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**FROM REFUGE TO STRENGTH:  
THE RISE OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA, 1787-1949**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Philadelphia has been a center of African American religious activity for more than two centuries, and much of its history and tradition has been preserved in Philadelphia's historic African American religious buildings. Today there are nearly 100 church buildings of vital historic significance within Philadelphia's city limits, several of which have been occupied by more than one historic African American congregation. Some of these church buildings were built by black congregations in times of intense racial prejudice or economic insecurity and stand today as monuments to the growing strength and solidarity of Philadelphia's African American church. Other church buildings were purchased from previous owners, most often formerly wealthy white congregations. These buildings demonstrate the Church's increasing economic power as well as Philadelphia's evolving ethnic and religious demography. Both types of buildings help tell the story of the developing African American community in Philadelphia and, on a larger scale, the wider African American religious experience from colonial times to the present.

The story told by Philadelphia's historic African American church buildings is a story of the changing role of the black church in the city. Philadelphia's first black churches emerged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as products of genuine Christian sentiment among several of the city's black leaders, coupled with frustration with the hypocrisy of racism that black congregants experienced from predominantly white congregations and a need for community networks with which to survive in an aggressive, racially-divided city. Unwilling to endure exclusion and segregation, but firmly believing the tenets of their faith, Philadelphia's early Christian leaders established churches that could serve as havens of refuge from a predominantly white city that spurned its black population. These early churches flourished in the early nineteenth century, giving birth to off-shoot churches and inspiring numerous black Christians to found their own independent congregations both within existing denominations and outside of them. Black churches of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century served as vehicles of community building and as sanctuaries from the daily pressures of life in the oppressive city, but the early churches did not seek to assert black rights or create movements of social protest. Instead they sought to affirm black equality with whites by creating religious institutions and structures that resembled their white counterparts by providing for their congregants what they were denied in white churches. Architecturally, Philadelphia's first black churches, Bethel, St. Thomas, and Zoar, looked almost identical to St. George's Methodist, the white church from which they arose. When each of these black congregations built a new church building between 1880 and 1890 after growing into large and prosperous religious institutions, they hired prominent white architects and chose building designs that were identical to those being used by white congregations of the period. Furthermore, in their social programs, early black churches sought to provide for the needy with their own limited resources,

but generally did not organize protests to pressure the local and national governments to guarantee them the rights and privileges proscribed by the constitution and the law.

It was not until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the beginnings of the rapid influx of black migrants from the south, which began in earnest in the 1890s and reached its peak during the period known as the Great Migration in the years surrounding the first World War, that Philadelphia's black churches adopted a new role as social organizer and became crucibles of protest among black communities. With increasing memberships and multiplying congregations within denominations, Philadelphia's black churches of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, beginning especially during the Great Migration, developed into the leading organizational units for African Americans in the city and adopted an aggressive stance against racial inequality. As Philadelphia's black population grew and dissipated from its historic center in the Moyamensing and Southwark sections of the city to areas to the north, west, and south, black churches followed suit, in some cases moving with their communities and in other cases springing up amidst new communities. By the time the U.S. entered the Second World War, the black churches in Philadelphia had become part of an assertive social force, affirming its differences from white churches while pressuring society for racial equality. Alternative versions of Christianity in the forms of independent denominations and "personality cults" sprouted around the city, often preaching radical messages of redemption, equality, and black exceptionalism. In the years after WWII, Philadelphia's demography changed dramatically, with many white residents abandoning their neighborhoods for space in the suburbs, which opened urban housing as well as church space to a growing black community.

Despite the adversity it experienced, the African American church in Philadelphia has grown and flourished through times of challenge and struggle. From the birth of Philadelphia's first African American churches in 1794 to the present, the church has boldly faced challenges of racial prejudice and inequality, and has developed with time to meet the spiritual, social, and economic needs of its members. The story of the evolving African American church in Philadelphia can best be studied when divided into four stages of history:

1. 1787-1830 – Origins of the African American Church in Philadelphia
2. 1830-1880 – Years of Growth and Challenge
3. 1880-1916 – Rise to Prominence
4. 1916-1929 – A Changing Role
5. 1929-1949 – Persevering Through Difficult Times

The growth of African American religious bodies in Philadelphia illustrates a larger story, the development of one of the nation's most influential African American communities. By studying the development of Philadelphia's African American Church one can better understand both the evolution of Philadelphia's black community and the larger religious experience of African Americans in the urban North.

### **ORIGINS OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA, 1787-1830**

The African American Christian faith began to develop as a new and separate religious tradition in the early years of American slavery. Although early colonial laws established that Christian baptism would not constitute freedom from slavery, seventeenth century American slaveholders generally resisted converting their slaves to Christianity on account of memories of earlier English traditions, which required freedom for Christianized slaves. Thus, it was not until

the early eighteenth century that active proselytizing of African Americans became commonplace.<sup>1</sup>

Pennsylvania, one of the first slave-holding colonies in North America and bastion of Quaker tradition, became one of the centers of black conversion. Philadelphia in particular had one of the largest free black communities in the colonies and so became an early center of black religious activity. In 1732, the English minister Thomas Bray founded the Associates of Doctor Bray, a Christian society dedicated to proselytizing African Americans in Philadelphia and other port cities.<sup>2</sup> With the help of influential Philadelphians like Benjamin Franklin, Bray was able to establish missionary schools for blacks in the city. Dr. Bray's group and related organizations operated on a relatively small scale before the First Great Awakening, the period of Protestant Christian revivalism in the American colonies between 1740 and 1790. It was during the Great Awakening that large numbers of African Americans became Christians and began to create their own religious institutions.<sup>3</sup>

The Great Awakening embodied the growing American impulse of egalitarianism, with revivalists preaching messages of salvation for men and women of all races and backgrounds, including Native Americans and African Americans.<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, who served as the intellectual backbone of the movement, expressed hope that black converts to the new movement would eventually become foreign missionaries to Africa and other parts of the world.<sup>5</sup> Philadelphia, a center of Great Awakening fervor, was host to numerous revivalist meetings, including some held by the famous evangelist, George Whitefield, an Anglican minister who came to the colonies in 1738 and held wildly popular revivals throughout the American colonies. Whitefield's revival meetings were popular among African Americans. "Nearly fifty negroes came to give me thanks for what God had done to their souls," recalled Whitefield after a sermon he gave in Philadelphia in 1740.<sup>6</sup> Some historians have speculated that the emotional nature of the Great Awakening revival meetings appealed to African Americans because the meetings allowed them to worship in the tradition of their West African ancestors, who incorporated emotional experiences and dancing into their religion. Such emotion was demonstrated in African American religious events that were commonly referred to as "shouts."<sup>7</sup>

Despite the egalitarian ideals of the Great Awakening, American religious institutions were reluctant to adopt principles that would involve opening church membership to non-whites. It was the hesitance of traditionally white congregations to accept new black converts that led to the creation of new and separate black congregations and denominations. The Baptist and Methodist churches, which placed less emphasis on strict organization and the education of professional clergy than other denominations, attracted more blacks than other denominations, but the relationship new black attendees had with their predominantly white congregations was always tenuous, with black members almost always segregated to separate pews and sections of

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<sup>1</sup> Edward D. Smith, Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Rise of Black Churches in Eastern American Cities, 1740-1877. (Washington, D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 23-28.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Joanne Blacoe, Anna Coxe Toogood, and Sharon Brown, "African American History at Independence NHP," CRM: Cultural Resource Management: Information for Parks, Federal Agencies, Indian Tribes, States, Local Governments, and the Private Sector 20, no. 2 (1997): 46. Some have speculated that Franklin's experience with the Bray Associates was an impetus for his conversion from his early days as a slaveholder to an avid anti-slavery advocate. Franklin would eventually serve as the president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. See Blacoe, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Climbing Jacob's Ladder, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Edwards, Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England. (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1742), cited in Smith, Climbing Jacob's Ladder, 29.

