy and income distribution for more decent jobs and better living standards. It focused upon building coalitions to provide political clout for blacks. And it focused upon agitating for fuller black participation in the decision-making apparatus. Major spokesmen emerging from this arena were Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and Huey Newton.

In The Name of The Black Messiah

The black nationalist movement also had impact to a considerable degree upon traditional religious leadership within the United States as exemplified by Dr. King. This is noted by the creation of the Black Christian Nationalist Movement,
founded by Reverend Albert Cleage (Jaramogi A. Agyeman) of the Church of the Black Madonna in Detroit, Michigan. There for the first time, in the scope expressed by this organization, the black church began to assume a posture of nationalism. Its programs of education, community control, means of production, distribution, and mutual sharing further illustrate this emphasis.

Cleage attacks the traditional concept of Christianity's patience, long-suffering and forebearance. He stresses the ideas that black people are God's chosen people and that they are to take a major part in the black man's revolutionary emphases as they try "to build one Black community, one Black Nation, all stemming from the hub which is the Shrine of the Black Madonna." In this way, he adds, black people must become more pragmatic to their approaches to liberation. Said another way, social planning must be added along with their prayers. Therefore, under Cleage's leadership, rhetorical skills, and religious base, the church is revolutionized and Black Power is brought into closer cooperation as a working concept of the black ministry.

Summary

What significance does the unique position of the black church and the black preacher bring to bear on the black
experience in America, religiously, rhetorically, and politically? Clearly it points out the diversity of their roles and rhetorical approaches throughout history. Furthermore, it indicates a variety of tactics to adapt the black world view to the changing political position of blacks in American society as well as to their ever-pressing problem of survival.

During slavery, for some slaves, the black religious assembly provided consolation for miseries in bondage. For others, that assembly functioned to retard pacification and keep their minds on freedom. Throughout this early period, the black preacher played the roles of teacher, diplomat, invigorator, politician, and preacher, to name a few. Some plantation preachers were used as instruments of white control. Their rhetorical stance was rooted in the alternatives of deferred joys for a compensatory reward in heaven or a life of sin, even death, for their disobedience. Other preachers, however, served God from a different perspective. They urged liberation which they claimed for themselves a necessary means to serve their God—the God of Moses who led the children of Israel out of bondage.

Other effective "men of words," from Allen through Paul, rendered consolation, guidance, and encouragement. They also birthed the first organized independent black church.
Throughout the period of Reconstruction, both independent black churches and black preachers increased their numbers many fold, in spite of a climate of intimidation and political setback. Into this arena of oppression came Marcus Garvey, brandishing a different religious perspective. Armed with the weapons of a black God, a black Jesus, and a black Madonna, Garvey preached a social gospel that became a tool to set in motion a black battalion—dynamic, creative, and more effective in the strain against barriers of time and traditions of racism.

Garvey directed himself primarily to a black audience and his rhetorical approach was carved out of the rhetoric of separation. Through this religious base, for the first time, black people became involved in the largest mass movement of that people that America had ever seen. In this atmosphere of nationalism, concepts of Black Power incubated to be birthed in later years. Together in nationalist philosophy and religion, the black man affirmed himself, participated in social and economic ventures for his own best interests, and glorified in his history and motherland, Africa.

For years following this birth of black awareness, blessings flowed and black people keenly felt the promise of complete freedom in America. But with the rise of the Ku
Klux Klan, the White Citizens Council, and other such terrorist groups, the black church and the black preacher were stripped of potency to act as a counterforce in this element. The Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were secular groups formed in response to such oppression.

Under Martin Luther King's leadership, the black church and the black preacher were re-established to positions of power and influence in the black community. He spoke to the moral conscience of the Nation—revealing the duplicity in the American way of life, urging equality toward the goal of integration into society. He dreamed a striking dream but did not live to see it manifested.

Then came Malcolm X, a revolutionary religious rhetor, who was shaped in the Garvey mold. Once again, blackness was glorified in religion and in life. Using the Nation of Islam as his platform, Malcolm hurled stinging attacks and abuses at American hypocrisy.

Following this segment of black history, Black nationalist organizations began to pick up momentum as did the developing concept of Black Power. In the midst of this came the Black Nationalist Church under the leadership of the Reverend Albert B. Cleage. His purpose as a religious rhetor
of a new age is to bring into closer cooperation, concepts of Black Power and the black church. His rhetorical approach is difficult to confine to the traditional limits of assimilation, revolution, and separation. The parameters of his rhetoric are more adequately calculated in eclectic combination. He uses each approach as it appropriately addresses black people, the social context, and the specific objectives of freedom.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter II


3 Lerone Bennett, Jr., Confrontation: Black and White, p. 16.

4 David Grene and Richard Lattimore, Aeschylus I, p. 39. The prophetic ambience of this climate in the lives of black people is likened to the lines from Aeschylus: "Now as this bed stricken with night and drenched with dew I keep, nor ever with kind dreams for company; since fear in sleep's place stands forever at my head against strong closure of my eyes, or any rest; I mince such medicine against sleep failed: I sing, only to weep again the pity of this house no longer, as once, administered in the grand way.

5 Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the Making of America, p. 35.

6 "Seasoning" was the process of acclimating the African slaves to the condition of slavery as part of the passage in the triangular route to the New World.

7 Alex Haley, Roots (tape).

8 Lerone Bennett, Jr., Before the Mayflower, p. 27.

9 Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism, p. 19.

10 John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 34.

11 "Stylin' out" is a term coined by Grace Sims Holt and used in her article "Stylin' Outta The Black Pulpit," in Rappin' and Stylin' Out.

12 This scripture was commonly used to justify his bondage to the slave. It was employed by early preachers of both races. Other scriptural texts can be found in Sermons Preached on Plantations by Alexander Glennie.

"Compensatory idea" is a term used by Benjamin E. Mays in *The Negro's Church*.


For more information on "Uncle Jack" see Woodson, *The Negro Church*.

Woodson, p. 48.

Wilmore treats the concept of "Africanisms" extensively in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*. For more detail, see this source.

*American Slave*, XII, Part 2, p. 333.

For a vigorous, creative study of spirituals, see James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and The Blues*.

Bennett, *Before The Mayflower*, p. 49.

Wilmore, p. 35.

Interesting insight into slave protests is provided in *Black Resistance Before The Civil War* by William F. Cheek. See this source for exciting detail of this part of slavery's story.

Bennett, *Confrontation*, p. 42.

Bennett, p. 43.


Allen, pp. 72-74.

For example, Virginia in 1832 and Alabama in 1833 passed laws to restrict the activities of these preachers. In addition, preachers could not service their congregations unless five "respectable" white slave-holders attended and the meeting was approved by local religious societies.


Chambers, p. 92.

Chambers, p. 92.


From the spiritual of the same name.

This line and the line above represent a small part of the phenomenon called the Amen Corner in which the preacher says a line or punctuates certain words in a line and they are repeated by the congregation with a melodious rhythm. It is also a feature used to heighten audience receptivity. Bennett, *Before the Mayflower*, p. 184.

The 14th Amendment granted blacks equal protection under the law; the 15th Amendment granted the right to vote; and the *Civil Rights Bill of 1875* granted full participation in public accommodations.

According to Mays and Nicholson, "the freedom which the Negro felt in this period is best revealed by the fact that of the 333 rural and urban churches of this study which originated then, 231, or 69 percent came into existence through the initiative of individuals and groups." Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, *The Negro's Church*, p. 30.


"Cast down your buckets where you are" has become a famous phrase from Booker T. Washington's speech at the Cotton States Exposition, in September 1895.
The NAACP organized a protest against the lynchings that had been on the increase at that time. On July 28, 1917 about 10,000 marched in a Silent Protest Parade down Fifth Avenue in New York.

A slogan used in the Garvey Mass Movement.

Amy Jacques Garvey, Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, p. 97.

Under this law, separate but equal became a way of life in America.

National Association for The Advancement of Colored People is another organization founded as a secular protest arm, begun in 1909.

The Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee were also formed later as protest organizations to bolster support in the black community in the wake of the realization that the black church was ineffective in the struggle for liberation and full citizenship in America.


This phrase is used by Frantz Fanon in his book, The Wretched Of The Earth.

Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," in Malcolm X Speaks by George Breitman.


CHAPTER III

CLEAGE

PROPHET IN A VALLEY OF DRY BONES

Historically, one of the primary factors of life for black people in America has been their long struggle to realize freedom from oppression. Many black preachers together with black religion and the black church, have worked within the struggle prodding, promoting, and pushing to strengthen the awareness and capabilities of black people to gain their freedom. For this group in particular, black religion had primarily a "this-worldly" perspective inextricably woven into the very center of black life. As Plumpp puts it, "Black Religion (is) those ways... which Black people, in Africa and later in America, conceptualized to explain the universe and man's relationship to it and to subsequently govern man's relationship to man."¹

As we look to the Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel, for example, we find him dramatizing the need for Jewish people to recognize the very essence of their religion by urging upon them increased consciousness of themselves so that they would unify under the promise--a commitment--to God and to each other. In that way, the Jewish people in the valley of
dry bones during the Babylonian Exile could be unified once again as a people of one Nation.

Likewise, throughout the black experience in America, black preachers have assumed an impassioned and assertive role to reunite black religion with the struggle for liberation and affirmation. From the legacy of this history, these people, and this religious thrust springs the Black Nationalist preacher, Reverend Albert B. Cleage—prophet of an oppressed black people.

"Prophet" is one common translation of the ancient Hebrew term nabi which means "spokesman" and "interpreter" for God. One characteristic is typical of the biblical prophets: they always emerged in a time of chaos and confusion. Their functions were to re-establish order among their people and to strengthen the relationship between their people and God. Indeed, they were an expeditious, resolute and spirited tribe whose language was characteristically zealous, urgent, and most certainly, intense. This was true because of the fierce burden they felt and the urgency they sensed to right the injustices that sundered the unity of their people. This was the context out of which they sprang; now let us turn to Cleage's.
The Rhetorical Situation: The Context of Black Power

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Cleage in terms of the rhetorical strategies which he used to confront the effects of the Detroit rebellion of 1967, and more generally, to consider his role and his effects as spokesman of black power theology since the upheaval of that time. Although Cleage is the most radical of his tribe—the tribe of black preachers at the forefront of the movement for black liberation, the student of rhetorical theory can use the tools appropriate to his discipline in order to see Cleage whole. The features of rhetorical discourse (exigence, audience, and, in a final section, constraints) and the strategies of revolutionary rhetoric (vilification, objectification, legitimation, and mythication) are all instanced in Cleage's work. Of special relevance to Cleage are the implements for understanding symbols, in discourse, for Cleage's most radical contribution to modern black thought is his use of a symbology of Black Christian Nationalism.

In order to examine the rhetorical situation during which Reverend Cleage came to national attention and popularity, Bitzer suggests that we explore the three key features of black rhetorical discourse. They are: (1) exigence, (2) audience, and (3) constraint. First of all, "Any exigence," writes Bitzer, "is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is
a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be." With that in mind, let us explore the exigence of the Detroit Rebellion of 1967, during which Cleage came to prominence.

**Exigence: The Need for a Rallying Call**

The decade of the 1960's was a momentous but a disenchanting period for black people who saw and often were a part of chaos and confusion everywhere. The civil rights movement was scarred by murders, bombings, and police brutality. In stark contrast to the strains of "We shall overcome" were the sounds of tear gas guns, snipers, and exploding emotions. In spite of all this, at least one black man tenaciously held to his dream—though it often was dashed by violence—of black and white together. Martin Luther King insisted that nonviolence and creative suffering formed the technique necessary to lace the fraying social fabric of America. One of black America's most charismatic leaders and moving orators, King preached brotherhood and equality, weaving his way across the nation and gathering about him a large following. But sickness eating in the marrow of the Nation was gripping it hard in a chronic condition, painful—indeed, nearly lethal. Fear and hysteria were reacting in the body of the country; and issues, causes,
and emotions tangled in frustration, lost hope, and near-blindness to integration. Racism, unemployment, overcrowded housing, powerlessness and police brutality were whirling currents of an explosive mixture moving and countermoving against implacable hostility between black and whites. The people grew silent, bitter, cold and desperately cynical because of the death of their dream. Then in Detroit, in 1967, shock gave way to rage. And rage gathered with greater rage as the news coursed through the country. Black communities in 35 major cities erupted in turmoil, the cries from which were terrifying and traumatized America.

In Detroit, thousands of black people surged onto the streets. Bottles were hurled. Rocks were thrown. Neon signs were dashed to the ground. The noise of shattering glass rang the dirge of the day. The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders notes that "To riot and destroy appeared more and more to become ends in themselves." Fires fanned (many of them set by Molotov cocktails), consuming buildings almost instantaneously; uncontrollably. And blacks and whites, citizens and police, wrestled through the night, teetering perilously close to total alienation, till finally, the fire consumed the rage. In the cold light of retrospection, hopes withered. For many black people, it was a kind of judgment, and as in the time of Ezekiel a new voice of deliverance was needed:
The hand of the Lord was upon me and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones.

And caused me to pass by them round about; and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry.

...Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones and say unto them O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.9

Deep in the incubator of the South, a new chant was quickening! "Black Power! Black Power! We want Black Power!"10 The first murmurs began in 1966, and the chant gained momentum during the setbacks of demonstration until it pierced the long hot summers of rebellion. When it was picked up by the press, the slogan became associated with violent images, and Black Power met with stubborn opposition—both black and white.11

It was profoundly stunning that few seemed to find positive value in "Black Power." "Black Power is separatism!" sounded some volleys.12 "Black Power is reverse racism!" "Black Power is violence!" sounded others. Clearly, these exhortations were hardly expressed in the language of hard-nosed assessment. Rather, they were more a kind of righteous outburst, a psychological malingering, from which sprang a fair average of curses, rooted in fear and tension. These responses expressed the national genius for using the "proper"
invective to avoid the recognition of Black Power as a statement of hope for black people. Thus, many blacks with "Black Power" on their lips were regarded as backsliders by what could be termed "significant others." What ensued was to some predictable. As Burke explains, we "act in the code names by which (we) simplify or interpret reality. These names shape our relations with our fellows. . . . Call a man a villain, and you have the choice of either attacking or cringing." 

The most common reaction to Black Power was in government's coy but very effective argument which used Black Power as an excuse for stringent budgetary blindness. Thus, Black Power became, for many, a collective "devil term" in which the "profit on't (was) to curse." It was called "separatism" instead of "black identity," "reverse racism" instead of "self-affirmation," and "violence" instead of "hope."

What was actually occurring was a different and more radical form of protest than Blacks had previously attempted. The movement began to change from a middle class movement headed by traditional civil rights leaders to a grass roots movement springing up spontaneously from a disenchanted people where despair had rooted deep. A shift in objectives came too. No longer was the goal to open public accommodations.
Rather, the focus of protest lay on education and housing. In addition, a shift came geographically from south to north in the urban ghettos. The strategy was no longer to use ad hoc marches; it now turned upon long-range strategies to abolish racism in America. Marches were seen to be ineffective in producing equality and brotherhood for blacks and whites. Finally, a strategy was chosen of strengthening the black community and black institutions to deal from a position of strength and power, building their own coalitions among their own kind. From these times and these people Cleage drew his following. Their needs were manifest in the 1967 Detroit rebellion.

Audience: The Nature of Cleage's Congregation

The second major element of the rhetorical situation is the audience. According to Bitzer:

Since rhetorical discourse produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change, it follows that rhetoric always requires an audience—even in those cases when a person engages himself or ideal mind as audience. . . . a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change.17

Who formed Cleage's audience? They all came. "The old-timers, the young extreme nationalists, many of whom favored starting a new country within the United States, the
middle-aged—all still uneasy and angry over the white establishment—flocked to hear the one man of the cloth who insisted on angrily twitting the system from the pulpit." Disenchanted youth came. Many of them were college-trained, articulate, energetic youth between twenty and thirty who had believed in the dream of Martin Luther King and had marched for it, some with King himself, either in spirit or in fact. They had acquired the tools the dream demanded but had been systematically excluded from full participation in American society. This promise had underlay the emphasis of their learning, so when its fulfillment was not imminent, an acute sense of betrayal hit them, winging them from rage to confusion to utter despair. Instead of citizens, they saw themselves as sacrificial lambs.

Coupled with these were the frustrated youth of the urban ghettos who felt excluded and alienated, imprisoned by poverty and their lost faith in brotherhood and equality. Indeed, many black people still believed in integration, many who hoped that when the confusion was spent, America would gather its senses and work for black and white together. But to a considerable number of them, when Carmichael shouted and Malcolm X shouted and Cleage shouted "Black Power!" the resounding note hit home. So, born from the painful
apprehension that integration would never happen, "Black Power" gained increasing attention as a legitimate statement of black affirmation.

For Cleage's rise to influence, another critical group came from the Detroit middle class. Before 1967 in Detroit, the black middle class, striving up the ladder of success, had felt clearly above the problems of the grassroots poor. However, because of the widespread and indiscriminate re­prisals after the rebellion, they too were severely affected. Thus, many of them joined the ranks of the disenchanted and the people of lost faith.

Thus, a clear result of the Detroit rebellion among those who composed Cleage's congregation was an eagerness for a leader and an urgency to push for self-identification, self-analysis, and movement toward a viable means for their liberation in an oppressive society. To the list of congregants must be added the many active young militants and notables who came. There were Nathan Wright, Director of Urban Work for the Episcopal Diocese of Newark and former rector in Boston for 14 years; Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X; as well as Richard and Milton Henry, later founders of the Republic of New Africa. They were joined by a large audience of blacks and whites created by the press who caught in Cleage, both the spirit of the Detroit rebellion and the rising
concept of Black Power. Even more, bound up in the Perelman's concept of Universal audience, we find the Prophet-Cleage addressing his exhortations to the universal body of reasonable men, distinctly black in genre.

As Cleage would "prophesy over" these audiences, "heavily populated with movement people", he excused himself from the stressful task of speaking to whites as well as blacks. For implicit in his remarks is an acknowledged failure to further race relations on a basis of mutual respect and equality. The Detroit experience had rather taught him that such a formula produced the insult of tedium—if it produced anything at all. The prophet finds such an approach not only religiously schizoid but, from a secular view, an abominable waste of time. Thus, Cleage's framework is exclusively black in character. He plunges our attention immediately to this rhetorical decision when he says:

White people will find it difficult to accept either my position or my conclusion because I am Black and an enemy, and 'ought not' understand them so completely and 'ought not' presume to build a realistic position for Black people which may someday threaten their position of white supremacy.

