

AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH

MODERN CHURCH HISTORY –SPRING 2024

ANCIENT ROOTS

- Christianity was in Africa before it was in Europe!
- One of the first converts in Acts was Ethiopian.
- One of the church leaders in Antioch was African.
- The first Christian university was located in Africa.
- My favorite early church father was African (Augustine).
- Many ancient African churches are still alive and well today.
- Christianity is also spreading faster today in Africa than anywhere else on earth!

EARLY AMERICAN SLAVES

- In early America, there were many different opinions and practices regarding the evangelization of African slaves.
- In most places, slaves were discouraged from openly worshipping, but they did so in secret.
- Many early slave converts practiced a mixture of Christianity and folk religions.
- As more Americans began to support for emancipation, Christianity was embraced by more slaves as a path to freedom.

EMANCIPATION

- By the early 1800s, there were Black churches forming across the country.
- The formation of Black churches as separate institutions mostly grew out of the limitations placed on slaves within predominantly white churches.
- Black Christians quickly discovered that the Bible opposes the institution of slavery and began spreading a message of freedom and equality.
- As such, issues of social justice have always been a part of the Black church.
- All major Black denominations formed in the 1800s (AME, AME Zion, CME, NBC, COGIC).

FREE AT LAST

- Into the 1900s, Black churches were at the center of social and political life for most Black Americans.

- Leadership development and political engagement happened almost exclusively within the context of church.
- Black churches and pastors were at the heart of the fight against racial injustice.
- The most prominent leader of the Civil Rights Movement was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, a Baptist minister.
- Rosa Parks was a lifelong member of an AME Church.
- Thurgood Marshall was a lifelong member of St. Philip's Church in Harlem, a historically black Episcopal Church.

STILL DIVIDED

- 50 years later, Sunday morning is still the most segregated time in America.
- History is obviously a big part of that division. Black Christians were not welcome in many white churches (and still are not in some places).
- Individual cultural preferences also contribute to some of the continued division.
- The ongoing division is also affected by differences in cultural values:
 - White Americans tend to be more individualistic in their thinking as it relates to faith and social issues. Black Americans tend to be more group oriented.
 - White Americans tend to be more competitive. Black Americans tend to be more cooperative.
 - White Americans tend to prefer non-expressive communication. Black Americans tend to be more expressive.
 - White Americans tend to separate work and personal life. Black Americans tend to live more integrated lives.
 - White Americans tend to have a linear view of time. Black Americans tend to have a more non-linear view of time.

Does the Bible speak to this division?