<sup>6</sup> George Whitely, quoted in Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 128; cited in Smith, Climbing Jacob's Ladder, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, Climbing Jacob's Ladder, 30-31.

the church. It was thus from these denominations that the first African American congregations emerged.<sup>8</sup>

Separatist Baptists encouraged the independence of individual congregations, and this impulse led to independent African American Baptist congregations on Southern plantations in Virginia and South Carolina as early as 1756. The first independent African American denominations, however, developed a few years later in the northern cities, where African Americans faced discrimination within newly integrated and traditionally white Methodist churches. The movement for independent African American denominations began in post-Revolutionary Philadelphia within St. George's Methodist Church, located on 4th Street above Vine Street.<sup>9</sup>

St. George's Methodist Church had black attendees since its founding in 1767, but with the increasing black numbers during the Great Awakening and the migration of many freed Pennsylvanian slaves to Philadelphia, racial tension became especially acute. Two black members, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, believed that best solution to the issue of racial unrest was to form a separate church. Only two other congregants, William White and Dorcus Ginings, agreed with Allen and Jones, and little help was offered from the rest of the white congregation. Nevertheless, in 1786 Richard Allen founded the Free African Society, a non-denominational group of about 42 African American Christians, and began planning an independent church.<sup>10</sup>

Richard Allen was born in 1760, the slave of Benjamin Chew, a Quaker lawyer who became Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1774. Chew sold Allen and his parents to a Delaware plantation owner who allowed his slaves to attend Methodist services in Dover. Through these services, Allen became a Christian and began holding his own Methodist services in his quarters on the plantation using traveling Methodist preachers as weekly speakers. In 1783, he bought his freedom and began a career as an itinerant preacher, eventually settling in Philadelphia in 1786.<sup>11</sup>

The catalyst for the actual foundation of a new African American church came not from popular sentiment within the Free African Society, but from an incident that occurred during a Sunday service at St. George's Methodist Church in 1787, which Allen recorded in his memoirs. That year, blacks who had been worshipping at St. George's were told that they were no longer allowed to sit in the pews with the white members of the congregation, but would instead be required to stand along the back wall. One Sunday, the Church sexton met the black congregants at the door and asked them not to stand on the main floor, but to remove themselves to the gallery. Richard Allen recalled that on that occasion, the pastor had just called the congregation to prayer, and when Allen heard some commotion below him, he looked up to find that Absalom Jones and William White, who had been kneeling on the church prayer benches, were being removed by two church trustees. Jones pleaded with a trustee to allow him to finish his prayer before returning to the gallery, but he was forcefully removed. The black attendees rose at once and left the church, many of them never to return. Although some black congregants continued to attend St. George's after the incident, many left permanently. Allen recalled that after that Sunday many blacks "were filled with fresh vigor to get a house erected to worship God in."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 31-33.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 33-36.

<sup>10</sup> Cyril E. Griffith, "Richard Allen: The First Prominent Black Religious Leader in Pennsylvania," in John M. Coleman, Robert G. Christ, and John B. Frantz eds. Pennsylvania Religious Leaders, Pennsylvania Historic Studies Series, No. 16. (Camp Hill, PA: Plank's Suburban Press, for Pennsylvania Historical Society, University Park, PA, 1986), 11-12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12-13. Also see: Ruby Chappelle Boyd, ed. On This Rock . . . The Mother of African Methodism. (Philadelphia, PA: Princeton Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Griffith, 12. More recent research has revealed that Allen may have erred slightly in his recollections of the precise year of this incident. See for example Doris Andrews, "The African Methodists of Philadelphia,

When the first group of African Americans left St. George's Methodist in 1787, the immediate discussion focused on what type of church the new group would found. A temporary settlement to the issue was the existence of the non-sectarian Free African Society, but when the time came to create an independent church, the debate resumed. Some members wanted to continue worshiping in the spirit of Methodism, while others were offended by their previous treatment and wished to abandon Methodism altogether. The majority of the group proceeded to form an independent Episcopal church that would become known as St. Thomas Episcopal, led by Absalom Jones. A smaller group meanwhile would found Bethel Church as an independent Methodist congregation under the leadership of Richard Allen. Both churches were founded in 1794 and some debate has continued since then regarding which of the two churches was founded first. This debate, which became especially acute around the centennial of the two churches, has led to a belief that the two churches were competitive rivals at their founding, but this misleading, as Richard Allen and Absalom Jones worked together to found their congregations. An even smaller group of African Americans remained with the St. George's congregation for several years before departing to found a mission church known as Zoar Methodist.<sup>13</sup>

Allen and Jones struggled to found their independent churches against a difficult climate in Philadelphia. Though they received a great deal of help from the Society of Friends and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, most white Philadelphians disliked the idea of organized independent African American churches. Pennsylvania was still a slave holding commonwealth, and as historian Gary B. Nash has explained, most whites at the time perceived African Americans as either "innately handicapped or . . . irreparably degraded by the experience of slavery."<sup>14</sup> The idea of blacks actually holding their own church services was as foreign as the idea of blacks holding political office or running independent businesses.

Absalom Jones and his followers initially proposed to start an African American school first and a church later, but with the help of the prominent Philadelphian Dr. Benjamin Rush, the emerging congregation was able to raise funds for constructing its own church building. Jones, Rush, and the future members of St. Thomas planned the church organization in 1791 and began seeking funds for the purchase of property and the construction of a new building. The original planned name for the church was to be "The African Church of Philadelphia," a name that indicated both a pride in the African heritage of its members and a reluctance to embrace any existing white denomination. For a time, Richard Allen himself was on the fund-raising board with Jones attempting to generate money for the foundation of the new church. Allen recalled that the group was initially very successful, collecting \$360 on the first day.<sup>15</sup>

By 1792, however, with the news of the slave revolts in the French West Indies and growing resentment among religious whites toward the "prideful" endeavor of establishing an independent African American church, the giving tapered off. Just as hopes were dwindling, a surprising gift in the form of large building loan came from a Welsh immigrant, John Nicholson, who had amassed a personal fortune in Western land speculation and wartime loan certificates.

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1794-1802," in Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (eds.), Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays. (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1993), 147.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, 35-37; also see Will B. Gravely, "The Rise of African Churches in America, 1786-1822: Re-examining the Contexts," in Gayraud Wilmore (ed.), African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1989), 301-306. On the centennial debate, see C. S. Smith, "Centennial Reflections," u.a., "Where Are Your Centennial Data?" and other newspaper clippings in Scrapbook #26, "Topical Focus: Centennial of the African M. E. Church, 1887," William H. Dorsey Collection, Cheyney State College, Cheyney, PA.

<sup>14</sup> Gary B. Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840. (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 114-15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 112-17; Ann C. Lammers, "The Rev. Absalom Jones and the Episcopal Church: Christian Theology and Black Consciousness in a New Alliance," Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 51, no. 2 (1982): 159-84.