Precisely, as if second-guessing a misunderstanding, he tartly remarks:

I am not greatly concerned about how white people will react to my analysis, but I am tremendously concerned that Black people
understand and critically evaluate my total position, because time is running out for the Black man. It is Black-Nation building time!"26

As these comments apply more particularly to the sermons preached during the Detroit rebellion, he notes in the preface of The Black Messiah that "the sermons included in this volume were preached to black people. They are published in the hope that they may help other black people find their way to the historic Black Messiah, and at the request of many black preachers who are earnestly seeking ways to make their preaching relevant to the complex and urgent needs of the black community. White people who read these pages are permitted to listen to a black man talking to black people."27

What then does Reverend Cleage "prophesy" to his people to open communication between them? Or put another way, how does this prophet gather up his people so that their bones will come together in one Black Nation, each to the other, "bone to his bone?"28

Cleage: Rhetor in Rebellion

Reverend Albert B. Cleage, if he were classified with the prophets of old, is an outrageous spokesman for God and for his people. Like Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and particularly Ezekiel, his language is serious, harsh, and relentless. He
demonstrates clearly through his speech a low tolerance for patience and a clear disdain for injustice. Moreover, taking his thesis from Old Testament tenets that man was made in the image and likeness of God, through his sermons and his ministry, he contends that black people must be liberated, for only in this way can they affirm their nature and their potentialities as free men of God's creation. Within this perspective then, Cleage embraces black power as a working concept of his ministry. For black power is viewed as an expression of self-affirmation and an inseparable element in the black man's struggle for freedom. A contemporary of Reverend Cleage, Reverend James Cone provides insight into this conjunct when he states that:

It would seem that Black Power and Christianity have this in common: the liberation of man! If the work of Christ is that of liberating men from alien loyalties, and if racism is . . . an alien faith, then there must be some correlation between Black Power and Christianity. . . . Black Power is the power to say No; it is the power of Blacks to refuse to cooperate in their own dehumanization. If Blacks can trust the message of Christ, if they can take him at his word, this power to say No to white power and domination is derived from him.29

In the sermon, "New-Time Religion," we are compelled to take note of both Cleage's language and the appeal to black awareness from which he builds a statement of power. He begins smartly:
I want to talk about the Church and what it means to be black in a white man's world. Our scripture reading is a very simple one. It says, if you have come into your neighbor's power, you have to do something to get out of it. You have to stay awake. "Give your eyes no sleep, and your eyelids no slumber. Save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter." He moves swiftly into the heart of the dilemma of black people. He insists to his audience that black people must awaken to a consciousness of themselves and a consciousness of the power that is impeding their liberation. What immediately strikes one most about Reverend Cleage's language is the precision and terse expression that is his style. He states:

What does it mean to be black in a white man's world? Obviously it means that we have difficulties everywhere we turn, because black people are powerless and white people are powerful, and are ruthless in the use of their power to maintain white supremacy in a white racist world. It means that in every area of life we are disadvantaged, and must be able to survive and move ahead against overwhelming obstacles.

Cleage's aim is to destroy the artificial walls for whatever reason they were erected that encase his people in an isolationistic view of religion, and in this way, an attitude that would in the long-run mean cultural obliteration and self-annihilation. Again, from the same sermon, he draws our attention to his point.
The Black Church must understand our dilemma, and must offer leadership in complex areas totally unknown to the down-home fire-and-brimstone preacher.

The Black Church must offer leadership in areas in which most of us are confused, if it is to survive. Few of us really understand what it means to be black in a white man's world. Many of us are just getting over the illusion that we are a part of the white man's world. Because we don't realize our powerlessness, we are confused. A black person will talk logically for five minutes and then he will say the most absurd things because he refuses to accept the obvious implications of things he knows to be true.  

To this point, he states further:

I would like to suggest that we approach the problem of the Black Church in a much too unsophisticated way. The role of the Church and religion is always adjusted to meet the needs of a people. Religion is not just something that goes on the same way from the beginning of time right on down. Religion and the Church constantly shift to meet the needs of a people. Religion isn't the same today as it was thirty years ago, a hundred years or two hundred years ago. It is shifting and changing all the time. One of the things that confuses us when we talk about religion is that we tend to think of it as something fixed, final and settled.

Cleage's message required a shift in thinking about religion. Formerly regarded as a fixed product, the Church had to be understood in dynamic process.

In the late 1960's, the traditional black church found itself between the rock and the hard place. The problem did not lay in a lack of numbers. For even to the casual observer
of the black community, churches seemed to blossom, pollinate, and blossom again, seeding no matter the season in the greater species of Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopalian. They filled the Sunday morning air with lurid litanies. Lights and sounds blinked and obtruded the divine advertisements upon visceral sensations. Shepherds, pastors, and preachers could be heard whooping and hollering and honking their religious wares: "Jesus operates here! He will give his angels charge over you ('Yes he will'). They will bear you on their hands, ('Make it plain Rev'end!') Lest you strike your foot against a stone ('Let the Church say Amen')." Here, Prophet Cleage would say, rests the problem. "Black people cannot build dignity on their knees" says Cleage, "worshipping a white Christ. We must put down this white Jesus which the white man gave us in slavery and which has been tearing us to pieces."34

For years, black people have been content to enjoy the psychological comfort of being "borne up" by which they mean that freedom, like salvation, will be borne up on the knees of prayer and carried on their brow like a birthmark. But the question is, howls the Prophet, where lies the dignity and strength of God's people fighting for their freedom--on their knees? Too long have black people prevailed upon the wind with their songs--head in hand--on their knees. Instead,
Cleage asserts, the authentic religion requires—no commands!—people to "Stand Up! Stand Up! for Jesus!" Thus, Cleage involved himself, in 1967, in a move for a massive ethical shift of the black religious perspective from penitent to militant!

We do not pray for racial peace. We pray for our brothers and sisters who were killed during the rebellion in Newark and Detroit and other cities. We pray for those who are still herded into filthy cowpens like cattle today because they are black. We pray for their spirit. We pray for our own spirit that we may not grow weak, that we may not, in the face of difficulties, turn back, that we may not become frightened, that conflict may not make of us Uncle Toms. We pray for that, and we pray that black churches from coast to coast will some day, and not too far in the future, become like we are, churches dedicated to the freedom of black people, centers of black culture. We do not pray for racial peace because justice has not yet come.35

Steadily emerging, then, are not only a defined theological position but also the means by which Cleage could follow up his prophetic commitment, saying,

I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.36

Examining the acute problems of his people very carefully, Cleage dared to create what he considered a new ministerial form planned to be viable to black people in America.
"Religion has several aspects," says Cleage,

"(1) priestly and ministerial, and (2) prophetic. Being prophetic is largely to place society under judgment of eternal values. It is a spoken thing—a voice, rather than a person-to-person ministry instead of a sacramental ministry. Just to talk is not a prophetic role. But a prophetic voice indicts, condemns, and brings under judgment of eternal values under (sic) the will of God. My ministry is more closely that of a prophetic voice than any other aspect. My ministry is to evaluate social action in the world, to see if it is compatible with what I consider truth, justice."37

Thus he embarked upon an architectonic ministerial form. This structure was based upon several beliefs: that the black experience in America is distinct and the church, in order to provide a pragmatic as well as a spiritual function, must reconsider its framework in terms of that experience: that in order for this to be properly done white theological prescriptions must be rejected: and that, once this is done, black churches need to be revamped in terms of their message to liberate the black man from oppression and yield a healthy religious climate in which his knowledge of personal worth, responsibility, and freedom are increased. So:

The new Black church, moving in a new direction, is not going to be essentially a preaching church. It will preach and it will teach, but only because they make meaningful action possible. The new church will be an action-oriented institution to which people can come for education and inspiration, in order that they may go back into the Black
community and deal with Black people where they are in terms of everyday problems. This is the kind of new Black church which we are building under the banner of Black Christian Nationalism. Shrines of the Black Madonna are being set up in cities across the country. This is the kind of ministry to which we are calling young Black men and women. We have merged the heaven process with the survival process and we are engaged in building a heaven on earth for all Black people everywhere. We are an African people and we walk in the footsteps of a revolutionary Black Messiah, Jesus.39

Cleage's Rhetorical Strategies: The Attack on White Culture

Smith suggests four categories by which we may examine Cleage's rhetorical strategies. They are: (1) vilification, (2) objectification, (3) legitimation, and (4) mythication. "Vilification," according to Smith, "is the agitator's use of language to degrade an opponent's person, actions, or ideas."40 Of objectification, he says: "It is the agitator's use of language to direct the grievances of a particular group toward another collective body such as an institution, nation, political party, or race."41 In Cleage's work these two concepts are closely related. In fact, they are hardly separable for Cleage. They both involve his negative attacks on white religion, on white values and ideals—indeed, on nearly anything white.

Cleage blames white society and white churches and condemns them for oppressing, by their traditional religion, the aspiration and liberation of black people. As a corollary,
Cleage condemns and blames black ministers and black congregations who have done no more than mimic white ideas and patterns of worship.

Early on Cleage made a major rhetorical decision. From a traditional perspective and thrust he shifted his religious philosophy to the more militant religious philosophy of Black Christian Nationalism. The critical problem, as this prophet sees it, is to provide a more viable survival structure that embraces more social planning than prayers; and to provide the necessary theological tools to equip black people to cope with their present conditions. Why? Serious reasons often require severe action. As Cleage puts it about the Church:

In the United States the Church was developed to meet the white man's needs. He decided what it should be. He decided the form, the structure, the theology, everything. The black man's Church has tried to work within the framework of the white man's decisions because we were so hell-bent on being integrated that anything he said had to be right. Only recently have we begun to understand that the whole development of the Christian Church has been something the white man was building for himself.42

Then, demonstrating his skill at using both a strikingly aggressive strategy and the ability to use words like whips, Cleage makes it clear that he is at odds not only with the duplicity of white churches but also with the complicity of
black religious vendors who pantomime them. "Everywhere the Black Church tries to be like the white man's Church. They go through the motions and the more education black worshippers have, the harder they try. They even try to copy the dead emptiness of the white folks' service, the little rhythmless songs with nothing to pat your foot to all through the services." Clearly, it is apparent that such a strategy is rendered effective when it moves one's hearers toward unity either of purpose or of spirit; while at the same time, it serves to vitiate the credibility of its mark.

Here lay a key appeal of the Prophet-Cleage. Despite his extraordinary capacity to communicate passion to his listeners, reason is the appeal—the testimony—of a man skilled in pragmatics and versed in the knowledge of his own people. The consistent application of these two forms in a systematic way constitutes the art of the Prophet-Cleage. For example, in the sermon, "We Are God's Chosen People", he builds his argument from the Psalms: "How long will you set upon a man to shatter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence? They only plan to tear him down from his dignity." He likens the problems of the people of Israel to the problems of black people today:

It is as if we were talking about the enemies of the Black Nation today. How long will they continue to oppress and to exploit and to do all the
things they have been doing? How long will they continue to use violence in an effort to destroy us? As we see the plight of black people in this white man's world, we echo the words of the Psalmist, "How long will you set upon a man to shatter him like a leaning wall?" That is a beautiful figure of speech because if a wall is leaning, it isn't going to stand long. Certainly we can say, "You only plan to tear us down from our dignity." 45

Seizing the initiative and expressing his concepts in a distinct, pedagogical fashion, his design imbues his hearers with a pronounced perception that here is a man who is not wrestling with concepts he does not understand.

The obvious effectiveness of his approach and his argument rest within the power to demonstrate how sloppy and inappropriate are standard brands of white Christian reasoning when applied to the oppressive condition of Black people in America. Indeed, his language is tart and he does seem quite put off. But the question is, is this just shallow theological bitchiness, or has he, in the fact of the matter, put his finger on something? Clearly, as his argument is further constructed, his concepts focus upon black liberation and the hindrances to that liberation. It is here that he attempts to snatch some of the blinders off. The problem lies in "dignity," he asserts. "Take from you your dignity and you have nothing left. Take from you the right to hold up your head, to feel that you are a man, the right to think to be--
take away that dignity and there is nothing left but a groveling animal, a slave."\textsuperscript{46} He has led us then into baffling terrain. The road is prickly by our own admission. It is altogether apparent that black people have forgotten something of utmost importance. For Cleage urges upon them that:

We know that Israel was a black nation and that descendents of the original black Jews are in Israel, Africa, and the Mediterranean area today. The Bible was written by black Jews. The Old Testament is the history of black Jews. The first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, tell the story of Jesus, retaining some of the original material which establishes the simple fact that Jesus built upon the Old Testament. Jesus was a Black Messiah. He came to free a black people from the oppression of the white Gentiles. We know this now to be a fact. Our religion, our preaching, our teachings all come from the Old Testament, for we are God's chosen people. God is working with us every day, helping us find a way to freedom. Jesus tried to teach the Nation Israel how to come together as a black people, to be brothers one with another to stand against their white oppressors.\textsuperscript{47}

His concepts center around the liberation of black people in America. This liberation is very much involved in the process of regaining dignity. And, of course, such a message has profound depth and significance for all black people, but was immediate to his audiences during the Detroit rebellion. His language is explosive as he shows himself openly vexed with white Christianity and its black proponents who would return to plantation religion and keep black people in a state of slavery or colonization. "No matter what the enemy does to
us" lobs the Prophet, "we are God's chosen people and we must love each other. We fight together against a common enemy, confident of ultimate victory because we are God's chosen people. 'How long will you set upon a man to shatter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence? They only plan to tear him down from his dignity.'"48

Along these lines, Cleage fully concretizes another standard by which to correct the racial malaise. His quest to help meet the salient needs of black people with a viable, theological vehicle led him to pronounce his involvement with a working concept of black power. Sprinkling it at first, then adding great dashes of the formula to the blueprint for black survival, he attempts to lock blacks into a vehicle that will take them the whole way of the journey. At the same time, he seeks to maximize the power position of black people to obtain a more decisive advantage. The Bible says, the bones came together and that when they did, the breath of the Lord came into them, "and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding army."49 It asserts that they should not grovel on their knees begging white society for equality. If black people are created in God's image, so goes the line of argument, then power is not only implicit but inherent. When a people have forgotten who they are, only fallacious
reasoning would imply they have remembered the power of their source. So Cleage adds:

God is trying to help people stand up as men, and if anything in our religion makes us less than men, there is something wrong with our religion. God says that we are created in his image. That means that we have to have some power. You can't stand up as a man if you are powerless. That means that the Black Church must dedicate itself to the task of building Black Power. Don't worry because white folks are afraid of the words 'Black Power.' Say 'Black Christian Power,' if you want, because that is what it amounts to. Black God-given Power. That is what we are talking about. God wants his chosen people to have power because if they don't have power, they are slaves. They are sick because there's no way to live without power and be well. 50

By this approach to his black audiences, during a time when their bones were very dry and their hearts empty, in the offensive strategy and view of life rooted in a man whose life is in close communion with them, we have an effective, militant, religious rhetor who is clearly a drawer of water. His strategy undermines traditional moral suasion, for Cleage simply ignores it. The strategy also undermines coalitions with whites. Black power is as mutually exclusive to black people as white power has always been for white people. Sharply stating so, Cleage has depicted white Christian concepts and white society as exploitative and hypocritical. White terrain is now clearly marked as the cause of black slavery rather than salvation.
Cleage's Rhetorical Strategies: The Legitimation of Black Hope

Two other strategies are particularly important in the discussion of Reverend Cleage—mythication and legitimation. Smith describes mythication as a strategy that employs "language that suggests the sanction of supra-rational forces, (by which) the agitator creates a spiritual dynamism for his movement." And of legitimation Smith states: "In legitimation, the black revolutionist seeks to explain, vindicate, and justify the activists involved in his movement."

For Cleage, the most effective and indeed, the most radical rhetorical tool of legitimation is mythication. Cleage gives symbolic and ritualistic expression to the fundamental principles of his black nationalism by embodying them in the persons of a Black Messiah and a Black Madonna.

Cleage insists that there is nothing to be gained by worshipping a white Jesus who would not understand. He adds further that Jesus was not white. Jesus was Black. Another tactic of the white man, he notes, is to confuse black people with illusions. A white Jesus is one of those illusions. "The white man is not going to admit that Jesus was black," he says. "He is going to twist history to make it fit the pattern of white supremacy. He will continue to paint pictures of Jesus looking the way he wants him to look. He
knows that all of those pictures painted during the Middle Ages are lies." This is one man who understands what it means to localize the enemy and pounce upon him with all of his might. The rhetorical strategy not only vitiates the credibility of whites and white theology but unifies black people under a common cause, by a common enemy.

To acknowledge this much is to acknowledge that insight is not gained by the withdrawal from the community of black people that white Christianity fosters. Further, he communicates persuasively that black people, should they endorse these concepts of the slave master, are only being willing parties to the plot. This is a hardy persuasive appeal that puts meat and sinew on the rhetorical skeleton. Not only does he seem to catch white liberals straddling the fence as part of the white plot, but also ignorant "Negroes" willingly being used for the oldest trick in the book: divide, conquer and exploit. Thus, he exhorts black people to turn to their own Jesus—the Jesus of their birth who is far superior to the shallow illusion of an alabaster Jesus misled, by culturally- and politically-minded artists of the Middle Ages.

This has striking implications. For, more clearly all the time emerges an adaptive rhetorician wielding the power of the prophets and the power of oppression, hurling his words like great gulps of breath into a people so that they might
"stand up on their feet, an exceeding great army." Not only does Cleage consider that he sees Jesus for what or rather, Who, He is, but also he considers that he sees black people as they really are.

For black people to live realistically, they must reject the view of Christianity as it has been handed down across the centuries. Black people must develop a Black Christian vision which applies to this earth, in community with blacks, and not that of a romanticized-version of plaster saints, sipping honey and flying about Heaven in new shoes. To a black, oppressed people, sacked in spirit, Cleage's advice was that black people must realize that their true Christianity does exist for them, and that it not only can but must be practiced every day. Further, it does not require a pilgrimage or a crusade to find it. Stop and reflect, he suggests, as the Bible said to the Black Jews in Babylonian bondage, to just consider their source—God—and their relationship to him as his chosen people. Any bondage ends when this fact is realized. Prayers to a white Jesus have no meaning as long as the notion of a white Jesus has no content. Black people can only take meaningful action when the internal conflict between them is resolved and they can come together in blackness and purpose--Black Nation--
building—and in their special relationship with God. As Cleage puts it:

Our relationship with God as black men also makes special demands upon us. God is disgusted with us because we have crawled too long. God did not intend for us to accept slavery and oppression for almost four hundred years. God has been ashamed of us for almost four hundred years. God demands that we fight, that we throw off the shackles of bondage now; that we stand up as free men now; that we come together as black brothers now, in the cause of black freedom. We must fight, and die if need be, that black people may be free with the power to stay free. This is what God demands of black men.55

The search, Cleage keenly identified, is for consciousness, unity and self-determination among Black people in America and in the African diaspora as well.

Cleage's Symbology: New Lives for a New Nation

When an unfamiliar visitor first enters Reverend Cleage's church, the view that dominates his gaze at once is at the center of the sanctuary. A huge painting stretching 30 feet high sets a striking atmosphere throughout the church. This is the now famed portrait of the Black Madonna holding in her arms a black baby Jesus. This symbol serves as an immediate rallying point not only for the worshippers at the Shrine but also for those black people who are converts to black theology in concert with black power.
Fotheringham provides significant insight into the definition of symbols. He writes:

The symbol does not point to or indicate the object's presence; it is not an announcer of things; it is not an observable part of an object or an observable event associated with an object. In this sense, a symbol is not real—physically real. Rather, the symbol is the name of the conception held about an object.56

Thus, the symbol, the Black Madonna, contains a conception of years of black experience, suffering, and oppression. But it expresses much more. For many black people it stands for a return to the proper theological position with a "this-worldly" perspective. Further, it is a statement of the proper basic premise of the Old Testament teaching—a black statement of Black religion.

