

Into the 20th Century: Denominations, Leaders, Music, Theology

(I) Historical context

- (A) Continued violence South, discrimination North
- (B) Devastating race riots in, for example, Wilmington, NC (1898), Springfield, IL (1908), East St. Louis (1917), Chicago (1919), Tulsa (1921)
- (C) Continued struggle for education and public space
- (D) Great Migration to northern cities in WWI and following, accelerated during WWII
- (E) “Christian interracialism” (historian Paul Harvey) in South begin to undermine the worst abuses (for example, the Association of Southern women for the Prevention of Lynching; Nannie Burroughs an effective leader of the women’s auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention)
- (F) Church-based thinking and activity in early 20th century the foundation of the civil rights movement of 1950s and 1960s

(II) Continued importance of denominations

- (A) AME and other Methodist groups remain leaders
- (B) Baptist Foreign Mission Convention (1880) led to National Baptist Convention of the United States of America (1895); 1915 controversy over control of publishing led to formation of NBC, Unincorporated, remaining group became the NBC, USA, Inc.; 1961 came out the Progressive National Baptist Convention to encourage stronger commitment to civil rights reform. The Incorporated denomination in 2020 (over 21,000 churches and over 8,000,000 members)
- (C) Black Roman Catholics: 1886, first ordination of Black priest (Augustus Tolton); 1889 first Congress of African American Catholics; Great Migration added numbers in North, with more growth from WWI onward (by 1975, over 1 million, with 80,000 in Chicago; in 1984, 10 Black bishops; today: as many as 3 million with one-fourth in all- Black churches). Catholic schools a key recruiter for the church.
- (D) From early 20th century, a strong Pentecostal presence, especially the Church of God in Christ, founded 1897 in Memphis by Missionary Baptists C. H. Mason and C. P. Jones. When Mason came to advocate special Holy Spirit gifts, Jones broke away to found the Church of Christ (Holiness) USA. COGIC became a strong presence throughout the country, and eventually the world (today, over 12,000 churches here and abroad, ca. 5 million members in U.S., almost 9 million worldwide)
- (E) From 1870s, many denominations sponsored colleges and universities (25 by 1900)

(III) Independent churches and individuals always important

- (A) Amanda Berry Smith (1837-1915): born enslaved, drawn into Methodist circles, independent missionary-evangelist in U.K., India, and Liberia before settling near Chicago (Amanda Smith Orphanage and Industrial Home for Abandoned and Destitute Colored Children)

- (B) Elder Lucy Smith: from Georgia to Chicago in 1910; founded All Nations Pentecostal Church in 1918; began radio broadcasts in 1933; by 1930s, 5,000 members (some whites and Asians as well as majority Black). “Passionately human . . . no less divine” (Wallace Best).

(IV) Gospel Music

- (A) Adaptation of earlier hymnody (esp. Isaac Watts) to urban environments and the blues
- (B) Charles Tindley (1851-1933), Bainbridge Street Methodist Church (Philadelphia) pioneered music publishing, including his hymns “Stand By Me” and “I’ll Overcome Some Day”
- (C) Thomas A. Dorsey (1899-1993): after early years playing jazz and blues he experienced a spiritual awakening and for 50 years directed the music at Chicago’s Pilgrim Baptist Church. Encouraged active expression and merging musical genres. Many compositions, including “Precious Lord, Take My Hand.” 1932 founded the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses.
- (D) Mahalia Jackson (1911-1972): in New Orleans, Baptist, jazz, and Holiness influences. Then to Chicago to sing and record with Thomas Dorsey. 1937 first record. Sang at 1963 March on Washington (“I’ve been ‘buked and I’ve been scorned”) and in 1968 at Martin Luther King, Jr.’s funeral (“Precious Lord, take my hand”).
- (E) COGIC singers Andraé Crouch, the Hawkins Singers, the Clark Sisters

(V) Theological development

- (A) Black Pentecostalism little studied, but important for many believers in many places
- (B) Black “fundamentalism”: into 1940s, significant AME and Baptist leaders either called themselves fundamentalists in opposition to theological modernism or advocated the same positions as white fundamentalists. Some quite active in promoting racial reform (recent book, Daniel Bare, *Black Fundamentalists*)
- (C) Progressive thinkers, but still mostly in churches
- (1) A compound of influences: biblical supernaturalism, Social Gospel (Rochester Seminary where MLK, Jr. studied), post-liberal Christian realism (Reinhold Niebuhr), Quaker pacifism (A. J. Muste, Fellowship of Reconciliation), Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent social protest, socialism (A. Philip Randolph, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters)
 - (2) leadership from Howard University, Morehouse College, and similar institutions
 - (3) Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson, *The Negro’s Church* (1933): shortcomings of education, perspective, and social condition, but they could also affirm that “the Negro church generally preaches love and tolerance toward all races and abides by these ideals in practice.”
 - (4) Mays, 1939, “The American Negro and the Christian Religion”: Jesus as a model of servanthood, the brotherhood of all humanity, racial pride as a sin.
 - (5) Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949).
 - (6) Morehouse professor George Kelsey, “The Christian Way in Race Relations” (1948) anticipated much of MLK, Jr.’s later appeal.