The new congregation acquired property on 5<sup>th</sup> Street one block away from the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall), and erected a two story brick building with a sanctuary that could seat more than 500 people. The majority of the new members wished to join the Episcopal denomination, against the wishes of Jones and Allen, who preferred Methodism. The congregation asked Allen to be its first minister, but he declined, still wishing to found an African Methodist church. Unable to convince Allen to take the pulpit, the congregation extended the invitation to Jones, who accepted. The church became incorporated as Episcopal church in July 1794 and adopted the name “African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas.” Its first service in the new building was held on July 17, 1794.<sup>16</sup>

Richard Allen meanwhile attempted to found a new Methodist church. He held a meeting of ten African American Methodists on May 5, 1794 to find a building in which the new group could meet. With the help of Dr. Benjamin Rush and another prominent Philadelphian, Robert Ralston, Richard Allen had been able raise the funds to purchase a piece of property on 6<sup>th</sup> Street between Pine and Lombard from its owner, Mark Wilcox, back in 1787. The property was still vacant in 1794 and would require a building to house the new congregation. Allen used his own money to purchase a blacksmith’s shop from a man named Sims and had it hauled to its new location on 6th Street. Within weeks the humble building had been repaired and opened to worshippers. At the dedication of the new Methodist church in July 1794, Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury officiated over the service, which included scripture reading from Genesis relating to Jacob’s dream of the ladder to heaven at a place called “Beth-el.” When the Rev. John Dickens, pastor of St. George’s Methodist Church gave the dedicatory prayer, and prayed that the new church would become a “Beth-el” for the gathering of thousands of souls, the congregation unanimously decided that the church should be called Bethel.<sup>17</sup> The property that Allen purchased in 1787 has been the site of 3 church buildings since, each the home of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, and is today the oldest piece of property continuously owned by African Americans in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

As the congregations of St. Thomas and Bethel were beginning to develop, the population of Philadelphia was struck hard by the yellow fever plague of 1793, which forced the state and federal governments to flee the city, with more than 20,000 wealthy Philadelphians close behind. The hardest hit of all Philadelphians were the urban poor and working class immigrants, who could barely afford to see a doctor. With a dramatic shortage in doctors and medical assistants the city turned to its long-ignored African American community for assistance. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were among the most effective leaders involved in organizing aid for the needy poor. Benjamin Rush was elated with the opportunity to show white Philadelphians what his African American Christian friends were capable of accomplishing. Mistakenly believing that blacks were immune to yellow fever, Rush recruited scores of black Christians to help in the treatment of the sick and the burying of the dead. At the peak of the epidemic more than twenty Philadelphians died each day, many of them African Americans.<sup>19</sup>

When they were first founded, St. Thomas and Mother Bethel had modest memberships. In 1794, St. Thomas recorded 246 members and Bethel recorded 108. But, a year later, St. Thomas recorded a membership of 427 and Bethel 121. It has been estimated that in 1795 approximately one-third of the black population in Philadelphia attended one of these churches, a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 119-28.

<sup>17</sup> Robert H. Wilson, Freedom of Worship: Meeting Houses, Churches and Synagogues of Early Philadelphia. (Philadelphia, PA: Olde Philadelphia Churches Historical Association, Inc., 1976), 33; Nash, 130-31; Boyd, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Boyd, 11-12. For more on the development of Mother Bethel, see Carolyn S. Beck, “Our Own Vine and Fig Tree: The Authority of History and Kinship in Mother Bethel,” Review of Religious Research 29, no. 4 (June 1988): 369-84.

<sup>19</sup> Nash, 121-25; C. B. Ashanin, “The Black Heroes of the Philadelphia Plague in 1793,” in J.S. Pobe (ed.) Religion in a Pluralistic Society. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 145-54.

rate equal to or greater than the rate of church attendance among white Philadelphians. The churches continued to grow. St. Thomas recorded a membership of about 500 in 1803 and 560 in 1813. Bethel recorded nearly 200 members in 1798, 211 in 1799, and 457 in 1804. Bethel outgrew its wooden building and in 1805 constructed a brick “roughcast” church in the place of the old building. In 1802, for the first time in its history, Bethel listed more baptisms than St. Thomas. This trend would never be reversed in the history of the two churches. Bethel continued to pass St. Thomas in size and influence throughout the early nineteenth century so that by 1813 Bethel boasted 1,272 members, more than double the size of St. Thomas.<sup>20</sup>

In April 1816, Bethel hosted a convention of African American Methodists who had grievances with the Methodist denomination. The convention organized the first General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and ordained Richard Allen as the first Bishop of the new denomination. Thus the AME Church, the first independent black denomination, was born.<sup>21</sup>

In 1796, a third African American church, Zoar Methodist Episcopal, was established. It began as a Methodist mission created out of St. George’s Methodist Church.<sup>22</sup> With the blessing of St. George’s minister, John Dickens, a small group (18 men and 3 women) of African American members of St. George’s began meeting in an abandoned butcher shop near the corner of Fourth and Brown Streets around 1794. In 1796 the group was able to purchase the lot at which it had been meeting and construct a new church building on the site. Bishop Asbury dedicated its new building in 1796, and today it is regarded as the first recognized African American congregation in the Methodist denomination.<sup>23</sup> The Zoar Mission continued to meet informally as a Methodist mission until 1837 when it was chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as the African Zoar Methodist Episcopal Church. The first pastor of the chartered congregation was Rev. Perry Tilghman who served from 1835 to 1844. Zoar Methodist would later adopt the name Mother Zoar Methodist because it “gave birth” to several other African American Methodist churches including Calvary Methodist (Tindley Temple), Janes Memorial, Mt. Zion, and St. Thomas.<sup>24</sup>

The fourth African American congregation established in Philadelphia was First African Presbyterian, organized in 1807. The Rev. Archibald Alexander, the pastor of Third Presbyterian Church wished to help create a separate African American Presbyterian church as early as 1806, and began training John Gloucester, the slave of former Tennessee minister Dr. Gideon Blackburn. After being set free by Blackburn and undergoing strict biblical teaching from Dr. Alexander, Gloucester founded the First African Presbyterian Church, which built its first building at Seventh and Bainbridge Streets in 1810. By touring Europe and giving lectures on the perils of American slavery, Gloucester was able to raise the necessary funds to purchase his wife out of bondage. Before his death in 1822, Gloucester had four sons; each trained for the ministry at Princeton. His oldest son, Jeremiah, founded Second African Presbyterian Church in 1824. In 1844, his second son, Stephen, founded Central Presbyterian Church, which moved to Lombard Street in 1848 after the construction of its new building near Ninth Street. It then adopted the name Lombard Street Central Presbyterian Church. Its Lombard Street building featured a stone obelisk monument in its courtyard as a memorial to its founder.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Nash, 132-33; 192-93.

<sup>21</sup> J.T. Jeniefer, “Who Was Richard Allen and What Did He Do?” (clipping from unidentified paper), December 8, 1887, in Scrapbook #26, “Topical Focus: Centennial of the African M. E. Church, 1887” William H. Dorsey Collection, Cheyney State College, Cheyney, PA.

<sup>22</sup> Nash, 192.

<sup>23</sup> Lois Mark Stalvy and Leonard L. Smalls, “Mother Bethel and Zoar Churches Spiritual keystones,” The Philadelphia Tribune, 1 January 1963, p. 2. Copy in Center for African American History and Culture, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Shelton B. Waters, We Have This Ministry: A History of the First African Presbyterian Church.