For Reverend Cleage contends that Paul bastardized the original message of the gospel when he made that gospel a statement of universal brotherhood instead of a black nationalistic doctrine. "When he said turn your other cheek, Jesus meant only to your brother," Cleage argues.57 "And when he said walk a second mile, he meant only with your brother."58 He adds further, "The black identity was lost . . . at the first century Council of Jerusalem, where Paul convinced local church leaders that the Gospel should be carried to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews."59 Thus, the
symbol of the Black Madonna comes to mean or symbolize the restatement of the original message of Christianity. In this way, it further emphasizes the new statement of hope and self-determination in the black theology existing in Cleage's ministry and propounded in his sermons, pointedly during the Detroit Rebellion and more pervasively in its current forms. "Black theology," Cleage asserts, "wants to roll back many of the major characteristics of Christianity. First on the list is its 'other-worldliness.'" Next is its emphasis on individualism.

Every Sunday Cleage preaches his gospel in front of the portrait of the Black Madonna. Afterwards, he makes his call of welcome to the members of his congregation. Departing from traditional altar calls, Cleage invites his worshipers to join the Nation of black people, rather than, as is traditional, "joining church." Also, the ritual of baptism is revised into the symbolic death of old black consciousness and old views of integration with whites and life within the Black Nation. This, according to Cleage, is one of the first statements (within his concepts of Black Christian Nationalism) of black "rethink" and self-affirmation.

Finally, Cleage has made other changes in ritual. He believes that many of the Jewish festivals are "as significant
to black people as for Jews" and he has reinstated them in the calendar of his ministry. He proposes changes in such traditional hymns as "Fairest Lord Jesus." He suggests that a new version should be sung: "Darkest Lord Jesus." All the rituals of his church break with tradition. All have been conceived anew in terms expressive of black lives. A newly baptized congregant gives up his former way of thinking and with it, his former life. Cleage makes each new convert symbolize this for himself with the taking of a new conception of himself and a new dedication to the Black Nation representing a new life of genuine black commitment in a wholly black nationalist church.

Constraints: The Boundaries of Black Prophecy

It must be pointed out that Cleage was not a great religious and rhetorical blotter for the problems of Black people during the time of the 1967 Detroit rebellion, nor is he one now. He had a difficult time then under considerable constraint. Many black people were not impressed then (or now) with Christian philosophies, whether black or white in origin. This was because Christianity itself has so frequently been the tool of, or the major sanction for, black oppression. Further, many young nationalists whose views were different from Cleage's offered numerous rhetorical
problems. Richard and Milton Henry are good examples of just such a group. These two brothers, whom some regard as considerably more militant than Cleage, were alienated by Cleage's approach to audience, his message and his ministry. They felt a movement for black reparations from the United States was a much more realistic message which would, in turn, determine their subsequent approach and ministry. Milton Henry said of Cleage's ministry, "The black power of Cleage is unrealistic."  

The prophet Cleage certainly had problems other than ones with young, energetic nationalists of different views. Some of his parishioners felt he was too fast, others felt he was too slow; some felt he was too conservative and others felt he was too traditional. But certainly, during the crisis of rebellion, a rhetorical position and argument which cut across and soothed all of the ruffled feelings and fevered tempers would have taken something on the order of divine intervention. Some older parishioners left his congregation, particularly indignant at talk about a "black Jesus!" Then others fell by the wayside in a fluff when on Easter Sunday, March 26, 1967, Reverend Cleage unveiled the 30-foot portrait of the Black Madonna and issued a call to all black churches to join with other black churches in the Black Christian Nationalist movement.
Cleage felt another constraint that is peculiar to any dominant black spokesman who commands the attention and audience of thousands of black people. That constraint is death. This was the constraint of Robeson, of King, and of Malcolm X to mention only a few. Often, the strategy has been to discredit them as was the case for each one of these three mentioned. Cleage's life was threatened many times during his speeches during the Detroit rebellion. He had then and still has his share of death warnings, threatening letters, and hate phone calls. One typical letter read, for example, "You black bastard, I hope you get all that is coming to you, nigger. Stay on Linwood where you belong, not with good white folks. Damn blackbird." In fact, so great was the threat to Cleage's life in 1967 that the church supplied him with a personal bodyguard, Beverly Williamson, who is still guarding him. Furthermore, each person entering Cleage's church is still searched for weapons. Williamson sits to Cleage's right in front of the church during every service. Wearing a plain black dashiki, "he stares into the face of the congregation, ready to warn and to shield Cleage if trouble develops." Cleage also has a group of men who organized in 1967 into his Security Committee. They still serve as ushers during every service.
Also, during the rebellion, the church relocated Cleage's living quarters so that he could live on the twelfth floor of Lafayette Park, an exclusive and tight-security apartment dwelling.

For the most part, however, Cleage didn't seem to stew over his personal safety. As he says in *The Black Messiah*: "Some of us, if need be, must die. Anytime we forget that, we forget that we must be willing to die, the Nation is through. Because anybody can oppress us if we're afraid to die." As Poinsett notes, in his description of Cleage: "A one-time close friend of Malcolm X, his reddish hair, reddish complexion and laser beam eyes suggest an incarnation of the murdered prophet of Black Power. As was with Malcolm, life was an "iffy" proposition for Reverend Cleage. Reportedly, a $100,000 assassination price rides on his head and he travels parts of Detroit with bodyguards. Yet the threat of death apparently neither stays his hand nor his tongue."  

To these constraints it must be added that quite frankly, thousands of black people and white people simply have not reached the level of sophistication which would enable them to understand the value and dignity of a Black Messiah, a black theology, and a black ministry enveloping concepts of
Black Power to service its people. Indeed, relatively few Americans, by comparison, were then or are now ideologically or psychologically prepared to break old icons and images. But during the Detroit Rebellion Cleage captured a congregation of more than 1500 members, not including notable visitors. More recently, this figure is increased by the alignment of other church memberships with the Shrine within the Black Christian Nationalist movement.

To bring Cleage's audience full circle, one other group must be brought to the fore—other black clergy. To some Black Clergy, Cleage's theology suggested the "Scriptural gymnastics of old segregations." "We're for Black Power," explained the Reverend Robert Craghead of the Detroit Presbyterian Caucus, "but we don't want black deification. That's idolatry, the same as white supremacy, deifying an accident of your birth." And Reverend Wyatt T. Walker added his voice to that group when he said, "Cleage is destroying the very thing that makes Christ appealing—His universalism."

Cleage was undeterred in the face of these constraints. He continued to magnify his position that he might prophesy upon the bones of his people that he would "say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." And each of them—all of black people—could come together in one Black Nation, each to the other, "bone to his bone."
Summary

Indeed, Reverend Albert B. Cleage is reminiscent of the early religious rhetors called prophets. He too seems to be imbued with a tremendous sense of purpose and a ferocity at fulfilling his divine commitment to his God and to his people. Like Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and particularly Ezekiel, he casts about him the urgency of the religious dynamic, bound up in the oppression of his people. As one must give the biblical prophets a wide berth, one must do the same with Cleage. For when he pulls himself up to confront a rhetorical situation it is clearly apparent the striking rhetorical strategies that emerge (vilification, objectification, mythic- cation, and legitimization). His prophetic voice, like that of his pioneer counterparts, is terrible and awesome in its force, majestic and unsentimental in its passion. Infused with power and reason, the Prophet-Cleage does not mince words with either the issues or the audiences. Moreover, just as the early prophets were serious holy men, Cleage is a portrait of severity at times, a man who has a low thresh- hold for patience.

In spite of the demands and constraints of his position, he is a man who is involved in an authentic commitment to prompt and urge his people to accept the responsibility for
their liberation. Reassuring all black people, Cleage gave a note in parting: "We are God's chosen people, God is with us in our struggle. Our freedom struggle, our movement, our Black Revolution is in the hands of God. And the things we do, we do with the guidance, the strength, the support of God--we have to understand this..."

This is Cleage, prophet in a valley of dry bones.
Chapter III


2The Hebrew word for "prophet" is "nabi". Its meaning is approximately "spokesman" as when the Lord told Moses, 'Aaron your brother shall be your spokesman (nabi). Exodus 7:1. That is how the Jews themselves translated nabi in the oldest Greek translation of the Pentateuch, the Septuagint, about 200 B.C.; and the Greek word which was there employed, prophetes, "declarer" or "interpreter," is the source of the English word "prophet." It even appears that the word "prophet" in English meant simply forthteller" or "preacher" as late as the time of Queen Elizabeth; the meaning "fore­telling," "predicting," is a later development. The prophet spoke for God, and interpreted His word and will to his fellow Israelites." Harry M. Orlinsky, *Ancient Israel*, p. 123.


5For background to this climate and data about the ensuing rebellions see Burn, Baby, Burn! by Jerry Cohen and William S. Murphy; The Kerner Report Of The National Advisory Commission On Civil Disorders; Mass Media and Violence by David L. Lange, Robert K. Baker, and Sandra J. Ball; Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness by Robert Conot; and "Mass Media and Communication Processes In the Detroit Riot of 1967" by Benjamin Singer.

6See Kerner Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders.

7Kerner Report, p. 4.

8Kerner Report, p. 4.

9Bible, Ezekiel, Chapter 37:1-4.
The cry "Black Power!" in 1966 heralded a change in black perspective and a shift in political strategy from moderate to militant activist. This cry was shouted in city after city during the rebellions that later occurred.

Many whites came to fear the slogan "Black Power" to a large extent by the fact that the slogan was shouted during the rebellion-torn summers of 1966 and 1967. Newspapers' distortions of the events and the meaning of Black Power caused considerable confusion. But, whites were not the only group to react in a frightened manner. Roy Wilkins, Baynard Rustin and Whitney Young were quick to react not only to negative images of Black Power but also to the frightened mood of many whites. For example, Roy Wilkins wasted little time in making a public statement about Black Power saying: "No matter how endlessly they try to explain it, the term 'black power' means antiwhite power. . . .It has to mean 'going it alone.' It has to mean separation. . . .We of the NAACP will have none of this." (see The New York Times, July 6, 1966, p. 14).

Any number of people—black and white—were confused as to what Black Power really meant. Thus many denounced the concept as separatism in a pejorative sense of drawing away from whites—to have nothing to do with white people or white society—rather than in a positive sense of black people "closing ranks" in order to unify and build consciousness of themselves and power.

Many black people who often and openly shouted "Black Power" found themselves in a precarious position since not only some of their peers and parents misunderstood, but their employers misunderstood as well.

Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History, p. 4.

Richard Weaver advances discussion on the rhetorical absolutes called "god terms" and "devil terms." He suggests that a speaker may identify in a more satisfying manner with his audience if he were able to discern and employ the clusters of terms as they appeal most appropriately to his audience. Some "god terms" are "progress," "fact," "efficient," and "American." While "devil terms" are "un-American," "prejudice," and "ignorance."

William Shakespeare, Tempest, I, ii.
This mood is skillfully portrayed in fiction by the writer Ralph Ellison in his book, *Invisible Man*. As the invisible man is approaching an understanding of this phenomenon, dramatic effect is heightened when it is a mentally disturbed man who points to the heart of the problem. He says: "Come out of the fog, young man. And remember you don't have to be a complete fool in order to succeed. . . . Play the game, but raise the ante, my boy. Learn how it (the system) operates, learn how you operate. . . ." (Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, p. 137).

To many black people, because of setback and stark frustration over the years, Black Power seemed to be the only logical answer to their dilemma.

Chaim Perelman speaks of three types of audiences: the self (we deliberate with ourselves about value for example; special or particular audiences; and universal audience or the whole body of reasonable men).


Reverend Cleage makes his point clear both in *The Black Messiah* and *Black Christian Nationalism* that his primary concern is to address black people and their condition of oppression rather than gearing the focus of his speeches or his ministry to appeal, by moral suasion, to white people. His emphasis is Black Nation-building rather than integration with whites. He, also seems to feel no obligation to explain or defend his position to whites either. His attention and stress is on black people, black interests and black progress.


Reverend Cleage, p. xviii.


Bible, Ezekiel, Chapter 37:7.


34 Cleage, *The Black Messiah*, p. 3.

35 Cleage, "Grapes of Wrath" in *The Black Messiah*, p. 2.

36 Bible, Ezekiel, Chapter 37:7.

37 Ward, pp. xvii-xviii.

38 This term refers to a ministry concerned with the style and design of its construction. As this applies to Cleage, this form is concerned with the style and construction of this ministry in a way more viable to the needs of black people.


41 Smith, p. 29.


44 Bible, Psalms 62:3.

45 Cleage, "We Are God's Chosen People", in *The Black Messiah*, p. 48.

46 Cleage, "We Are God's Chosen People", in *The Black Messiah*, pp. 48-49.

"We baptize into a whole new way of life," said Cleage, which Christians have always said, not a mere cleansing. . . . One dies to the old way of life. For black people who live in a hostile nation and identify with the oppressor, one dies to that. The Shrine is dedicated to the rebuilding—if one accepts the new way of life, he is dedicated to the building of the Black Nation. Hiley H. Ward, Prophet of The Black Nation, p. 2.

During the transition of Cleage's church from a black church of traditional white theological concepts and bases to a Black Christian Nationalist church, many of the older, more conservative members refused to participate. Rather, they chose to move their memberships to other churches.
66 Ward, p. 106.
67 Ward, p. 115.
69 Alex Poinsett, "The Quest for A Black Christ," p. 172.
70 "Black Power Shakes The White Church," p. 84.
72 Bible, Ezekiel, Chapter 37:7.
CHAPTER IV
TOWARD A TOTAL MINISTRY

In the aftermath of rebellions and in the rise of the Black Power movement, many changes began to occur within the black consciousness, within the black community, and within the black church. Events had been cataclysmic; they burned unforgettable imprints onto the face and into the soul of black people. No black person in America entirely escaped the swath of this time. Incisions which had cut deep testified to reprehensible coercion and repression. Thus, what happened subsequently in the black community was scarcely believable. Self-consciousness grew more astute. Hope was building and black people's commitment to their own survival was gaining momentum.¹

Black power gained increasing legitimacy among black people, and as a result greater and greater numbers of blacks, increasingly disenchanted with the fossils of traditional black approaches and with the adamantine resistance of white power, jointly advocated new political endeavors,² complete control of their own communities and schools,³ and policies of black economic self-help.⁴ In this way, Black Power was
more and more manifesting itself in clear concrete forms.

As Wilmore suggests:

Black Power meant that only by Black people solidifying their ranks through a new consciousness of history and culture, building political and economic power, and being willing to legitimize ethnocentrism, group self-interest and even defensive violence, if necessary, could they hope to survive the onslaught of repression following in the wake of disillusioned white liberalism, and take control of their own future.⁵

From the course of these happenings, black clergy who had actively participated in the civil rights marches and who had worked within the confines of traditional white church structures during the rebellion found themselves disenchanted with the shocking consequences. Invigorated by the shift in political consciousness marked by rebellions which happened in urban cities across the country, their response was to align themselves with Black Power and to clear the air with a public pronouncement of a clear definition of the clergy's position on Black Power. Their statement reads:

As black men who were long ago forced out of the white church to create and to wield "black power," we fail to understand the emotional quality of the outcry of some clergy against the use of the term today. It is not enough to answer that "integration" is the solution. For it is precisely the nature of the operation of power under some forms of integration which is being challenged. . . Without . . . capacity to participate with power-i.e., to have some organized political and economic strength to really influence people with whom one
interacts--integration is not meaningful...We regard as sheer hypocrisy or as a blind and dangerous illusion the view that opposes love to power. Love should be a controlling element in power, but what love opposes is precisely the misuse and abuse of power, not power itself. So long as white churchmen continue to moralize and misinterpret Christian love, so long will justice continue to be subverted in this land.6

Shortly after this announcement, the mobilization of black ecclesiastical forces gained momentum rapidly. Black caucuses of clergy, in unprecedented displays of organization and degrees of commitment, impelled their congregations into the deeper knowledge of their consciousness and imposed upon their ministries the blueprint of black power.7

From these black caucuses and these political and religious assessments came a significant thrust, dramatic in its proportions and implications for blacks and whites alike. This thrust was to redefine the essence, role and function of black religion and the black church, actualizing them in a more practical way for the lives and position of black people in America. Owing to these developments, a black theology of black power developed. Out of the currents of these happenings and springing full-blown from the head of these events and conceptions, came Albert Cleage, who pioneered their implementation. As Cleage's efforts got underway, his brothers in the clergy were moved to take note of him. As Dr. Truman Douglass
has said, "Cleage is the most influential Negro clergymen in Detroit today. In fact, he may well be the city's most influential Negro." And Wilmore adds, "No Black theologian has been more controversial than Cleage."

Using the black church as his platform and a Black Messiah as his example for black liberation, Cleage preaches the gospel of black nationalism and black power to a black nationalist congregation. He seeks a total free survival of black people, and his means to that end is Black Christian Nationalism. Through primarily religious communication, Cleage is attempting to actualize the theoretical bases of Black Christian Nationalism within the collective community of black people.

Objectives in Service

"The struggle is not simply for 'equality,' or 'better jobs,' or 'better schools,' and the rest of those half-hearted liberal cliches; it is to completely free the black man from the domination of the white man. Nothing else, contends Baraka. In accordance with this goal, Reverend Cleage has reshaped traditional Christianity to provide blacks worship, personal commitment, and fellowship in a religious environment which also promotes the growth of social and political power more reflective of the black experience."
Thus old escapist church concepts, like old shoes, must be discarded when they do the soul injustice. "As long as black people had no conception of how to change their situation," Cleage acknowledges, "the escapism of the black church was valid." Yet, he goes on to say, "When black people began to see that if black people just worked together that things can be changed--from that moment we didn't need an escapist institution." Therefore, Cleage asserts that the black church must be remolded and his ministry attests to fulfill this assertion.

More specifically, then, the objectives of his ministry are to change the Black church "because Black people are demanding that it become a part of the Struggle to liberate Black people from this declaration (of inferiority); that it become the heart, the soul, and the brain of the black man's struggle; that it become a teaching church in the sense that it teaches Black people what is necessary if they are to participate intelligently in the Liberation Struggle; that it organize black people effectively for participation in the Liberation Struggle; (and) that it give black people a sense of dignity as God's Chosen People." And, ultimately, as the Reverend Robert Newbold has suggested, the goal of Cleage's ministry is black Christian unity: "As I see the Reverend Albert Cleage and Black Christian Nationalism, they
can be likened to another strong span in the bridge over troubled waters helping to develop better Christian relations (so) that ultimately the brotherhood of man can work in unity with the Fatherhood of God."\textsuperscript{14}

**Mission of a Man and a Ministry**

"The issue facing the majority of black churchmen and (the) black church is," according to Marshall, "will we or will we not involve ourselves in the struggle for black liberation. For no institution needs to exist in the midst of black people unless it is inextricably bound to the liberation struggle of our people."\textsuperscript{15} In this statement of commitment, Marshall sets forth four conditions of the status quo that the black church must confront and remedy if it is to be responsive to the needs of black people. They are the Afro-Saxon Mind, the Syndrome of the Colonized, the Slave Mentality, and the Right-On Brother. Since the mission of Reverend Cleage and his church are, in large part, a function of these conditions, the charge of this stewardship is discussed within the boundaries of these aspects.