Philadelphia's fifth African American church was created in 1809 as a result of the desires of several black members of First Baptist Church to form their own congregation. Blacks had worshiped in white Baptist congregations in Philadelphia since 1746, but by the turn of the eighteenth century, several black members decided that a separate black Baptist congregation was desirable. On June 13, 1809, thirteen members of the primarily white First Baptist Church received their voluntary letters of dismissal to form their own congregation. Six days later, the First African Baptist Church was born. It was immediately recognized as a regular Baptist congregation at the annual meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association in October 1809. The young congregation began meeting in a building at 10<sup>th</sup> and Vine under the leadership of its first pastor, Henry Cunningham.<sup>26</sup>

When Bethel founded the mission that eventually took the name Union A.M.E. shortly after the founding of First African Baptist, the number of African American churches in Philadelphia reached six. In 1813 the six churches claimed a total membership of 2,366. Bethel had the largest membership with 1,272, more than twice the membership of the second largest congregation, St. Thomas, which had a membership of 560. First African Presbyterian reported 300 members. Both Zoar and First African Baptist reported memberships of 80, and the fledgling Union Mission claimed 74 members.<sup>27</sup>

### **YEARS OF GROWTH AND CHALLENGE, 1830-1880**

The years between 1830 and 1880 witnessed a tremendous growth in Philadelphia's African American population and, with that growth, a corresponding increase in both the number of congregations in the city and their size. In this time, however, Philadelphia's black churches and their members experienced unprecedented racial oppression.

Around 1810, the African American population of the city reached its largest size in relation to the city's total population for anytime in the nineteenth century. In 1800, there were close to 7,000 African Americans in the city, about 8.5% of the total population. These numbers were considerably higher than they had been ten years earlier, when African Americans numbered barely 2,500, a mere 4.5% of the population. By 1810, the African American population reached its proportional peak for the century at close to 11,000, 9.5% of the city's population. These numbers remained high through 1850, when the African American population dipped to slightly below 6% of the city's total population. In the years between 1820 and 1860 the African American population nearly doubled in size, growing from about 12,000 to about 23,000. In comparison to the size of the total population, African Americans saw their strongest numbers in the years between 1800 and 1840, in which they never dropped below 7% of the population and maintained a citizenry of between 8% and 10% of the total population of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia's predominantly white population met this dramatic population growth with marked resistance and frequent violence. Thus, while the years preceding the Civil War in Philadelphia were years of growth in the African American community, they were also years of frustration and disturbance, full of race riots and violent attacks on African American establishments, from which even churches were not spared. White residents of Philadelphia, especially poorer communities which included large groups of recent immigrants, resented black social and economic success and perceived black progress and population growth as a threat. As the black population increased in size relative to the white population in any area of the city, blacks were treated with increasing disdain and violence, often in the form of race riots. Each of

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(Philadelphia, PA: Gloucester Memorial and Historical Society, 1994), 2-27.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "Condition of Negroes, 1838" reprinted in W.E.B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1889; reprinted by same publisher, 1996), 199.

the racially motivated riots between 1834 and 1949 resulted in the destruction of at least one building that served as a symbol of African American success.<sup>28</sup>

In the years between 1830 and 1850 there were at least five major racially motivated riots in Philadelphia.<sup>29</sup> A riot broke out in 1831 when black Philadelphians sought to participate in Fourth of July festivities. A three-day tumult in August 1834 left one black church destroyed and another defaced. Three hundred constables and militia were called to quell the violence that forced many African Americans to flee their homes in the city for Attleborough, Bucks County, where they were further pursued. Historian John Runcie argues that successful blacks became “aggression objects” on which working class Irish immigrants could “vent their frustrations and blame their failure to make the American Dream come true,” since the two groups “were competitors for the most menial, unskilled and low paid types of employment available.” He argues further that, “They were involved in a struggle for survival at the lowest level of American society where many of them were confined by their rural backgrounds, lack of training and skills, and by the prejudices of the groups above them.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, when successful blacks were perceived to be flaunting their success, they became victims of jealous rage from less successful whites. When the riots subsided, the city formed a citizen’s committee to investigate their cause. Its report claimed that some participants “sought to intimidate the colored people, with intent as it would seem, to induce or compel them to remove from this district.” The attacks on churches, it concluded, were designed to put an end to “the disorderly and noisy manner in which some of the colored congregations indulge, to the annoyance and disturbance of the neighborhood in which such meeting houses are located.”<sup>31</sup>

One of the most famous riots was that of 1838, in which the newly-built abolition meeting place, Pennsylvania Hall, was burned to the ground. One of the most important parts of the life of the African American church in Philadelphia had been its active involvement in the abolition movement. Serving as meeting houses for anti-slavery rallies and as secret stops along the Underground Railroad, African American churches were among the most active Philadelphia institutions supporting the abolitionist cause. White sympathizers of the abolitionist cause had offered support and formed the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia in December 1833. In 1838 the society constructed an enormous meeting hall at 6<sup>th</sup> and Haines Street (above Race) named Pennsylvania Hall. Although Philadelphia became a vital center of abolitionist activity, it was far from a safe haven for anti-slavery activists. Abolitionists on their way to meetings at the hall were often harassed and insulted. An angry white mob in 1835 hurled anti-slavery literature into the Delaware River with the city’s mayor looking on. In 1838, a violent protest against radical abolitionism arose in the streets of Philadelphia. White supporters of slavery burned Pennsylvania Hall to the ground and then moved on to destroy the Shelter for Colored Orphans at 13<sup>th</sup> and Callowhill Streets. At least one African American church was burned in the melee.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Emma Jones Lepsansky, “‘Since They Got Those Separate Churches’: Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia.” *American Quarterly* (Spring, 1980): 75.

<sup>29</sup> DuBois, 48.

<sup>30</sup> John Runcie, “‘Hunting the Nigs’ in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834,” *Pennsylvania History* 29 (April 1972), 186-218; Nick Salvatore, *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber*. (New York: Times Books, Random House, 1996), 22-23; Lepsansky, 54-55.

<sup>31</sup> *Hazard’s Register*, XIV (September 27, 1834), 201, quoted in Runcie, 210.

<sup>32</sup> Nash, 277-278; Charles L. Blockson, *Philadelphia Guide to African American State Historical Markers*. (Philadelphia: The William Penn Foundation, 1992), 61. There are conflicting accounts of the 1838 riot. At least one source indicates that the destroyed church was located at 7th and Shippen (Bainbridge) Streets. This would likely have been First African Presbyterian Church, but the self-published history of the church gives no record of such an event. A detailed city map from 1838 in the Free Library of Philadelphia map Collection indicates only one church near the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Shippen, presumably First African Presbyterian.