**Afro-Saxon Mind**

"The Afro-Saxon Mentality," says Marshall, "is the psychological urge to be white, and so strong is the urge that men who have black faces and who have suffered the reality
of the black condition, yet seemingly can brush aside their blackness and embrace values that are white." Examples of the Afro-Saxon mentality are everywhere in black communities: these are blacks who believe that "assimilation now" will happen in America and who work toward that aim. To Cleage, these blacks are clearly misguided and have seized upon a "philosophy of self-hate." "No Black man in his right mind, in a healthy, normal state of mind, could possibly dream of integration with his enemy," declares Cleage. Then he adds, "To dream of integration, a Black man must believe in the goodness of white people. He must believe that for some reason what is being done to him is his own fault and that he must persuade white people to accept him in spite of his short-comings and that he must measure up to white people. Self-hatred is the inevitable corollary of the dream of integration." What it means to integrate, Cleage explains, is to give up the claim to blackness that is the vital food of black life. Therefore, not only to give up one's "blackness" but to give it up willingly is both an act of sale of one's very soul, and a signature to a contract of self-hate. Thus, risking the grave expense of double alienation, such a black man carries his life style, his values, and his past to the sacrificial altar of white society, whereupon all will be forgotten, he expects, in the new mixed camp of kin and a
new camaraderie of faith. This man resolutely labors to be washed, made "whiter than snow" if not in face, at least in mind. The challenge, says Cleage, lies in "an honest recognition of the fact of Black separation and its implications (as) the necessary first step toward Black sanity and programmatic realism." 20

The central issue of black separatism has been one of Cleage's most controversial beliefs. In April, 1968, Cleage addressed the Catholic Clergy Conference on the Interracial Apostolate on the subject "Black Leadership in the Urban Crisis." His audience was largely clergymen, and at the end of Cleage's address, a white priest, "disturbed by the implacability of Reverend Cleage's presentation, asked how he could reconcile the separateness with Christ's teaching of unity and brotherhood." Cleage's answer to the man was a deeply felt tu quoque: "It was precisely because white men had ordained and enforced separation that black men had been driven to these conclusions." 21 Cleage said black men did not desire the separateness that had been so damaging, and he remarked that if white men had been preaching Christ's teaching of unity and brotherhood with any efficacy, the separateness would not exist as the reality it is. 22

But some members of Cleage's own racial community also differ from him on this question of separateness. Remarking
on Cleage's injunctions to remain separate, and turning for his justification for a rebuttal to Cleage to the scriptures themselves, the Reverend A. Wilson Wood argues:

It was the work of Jesus to bring nations together. You see, when the veil was split, this act gave the Gentiles access to God. You see when Peter went to Joppa for a vacation and the Lord showed him that nothing was common or unclean. Just look in Acts. And when Cornelius, a Gentile, who had been inspired by God, was told to send for Peter and he would make known the mysteries of God; when Cornelius and Peter talked, Peter perceived that God was no respector of person. He loves both Jew and Gentile. And by this same Apostle the voice of God was made known to the Gentile world. Here, Cleage justify himself. His position is just not sound.  

In response to such arguments, Cleage points out that in order to gain more than a modicum of freedom, black people must extricate themselves from notions of universal love and brotherhood, for these are illusions. Explaining, he says that Paul taught the doctrine of universal love in direct contradiction to the doctrine of the Old Testament:

Jesus was concerned primarily with salvation of a nation and its growth. This is much different than salvation by the blood of the Lamb. This is Paul, who tried to make a religion acceptable to white gentiles by salvation through faith. There are two religions in the Bible, the religion of Jesus and the religion of the Apostle Paul. When blacks were brought to this country, they were given the religion of Paul. The basic mission of the black church is to rediscover the religion of Jesus. . . . to build a Black Nation, rather than to shout on Sunday.
Therefore, to move forward in freedom is to accept the basic fact of life in America set forth repeatedly and boldly. Blacks and whites are separate in race and in Christ, Cleage insists. To urge universal love is to forget a rhyme of black youth:

Too much love! Too much love!
Nothing kills a Nigger like too much love!

"Black people and white people have never been 'one in Christ' and never will be" pronounced minister Cleage. So, blacks must be willing to shake off the Afro-Saxon mind and establish for themselves standards of dignity and pride, reinvesting themselves in "Black Mind," black church, and black nationalism.

As Black Christian Nationalists, we seek to change society in order to accomplish the liberation of Black people; and we realize that we are engaged in a struggle for power and for survival. We believe that nothing is more sacred than the liberation of Black people. We must transform the minds of Black people by freeing them from dependence on white cultural values and from their unconscious acceptance of the white man's declaration of Black inferiority. We must restructure our relationships within the Black Nation toward unity and love in preparation for a realistic power struggle against our white oppressors. We must control all the basic institutions which dominate the Black community. Self-determination and community control must become realities in every area of ghetto life.

"The greatest challenge to the black church," Marshall writes, "as we move it back into the struggle is the sickness of
identity for most of the people to be found in most of our churches are plagued with Afro-Saxon Minds." In the mission of Reverend Cleage and his ministry, however astringent his rhetoric, this challenge has been accepted.

**Syndrome of the Colonized**

"Although many of them (suffering from the Syndrome of the Colonized)," outlines Marshall, "will proclaim that they are as good as and equal to any other people, long years of powerlessness in the black condition causes them subconsciously to see themselves as an inferior breed. There is a resignation to conditions as they are and a sense of non-confidence in their ability to take into their own hands their social, educational and political destiny." To this group, Cleage and his ministry respond in terms of black community control. Taking what they feel to be a realistic view of black community, black control is the only viable answer to the dilemma.

In terms of the goals of the black church, this means creating greater black representation on all levels of public service; participating in the learning experience of electing community leaders on boards of city council, education and police commissions; and vigorously facilitating efforts to bring about the mobilization of the black community to form
more and more sophisticated, pressure groups to influence the institutions of the larger American society. Reverend J. Metz Rollins, Executive Director of the National Council of Black Churchmen, states why the black church's role in this advocacy is serious: "In a period of black awareness and black consciousness in the larger black community. . . . the witness of the black church is meaningful only as it becomes a militant advocate of the cause of justice and dignity for black people." As this comment penetrates the goals of Cleage's ministry, community control is seen as a vital step to developing black pride and deeper involvement in black community. The minister points out that:

Real Black Power is engaged in a counter-process dedicated to taking Black people to heaven. . . . If we are going to deal with our oppression and exploitation we must build the institutions and mechanisms that will enable us to move from power rather than from weakness. As wrong and as irrelevant as the Black Church has been, we need it. We need its potential institutional strength, and we must begin the task of reorganizing and restructuring it for Black liberation. If offers a workable basis for the establishment of a national Black institution, and without it Black liberation and even Black survival are impossible. It exists everywhere Black people are. It is accepted by the Black community. It alone can mobilize the institutional power necessary for our battle against oppression. Somehow we must merge the two separate processes present in the Black community. The task of deliverance must become a single process including the totality of life.
To this end, Cleage urges black ministeries to join with the Shrine of the Black Madonna in participation with the Black Christian Nationalist movement.

With an impressive track record, Reverend Cleage has served as Chairman of the City-Wide Citizens Action Committee and the Inner-City Organizing Committee in Detroit. During his tour of duty in the City-Wide Citizens Action Committee, Cleage collected $120,000 in research and planning money from the black community development programs. Further, his pastorate, the Shrine of the Black Madonna, and its commercial arms are financing a black supermarket, are promoting classes in Swahili in the public schools, and are advancing energetically to establish a company to manufacture African fashions. The concept of black power within the realm of community control are operating strongly and pervasively under Cleage's direction.

Moreover, because of Reverend Cleage's efforts, other Black Christian Nationalist churches are working in these same ways to actualize the theoretical bases of Black Christian Nationalism for the total survival of black people. Says Reverend George Clements, a black priest and militant clergyman in Chicago:

There is now emerging a black church, cutting across denominational lines—"a
black church that holds itself accountable to the black community that meets the needs of the black community. Black Christian Nationalist churches in every urban community will serve as the unifying center for the totality of the black man's life and the spiritual source of his struggle for black liberation and the building of the (black) Nation.  

Marshall admonishes the black church that it has neglected the powerless blacks. And again, Cleage's mission and ministry have responded in a distinctive manner. To this task, the philosophy of Black Christian Nationalism states that, "The most important single aspect of both our faith and our program is the fact that we have rediscovered the process by which the individual can be led to divest himself of individualism and to merge into the mystic, communal oneness of the Black Nation." What follows is building, then power. The effectiveness of the work done on this problem is summed up by a militant young participant. "Cleage demands stuff with dignity," he announced, "that's why we follow him".  

Slave Mentality  

Marshall further observes that "there are blacks who feel that their inferior status has been indeed decreed by heaven and they are justly proud of being orderly and knowing their place." They do not delude themselves," he adds,
"with the notion that they have entered into the mainstream of white society. They are contented in being the good, God-fearing, patriotic colored servants."³⁷

Cleage responds to this issue and addresses himself to rediscovering and teaching what he is convinced is the original teachings of Jesus and the Nation of Israel. It should be repeated in this context that Cleage's notion of the Black Jesus and a Black Madonna are not new. Marcus Garvey preached them long ago. But Cleage's special contribution makes them both novel and radical. He has joined them to the black power movement, aligned and implemented through his own skills as an effective rhetor. Now, to many oppressed blacks, these structures and symbols carry dramatic, significant impact. Cleage has actualized a Christ who is both black and a Zealot.³⁸ The reason for this approach, Cleage emphasizes, is directly related to the critical function the church must perform to thwart the slave mentality. He says that "A revolutionary Black church must be a place to which Black people come with pride, knowing that Jesus was black, that the Nation Israel was Black, and that we are following in the footsteps of a Black Messiah."³⁹

It is important to appreciate that Reverend Cleage has researched extensively the background of Jesus, as the leader
of the Zealots, a revolutionary activist group that led rebellions against Rome, ending in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D. and the fall of Masada in 73 A.D. So when he insists that Jesus was the Black Messiah, he brings redefinition to the speaker of this verse: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword." Furthermore, in his teaching, Cleage maintains that the meaning of the Black Messiah is more than a mere symbolic or suggested significance. Adamantly he states: "I'm not saying, 'Wouldn't it be nice if Jesus was black?' or 'Let's pretend that Jesus was black' or 'It's necessary psychologically for us to believe that Jesus was black.' I am saying that Jesus WAS black. There never was a white Jesus." It is important that black people be taught this fact, according to Cleage; otherwise their history is made a travesty and their "inferiority" granted divine ordinance.

With this view, a new sense of importance and "somebody-ness" is propagated and reinforced. At the Shrine of the Black Madonna, by the ritual of baptism a new bearer of the faith is reborn into the Black Nation. Old conceptions of inferiority are given a proper demise, along with white values and definitions of black life. Then, in this and
other churches of the Black Christian Nationalist concept, when the sacraments are administered, "it symbolizes our total rededication to personal participation," defines Cleage, "in the struggle of Black people and total rededication to the Black Nation. The sacraments and ritual of the church then become for Black people an intrinsic part of the revolutionary struggle." 43

However, in Marshall's consideration, blacks who have the slave mentality are indeed an obstinate group, baffling many and disturbing most. They stand in the greatest opposition to the church becoming a relevant viable tool for black liberation. For him, the solution to the problem of slave mentality will be found in firm, aggressive actions. This may mean, "in some instances moving them (that is, slave-mentality blacks) aside, going over them, undermining them, but whatever is necessary to be done must be done to shake the black church loose from those who are plagued by this Slave Mentality." 44 Cleage is more confident. He is unyielding in the belief that Black Christian Nationalism is the antidote that will not only check the malady of Slave Mentality but cure it. "Across America," remarks Cleage, "Black People are beginning to realize that only Black Christian Nationalism can offer a new sense of direction,"
institutional stability, and a trained leadership totally committed to the Black Liberation Struggle."^5

The Right-On Brother

The Right-On Brother is described as usually a graduate of one of the three categories previously discussed. "He possesses a very superficial understanding of his present condition and little or no viable strategy for his future. His rhetoric is often what he calls revolutionary, and he is convinced that ideologies formulated in other times, in other places, by other people under other circumstances, can be adopted and super-imposed upon black people as they struggle for liberation."^46 Marshall goes on to say that the believers of the right-on brother, more often than not, reject all of Christianity as "white man's religion," useless to them and to black unity. They abhor slavery in all of its forms and manifestations. Thus, they take on the quest of liberation with magnitude and zeal. However, according to Marshall, in their enthusiasm for liberation, at times their method is like "going bear hunting with a switch."^47

According to Cleage, the reasons this phenomenon occurs is that many black militant youth are convinced, first, that restructuring the black church is too much trouble, and second, that renewal is not a viable option—there is just
nothing to renew. What is needed, in their view, is revolution in its basic sense. But, Cleage argues, "Black Christian Nationalism is determined to take it along with the revolution. We are convinced that it can serve a valuable purpose if we take the time to restructure it." Moreover, it is the aim of Cleage and the ministry within the Shrine of the Black Madonna specifically, and the Black Christian Nationalist movement generally, to gather the militants to the church too, mindful that they fill a vacuum that was once occupied by a potent, burgeoning religious body that was the black church.

Summary

Reverend Albert B. Cleage, pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna, and pioneer of the Black Christian Nationalist Movement exemplifies the dynamic function of the black preacher and the black church. Once again, the surgery of redefinition and reconstruction has been performed on black religious concepts and concrete vehicles in order to render the total religious body a more significant symbol and viable tool in the black liberation struggle. Adding to his ministry, Cleage operationally defines and implements concepts of black power and preaches the gospel of black nationalism to the celebration of the Black Messiah and the black people.
Realizing the problems inherent in the struggle (including negative images of blackness propagated in movies and other media), Cleage advocates what he considers to be only natural to blacks and whites in American society—separation both in race and in Christ.

The general objectives of Cleage's ministry are found in the building of black political and economic power, black control of communities, and black ecclesiastical power, the force of which forms the unifying center for black life, religion, and freedom. Additionally, the black preacher, together with his congregation, under the veil, perform in mutual fashion, for the purpose of invigorating the spirit and furthering the cause of black people. Then, the specific objectives of the church and the preacher lay in the mechanisms that would assure progress in the struggle for black liberation.

Calvin B. Marshall issued a challenge: if the black church is to involve itself as a major part of the black man's freedom struggle, four present conditions of black mentality must be changed. These conditions are the Afro-Saxon Mind, the Syndrome of the Colonized, the Slave Mentality, and the Right-On Brother. Then, since Cleage's service is a major function of these factors, discussion of his stewardship is contained within these perimeters.
What Reverend Cleage, the Shrine of the Black Madonna, Black Christian Nationalism, and their joint mission clearly point up is the changing role of both the black church and the black preacher as they attempt to be responsive to the needs of their dynamic community of "black and beautiful" people.
Chapter IV

1 Many black people had become increasingly disenchanted with talk of equality and brotherhood when, at the same time, their lives reflected stark contradictions of these beliefs. Moreover, Black Power was gaining more credibility and confidence as a legitimate form for organizing black political, economic and social power as well as the basis for building black hope.

2 Among other things, in the growth and sophistication of black power concepts, numerous black people sought political office, others campaigned for increased political awareness and voter registration in the black community.

3 The Oceanhill-Brownsville Controversy typifies the attempt of black communities across the country that are seeking to gain control over their own communities and schools. In addition, it also typifies the white opposition that most of them receive. For more detailed information on this issue see Gittel and Berube, The Oceanhill-Brownsville School Controversy; Meranto, School Politics in the Metropolis.

4 In black communities emphasis was also placed upon creating black owned and operated businesses, banks, insurance companies, service organizations, etc. to participate in the overall thrust for black economic uplift. Greater stress was put upon increasing knowledge and skills of black people that their communities have a greater share of power in America. See Floyd Hunter, Community Power Structure; Samuel Yette, The Choice; Alan Altshuler, Community Control.

5 Gayraud Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism, pp. 164-165.


7 Numerous black caucuses were created in United Methodist Church, Lutheran Church, United Church of Christ, American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church, Unitarian, Roman Catholic Church, AME Zion Church and the large single body (interdenominational) called the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC). In addition, Jesse Jackson's ministry bears the imprint of this idea as his
ministry shifted from moderate to a more militant and activist philosophy as seen in his organization PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) as he develops concepts of black nation-building. See "County Preacher Jesse Jackson Launches New Black Liberation Effort: People United to Save Humanity," Ebony, March 1972.

8 Newsweek, January 15, 1968.

9 Wilmore, p. 289.

10 Imamu Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Home, p. 84.

11 Alex Poinsett, "The Quest For a Black Christ," Ebony, p. 178.

12 Poinsett, p. 178.

13 Albert B. Cleage, Jr., Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for The Black Church, p. xxxiv.

14 Interview with Reverend Robert Newbold, Associate Director, Council on Administrative Services, United Presbyterian Church, New York


16 Marshall, p. 16.

17 Cleage, p. xxvi.

18 Cleage, p. xxvi.

19 Cleage, p. xxvii.

20 Cleage, p. 54.

21 John Howard Griffin, The Church and The Black Man, p. 95.

22 Griffin, p. 95.

23 Interview with Reverend A. Wilson Wood, Pastor, Bethany Baptist Church, Columbus, Ohio
These ideas, according to Cleage's ministry, are in direct opposition to the authentic teachings of Jesus. See Ward, Prophet of The Black Nation and Poinsett, "The Quest For A Black Christ" as well as "Color God Black", (The New York Times, November 10, 1968).


Cleage, p. 54.

Cleage, p. 44.

Marshall, p. 17.

Marshall, p. 17.


Cleage, pp. 49-50.


Cleage, p. 67.

Serrin, p. 30.

Marshall, p. 17.

Marshall, p. 18.

See Samuel Brandon's book, Jesus and the Zealots.

Cleage, pp. 42-43.

Poinsett, p. 176.

Poinsett, p. 176.

Poinsett, p. 174.

Cleage, p. 42.
44 Marshall, p. 18.
45 Cleage, p. 13.
46 Marshall, p. 18.
47 Marshall, p. 18.
48 Cleage, p. 34.
Summary: Together Under the Veil

In *Gone With The Wind*, the famous American saga of the antebellum South, a devoted but helpless black woman slave quails before the force of her mistress's scorn, "Lawd Miss Scawlett, I ain't neva birthed no baby!" Livid, Miss Scarlett is appalled and disgusted first at the slave's pronouncement and again at the innocence of its delivery. With frightening power, she snares her fluttering victim in a web of silent stares, designed for—and effective in—the slave's complete undoing. In this way, Miss Scarlett casts across the screen for millions, her mute but mulish white postscript: "Negras cain't do nuthin' right!"

This cameo of the inept, vacuous, but devoted "dardy," together with other romanticized versions of slaves in inaction, has been repeated in continuously stereotyped images of black people, images that have survived in spite of black protests over centuries. But the popular portraits of blacks never show the whippings, the murders, and the rapes of black people in the cabins and in the bushes of slave row. They never show the slave retaliations—the sit-downs, sabotages,
run-aways, and fires, or the spiders deposited in the "big house soup." Left out were the six-day work weeks under the lash of the overseer; the terror which the slave traders struck in black communities when he came ready to get a bargain. What survived were neatly-framed dramas, cut and spliced to portray "the beloved female enslavers...constantly fussed over, fed, dressed, patted, and flattered by bouncy, well-fed, philosophical, Black, ever-loving, slave 'mammys.'"¹ Black waiters and black butlers bustled to serve them, "fresh," of course, "from the work in the fields...singing joyously in perfectly arranged, properly balanced four-part harmony."²

The fact that the slave's life was molded by the experiences of bondage while the enslaver's was not created a natural diversity of life-style which was perpetuated over time by new forms of oppression and degradation. As Killens explains, "Most of us came here in chains and most of you came here to escape your chains. Your freedom was our slavery, and therein lies the bitter difference in the way we look at life."³ When in the twentieth century, the black man champions "black is beautiful," affirming himself and rejecting the Sambo images, he finds himself confronting other, older forms of racist superiority and subterfuge.
Throughout the period of slavery, many black preachers rose from the midst of the slave community, usually to bring pacification with an "other-worldly" perspective in which the slave was assured of his compensatory reward in Heaven. Key examples of these preachers are George Liele who was so skilled in his rhetorical abilities to pacify his people that his master did not have to employ any physical forms of punishment to keep the slaves complacent. Liele's ability to sway his audiences to a black worldview of unity, brotherly love and peace were superbly effective for that task. "Uncle Jack" and Black Harry functioned in a similar manner. "Uncle Jack" particularly was effective and so pleased his master that he rewarded "Uncle Jack" by purchasing a farm for him in Virginia. Black Harry was also popular among the slave masters for his effective functioning at the job of persuading the slaves that God would, with enough prayers, break the chains of their bondage. They then could march free, their preachers at the forefront, moving like Moses and the Children of Israel through the muck and mire of the parted Red Sea—out of the Wilderness, into the Promised Land.

But other preachers at that time protested against "other-worldly" religion as alien, white-inspired, and a critical source of their oppression. They actively promoted a "this-worldly" view. They preached that God was on the
side of the oppressed people and would not require that they willingly submit to their own annihilation. Instead, to serve God properly, the slave was obligated to strive for liberation so that he might affirm himself and his potentialities for the freedom that was his birthright. Some historians characterized this argument as an "Africanism," a carry-over from African ways of living. Be that as it may, the manifestations of this religious belief were in various forms of active protest. For this kind of believer, Jesus was not the bleeding Lamb but a fighter for freedom. Following His example, they fought in song and in action, sounding:

Oh freedom, Oh freedom, Oh freedom
over me, over me.
And befo' I'd be a slave
I'd be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free!

This religious form, they felt, was active in them while they lived and was interred in their bones when they died—fighting for freedom.

In the Revolutionary period during which many slaves were manumitted, this "other-worldly" perspective was punctuated by the rise of the black church. It was during this time that increased numbers of black preachers set their rhetorical skills to work for the cause of black liberation. Many of them appealed through moral suasion, signalling a new form
of protest and mode of persuasion. Major religious rhetors of this period were Reverend Richard Allen and Reverend Absalom Jones who founded the first organized black religious institution, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. With this act, a black church and a black religion were institutionalized—entities in which black people could worship in dignity and peace appreciably free of white domination and control.

During Abolition, many religious rhetors, using their oratorical skills and leadership abilities, were pushed to the forefront. Since many of them were ex-slaves, they not only appealed to the large audience of white America but also joined to aid runaway slaves as a part of the Underground Railroad. During this time, David Walker rose to prominence as an impassioned speaker for black liberation. He urged the slaves to seize their freedom for themselves in the glory of God. Following in an atmosphere created by Walker came Nat Turner, a major religious fighter of the period who led a dramatic slave rebellion. In the wake of these events, fear and panic gripped white communities, resulting in white backlash and restrictive new laws. In the North, black preachers continued to speak boldly, decrying the grave injustices of white America and openly doubting the potential and wisdom of integration. Reverend Nathaniel Paul was among their number.
In his sermons, he urged that the slave take up the spirit of liberty which was a gift from God and destroy the means of his bondage. In spiritual tandem was Garnet, the militant preacher whose rhetoric rent the air in dramatic appeals to the slave, who, if they would be free, "must themselves strike the first blow!"^4

These effective "men of words" were representative of many others during this period of history—men whose outstanding gifts of verbal skill made them natural leaders and dynamic preachers. Using a rhetorical approach essentially religious in nature, to their people they provided consolation, guidance, and encouragement. They also actively participated to organize the first independent black churches and functioned intimately with the first freedom movement.

Throughout the period of Reconstruction, both independent black churches and black preachers rose in number. But as they grew, other elements clouded the environment to produce a climate of intimidation and political setback, a climate in which the power of the black church was obviated and political and rhetorical strategies of black preachers were checkmated. In this period Marcus Garvey came preaching a different religious perspective. He directed himself primarily to a black audience and his rhetoric was that of separation. Through his dramatic rhetorical appeals for nationalism
through separatism, Garvey glorified the black man and gave thrust to social gospel by his concepts of a Black God, a Black Jesus and a Black Madonna. With this philosophy, black people began to affirm themselves both in dignity and social and economic ventures in their own best interests. Importantly, in the focus of this ministry, black history and the homeland of Africa were glorified.

Subsequent to this period however, the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council again sprung up, working various acts of terror upon black people. Caught in this critical position, the black church and the black preacher were stripped of their potency as a counterforce. In the wake of this realization, many secular groups were formed. The Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference responded to the oppression. In the forefront of those protest organizations was one of the most dynamic wielders of moral suasion in the history of America. This man was Martin Luther King. By his leadership the black church once again became a catalyst against black degradation. Through his skillful rhetorical abilities, he pricked the moral conscience of America. He preached brotherhood and equality for all people to be free. He dreamed a striking dream for America,
but an assassin's bullet stopped his life before he could see the dream realized. This is a wound the nation yet favors.

Within the same period, Malcolm X came to national prominence. He was a revolutionary rhetor who repudiated white society in his speeches. But he gathered together thousands of black men and women under an umbrella of black interest and regard called black consciousness. He urged them to glorify themselves and affirm themselves; to love being black and all that that blackness stood for.

Indeed, there was a time when the black man's pose was a striking defense of black life. He accepted offers to white cocktail parties where he, as the token black, explained "what black people want anyhow." He also customarily clutched at white values, white styles, and white religious forms. He straightened his hair and bleached his skin to each his way into the mainstream of American society. He preached a rich, elaborate gospel, by which he hoped to rub open the eye of American conscience, to exorcize demons that heretofore could not be cast out. His triumph was ephemeral. He found himself bilked once more, deluded once more, betrayed, raging, and stumbling once more.

The question again became not only serious but critical, "How can black people together under the veil, create new
and viable equations in the critical formula for their survival in America?" Reverend Albert B. Cleage, who like all blacks was molded by the cause of the question, thunders in answer: "All we do is in separation. We can use separate, Black Power, or let exploitation continue." Naturally, he adds, "the kind of religion which met the needs of the white master could not possibly meet the needs of the Black slave."6

Thus, in the wake of Black Power Reverend Cleage has created a black nationalist church. His purpose as a religious rhetor through his ministry is to meet the problems of the new black consciousness and of black survival. Further, his purpose is to bring concepts of Black Power and the black church into closer cooperation. He attacks traditional concepts of white Christianity, redemptive suffering, and universal brotherhood. He stresses that black people are God's chosen people and need to build one black community, and one Black Nation. With the force of Black Christian Nationalism, Cleage fans out his ministry catching up black churches, regardless of denomination. In this way, black theology is being coupled with black power to build that Black Nation.

Cleage emerged into national attention especially during the Detroit Rebellions. Black people were angry and confused
after the momentous setbacks which followed each other quickly and later (particularly the deaths of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X). In the spirit of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, Prophet-Cleage sought to gather up the dry bones of his people into one Black Nation under the aegis of an active nationalist black church (the Shrine of the Black Madonna) and black theology. These he placed within the working framework of Black Power.

His rhetorical strategies were vilification and objectification as he blamed white society and white Christian concepts by an aggressive rhetoric. Further, he condemned black people and black churches who attempted to mimic white Christian forms, values, and ideals for being willing assistants in black genocide. He encouraged black consciousness and self-affirmation in blackness and in God. Through legitimation and mythicization, he preached black hope and Nation-building based upon a black theology, the original identity of Christianity, a black identity. Moreover, the thrust of his appeal moved on the basis of a Black Messiah, the revolutionary Zealot and fighter for black liberation.

Particularly important to his appeal to black unity and self-determination were the symbols of a Black Messiah and a Black Madonna. Because of the nature of these symbols, the conception of the Black Christ and the Black Madonna
stand for the black experience throughout the ages. Such symbols then become the rallying points for Cleage's movement. Through the rituals of baptism and communion, black people joining the Shrine assert their unity within the Black Nation.

Since the Detroit Rebellion, Cleage's ministry has gathered up numerous other churches—without respect of denomination—in the Black Christian Nationalist Movement which combines black theology with the working concepts of black power. Also created under this auspices have been Black Christian Nationalist centers whereby black people not only own, operate, and produce their own goods and services, but also where more political consciousness has been engendered by the movement. Moreover, Black Christian Nationalist training centers have been established across the country to train cadres of black people to carry the messages of black theology and black power into the community, seeking active involvement in the mass education of black people about themselves.

Conclusions and Implications: Some Harsh Challenges to the Black Nation

Reverend Albert B. Cleage and Black Christian Nationalism are clearly logical outgrowths of the Black Power movement.
They share the aim of using existing resources inside the black community to control the resources outside the community of black people.

At some point, it was only logical that someone with keen insight and perception would attempt to organize around the strongest focal point of black life—the black church—once the concept of black power and the dimensions of this force were recognized. Moreover, anyone who was serious about the traditional black church must have realized that the religious body of that persuasion and the concept of black power were indeed incompatible. The primary reason for this is that the concept of black power is geared toward dealing with the totality of black life. The traditional black church is seldom geared to deal with the totality of black people; more often than not, it is concerned only with the "appearances" of that ministry to black people. For example, any time questions are raised as to methods for alleviating oppression at the hands of the oppressors, the churches call on God to engage in battle for them. The black power concept is predicated upon active participation by black people in controlling their own lives. So it was predictable that at some juncture, some particularly skillful rhetor would seek to make the black church a more viable institution in the realization of the black power concept.
This necessity required a recreation of the symbols of Black Christianity, presupposing that Black Christianity was the original identity of Christianity. Black power is built upon the concept of black people being as significant as any other person. This goes beyond conceiving of blacks as equal to anyone else. For it means that black people will use themselves as the standard for determining priorities and actions. Such a concept precluded the traditional black church as an ally in black power since the symbols in the traditional black church are white iconography. Now the black community had the potential for assisting and implementing the total survival of black people while at the same time regaining its history and current direction.

Cleage concludes that he has, in the black church, a standing army—disciplined, well-organized, with a land-base and a communications network. It is the only primary structure of the black community totally owned by black people and reaching into the lives of all black people in the community. At the same time, the black church is owned physically by black people in the same way that its ministry is only concerned with control of its constituency physically. The white appeal toward the spirit and the concept of life after death in reality had little to do with the spirit; they had
everything to do with control of the physical body here on earth to guarantee "that the Nigguhs not bother the white people." Before Cleage, the black church was still, more often than not, doing what the white church was doing when Christianity was introduced as a means of physical control over the slaves. The physical control was maintained through talking to the spirit while placing the mind in bondage. The primary element in the traditional black church is the element of unquestioning belief. Therefore, it was possible for the tenets advanced by the early Christian slave religion to be the foundation on which the black church is built in the twentieth century. That is, "love thy neighbor as thyself;" "turn the other cheek." The logical extension of this concept was buried with Martin Luther King. It would then become apparent that a marriage between parties working for total black survival--that is, black power concepts, black nationalism, and the black church--was imminent. To facilitate or make workable such a union, all faith had to be put to the test of the reality or validity in the day-to-day war waged by blacks upon their oppressors. It became, or would become, impossible to muster a force of black Christian foot-soldiers locking arms with black nationalists marching to the tune of "Onward Christian Soldiers" while having their eyes riveted
upon a banner displaying the image of a white, blue-eyed, blonde-haired Jesus Christ. Any prophet who wished to use the black church would soon realize that the black church in fact held potential for either the total salvation of the black populus or for its continued oppression and subjugation. Any prophet would soon come to realize that ultimate control of a people's destiny would rest in the hands of that people alone. This lesson was learned down through the years of history: any nation that has survived or prospered has done so through its own initiative. Since the black church was founded upon and continued to espouse religion directed toward a slave mentality, only the organizational power of the black church would have to be maintained, while symbols and concepts relative to its implementation would have to be reformed. In short, the black church must in fact become a black church and not a white church in black face. The significance of the need for this change may be emphasized by pondering the dilemma of a black person each morning, looking into the mirror, and saying, "I want to be more and more like Jesus," and then living the remainder of the day with the reality that the separation between his and her concept of Jesus and his or her personal reality was totally incompatible. Any prophet would then seek to change the basic
symbols of black Christianity which were birthed through and for the maintenance of slave mentality and to unite it with its proper and original form. All great religions have been indigenous to one race of people and, in almost all cases, exploitative of other races. The concept of universality in religion is not only untenable but in many ways, criminal.

Black power then becomes the symbol around which and through which the organizational structure of the black church is directed and made viable. Thus, the primary icons of black Christianity bear the imprint, the facial configuration, and the essence of blackness. The organizational structure is then directed toward the salvation and total survival of black people as a primary objective.

On the ultimate level, black Christianity and the black power concept do not need uniting; their unity has always existed without having been identified except by a rare and far-sighted few. Black Christianity and black power are inseparable, in the same way that a black man's mind, soul, and body are inseparable while he lives. The distinction here is significant in that white Christianity sought to separate the mind, soul, and body (while the black man was alive!) and in so doing easily maintained the body of the black man. The body of the black man on this earth was housed in the house
of the white man, and his soul was housed in a white heaven which was guarded by the white man. His mind was left in the limbo lying between the white man's heaven and the white man's earth, in a perpetual state of purgatory.

Confucius said that at the age of thirty he knew where to stand. Confucius had a country. The black man in America has a country also—his mind. The uniting of the black power concept and black Christianity forming Black Christian Nationalism extracted the black man's mind from purgatory and used it as a unifier of his spirit and his body.

Albert Cleage's ministry is concerned with the total survival of black people in fact. Just as the ministries of white religions are concerned with the total survival of white people, in fact. The term "in fact" is emphasized in order to separate reality from fairytale in the practice of Christianity. As I have stated, all religions exist primarily for the Nation which created them. Once the mind of the black man became unencumbered by the myths of "universal brotherhood" and "creative suffering" perpetuated by white Christianity as camouflage for economic and psychological exploitation and servitude, then the black man created his own institutional religious form. This form has the same
objectives as any religion created by a group of people who believe doing "by any means necessary" all those things required to insure the protection, perpetuation, and full growth of that race of people.

The ministry of Albert B. Cleage is one of the most significant manifestations of black consciousness to occur in the United States since the death of two great "dreams." It is clearly rooted in the black condition and is directed toward the total survival of black people, mentally, spiritually, and physically.

Since Black Christian Nationalism is anchored in blackness and therefore infused with the wisdom of history and the everyday experiences of black people, the doctrine which springs from it is less easily swayed by the prospect of economic gain or individualism. Only alliances entered into by way of positions of mutual power are honored. The history of the United States attests to this fact. Only when China became capable of destroying not only Russia but also the United States was an economic pact agreed upon. Thus, if we are mindful that economics controls politics and therefore controls the behavior of people, it becomes
obvious that the black man like the Chinese must build the independent psychological separatism which will permit bargaining from a position of equality and not slavery. Black Christian Nationalism addresses itself to the attainment of this condition through the organization of blacks not only in the United States but also in a Pan-Africanist frame of reference. Black Christian Nationalism steps beyond the game-playing of separatism of politics, economics, religion, and all the other various separate organizations and institutions of a modern American society and takes a giant step, a giant movement into the future by returning to the past to embrace the African reality that everything is, in fact, a part of everything else. In this way, religion is like the beat of one's heart—a steady connection inextricably bound to everything else.

A Coda on Future Research

For further research, more in-depth and critical coverage of the rhetoric of black power would be significant to increase our understanding of the black rhetors who gather
up greater and greater numbers of black people in their audieces. Many such studies done by black scholars could add significantly to this body of rhetorical and human understanding, bringing with them their own world views. This, particularly has been lacking—studies done on black people and black issues by black scholars.

Moreover, it would be well to consider black rhetors from other angles, using other models of rhetorical criticism to explore Reverend Cleage's rhetoric and the Black Christian Nationalist Movement. This present study is not all-inclusive. But if it spurs more interest to this critical area of black life so that other black scholars seize the initiative to examine and explore this man, this movement, and these people, to bring greater understanding to bear, then this study was successful. In addition, other studies of black theology and black power could add greater knowledge to the racial dilemma in America so that interaction between blacks and whites may perhaps be conducted one day on the basis of dignity, mutuality, and equality.

Another area in which black scholars might want to
work is to study the effects of contemporary black rhetors on white audiences. Another study as an offshoot of this present one could be initiated from such questions as:

1. How has Cleage affected the whites, particularly, who have seen his work in Detroit?

2. How do white ministers, especially, react to the notions of a Black Madonna and a Black Messiah? Cleage would argue that these reactions can make no difference to black theology, but in the prosecution of a total ministry, the effect on the milieu cannot be ignored, since these reactions became a second-level problem to be faced.

3. Will educating whites about the need for a Black Messiah help them to understand and appreciate the ministry of Reverend Albert B. Cleage?

4. Will educating blacks about rediscovering themselves through their own religion and their own church help them to understand more completely the words of the Prophet:
And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter V


2 Morgan, p. 25.


4 This is the now famous phrase from Garnet's "call to rebellion." See Chronicles of Black Protest, ed. Bradford Chambers, p. 92.

5 Hiley H. Ward, Prophet of the Black Nation, p. 95.

6 Albert B. Cleage, Jr., Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for The Black Church, p. xxvii.

7 Bible, Isaiah 65:24-25.
Reverend Albert B. Cleage was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on June 13, 1911 and shortly subsequent to his birth his family moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan where he spent most of his youth. At college age, Cleage attended Wayne State University to begin his college career, then transferred his attention and his curriculum to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. During this year (1931-1932) he studied in sociology. Back in Wayne State University in 1934-35, Cleage worked on his degree. In 1938, he withdrew from WSU and enrolled in Oberlin Graduate School of Theology. At Oberlin, he also worked as a student pastor for Union Congregational Church for two years after which he returned to Wayne State University in 1940 and in 1942, received his undergraduate degree. Furthermore, he also received his Bachelor of Divinity degree and was married in 1943.

At present, Rev. Albert B. Cleage is a middle-fifties militant pastor of the black nationalist church, The Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit, Michigan. He has a congregation of about 1500 members, some of whom have remained with him in the shift from a traditional ministry under the name of the Central United Church of Christ to a nationalist emphasis under the name of the Shrine. His aim is, through a
phrothetic ministry, to restore Christianity to its original identity—a black identity—a black religion.
"Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber; save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter....

"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond, and want like an armed man" (Proverbs 6:4-5, 10-11).

I want to talk about the Church and what it means to be black in a white man's world. Our scripture reading is a very simple one. It says, if you have come into your neighbor's power, you have to do something to get out of it. You have to stay awake. "Give your eyes no sleep, and your eyelids no slumber. Save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter." Then, down a little farther, in the tenth verse, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond and want like an armed man." I just want you to think about those words as we consider the Church and its relevance to black people in today's world.

I was in a barbershop recently and everyone was arguing about religion. The interesting thing to me was that each one was arguing against some religion he had heard preached down home some place. The one arguing the loudest came from West
Virginia, and he must have had a real windburner in his church when he was a boy. The dangers of hell fire had scared him half to death every Sunday morning, and he still hasn't recovered. As soon as anyone admitted that he was a Christian, he would start arguing with things that preacher back in West Virginia said thirty years ago. He didn't have any idea that Christianity could be anything other than the gospel preached in his little home town church.