On August 1, 1842, another riot broke out when at least 1,200 African Americans marched through Philadelphia under the banner of the Moyamensing Temperance Society to celebrate their support for the temperance movement and the anniversary of slavery's abolition in the British Empire. When the marchers reached Fourth and Shippen (Bainbridge) Streets, a mob of angry white (primarily Irish) dissidents set upon them. The riot spread into a nearby black neighborhood where numerous homes were ransacked and several individuals were brutally assaulted. The mob torched Smith's Hall on Lombard Street, the building that had served as an abolitionist headquarters in the absence of Pennsylvania Hall, and then burned nearby Second African Presbyterian Church on St. Mary's Street near 6th Street. The riot stretched into the following morning, and by 6 A.M. the white mob grew to an estimated 1,000. By the end of the day the African American neighborhoods had been decimated, and at least one African American church had been burned to the ground.<sup>33</sup>

Historian Emma Jones Lepsansky has argued convincingly that the growth of the African American church coupled with the increasing relative wealth and size of the black community was directly linked to the violent response of the white population in antebellum Philadelphia. Citing the fact that institutions, such as churches, that signified growing economic progress and "status" in the African American community were singled out as targets for destruction during the riots, Lepsansky argues that Philadelphia's white community feared what it perceived as an ever-increasing black threat of competition for jobs and housing. The development of a wealthy black middle class, including a few extremely wealthy black individuals that could be described as "old money" among the city's ruling elite, threatened the perceived economic security of the growing white population. Though Philadelphia's African American population remained below 10% throughout the antebellum period, its increasing size and dispersion, especially in the years between 1830 and 1850 created a perception of great "black threat" to much of the white working class. This anxiety manifested itself in frequent and destructive race riots throughout the city.<sup>34</sup>

Adding to white frustrations were the increasing "cosmopolitan contacts" of much of the African American population. Many black Philadelphians abandoned their previous attitudes of subservience for a new spirit of independence and equality that seemed troubling to many whites. The growing number of African American social and religious bodies was a sign of increasing feelings of independence, and further compounded white racial fears. Even more troubling to white Philadelphians was the increasing refinement of black social figures and institutions. Well-dressed, educated, and financially stable African Americans that aspired for upward mobility became increasingly common. This fact, combined with the perceived threats of racial amalgamation and job competition, seemed to threaten the established social order.<sup>35</sup>

By the 1830s the African American church was the vital center of black community organization in Philadelphia, providing a place where the city's leading blacks could congregate and create social networks outside the city's white organizational base. The churches further provided places for blacks of all economic backgrounds to feel conformable speaking their minds on contemporary issues and establish contacts that created a sense of unity within specific communities. Hence, during antiblack riots, white rioters attempted to pierce the heart of African American mobility and stability by striking at individual churches. Despite these attempts, however, white rioters succeeded only in destroying church buildings. The spirit of unity and community that propelled Philadelphia's growing black population to its position prior to the riots persisted with increased strength after them, and the church continued its critical position of leadership in social organization.

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<sup>33</sup> Salvatore, 22-23.

<sup>34</sup> Emma Jones Lepsansky, "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia." *American Quarterly* (Spring, 1980): 54-78.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-64.

The first three decades of the nineteenth century saw the greatest growth in African American Baptist and Methodist churches, but other denominations experienced growth as well.

**TABLE 1: African American Churches, 1830**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Location NS</u>	<u>Location EW</u>
St. Thomas	Episcopal	5th	Adelphi St.
First African	Presbyterian	7th	Shippen St.
Second African	Presbyterian	2nd	Norris Alley
First African	Baptist	8th	Vine St.
African	Baptist	13th	Vine St.
Bethel	AME	6th	Pine St.
Union	AME	Old York Rd.	Coates St.
Zoar	Methodist	4th	Brown St.
Wesley	AME Zion	5th	Lombard St.
	AME	5th	Gill's Alley

Source: E. L. Carey and A. Hart, Philadelphia in 1830-1, or A Brief Account of the Various Institutions and Public Objects in the Metropolis Forming A Complete Guide For Strangers and A Useful Compendium for the Inhabitants. (Philadelphia, PA: James Kay, Jun & Co., 1830), 49.

The church that saw the greatest decline in attendance was Philadelphia's oldest African American church, St. Thomas Episcopal. A minor division occurred in 1810 when a few church members began communicating with a Jamaican minister regarding the possibility of his accepting a ministerial position at St. Thomas. The unauthorized action of these members culminated in conflict when the Jamaican, Alexander Cook Summers, arrived in Philadelphia to accept his position. Having no knowledge of his solicitation the church vestrymen refused him. The resulting church division hurt both membership and giving in the first years of the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Another problem arose when Absalom Jones died in 1818 and St. Thomas struggled to find a successor. Still governed by the Episcopal Church of Philadelphia, the vestrymen of St. Thomas struggled to find a candidate that suited both the desires of the African American congregation and the restrictions of the white Episcopal church officers. The church found one promising candidate, a self-educated preacher from New Haven, Connecticut, especially appealing, but his nomination was rejected by the Episcopal leaders because of his lack of formal education. In the meantime white clergy filled the pulpit and the congregation dwindled. In 1813, St. Thomas boasted a membership of 560, but by 1837 it had shrunk to a mere 250.<sup>37</sup> By 1839 the church had sufficiently recovered so that it was able to remodel its church building with \$4,300 in renovations.<sup>38</sup>

In 1820, a dispute over the rights of lay leaders in the government of local Methodist churches led to the development of a new congregation that called itself Wesley Church. Wesley originally met in a house in Cypress Alley and then moved to the home of Asbury Church on St. Mary Street. In July 1820 the congregation purchased a carpenter's shop and constructed its first building on Lombard Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets. The church was officially consecrated on Christmas Eve, 1820, under the leadership of its first pastor, Rev. Joshua Blue. In

<sup>36</sup> Sunday Republic (Philadelphia), 11 February 1872.

<sup>37</sup> Nash, 260-62.

<sup>38</sup> Sunday Republic (Philadelphia), 11 February 1872.

1822, the congregation chose to merge with the burgeoning A.M.E. Zion denomination, which had been founded in New York in 1796.<sup>39</sup>

While no antebellum African American congregation in Philadelphia was exclusively upper, middle, or lower class in membership, some churches were more affluent than others. As was the case with white congregations in the city, the Episcopal churches generally garnered wealthier congregates, while evangelical Baptist and Methodist congregations gleaned poorer Christians. The Presbyterian churches were somewhere between them. In 1837, the mean wealth of African American Episcopalians in Philadelphia was \$1,255, while Presbyterians averaged \$508, Baptists \$414, and Methodists \$197.<sup>40</sup>

While Baptist and Methodist churches witnessed the greatest growth in membership, several new denominations were born and a few churches emerged within denominations that had been historically underrepresented by African Americans. One example of the emergence of a new African American church in a historically white denomination was Jehu Jones' founding of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in 1832. Jones was born in 1786 in Charleston, South Carolina, the son of a successful black business tailor and business owner who had been born a slave and had bought his freedom. Jones grew up attending Lutheran church services with his family in a predominantly white church in which blacks sat in separate pews. In 1831, when several of the leaders of the African American community in Charleston met to consider emigration to Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, Jones volunteered to become a missionary to the West African coast. He visited the New York Synod of the Lutheran Church in 1832, where the ministers presiding ordained him missionary to Liberia, but when his plans to depart for Africa fell through the following year, he visited the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Pennsylvania at its session in Pottsgrove, PA. The Synod voted to make Jones a missionary to Philadelphia, and he promptly began to work among the growing black population in West Philadelphia. By January 1834, Jones had succeeded in starting a congregation and began seeking a permanent building in which it could meet. As there was no black Lutheran church in the city at the time, Lutherans from around Pennsylvania began to donate funds to his project of building one in West Philadelphia. In June 1834, Jones purchased two adjacent lots on the west side of Quince Street below Spruce for \$375 each with a seven-year mortgage. Later the same month, the church laid its cornerstone, which is still visible today, reading "St. Paul's E. L. Church 1834." When the church building was dedicated two years later, the congregation was \$2,000 in debt, and with only ten official members there was little hope of repaying. Despite Jones' pleas, the Synod refused to help. In February 1839, with debts rising and collectors hounding him, Jones was forced to sell the church. He was eventually dismissed by his Synod, which viewed him as a failure, and he retired with his family in Philadelphia, where he died in 1852. Although it has been modified significantly, St. Paul's Lutheran Church's tiny building stands today as a reminder of Jones' attempt at founding a black Lutheran church in Philadelphia. The building is today the home of the Mask and Wig Club at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>41</sup>

African American churches drew some members from outside of their immediate neighborhoods, but most members lived within a short walk of their house of worship. Thus, the trend in the antebellum period was similar to that of later times; churches were born in the neighborhoods in which their membership lived. In 1837 the vast majority of African Americans in Philadelphia (about 62%) lived in the city proper (the area bordered by Race Street in the north, Cedar or South Street in the south, and the Schulykill and Delaware Rivers on the west and east sides respectively). The second largest number (about 18%) lived in Moyamensing (the area south of South Street, west of Broad Street, and east of the Schuylkill River). Southwark (the

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<sup>39</sup> Stalvy and Smalls, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Nash, 260-66.

<sup>41</sup> Philadelphia Inquirer, January 22, 1998, p.13; Karl E. Johnson, Jr. and Joseph A. Romeo, "Jehu Jones (1786-1852): The First African American Lutheran Minister," Lutheran Quarterly 10 (1996): 425-43.

area south of South Street, east of Broad, and west of the Delaware River) accounted for about 7% of the city's African American population, and the northern areas (Northern Liberties, Spring Garden and Kensington) accounted for the remainder.<sup>42</sup>

African American churches in Philadelphia followed the population trends of the African American community. By 1849, there were 10 African American churches in the city proper (about 53%), 4 in Moyamensing and Southwark (about 21%), 3 in the northern sections (about 16%) and 2 (about 11%) in newly developing West Philadelphia.<sup>43</sup>

In 1857, there were at least 18 African American churches in Philadelphia. Their names, locations, approximate memberships, founding dates, building square footage, seating capacities, and values are described below:

**TABLE 2: African American Churches in Philadelphia, 1857.**

Name	Location	Members	Founded	Square Feet	Capacity	Value
St. Thomas Episcopal	5th & Aldephi	337	1794	2,400	800	\$40,000
First African Presbyterian	7th & Shippen	180	1807	60	900	\$8,000
Bethel AME	6th & Pine St.	1,100	1816	4,340	2,500	\$60,000
Union AME	5th & Coates St.	297	1816	2,584	800	\$14,000
Wesley Methodist	6th & Lombard	500	1820	2,520	800	\$20,000
Second Presbyterian	7th & St. Mary	75	1824	1,887	450	\$6,000
First African Baptist	11th & Pearl	200	1830	1,920	350	\$5,000
Union Baptist	7th & Little Pine	260	1832	1,632	500	\$5,000
AME Wesley	6th & Hurst	300	1834		500	\$6,000
Union Methodist	7th & Little Pine	100	1837	720		\$2,000
Shiloh Baptist	Clifton & South	225	1842	2,160	600	\$11,000
Central Presbyterian	Lombard	260	1844	2,280	600	\$15,000
John Wesley Methodist	8th & Shippen	100	1844	1,035	200	\$4,000
Israel Congregational	5th & Gaskill	200	1850	2,952	2,000	\$18,000
Church of the Crucifixion	8th & Shippen	50	1850	2,200	500	
AME Mission	7th & Dickson	120	1852	396	250	\$800
Zoar Methodist	4th & Brown	150		2,100	400	\$12,000
Allen Chapel AME	2nd & Christian	30		320	150	\$400

Source: Rev. William T. Catto, A Semi-Centenary Discourse, delivered in the First African Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, on the fourth Sabbath of May, 1857: With a history of the Church from its First Organization; including a brief notice of Rev. John Gloucester, its first pastor, also an appendix containing sketches of all the Colored Churches in Philadelphia. (Philadelphia, PA: Joseph M. Wilson, 1857), 105-111.

The antebellum period was also an age of development in the field of African American musical tradition. The first or second African American church in the United States to purchase and use an organ in church services was St. Thomas Episcopal of Philadelphia in 1828. St. Thomas and Mother Bethel both introduced choirs in the 1840s, and although there was some controversy over the introduction of “note singing” in the A.M.E. denomination, choral gospel music quickly became a vital part of African Methodist churches around the world. The A.M.E. hymnal, originally organized by Richard Allen in 1801, had embraced 64 Christian hymns that ranged from traditional pieces by Charles Wesley and John Newton to simple choruses arranged by Allen himself or members of his congregation, and was used widely by A.M.E. churches

<sup>42</sup> Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color of the City of Philadelphia and adjoining districts, as exhibited by the Report of a Committee of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. (Philadelphia, PA: Merrihew & Gunn, Printers, 1838), 5. Copy in Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>43</sup> Statistical Inquiry Into the Condition of the People of Color of the City and Districts of Philadelphia. (Philadelphia, PA: Kite & Walton, 1849), 29. Copy in Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

around the country.<sup>44</sup> According to late AME minister and church historian Daniel A. Payne, instrumental music was not introduced into AME churches until 1848. Other churches however, especially Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches, which generally had more resources, enjoyed performances and worship accompaniment from organs and orchestras. Hayden's "Creation" was performed in its entirety at First African Presbyterian at 7<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge in 1841, and the chorus and 50-piece orchestra were so well received that the concert was repeated for a white church nearby. The leader of the black orchestra was Francis Johnson, a professional black musician who was renowned for his performances in New York and Philadelphia. Classical performances were particularly numerous in the fall and winter, while less formal summer camp meetings, which encouraged sing-alongs and dancing, were more popular during summer months. Camp meetings, which became especially popular during and immediately after the surge of revivalism that accompanied the late-antebellum Second Great Awakening, permitted the singing of "spiritual songs" (Payne called them "corn-field ditties"), which were generally banned from formal Sunday services.<sup>45</sup> When Payne visited a summer camp meeting (or "bush meeting, as he called it), he was appalled by what he saw:

After the sermon, they formed a ring, and with coats off sung, clapped their hands and stamped their feet in a most ridiculous and heathenish way. I requested the pastor to go and stop their dancing. At his request, they stopped their dancing and clapping of hands, but remained singing and rocking their bodies to and fro.

These "Bands" I have had to encounter in many places . . . . He who could sing loudest and longest led the "Band," having his loins girded and a handkerchief in hand with which he kept time, while his feet resounded on the floor like the drum-sticks of a bass drum. In some places it was the custom to begin these dances after night service and keep it up until midnight, sometimes singing and dancing alternately.<sup>46</sup>

From the end of the Civil War to the turn of the twentieth century, the African American church in Philadelphia experienced continued growth and change. New congregations and denominations were formed as the church responded to the mass migration of African Americans to Philadelphia, coupled with the growth of an exclusive African American middle class.

In the period between 1865 and 1900, the African American population in Philadelphia grew at an unprecedented rate, but this increase had little effect on the relative size of the African American population in relation to the general population of Philadelphia. In 1860, there were approximately 22,000 African Americans in Philadelphia, about 3.9% of the total population of the city. This number was the same in 1870, but the growing European immigrant population in that decade drove the relative size of the African American population to its all-time low, 3.2%. By 1880, the African American population in Philadelphia had leapt to nearly 32,000, 3.74% of the total population. By 1890, the African American population in the city had made its largest jump to date to near 40,000, but still accounted for only 3.76% of the total population.<sup>47</sup>

In 1867, there were approximately 20 black churches in Philadelphia. Bethel A.M.E. was still the largest congregation in the city, and Methodist Churches continued to dominate African American religious life, with more than 9 congregations representing three distinct denominations within the Methodist tradition. The most successful denominations of the period were the

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<sup>44</sup> Horace Clarence Boyer, "Philadelphia and the Gospel Sound," in Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, Philadelphia, Let This Be Your Home: The African American Migration to Philadelphia. (Philadelphia, PA: Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, 1991), 41-42.