The Church has come a long way in thirty years. I don't mean the whole Church. I know a lot of preachers who are preaching just like they were thirty years ago in some little country church in West Virginia. But we have come a long way in what we expect of a Church because we have come a long way in the kind of problems we face and the kind of questions we are trying to grapple with. "What does it mean to be black in a white man's world?" is a new problem for us. Just a little while ago we refused to recognize this. We wouldn't admit that it was a white man's world, because as far as we were concerned we were all white together. Some of us were just a little "dark white." So today, when we talk about the problem of being black in a white man's world, we have changed our whole position. We no longer identify with the white man and things of ourselves as being a part of his world. Now we know that we are a separate black people. We have a separate
culture and a separate history. We realize this today and we are not ashamed of it. We have come a long way, and these changes which are taking place in our thinking impose strange new demands upon the Black Church.

What does it mean to be black in a white man's world? Obviously it means that we have difficulties everywhere we turn, because black people are powerless and white people are powerful, and are ruthless in the use of their power to maintain white supremacy in a white racist world. It means that in every area of life we are disadvantaged, and must be able to survive and move ahead against overwhelming obstacles. The Black Church must understand our dilemma, and must offer leadership in complex areas totally unknown to the down-home fire-and-brimstone preacher.

The Black Church must offer leadership in areas in which most of us are confused, if it is to survive. Few of us really understand what it means to be black in a white man's world. Many of us are just getting over the illusion that we are a part of the white man's world. Because we don't realize our powerlessness, we are confused. A black person will talk logically for five minutes and then he will say the most absurd things because he refuses to accept the obvious implications of things he knows to be true.
The most ignorant people I have talked to since the Detroit Rebellion have been black professional people. They could have been living thirty years ago. Many of them haven't changed one iota in their thinking. They can sit there in their silk suits and be just as out of touch with reality as a small town black preacher. Obviously we cannot expect them to play any part in the struggle to make the Black Church relevant.

One group kept arguing all night that I was unfair to them because I tell people that the black middle class is not doing its part. I said, "That's right, you're not doing your part." They contended that just living and maintaining their position was a real contribution. They hadn't even begun to face the implication of being black in a white man's world. They were black on the outside, but just as white as they could be on the inside. Oh, they knew in a vague kind of way that they were black. They knew there were whole areas of life which were closed to them. But they hadn't faced its implications.

The Black Church faces this kind of confusion in the black community as it seeks to face the problem of being black. These people will tear up a Church or leave it if the preacher talks too much about racial problems or the struggle to get Black Power. They will admit that they don't believe in anything all black.
What does it mean to be black in a white man's world? A black mother called me last week. Her boy had gone to school dressed in an African Dashiki and the principal had called him in and told him that he couldn't wear it because it was disrupting the school. The boy said, "This is the dress of my people, I have a right to wear it if I want to." He tried to tell the principal about the black man's heritage, and suggested that if the Irish can wear green ties on St. Patrick's Day, he could wear an African Dashiki. The principal expelled him. So the mother put on her African outfit and went to talk to the principal. She told him more about the history and culture of Africa than he cared to know, until the principal finally said, "Let's forget the whole thing. He can wear anything he wants to wear." But the mother said, "I'm not about to forget it, now that you brought it up." And she talked to him all afternoon.

This is another response to being black in a white man's world. This boy was black. His African Dashiki and his African heritage meant something to him, and the white man is not used to any black person having something of his own that means anything to him. Now the boy is back in school, and a whole lot of other black boys and girls are wearing Dashikis because they know the man doesn't like them. The Black Church too, must speak to the needs of black people who are proud of their African heritage.
But we are confused on so many things. The Black Teacher's Workshop, a very advanced group of black teachers, invited some black young people to present their ideas. Some of the young people thought that getting skills, learning something, was important, but some of the college age "black nationalists" thought that all you had to do was to "come out of your black thing." One of the kids suggested, "I still think it would be better if we 'come out of our black thing' knowing something." The younger kids were right in wanting the schools to teach them skills. They wanted Afro-American history and Swahili, but in addition, they wanted to be learning skills to equip them to fit into the 20th Century.

It is not enough to just learn how black you are. That's the problem of being black in a white man's world. You have to stop and figure out what's important at every step of the way. Both the young folks were sincere and the older folks were sincere. The problem wasn't that they were not sincere. It's difficult to be black in a white man's world and know what to do all the time. You have to figure it out, you have to think, to plan, to plot. Being black in a white man's world is not easy and the Black Church cannot survive if it tries to ignore the problem and pretend that it does not exist.

Our young people went down to the anti-war demonstration in Washington. My daughter went. She said that there was a
beautiful black contingent. They insisted on going in their own buses and when they got there they had a separate place to meet, a black caucus. There were hundreds of black people from all over the country, from as far away as Los Angeles and San Francisco. And there they faced it again, how can you be black in a white man's world? Should they march on the Pentagon with the white kids and get whipped up in an integrated protest? And they had to sit down and argue it out right there before they could do a thing. They had gone to Washington, but they were not sure exactly what they wanted to do. Finally, they decided, "This is the white man's thing. Let them go get whipped up about their thing at the Pentagon, and we'll get whipped up about our thing somewhere else."

So they paraded and had their own separate black anti-war demonstration. They tied up traffic all over Washington. They marched to Howard University and held a rally there. Black young people had their own caucus and made their own decisions. Every time I see black folks getting together, trying to figure something out, I know it's a problem. And it's not going to be something that is all cut and dried. We have to think every minute, and we have to figure every minute. And we are going to have differences, but as long as we are trying to decide it in terms of what is best for us, it's
going to come out all right. The Black Church must become a part of this important decision-making that black people are doing everywhere and in every area of life.

What is the role of the Black Church in all that is happening, where nothing is just accepted at face value? Can the Black Church adjust and survive, or must it be destroyed and rebuilt from the ashes? As black people begin to re-evaluate, they more and more tend to kick out religion and the Church. They say this is a white man's thing. He has used it to keep us in subjection all these years. We'll just put it aside and forget it. That is just one of the many problems we must figure out if we are to survive as black men in this white man's world.

I would like to suggest that we approach the problem of the Black Church in much too unsophisticated way. The role of the Church and religion is always adjusted to meet the needs of a people. Religion is not just something that goes on the same way from the beginning of time right on down. Religion and the Church constantly shift to meet the needs of a people. Religion isn't the same today as it was thirty years ago, a hundred years or two hundred years ago. It is shifting and changing all the time. One of the things that confuses us when we talk about religion is that we tend to think of it as something fixed, final and settled. The man in the barbershop
was arguing about a religion that he heard preached thirty years ago, but he thinks it's the same today.

Once there was a unified Christian Church which dominated the western world. The Church told kings what they could do, and if a king got out of line, the Pope made him crawl for miles to beg forgiveness. The Church was really running things then. That was the old Roman Catholic Church which existed before the Protestant Reformation. The Protestants broke away from the Catholic Church, and today, Protestants give a lot of reasons to explain why they broke away. The Catholics were corrupt and immoral and a whole lot of bad things were going on. But that wasn't enough to make folks break away. You know yourself that a whole lot can go on in a Church and everybody will just look the other way. There had to be a logical reason why so many people found so many reasons to get out of the Catholic Church at this particular time.

I am suggesting that this split had to do with the simple fact that the Church must adjust to meet the needs of the people. The Protestants, with their Reformation, placed a new emphasis upon the rights of the individual. In the old Catholic Church, the individual didn't have much in the way of rights. The Church, the institution, the group, had the power. The individual was forced to conform. People in general were getting tired of conformity and restrictions. The Protestant
Reformation merely gave expression to the growing desire of people to free themselves from this monolithic Church which controlled everything. The Protestant Reformation declared the freedom of the individual.

Freedom is a funny thing. Protestants declared the individual's right to worship according to the dictates of his conscience. But freedom, once announced, could not be restricted. So the Reformation declared the freedom of the individual in many other areas: his freedom to get rich, his freedom to exploit, and his freedom to take whatever he wanted. The other side of Protestantism was capitalism, with each individual having the right to do almost anything necessary to make a profit. And in the artistic and intellectual areas, also, books, paintings, poems and music began to reflect the chaos of individual revolt. Obviously people wanted something new. They wanted a change. They wanted individual freedom from the restraints of an institutionalized omnipresent God.

The Church can always justify the changes it is forced to make. When the people wanted freedom from the control of a powerful Church, they went back to the Apostle Paul, the evangelist of individualism. Every time Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation, sat down to search out an escape from Church power and domination, he would always
go back to the Apostle Paul. Finally he found the phrase he needed, "We are saved by faith," and he said, "That's it! The Church can't save you. Each individual is saved by himself. We are saved by faith." He took this little concept of individual salvation and made a revolution out of it. Do you know why people paused to listen to this almost meaningless half truth? Because they wanted freedom from the control of the Church and here was a man who said: "You aren't saved by the Church, you are saved by your own faith." And they said, "Lord, that is what I have been waiting to hear somebody say." And so the whole Protestant thing came into being. "We are saved by faith." Each individual decides everything for himself. The Bible is a sufficient rule of faith and conduct, as interpreted by the individual. The Church doesn't decide. You read the Bible and the Holy Spirit tells you what's right and what's wrong.

This pure individualism was so extreme that Protestant Churches never really accepted it in practice, after the organization of Protestant Churches. In today's world, society borders on chaos as a result of this Protestant individualism. Individualism merely means that each individual feels that he is the most important thing in the world. Your whole life is built on getting what you can for yourself as an individual and getting ahead as an individual. Your concern for your
little family is merely an extension of your self-centered individualism. Today the whole fabric of society is falling apart because there are so many individuals who have no sense of unity. There is no cement to hold society together. The Hippies reject a decadent society. Many motion pictures portray the step by step disillusionment of society, and contribute to it. In this kind of world, the Church seeks to hold back the tide by trying to come back together. The Church Universal broke up because people wanted to be free, sick of being individuals, and so the Church is trying to find its way back together. This is the ecumenical movement. Denominations merging and making little flirting gestures towards Rome, suggesting that maybe we can all come back together and have one big Church that can dominate the world again. Today, people are looking for the kind of security which a unified Church might offer. The very simple fact is that people make the Church serve their needs.

(In the United States the Church was developed to meet the white man's needs. He decided what it should be. He decided the form, the structure, the theology, everything. The black man's Church has tried to work within the framework of the white man's decisions because we were so hell-bent on being integrated that anything he said had to be right. Only recently have we begun to understand that the whole development
of the Christian Church has been something the white man was building for himself.) We have been going along with the pro-
gram and making only minor modifications to suit our own needs. Everywhere the Black Church tries to be like the white man's
Church. They go through the motions and the more education black worshippers have, the harder they try. They even try to
copy the dead emptiness of the white folks service, the little rhythmless songs with nothing to pat your foot to all through the service.

Have you ever heard a black preacher trying to sound white? He gets up and tries to whisper at you and tell you how nice everything is. That's only in churches for well-to-do-black folks who don't go to Church often, anyway. This is the most ridiculous Black Church there ever was because it doesn't have any relationship to the needs of black people at all. We don't like the music. We don't like the preaching. We don't like anything about it and the only black people who attend are black people who have a need to pretend that they really like to do things the same way white folks do them. A black Church which is a copy of the white Church cannot meet any of our needs. Some black folks take pride in sitting through a service and saying to themselves as they suffer, "If white folks came in here they wouldn't know that this was not a white Church." They think that that's the highest
compliment they can give themselves. Sometimes they even put a white preacher on the staff to make the illusion complete. It is as completely ridiculous as it is pathetic.

Now, the old down home Churches, Baptist, Methodist or what have you, were in a sense a replica of white folks religion. But there we took white folks Christianity, twisted it around and made it fit at least a few of our needs. When you worship in a down home Black Church, at least you feel good. The music is good, you can jump up and down, you can shout and feel free -- free like you are home. To help you feel good and release tension is meeting at least some need. You caught hell all week. The white man was driving you and all week you have wanted to tell him off but you couldn't because you didn't want to lose your job. You took insults because you didn't want to get whipped up and go to jail, and on Sunday you just let yourself go.

So the uneducated black preacher who can "shout" a congregation on Sunday morning is more meaningful than the most sophisticated middle-class black pastor who whispers a sermon that's unrelated to anything in the black man's experience because he is trying to sound like a white minister. If it doesn't meet the needs of a people, religion is nothing, and if it's geared to meet the needs of some other people, that doesn't help you any. There was a whole lot in the old time
Black Church that was good. It was built wrong because we
didn't know any better then. But it tried to satisfy the
needs of black people. All the shouting and emotionalism that
people laugh about offered an escape from oppression and we
had to have some kind of escape. From somewhere we had to
have some kind of escape. From somewhere we had to find the
strength to get through another week.

We had sex and alcohol on Saturday night and Church on
Sunday morning. All week we would be waiting for Saturday
night and Sunday morning. We don't have to be ashamed of
that because it is the truth. If we hadn't had Saturday night
and Sunday morning, we never would have made it this far.
We took the white man's individualism, turned it around and
made it an escape from oppression. On Sunday morning we would
feel good together. We didn't have to talk about the problems
of the world. In fact, we didn't want to talk about them.
We just talked about up yonder and Jesus taking care of us.
And we knew that one of these days God was going to shake the
white man over hell-fire and take us up to heaven through the
Pearly Gates. It was such a wonderful thought that God was
just. We knew that if God was just, there was no place but
heaven for us. We could look at the white man all week and
we knew where he was going. He was headed stright for hell.
Besides, we never had money enough to get from payday to payday, and that's still true for most of us. The Black Church offered deliverance. You came to Church, you were broke, you were hungry, you had no job, you were sick or whatever it was and the Church offered you deliverance. God delivered a whole lot of us a lot of times. You can't explain it, but things would happen, and we would say, "God did it." That is why the Black Church was valid. It related to the needs of black people.

Why did this down home Black Church put so much emphasis on sin, little petty sins like drinking, fornicating and adultery? Because the Church knew that there was not only Sunday morning but there was also Saturday night. And a people seeking escape from oppression might very well make Saturday night extend over the entire week. Then the Church could not have saved and delivered them on Sunday morning. The Black Church was preaching to the real everyday needs of black people. The Church had to keep black people from going too far in finding escape through sins of the flesh.

So the down home Black Church was not irrelevant to the needs of black people, but it met those needs only partially and superficially, because essentially it was but a slight modification of the white Church; it taught black people that they had been saved by a white Jesus because of the love of a
white God. It could not come to grips with the black man's powerlessness. The white man's Church and religion are designed to meet his needs, not ours. We cannot borrow a Church which meets our needs from the white man. The white man's Church is inescapably an instrument for the preservation of white power. The Black Church must be something different—separate and apart from the white Church—because black people and white people have different needs.

Let me say it this way. The oppressor, the white man, needs a religion that gives him an opportunity to find escape from the guilt of his oppression. He knows that his oppression is destroying black people all week. He knows that he is responsible for a system of oppression that keeps little black children in inferior schools. He knows that everything he does is designed to reduce black men to permanent powerlessness and inferiority. He needs a religion that can give him escape from these feelings of guilt. His religion has to give him an individual escape from guilt. The white Christian finds the basis for this religion in the New Testament, in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul. He must find escape from the guilt of white racism in a faith in universal brotherhood. This faith provides "escape techniques" for the white Christian, without in anyway endangering white power and domination.
A white Christian can go out into the community and do little brotherhood acts. He can fight for "open occupancy." He can do little, almost meaningless acts of face-to-face kindness which in no way touch the problem of the black man's powerlessness. That's his religion.

But our religion is something different. The black man's religion is essentially based on the Old Testament concepts of the Nation Israel, God's chosen people, and our knowledge that the problems of the black Israelites were the same as ours. When we read the Old Testament, we can identify with a black people who were guided and loved by God. Everything in the Old Testament speaks directly to our problem.

We know that Israel was a black nation and that descendants of the original black Jews are in Israel, Africa, and the Mediterranean area today. The Bible was written by black Jews. The Old Testament is the history of black Jews. The first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, tell the story of Jesus, retaining some of the original material which establishes the simple fact that Jesus built upon the Old Testament. Jesus was a Black Messiah. He came to free a black people from the oppression of the white Gentiles. We know this now to be a fact. Our religion, our preaching, our teachings all come from the Old Testaments, for we are God's chosen
people. God is working with us every day, helping us find a way to freedom. Jesus tried to teach the Nation Israel how to come together as a black people, to be brothers one with another and to stand against their white oppressors.

There is no way in the world that a black man can teach the same things in his Church that the white man teaches in his Church. (The white man is not going to admit that Jesus was black. He is going to twist history to make it fit the pattern of white supremacy. He will continue to paint pictures of Jesus looking the way he wants him to look.) He knows that all of those pictures painted during the Middle Ages are lies. He knows that the religious films which have come out of Hollywood are all white supremacy lies. Jesus was black, and he did not preach universal love. Remember the white Gentile woman who came to Jesus asking him to heal her daughter? "I don't have time to waste with Gentiles. I have come to the house of Israel," Jesus said.

Our whole religion, then, since we are black people, becomes different. There are many ways to say it. God is trying to help people stand up as men, and if anything in our religion makes us less than men, there is something wrong with our religion. God says that we are created in his image. That means that we have to have some kind of power. You can't stand up as a man if you are powerless. That means that the
Black Church must dedicate itself to the task of building Black Power. Don't worry because white folks are afraid of the words. "Black Power." Say "Black Christian Power," if you want, because that is what it amounts to. Black God-given Power. That is what we are talking about. God wants his chosen people to have power because if they don't have power, they are slaves. They are sick because there's no way to live without power and be well.

It is God's will, then. If God created us in his own image, he doesn't want us running around acting like lap dogs for white people. He wants us to stand up and be men, to fight for the things that belong to us, to build a heritage to hand on to our black children. This is what God wants. This is what we have to preach from the black pulpit. We can't really care what white people are preaching. They can be talking about brotherhood and love, day in and day out, but black people must learn to love one another. The white man stands separated from God by his oppression. God cannot look with favor upon the white man. If we can see that he acts like a beast, what must God think of him? He's oppressing everybody in sight, he's abusing people, he's robbing them of manhood. That is the white man's sin, so what can the white man do to rid himself of that sin? He must seek brotherhood
and universal love. He must rid himself of this thing which he is doing. An oppressor is always in a peculiar relationship with God because he's filled with guilt.

Our relationship with God as black men also makes special demands upon us. God is disgusted with us because we have crawled too long. God did not intend for us to accept slavery and oppression for almost four hundred years. God has been ashamed for us for those four hundred years. God demands that we fight, that we throw off the shackles of bondage now; that we stand up as free men now; that we come together as black brothers now, in the cause of black freedom. We must fight, and die if need be, that black people may be free with the power to stay free. This is what God demands of black men.

So God is demanding different things of black men and white men. Don't let white people confuse you. Everytime I speak some place they say, "You're a preacher; you shouldn't be talking about power." I tell them, "You do what God wants you to do. You get down on your knees and ask forgiveness for all of the sins you have committed against black people, but don't ask me to get down there with you, because God is asking something different of me." That's why our Church here, The Shrine of the Black Madonna, is so important. We are pointing the Black Church in a new direction. We understand where we are going and why.
To the Black Revolution we bring the stabilizing influence of the religion of the Black Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Black Revolution is not going any farther than the Black Church enables it to go, by giving it a foundation, a philosophy, and a direction.

Angry frustrated black people running up and down the street are not going to make a Black Revolution. Our Black Revolution depends for success upon a people who are welded together into a Black Nation and who can fight together because they share a common faith. That's why this Church is so important. We are the wave of the future. The Black Church is in the process of being reborn, and we, here, are participants in that tremendous beginning. It is hard to be a black man in a white man's world. But if you don't have a black man's religion and if you can't be a part of a black man's Church, it's almost impossible.

Heavenly Father, we thank thee for this fellowship, for the opportunity of coming together in thy house as black brothers and sisters dedicated to the accomplishment of thy will, the freeing of thy people everywhere. Give us the courage, the wisdom, the unity, and the love for each other, necessary to accomplish this task. Bless this Church and bless this house, that we may be in fact thy chosen people. Help us that we may follow in the footsteps of the Black Messiah, thy
Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Give each of us the courage to do the things which must be done. Give us the courage, if we are not yet a part of the Black Nation, to come forward, as we open the doors of the Church, and become followers of the Black Messiah. Give us the courage to wipe from our hearts and minds those little twinges of Uncle Tomism that still linger there. Help us to come forward and say: "I am not ashamed to worship a black Jesus." Help us, God, as we open the doors of the Church that people here and now may feel the persuasive touch of thy Spirit. These things we ask in His Name. Amen.
"Then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth" (Jeremiah 26:6)

A march which began almost fifteen years ago in Montgomery, Alabama, has now reached Newark, New Jersey, Detroit, Michigan, and almost a hundred other cities from coast to coast. This is the same black revolution that started when Rosa Parks refused to move in Montgomery, Alabama. The same one. The same black revolution that drew black college students to the South for freedom rides and demonstrations. The same black revolution. The same movement, the same freedom struggle. It is the same thing going on now, today, in New Jersey and Detroit and a hundred other cities. The same thing. But people are reacting differently because a movement grows up. A movement comes of age, a movement one day begins to come to grips with reality.

The President of the United States has asked us to join with Christian Churches everywhere in America in a big prayer for racial peace. By racial peace I know he means the end of racial violence. And I know that in many black churches all over the U.S. there will be pious exhortations to black congregations. Black preachers will read from the Bible and
misinterpret what Jesus said and misinterpret the message of
the Old Testament. And they will caution people that "this
thing has gone too far." It hasn't gone too far, it hasn't
gone far enough, and black preachers in black churches who
try to make it seem that the message of Jesus Christ is a
message of reconciliation with injustice, misunderstand the
Old Testament and the message of a Black Messiah.

We cannot pray for racial peace yet. Not in this church,
because we know whom we serve. We are followers of a Black
Messiah who two thousand years ago tried to bring black men
together so that they might fight for their freedom. So we
do not join in prayer for racial peace. We pray that struggle
and conflict may go on until black men and women are free.
We do not judge the struggle in terms of its costs but in
terms of the value of that for which we struggle and die. And
there is no price too high to pay for justice and freedom.

We do not pray for racial peace. We pray for our
brothers and sisters who were killed during the rebellion in
Newark and Detroit and other cities. We pray for those who
are still herded into filthy cowpens like cattle today be-
cause they are black. We pray for their spirit. We pray for
our own spirit that we may not grow weak, that we may not, in
the face of difficulties, turn back, that we may not become
frightened, that conflict may not make of us Uncle Toms. We
pray for that, and we pray that black churches from coast to coast will some day, and not too far in the future, become like we are, churches dedicated to the freedom of black people, centers of black culture. We do not pray for racial peace because justice has not yet come.

In all that is happening we can see the hand of God, the kind of God we worship. You remember the Battle Hymn of the Republic. White folks used to sing it. I don't know if they will sing it anymore. You remember the words: "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord./ He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored./ He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword./ His truth is marching on." We can sing that kind of song. We don't have to be ashamed of it. We don't have to keep the doors closed tight lest the brothers think we are that kind of Toms. We can sing that kind of song because that is the kind of God we worship.

I have seen him in the watchfires of a hundred circling camps. I have seen him in a hundred watchfires of a different kind. "They have builded him an altar in the evening dews and damps./ I can read his righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps./ His day is marching on. His day is on the way because we are participating in bringing it closer every minute and every day. He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall
never call retreat. I don't think they are going to sing it anymore. **He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat.**

He is sifting us. When you get home and look out and say, "I wish those hoodlums would stop," when you get on your little street and say, "I am afraid those folks will come over here and get us," it is because you are scared, because you've got guilt feelings. That is just your identification with the man, coming to the surface. You know that living on your street, you ought to have done more than you have been doing, and you feel like, "If I was out there rampaging I would come over here and get men." That is what you are feeling. He is sifting out the hearts of men, all of us.

You were sifted during the riots. You had to make some kind of decision. When you crept back to work, and the man asked you what you thought and he said, "It sure is terrible," you could say, "Yes, it sure is terrible." You know you had to make a decision and some of you made one decision and some of you made another. But he is sifting our hearts in this sort of thing. I am talking about my kind of God. He wants to know where you stand when things are happening. On what side?

Some of you are too old to participate in this way. You would just be in the way. But you don't have to talk like an
Uncle Tom because your feet are slow. Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet! You know what he is talking about. Our God is marching on. And then it ends up, Glory, glory, Hallelujah! Sometimes you look back at the spirituals. In "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen"—you know what trouble they were having—they could still sing Glory, glory, Hallelujah! We can say the same thing today—"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. We are going to keep on fighting. Glory, glory, Hallelujah!" It is a state of mind. It is an attitude.

Our Scripture lesson is taken from Jeremiah. Jeremiah is telling them, "The way you folks have been acting (he is talking to the Black Nation Israel), I have to tell you what God said. He is going to tear up the temple and the city because both of them are wrong. 'I will make this house like Shiloh.'" That is the temple in the north that they desecrated and destroyed so that everybody would have to come to the temple in Jerusalem. He is telling them it doesn't matter how big the church is, how much money you have, how many people you've got shouting "Amen." God will destroy the temple as well as the city. "I will make this house like Shiloh and make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth." When you understand the things that God was trying to tell us through Jesus Christ, then you understand that all men in the
sight of God have a right to dignity, and when somebody de­
cides that he is going to build a civilization, a world, and
deny black men the right to dignity, then God is going to act
to destroy that very civilization and that very nation.

"I will make this city a curse to all the nations of the
earth." That was true then. Jeremiah said, "Babylon is
going to come in here and destroy this temple, make desolate
this temple and this city and take you all into captivity."
That is what Jeremiah told them. They didn't believe him.
They met, they talked around, held meetings and said that
couldn't be. But it happened. Anytime a people try to de­
stroy God's chosen people, they are bound to find that deso­
lation is their reward.

We are God's chosen people, God is with us in our
struggle. Our freedom struggle, our movement, our Black Rev­
olution is in the hands of God. And the things we do, we do
with the guidance, the strength, the support of God—we have
to understand this, because there is so much nonsense and
foolishness now being spoken and written in the newspapers
that we are getting confused.

I have talked to so many confused people. I know a Tom
when I see one, but this is just outright confusion. This
lady called me up and talked for a solid forty minutes.

She said, "There is nothing racial about this distur­
bance. White folks did it."
I asked her to explain it to me.

"Well, the John Birch Society went into our neighborhoods and got our boys all excited. They did it."

I said, "What are you trying to do, explain away the revolution?"

She was trying to explain away what the white folks were saying. The white folks are saying this was a criminal action and she wanted to disassociate herself from this so-called criminal activity. So all she could do was say, "We didn't have anything to do with it all. It was the white man did it." That is the old kind of slavery talk, isn't it? We haven't even got sense enough to revolt by ourselves. Somebody else must come in and tell us what to do. She didn't understand what she was saying. I would rather be a criminal than be somebody who didn't even have sense enough to revolt by himself.

I want to say one thing about this criminal thing because that is what they are going to be talking about from now on. White folks have got to establish in our minds that those who participated in the freedom struggle are criminals and, therefore, we have got to separate ourselves from them in order to be nice, decent Christian people. They have got to make a division down the middle of the black community. They have got to separate one group of black people from the
other. They have got to make you believe that those people over there are criminals. And you don't want anything to do with them, do you?

That is the purpose of the President's Committee. That committee is supposed to run all over the country and come back with all kinds of homemade evidence that there is some kind of conspiracy, and that criminal elements are running this thing all over the country. Not that they believe it, and no one will believe this report anymore than they believe the Warren Report on the assassination of President Kennedy. But we will be the ones to believe it because we are the target. We will be trying to decide who is a criminal and who is not. It will all be done for our benefit. It is really amazing the number of black people who have been calling up their friends, the police, during the riots telling on their black brothers and sisters, trying to get straight with the man, trying to let him see that he is a good one. As though the man is going to write down, "This was a good one. He reported something over there. I went over there. There wasn't anything going on but I knocked hell out of everybody anyway. So he was a good one, he was trying."

That is what they want us to do. Let us understand. We are trying on the other hand to build a Nation that takes in
all black people and where we understand that there are a lot of different ways of fighting and where we try to include everybody in what we are trying to do. But the white man doesn't like that. That is what scares him. We begin to talk about black consciousness and they get scared. Then people begin to believe it enough to fight for it. Then they really get scared and they say we have got to separate them, divide them, we have got to make them like they used to be on the plantation. We have to make us some more house niggers, and that is what they are going to try to do.

So when you read, when you listen to radio, when you look at television, understand what the man is trying to do to your mind. He is working on you to confuse you. Because there was strength and power demonstrated in these disturbances from coast to coast, which sake at the very foundation of this country. That is why they are all saying, "We are going to rebuild America and make it like it was."

Let me tell you, they are not going to rebuild it like it was. We didn't like it the way it was, and they are not going to rebuild it like it was. They are going to rebuild it like we want it. We are going to keep on participating until they rebuild it like we want it. Now understand, we are talking about rebuilding our own community, controlling
it, rebuilding it the way we want it. All of us. Don't try to separate yourself, because we will come get you!

Let's go into this criminal business that they are trying to make so much out of. Any effort on the part of the powerless to take power is criminal. Isn't that right? If you don't have the power and you try to take power, anything you do is criminal—understand that when you read all this stuff, when you listen to all these learned professors making statements, or watch all those press conferences. Any effort by the powerful to hold the powerless in bondage and oppression is the preservation of law and order. Do you understand me? This is their interpretation. They decide what is law and order, and they decide what is a crime. We don't have any power. So whatever we do that disturbs their power, that is criminal. Whatever they do that keeps us like we are, hopeless, helpless, oppressed and exploited, that is law and order.

We have seen many illustrations of their law and order during the recent revolt. The Inner-City Organizing Committee sent a telegram on the first day to the Justice Department, the Attorney General, the Bar Association, demanding an investigation of the way prisoners were being treated. Most of you probably understood what was happening, but most of the people up and down the street took it like they got it.
Those arrested were criminals. They were supposed to be treated like dogs; the very judges who are going to try them were issuing statements about what a mob and a pack of swine they were. The judges declared them guilty and they hadn't even been examined. One judge issued his statement, a denunciation of prisoners before they had even been examined, saying, "We (the judge talking now) will prove them guilty." As a judge, he is only supposed to decide a case on the basis of evidence presented. Yet the court is already pre-judging black people who have been picked up by a cracker police department that has discriminated against black people down through the ages.

It wasn't only the words and acts of the judges. It was the very procedure by which arrests were made. Grab anybody in any kind of a situation. He is automatically guilty. If he doesn't act like he is guilty, kill him in the street. Take him down, give him none of his constitutional rights, don't let him communicate with anybody or make a telephone call, don't let him have a lawyer. All of these things were done by the power structure. All of these things are criminal. At the very time that they are denouncing black people for criminal acts, they are downtown in the halls of justice, in the City-County Building, in the State Capitol in Lansing, carrying on criminality much worse than anything any black
man has even been charged with. A prisoner's right to a lawyer is a time-honored constitutional right, and yet it has been and is still being refused.

Excessive bail is another thing. They put bail of $10,000 on little children who picked up things in the street. If he is down there, it is $10,000; I don't care how old he is. If he is an adult, it is $15,000 or $20,000. If they thought he was anywhere near a gun, it was $100,000 or $200,000. This is not bail. This is the court using its power to oppress, to participate in oppression and to keep black people off the streets. Criminality! Who is the criminal?

Now we go back and look at America and America's whole fabric and ask who is the criminal? Who is the criminal in Viet-nam? The United States. "Our" government, this United States, is the criminal in Vietnam. They have invaded a nation, they are killing people daily. America is the criminal in Vietnam. And yet they talk of criminal acts in Newark and Detroit.

The French Revolution was criminal. A group of people who had nothing, fighting against the government for power. It was criminal until they won. Do you understand? When you win, then the thing you did is not criminal anymore. America
was engaged in criminal activity taking the land away from the Indians until they got the Indians all crowded into concentration camps (reservations). Then it ceased to be criminal.

The Russian Revolution was a criminal act, the effort of people who were oppressed to throw off the shackles of bondage. It was criminal until they won. Now the dignitaries of Russia sit in the highest councils of the world because they won.

The difference between a criminal act and an acceptable act lies only in whether you lose or win. During this whole period of our struggle we have got to bear this in mind. If we lose, we are criminals. While we are fighting and until we win, every act that we do is going to be defined as criminal act. This is a part of the system that the man controls. While he is in power he decides what is crime and what is not crime.

It was true in the Old Testament. When Israel was struggling to enter the Promised Land (God gave Israel the Promised Land, you remember), they fought their way out of Egypt, stealing everything they could before they left, killing the first-born of the Egyptians. When they got to the Promised Land, they had to fight their way in. God said, "I give you the Promised Land." But he didn't just open the gate and let
the people in. He said, "If you want it, go get it." Their activities were criminal until they took it, until they won. The difference between a criminal act and an acceptable act has to do only with whether or not you win. Understand that and you won't get so excited by "the man" talking about how many of our people are criminal.

Black people are engaged in a freedom struggle and a lot of the things they are going to have to do are going to be defined by the man as criminal. If you don't understand that and you are going to run every time he starts calling someone a criminal, you better start running right now, and it will be a long time before you find a place to stop. The sit-in demonstrations in the South were criminal acts. Now we accept them. They were against the unjust laws of a particular community. Every step of the freedom struggle has been filled with criminal acts because the very power structure that controls everything decides what is criminal and what is not criminal. They write the laws and they define what is and what is not criminal.

Walter Reuther was down in the City-County Building at this great meeting to which twenty black people were invited. I called down and asked would there be any great objection if I came down. Would I have to fight my way in and incite
a riot to get into the meeting? They said they would rather
I didn't come, but if I promised not to say anything...I
said, "Just forget it. I am coming anyway."

But when I got there it wasn't worth saying anything.
It was complete nonsense from start to finish. Walter Reuther
stood up—you know is our great black leader—to explain the
whole thing and said he was going to come in and rebuild
everything. The first ten minutes of his talk were about how
opposed he was to any criminal activity, how criminals must
be punished and how he can't stand anything criminal. I
thought back to when the CIO was being organized. He is re-
spectable now, all of his officials are respectable now.
They live in nice houses, they go to dinners at the White
House. Everything they did to build the CIO was criminal in
the days when they were struggling. They fought, they looted,
they burned, they killed, they did everything they could do.
You remember the first sit-in demonstration. It was the UAW.
That was against the law, that was criminal activity. Now
Reuther stands up, all honest and sincere, and says he can't
stand criminal activity. Nobody can stand it after they win.
And let me tell you when we win, we are not going to stand
it, either.

We ought to understand what happened in this whole thing.
Don't get all mixed up in the "events." Understand this was
a struggle. Black people are fighting against oppression. The white man has put the oppression on us. He can send all the canned food he wants into the ghetto now. That doesn't remove the oppression which he put on us and which he still controls. We are fighting against oppression, against white men controlling our communities, controlling our schools, controlling all of our public services, controlling the businesses we have to patronize. That is a struggle against oppression. That is rebellion.

I don't care how many white people participated for kicks or how many white criminals went out under cover of the confusion to steal all they could. We know white folks can steal. We didn't need a disturbance to prove it to us. But at the foundation of the whole thing is the simple fact that black people are fighting against white oppression. And don't let anybody tell you it was something else. You look up and see these houses that were burned and black people lived in them. Paramore's house was burned down; he is a member of this church. I am sure he's got sense enough to know that black people didn't burn his house down on purpose. It just was unfortunate because he lived up the street from this exploitative white business and they were going to get rid of that business and the wind blew the sparks down his
street. No use his getting mad and saying, "Negroes got no right out there burning down their own houses." They were not burning down their own houses. The wind sometimes is uncontrollable.

Every business that was burned down can be explained. You go and look at the places and think back, what kind of store was that? That was one of the stores that was cheating everybody who came in the front door. You know, charging ten, fifteen, twenty cents higher on every item, bringing in meat after the other store couldn't use it anymore, old vegetables, and still not hiring black people except to clean up the place. That was the kind of store that was burned. And it didn't take a national conspiracy or Stokely Carmichael beating drums off some place to tell black people that somehow those stores had to be gotten out of our community.

In every community that has been the pattern. Black people, as they come of age, as they become sophisticated, understand that these businesses have got to be removed. We have tried to talk to them. You know I am peaceful. We picket Sears, we try to talk to them. We try to tell black people, "Don't buy at these stores until they hire black workers in proportion to black customers." We will be back,
we will be picketing Sears and other stores with unfair em-
ployment policies. White folks won't listen to a non-
violent approach to the problem. I know because I have been
using it. They don't listen to me.

I tell them down at the school board that they are turn-
ing out black kids who can't do anything because they are
not equipped. They are not educating our children. They
argue with me: "We can't do anything because they come from
nothing—they are culturally deprived." So they can't go to
college and they can't get a job. Now I tell you, the kids
that were fleetest of foot and knew what they were doing out
there during the rebellion, were sixteen to twenty-six years
old. Those were the ones they refused to educate. Those
kids had no choice but to fight for freedom here or in Viet-
nam. Now if the Board of Education can see that they have
failed, that this whole thing need not have happened if they
had been willing to listen to black people when we told them
what had to be done, then something might still be done in
Detroit.

But let me tell you, brothers and sisters, they will
have not gotten the message. They think they can talk us to
death. They haven't gotten the message that they have got to
give over the control of the black ghetto to black people.
This has to happen in Newark, in Detroit, everywhere. If
there are enough people to have a black ghetto, they want to control it. Now we are not going to control only the black ghetto. You will be surprised, since this thing has happened, at the exodus of white people from the city and houses that are up for sale or are in the hands of real estate brokers. We are going to control this city faster now than we would have before, if we have sense enough to use our political power and not be confused and go to the polls and vote for these so-called "liberal" white friends, who come out every election and talk about "what I have done for you people."

We must have a black man in the mayor's seat in the City of Detroit. I know how it is going to be—and this discourages me—not the struggle, but I just know when the election comes, black people will be out working and voting for a white liberal just because they don't know any better. Crockett was one of the best judges down there. They fought him every way they could, and I thank God they did because he learned a lot from white folks fighting and trying to stomp him. He learned a lot because no matter what hysteria was going on he was down there in his court practicing law. He was being a judge, one of the few on the bench. We must remember that.