<sup>45</sup> Eileen Southern, "Musical Practices in Black Churches of New York and Philadelphia, ca. 1800-1844," Afro-Americans in New York Life and History 4, no. 1 (January 1980): 61-77.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel A. Payne, Recollections, 253-55, quoted in Southern, 72.

<sup>47</sup> All figures are approximate. W.E.B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro, 48-49.

Methodists, African Methodists, and the AME Zion Church. Off-shoot churches grew out of Bethel AME, which by 1857 had well over 1,000 members, more than double the membership of any other black congregation in the city. AME Wesleyan Church (later Mt. Olive AME), which was among the first, met in south Philadelphia as early as 1820 at 6<sup>th</sup> and Hurst, and had an estimated 300 members by 1857. Three AME churches were founded within three years of each other in the 1830s, Mt. Pisgah in 1833, Wesley AME in 1834, and Campbell AME in 1836. Wesley AME Zion was the first church of its denomination in Philadelphia, appearing in 1820, and by 1857 it had an estimated 500 members meeting at 6<sup>th</sup> and Lombard. Grace African Union Methodist Episcopal was the first of its denomination, appearing in 1830, and the first Congregational Methodist church, named Israel Congregational, emerged around 1850 at 5<sup>th</sup> and Gaskill. Another AME mission church that would later take the name Zion Chapel AME, was founded in 1852 at 7<sup>th</sup> and Dickson.<sup>48</sup>

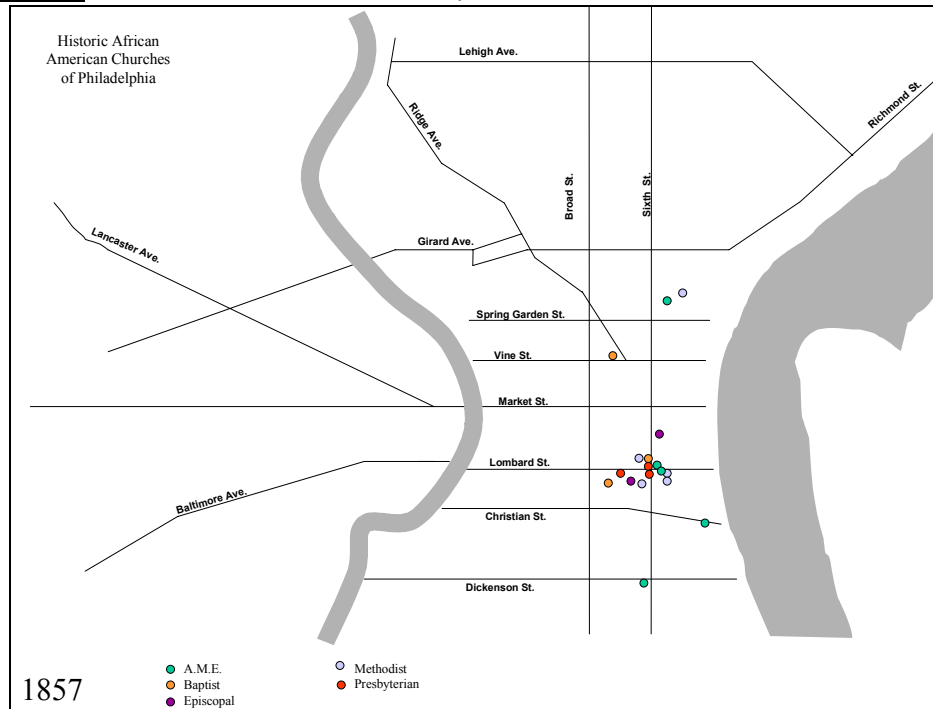
The second black Episcopal church in Philadelphia also emerged in this period. The Church of the Crucifixion was founded in 1847 at 8<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge in an area known for its racial discord. The new church drew some of the poorest blacks in the area, but the modest congregation managed to build its first place of worship at a cost of \$2000, and furnish it with furniture valued at more than \$200. For more than half a century St. Thomas had been the only black Episcopal congregation, but the new church grew rapidly and drew a large crowd each Sunday. Congregants braved the walk to church through rough neighborhoods in order to attend. Many men from the congregation were singled out and attacked by idle white men on 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Another source of turbulence was the nearby volunteer fire department, which was just south of the church on 8<sup>th</sup> Street and unrelenting in its oppression of black, church-going men. One Sunday in the 1860s, a member named James W. Purnell, was en route to church with his wife, when he was attacked and killed by a group of white men who thought his wife looked white. The commute was dangerous, but there were several draws to the church that made the risk worthwhile. Among the church's special features were its choir and its pipe organ, built by its player, a black musician named Joseph Carter. Despite its rough climate, the Church of the Crucifixion persevered and became one of the city's leading black congregations, helping to organize at least two other Episcopal Churches in the area in the following decades.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Catto, 105-111.

<sup>49</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, March 16, 1912, p. 4; March 23, 1912, p. 4.

## MAP 1: African American Churches, 1857



Source: Rev. William T. Catto, *A Semi-Centenary Discourse, delivered in the First African Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, on the fourth Sabbath of May, 1857: With a history of the Church from its First Organization; including a brief notice of Rev. John Gloucester, its first pastor, also an appendix containing sketches of all the Colored Churches in Philadelphia.* (Philadelphia, PA: Joseph M. Wilson, 1857), 105-111.

## RISE TO PROMINENCE, 1880-1916

The black population in Philadelphia grew steadily in the first decades after the Civil War, increasing by 43% from 22,147 in 1870 to 31,699 in 1880, and then by 24 % to 39,371 by 1890. Then, in the decade before 1900, the black population experienced a massive migration movement from the South that foreshadowed the great migration of the WWI era. Between 1890 and 1900 the black population in Philadelphia increased by 59% to 62,613. The 1900 U.S. census for Philadelphia shows that the black population at the turn of the century was predominately unmarried, with the majority of blacks between 20 and 44 years old with most renting their living space. Less than 12% of the black population was illiterate, but the vast majority of blacks for whom employment information was available in 1900 worked in domestic and personal service—some 26,646 of the 35,223 who were employed in Philadelphia. Another 4,727 worked in trade and transportation, and some 3,051 blacks worked in manufacturing. The bulk of the black population continued to live south of Chestnut Street and north of South Street between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers, but a good part of the population was beginning as early as 1890 to settle to the north and west. A large concentration of blacks lived north of Vine and south of Montgomery between 7<sup>th</sup> and Broad Streets. Black communities were also growing on the opposite side of Broad Street east of the Schuylkill. Scattered enclaves of blacks were also emerging in Germantown, Frankford, and West Philadelphia south of Fairmount Park.<sup>50</sup>

Writing on the living conditions of African Americans in Philadelphia in 1899, W. E. B. DuBois explained that most African Americans lived near their place of employment and near

<sup>50</sup> Philadelphia Colored City Directory, 1908.