I want to remember another man—Poindexter. In spite of white folks who put him in office, he was down there in his court turning black folks loose with all the white folks
saying he was crazy. Everybody down there was acting a fool and he was saying, "It isn't legal. We got nothing on him, turn him loose." He certainly didn't have anything to gain because we didn't give him two votes. This whole thing means that the white folks downtown must realize that the whole movement has changed, that we are going to be free, and that they must do certain things. If they realize this, it is going to save a whole lot of trouble. If they don't realize it, there is going to be a whole lot more trouble.

Heavenly Father, we thank thee for the opportunity to come into this thy house. We thank thee for protecting it during the week from the defenders of the law. We thank thee for the fact that this building is still situated here. We thank thee for thy guidance, thy counsel, and thy strength, for all that thou hast helped us to do during the past days. We thank thee that thou has protected us, that we can gather together again and rededicate ourselves to the struggle for freedom. Heavenly Father, be with us to build and strengthen this Church, that it may be a beacon, a light upon the hill, that we may call black people from coast to coast to the sure and certain knowledge that thou are our God, that thy Son Jesus Christ was a Black Messiah, that we are dedicated to following him, that this is his house, that we are his
disciples. Be with us that this Church may become increasingly meaningful in the freedom struggle, and let us remember that it is not a house made with hands but a people dedicated to thy will, and even if we must meet on the corner or in a barn, we will do thy will and struggle that our people may be free. Amen.
"WE ARE GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE"

"How long will you set upon a man to shatter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence? They only plan to tear him down from his dignity" (Psalms 63:3).

Speaking about the enemies of Israel, the Psalmist says:

"How long will you set upon a man to shatter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence? They only plan to tear him down from his dignity" (Ps. 62:3,4).

Forget for a moment that this is from the Bible and was written a long time ago. Just think about the simple words themselves. It is as if we were talking about the enemies of the Black Nation today. How long will they continue to oppress and to exploit and to do all the things they have been doing? How long will they continue to use violence in an effort to destroy us? As we see the plight of black people in this white man's world, we echo the words of the Psalmist, "How long will you set upon a man to shatter him like a leaning wall?" That is a beautiful figure of speech because if a wall is leaning, it isn't going to stand long. Certainly we can say, "You only plan to tear us down from our dignity."

Often we don't think of our dignity as something of great value. We even laugh at it, as when someone is said to be
putting on airs. But then we are only thinking of dignity in a superficial way. Take from your dignity and you have nothing left. Take from the right to hold up your head, to feel that you are a man, the right to think, to be - take away that dignity and there is nothing left but a groveling animal, a slave.

Let us look for a moment at the Psalm from which our text is taken. It begins with a statement of faith in God, "For God alone my soul waits in silence." The Psalmist is leading up to the description of what the enemy is trying to do, but he begins with this plaintive, and yet, heroic statement. "From him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I shall not be moved." It may seem strange to us in the 20th Century that the Psalmist should move from this simple primitive statement of faith, through a description of what the enemies of Israel are trying to do, and then at the close of the Psalm, reaffirm his faith by repeating, "From him comes my salvation."

I think that it is well in this day for black militants, black nationalists, and those who believe that we must rebuild the Black Nation as Jesus tried to rebuild it two thousand years ago, to remember the Psalmist's simple words. "From him comes my salvation." We have a great tendency, as
we become emancipated from slave religion, from slave thinking and from a desire to identify with the enemy, to reject God altogether. We begin to say to ourselves that we never did need God. He was only a stumbling block to our people.

Young people find this an almost irresistible temptation as they become involved in the black revolution and committed to struggle and sacrifice. The Movement exists today because black young people have been willing to make tremendous sacrifices to bring it into being and to maintain its momentum. I think of the young people at Texas Christian University who fought to protect their campus from police invasion. But more and more as they struggle they are beginning to say, "what do we need God for? We can do it ourselves. All we really need is the courage to get out there and fight."

You hear this everywhere and perhaps there are echoes in your own mind. "If only we could have gotten together a long time ago and stopped talking about God, we would be farther along." That is why in most cities those who are actively engaged in the Freedom Struggle are not a part of the Church. They look with contempt and scorn upon the Church and in many instances, rightly so, because the Church has not lived up to its obligations. It does not represent God. It does not fulfill the revelation of God which we have in Jesus Christ. It
is important for us who have come into the Black Nation as disciples of the Black Messiah to remember these simple words. "For God only is my rock, and my salvation, my fortress, and I shall not be moved."

You may think that it is unnecessary, that we don't need this. Why should we clutter up our thinking with a God who is off somewhere, who may or may not have created the universe, or may or may not have spoken through the prophets?

You need it for the same reason the Psalmist needed it, that Israel needed it. Because a man cannot maintain dignity in a world of exploitation, suffering, and oppression all by himself. If you are going to believe that you are somebody, that you have worth and value, then you must know that that worth and value was built into you. You were created with worth and value. You didn't make it by yourself. You were created by God with certain inalienable rights.

This is why you need God. It is not enough to just look at the world in which you live, to look at the people, to understand what suffering and systematic exploitation have done to you, and say that despite all of this, I am going to maintain my dignity. You can't do it by yourself. The Psalmist was not talking about his little individual dignity. He wasn't sitting off someplace talking about a God who was
concerned with the Nation Israel, a God who was concerned with the destiny and the problems of the Nation Israel. This we must remember today if we are to maintain our dignity. In the greatest adversity, Israel depended upon God.

We can say that in today's world, with our knowledge of science, atomic energy and many mysterious things which we do not understand even as we use them, we don't need God any more. But we do. In the greatest adversity, the Nation Israel depended upon God. No matter what the enemy did, the Gentiles, the white people, no matter what they did to Israel, Israel was still confident.

As we look back at the history of Israel, we can ask, "How did this little handful of people, at the crossroads of the world, hemmed in by the great nations on every side, maintain its identity and its confidence, even as it was conquered by first one enemy and then another? How could this little handful of people still believe that somehow they would emerge triumphant? In every adversity they believed that God was concerned about them. They believed it. They believed that their strength was a strength that their enemies could neither conquer nor destroy because it came from their unique relationship with God.

During the Egyptian bondage, it would have been easy for Israel to have given up. The conditions of their slavery were
very much like our own. But they continued to believe that somehow freedom would come, somehow conditions would be changed. The enemy found it impossible to destroy them because their dignity could not be affected by anything men could do to them. Men could not destroy a dignity which had been given to them by God. So, efforts to destroy their dignity failed. No matter what the enemy did, Israel knew that it was special. When they were taken into Babylon, it was not into a harsh kind of captivity. The Babylonians had no need to destroy them. They were not that important. Only the leaders were taken to Babylon. This seemed sufficient to destroy their institutions and their identity. The Babylonians didn't beat them or use cattle prods or fire hoses on them. They just took the cream of the nation to Babylon. The Psalmist says, "Our captors required of us mirth, saying, 'Sing us the songs of Zion.'" The Babylonians weren't vicious men. They weren't beating or whipping them. They just laughed at them. "They required of us mirth," just as today in the Gentile nightclubs they say, "you black people have such a talent for singing. Sing us your spirituals."

The other night I saw the Clara Ward Gospel Singers on TV, entertaining in a Las Vegas nightclub. They were singing the very songs which our people sang in their suffering and
misery, while the white folks laughed. When the Babylonians said to the Jews in captivity (these biblical Jews were the Black Nation Israel) "Sing us the songs of Zion, laugh and make merry for us, we like your songs," what did the Jews reply? "How can we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?" They said, "The Nation is shattered. We aren't going to sing the Lord's songs for these Gentiles." It wasn't a place that they remembered. It was a Nation, a people. They wept because they were God's people. They were not going to make light of God so white folks could laugh and make merry.

Do you know what the difference was? The ancient Jews had dignity. You may not think that dignity is important. But you know that when the Ward Singers jazzed up our spirituals, those white folks in Las Vegas had less respect for all of us. They knew that those songs were religious songs. They knew that when those songs were first sung, black women were being raped, their children were being snatched from them and sold into slavery, and their men were being whipped and killed. When they heard the Ward Singers singing those songs for entertainment, they said, "These people have no dignity"; and they thought less of all of us.

"How can we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?" is a statement of dignity. Don't act a fool for white folks. You see it so often. Some black people think that they have
emancipated themselves when they act a fool. You see it on
the bus all the time. A black man without dignity will talk
loud and act simple and think that somehow he is showing
white folks that they don't frighten him any. A black man
without dignity will do foolish things to make white people
laugh. He'll talk to some imaginary friend at the other end
of the bus. All the time he is talking for the man's enter­
tainment, laughing for the man, performing for the man. The
man sees him and thinks that we are all fools. It's no use
my just sitting there and looking the other way because he
is destroying me.

As black people, we don't have a lot of separate digni­
ties. We have one dignity. If you mess it up, you mess it
up for all of us. Or you see our black kids acting a fool
out on the streets. They are messing up our dignity. You
know why they are doing it? Because they don't understand.
Because they are living in a world in which they have been
shattered -- leaning walls, tottering fences. So they are
out there fighting back in their own little way, making a
fool of themselves for the man.

We have got to find dignity somewhere because we will
never be a Nation until we can first build a sense of dignity.
That means that anywhere, on the job, on the bus, on the
street, there are certain things that the man is not going to
to make you do. What can he give you if he takes your dignity? Nothing he has is worth it. You say, "I've got to eat." And I say, "Eating is not that important." You say, "I got a wife and children." I am not going to tell you that they are not that important. I am going to say that they are that important. They don't want a clown feeding them, and if you feed them, acting a clown, you are destroying them at the same time. "They only tear him down from his dignity."

The Psalmist analyzed it all a long time ago, and he knew that it was possible to take a man and make a clown out of him.

John O. Killens means the same thing when he says the white folks took a black man and made a Nigger out of him. They robbed him of his dignity. The children of Israel remembered this one thing, and struggled to keep their dignity. They remembered that God had chosen Israel.

Don't laugh at that because we are God's chosen people. You don't fully recognize yet what that means. When we talk about the Black Nation, we have got to remember that the Black Nation, Israel, was chosen by God. Out of the whole world God chose Israel to covenant with, to say, "You will be my people and I will be your God." What else does a man need for dignity? He didn't go to the big nations with their big armies. He went to this little nation and said, "You are my
chosen people." Perhaps if we could just remember that we are God's chosen people, that we have a covenant with God, then we would know that God will not forsake us. Even in the midst of violence and oppression, we would know that we are God's chosen people. We could look the white man straight in the eye and say, "There is nothing you can do to destroy us, and you cannot take from us our dignity."

The concept of the Nation must include the basic thought that the Nation consists of God's chosen people. Don't be afraid to say the word "God" because this is the 20th Century. You know what God means. It means that somebody is taking care of us. Don't try to make something selfish out of God. Don't try to use God to get something for you that you want. Understand that God is going to take care of us, the Black Nation, because we are God's chosen people. Because of this simple fact, the enemy is not going to destroy us. The time of our greatest strength (I am talking now about black people in this country) has not been in recent years, when we have had jobs and money and the illusion of being accepted. The time of our greatest strength was back in slavery when our slave forefathers believed that God was going to do something for them. They didn't just sit down because they believed this and wait for God to free them. The Underground Railroad was possible because black men and women were willing to to back into slave territory to bring out their people.
Nat Turner's faith in God did not stop his insurrection, nor thousands of slave insurrections all over the South. Every time a black man led an insurrection, he knew that he was doing the will of God. Just being mad is not enough. That is the trouble with most of our rebellions. We get mad because somebody did something we didn't like, and we start throwing Molotov Cocktails and breaking out windows. This isn't enough. We must believe that our struggle is a revolutionary struggle designed to change the world and to establish us in our rightful position. We must have faith that we are doing the will of God who created us in his own image.

Anything that destroys a black man's dignity is bad. This is our yardstick. Just ask yourself, "Is this building a black man's dignity?" Then it is good. If it is destroying a black man's dignity, then it is bad. That is the only yardstick there is. It doesn't make any difference how much money is involved. Anything you do that makes black people proud, that is good. Anything that makes black people ashamed, that is bad. That is why so many black preachers in pulpits throughout this country are bad. They use the name of God but what they are doing is bad because they make black people ashamed. That is why Muhammad Ali is good, because what he did makes us proud. So he is good. What Muhammad Ali did and is doing is the will of God. You know how we know?
Because it makes black people proud. That is God's will, but what preachers are doing in so many pulpits is bad. It doesn't make any difference how many times they say God on Sunday morning, or how big their Bible is, or how many songs they sing about what God is going to do in the great bye-and-bye. It is bad because they are destroying our dignity, and even the little children sitting in these churches are getting to the point where they are ashamed. It is bad, it is not the will of God.

Don't be afraid to try to figure it out in terms of the will of God. God wants us to be men. If he had wanted us to be something else, he would have made us something else. If he had wanted us to be snakes or bears, he would have made us snakes or bears. He made us men; he expects us to be men. We tend to forget. Back in slavery our people remembered. We look back and think that this is a time we would like to forget. But we must never forget it because back there we had men and women with dignity. In the midst of the most difficult conditions, they had dignity. There were men and women that Ole Massa couldn't break. That was what he was trying to do. The things he did were not only designed to make him money, but to break black men.

This is still what the white enemy is trying to do today, to break you. That is why he is happy to get Clara Ward and
her singers to shuffle for him. That is why he is happy when he can get Roy Wilkins to issue ridiculous statements. He knows that he is making us ashamed. If he can take our little children and make them think that being a pimp is the greatest thing in the world, he is happy. He is breaking us, making us ashamed.

Everything he has done to us was intended to make us ashamed, to destroy our pride. Why do you think he gives black children second-class schools which teach white supremacy? Because he knows that this is one certain way to keep a people down, by robbing them of pride. It is a miracle that we have a Black Nation today, that so many black men and women and children believe that they are somebody, after the systematic effort that has gone into breaking us. But millions of us are bewildered and confused, not even understanding that the man is deliberately trying to break us by robbing us of our dignity.

I was talking to a friend of mine in the barber shop the other day. He means well. He bought a house out there where some of you are trying to buy or have already bought. He lived around the corner for a long time, but when he started making a little money he wanted something better for his children. He wanted good schools for them and a good neighborhood. So he took his children out of public schools and
put them into a Catholic school. He was getting the best for them. There were only a few black children in the school or in the neighborhood. Everything was so fine. He was telling me about his son.

I said, "You are destroying that child." He loves that boy more than anything in the world. He works 12 hours a day trying to do his best for the boy.

He said, "How am I destroying the child? Everything I do is for that boy. That's why I took him out there so he wouldn't be with these..."

"That is the first wrong thing, telling him that you took him out there so he wouldn't be with us."

"But I look out on 12th Street at night and see little children running up and down the street, I don't want that for my children." So I said, "If I had to choose, I'd choose one of those running up and down 12th Street, because if he comes out of it alive, he is going to have some sense of identity with his own people. Out there where your child is, you have destroyed that possibility. How is he going to get it in a white Catholic school, in a white neighborhood? What can you say to him?"

"I tell him to stay in school and he will get a better job. He won't be like..."
"There you go again -- won't be like them. That is what you are trying to say. You can get a better job, you can live in a white neighborhood, you can send your children to a white school, that is what you are trying to tell him. You are separating him from the Black Nation. Your whole way of life is designed to separate him from his own people."

He said, "Oh, no, he knows he's black, he has pride in being black."

"Does he know that white people are his enemy?"

"That isn't so, white people are not his enemy," he said.

"Let me give you a little illustration. My little boy and another little boy play together, and there is a little white girl who lives across the street. So my little boy and the boy he plays with were talking to the little white girl, and they asked her which one she liked best. The little white girl said that she like the other little boy best. She didn't like my boy best, yet the little boy she picked is darker than my little boy."

I said, "Now how about that? Do you think you have really proved your point? Don't you know that they were both little 'Niggers' to that little white girl, and don't you see what you have done? You've got your little black boy out there in a white neighborhood, begging a little white girl to say that she likes him. Now there's no hope for either of you."
The important thing is that this black father doesn't see anything wrong with his little boy trying to get a little white girl across the street to say that she likes him.

I asked, "How many times have they called your little boy 'Nigger' in school?"

Now he was getting defensive, "Not much, just once or twice, that's all."

"Do you think that being called 'Nigger' once or twice a day is doing him a whole lot of good?" i asked. "And do you think that all these white folks teaching him all about white supremacy are really going to make him a better black man? Don't you think that all of this will ruin his mind?"

"No," he replied, "what he is learning is good. He's in the best school that I can afford."

I asked, "Don't you think when he gets through the day with all those white teachers, priests, and nuns, he must hate you when he comes home because you are black and inferior?"

"Oh, no, you don't understand," he protested, "I am protecting him from all that. I will give you another illustration. You know all these slick-headed 'processes' that the boys wear in black neighborhoods? Well, out in our neighborhood, he never sees one. Well, the other day a teen-age black
boy came to pick up a maid from across the street and he had a 'process.' He is nine years old and he had never seen a process, isn't that good?"

I said, "I'm on the verge of tears, go on with your story."

"Well, that night when I came home he told me that he would like to have his hair fixed like that so it would be long and slick and shiny. He didn't know what to call it, but he wanted one."

I asked, "What did you think about that?"

He said, "I was glad that he won't see that kind of thing very often out where we live."

I said, "Aren't you worried about the fact that the very first time he saw a black boy with a 'process' he wanted one? Why do you think he wanted it? Can't you see that your little boy is ashamed of being black with kinky hair, and he wants to be white?"

He said, "Oh, no, it just shows what a little bad influence can do to a child."

There we have a poor little black boy being torn to pieces by white people -- or as the Psalmist says, "being shattered." And his poor father, thinking that he is doing the best thing for his child, sacrificing, working himself to
death, and his wife working herself to death, and this poor little black boy going straight to hell. By "hell" I mean the place where a man has no dignity and no respect for himself.

We have only one basis for judgment. If anything gives a black man a sense of pride and dignity, it is good. If it destroys his pride and dignity, it is bad. Remember this when you get ready to buy a house in a white neighborhood. Is it going to give your child a sense of pride to be out there in an all-white school where he is despised by teachers and students alike? The public schools are not good and the fight to improve them seems almost futile, so you are going to send him to some Lutheran or Catholic school and destroy him completely. Many black people see other black people only through the white man's eyes. The white man has completely destroyed their love of self. They have no sense of pride. They are actually afraid of us and of our influence upon their children.

We are not going to hurt their little children. From the front of the Church everyday, I see hundreds of little children who live in our neighborhood. They are all better off than this black child in his better white neighborhood. They look around and everybody is black. I may scream at them for
throwing stones through the back windows, but I scream at them because I am concerned about them. I don't want them tearing up our Church building, but I don't hate them and I don't despise them. I can't call them "Nigger" because they are a part of me. And that is the way everybody else is, up and down the street. But out in my friend's better white neighborhood, his little boy isn't a part of anything, and he knows it. He can walk up and down the street and ask little white girls whether or not they like him, but every day his dignity is slipping away and self-hate is taking its place.

Those of us who are in the Black Nation realize that we are God's chosen people. No matter what the enemy does to us, we are God's chosen people and we must love each other. We fight together against a common enemy, confident of ultimate victory because we are God's chosen people. "How long will you set upon a man to shatter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence? They only plan to tear him down from his dignity."


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