their church. Most blacks in Philadelphia, he wrote, were “purveyors to the rich—working in private houses, in hotels, large stores, etc.” The pay for this work was low and these jobs kept long hours that often began before sunrise or ended after dark, so commuting long distances was not an option. Thus the majority of blacks were forced to live near their place of employment, and this “peculiar connection of dwelling and occupation” was particularly problematic because it required black families to spend between one-fourth to three-fourths of their income on rent near the city’s centers of wealth. Compounding these problems was the lack of available housing to blacks. DuBois found that “the undeniable fact that most Philadelphia white people prefer not to live near Negroes limits the Negro very seriously in his choice of a home and especially in the choice of a cheap home.” Real estate agents often refused to assist blacks, and rent was usually raised significantly for black tenants. An even more powerful motivation to remain in localized black neighborhoods was the fact that blacks were socially ostracized outside of their own communities. A black person who ventured “away from the mass of his people and their organized life” found him/herself “alone, shunned and taunted, stared at and made uncomfortable.” As a result, the bulk of the black population stayed near the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward.<sup>51</sup> “Here is a people,” wrote DuBois, “receiving a little lower wages than usual for less desirable work, and compelled, in order to do that work, to live in a little less pleasant quarters than most people, and pay for them somewhat higher rents.”<sup>52</sup>

Given these conditions it came as no surprise to DuBois that overcrowding in areas like the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward was commonplace. Regardless, even as early as 1899, he recorded some migration from the south-central section of the city. The fact that blacks were social outcasts outside their own communities resulted in group migration to areas to the north, south and west. “Emigration from the [7<sup>th</sup>] ward has gone in groups,” wrote DuBois, “and centered itself about some church, and individual initiative is thus checked.” In addition, DuBois argued that the existence of black churches in the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward created a strong incentive for blacks to remain there.<sup>53</sup>

Amidst a climate of exclusion, black churches in Philadelphia entered a Gilded Age at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1892 there were at least 29 African American churches in Philadelphia. While three decades earlier African American churches had been centered in the Southwark section of southeast Philadelphia, the churches of the 1890s were scattered much farther north, west, and south. In 1857, the northern-most African American churches in Philadelphia were Zoar Methodist (4<sup>th</sup> and Brown Streets) and Union A.M.E. (5<sup>th</sup> and Coates, now Fairmount, Streets); and the western-most churches were Shiloh Baptist (Clifton and South Streets) and First African Baptist (11<sup>th</sup> and Pearl, near Vine, Streets). In 1857, no African American church in the city was more than 15 blocks from Bethel A.M.E., and an astounding 10 churches were located within a two-block radius of Bethel.

By 1892, only one African American church, First African Presbyterian (7<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge) met within two-blocks of Bethel. The largest concentration of African American churches was west of Bethel in the area between 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets below Pine and above Fitzwater, where six churches met within two blocks of the old Shiloh Baptist building (Clifton and South Streets). The Shiloh building had been purchased by Murray Chapel A.M.E. (later Mt. Olive A.M.E.) in 1885. The remaining churches were scattered throughout the city. Three churches were located in the Moyamensing area below Pine and between Broad Street and the Schuylkill River. Three churches (all A.M.E.s) were located in the deep south of the city, below Reed Street. Three churches were located in West Philadelphia, west of the Schuylkill River. The western-most African American church was St. Michael’s Protestant Episcopal (43<sup>rd</sup> and Wallace Streets). The most dramatic growth of churches occurred in North Philadelphia, where

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<sup>51</sup> At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Philadelphia’s 7<sup>th</sup> Ward was bounded by 7<sup>th</sup> Street on the East, 25<sup>th</sup> Street on the West, Spruce Street on the North, and South Street on the South.

<sup>52</sup> DuBois, 295-97.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

African American congregations occupied a string of church buildings along Ridge Avenue or within a few blocks of it.

As in previous times, the locations of African American churches in the 1890s followed the location of the African American population. The 1890 census returns indicated that the greatest concentration of African Americans in Philadelphia resided in 7<sup>th</sup> Ward, the area bounded by Spruce Street on the north, South Street on the south, 7<sup>th</sup> Street on the east and the Schuylkill River on the west. Other concentrations were found in the area south of Chestnut Street, north of Catherine and east of 7<sup>th</sup> Street, as well as in the area west of 7<sup>th</sup> Street between Montgomery and Vine Streets.<sup>54</sup> The African American churches of this period were largely found in these areas as well. A directory of “colored churches in Philadelphia” from 1892 indicates that there were approximately 29 African American churches in the city by that time. These were indicated as follows:

**Table 3: African American Churches in Philadelphia, 1892**

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<sup>54</sup> Map based on U.S. Census Data, “Negro Population of Philadelphia, in 1890, by Ward,” Copy in Philadelphia Free Library Map Collection, Philadelphia, PA.

Church	Denomination	Location NS	Location EW
Allen Chapel	AME	19th	Lombard St.
Bethel	AME	6th	Pine St.
Bethel (Germantown)	AME		Center St.
Campbell Chapel	AME	Oxford St.	Paul St.
Eliza Turner	AME	20th	Tasker St.
Emmanuel	AME	24th	York St.
Morris Brown	AME	25th	Ridge Ave.
Mt. Pisgah	AME	40th	Locust St.
Murray Chapel	AME	Clifton St.	South St.
Union	AME	16th	Fairmount Ave.
Zion Mission	AME	7th	Dickinson St.
Cherry St.	Baptist	11th	Cherry St.
Ebenezer	Baptist	Broad St.	Mt. Vernon St.
Monumental	Baptist	41st	Ludlow St.
Shiloh	Baptist	11th	Lombard St.
Union	Baptist	12th	Bainbridge St.
Zion	Baptist	13th	Melon St.
Zion Wesley	AME Zion	15th	Lombard St.
Grace Union	AME Zion	15th	Lombard St.
Bainbridge St.	Methodist	12th	Bainbridge St.
Haven	Methodist	26th	Jefferson St.
Berean	Presbyterian	19th	S. College Ave.
Central	Presbyterian	9th	Lombard St.
First African	Presbyterian	17th	Fitzwater St.
Church of the Crucifixion	Episcopal	8th	Bainbridge St.
St. Thomas	Episcopal	12th	Walnut St.
St. Michael's	Episcopal	43rd	Wallace St.
St. Peter Claver	Roman Catholic	12th	Lombard St.

Source: Directory of Colored Churches in Philadelphia, 1892, in Scrapbook #25: Topical Focus: Colored Churches of Philadelphia, 1892. William H. Dorsey Collection, Cheyney State College, Cheyney, PA.

The period often called the Gilded Age in American history was an era of prosperity for many African American churches across the country. In 1884 the A.M.E. Church alone listed 405,000 members, 3,417 Sunday schools, 2,540 ministers, 9,760 local preachers, 3,978 churches, over \$4.1 million in property, and an annual collection of \$814,648.<sup>55</sup> It also supported more than 14 institutions of higher learning, including Wilberforce University (Wilberforce, OH), Allen University (Columbia, SC), Morris Brown College (Atlanta, GA), and Dickerson Memorial Seminary (Portsmouth, VA).

No African American Christian denomination in Philadelphia witnessed more success in terms of congregation growth and new church development between 1880 and 1916 than the Baptists. Some new Baptist congregations formed spontaneously in neighborhoods around Philadelphia, others were products of church planting by existing congregations, and still others arose out of discontent with existing churches. Older and more established black Baptist churches outgrew their church buildings and opted to build larger buildings or purchase buildings that had once housed flourishing white congregations. At least sixteen black Baptist churches in

<sup>55</sup> J.T. Jenifer, "Who Was Richard Allen and What Did He Do?" (clipping from unidentified paper), December 8, 1887, in Scrapbook #26, "Topical Focus: Centennial of the African M. E. Church, 1887" William H. Dorsey Collection, Cheyney State College, Cheyney, PA.

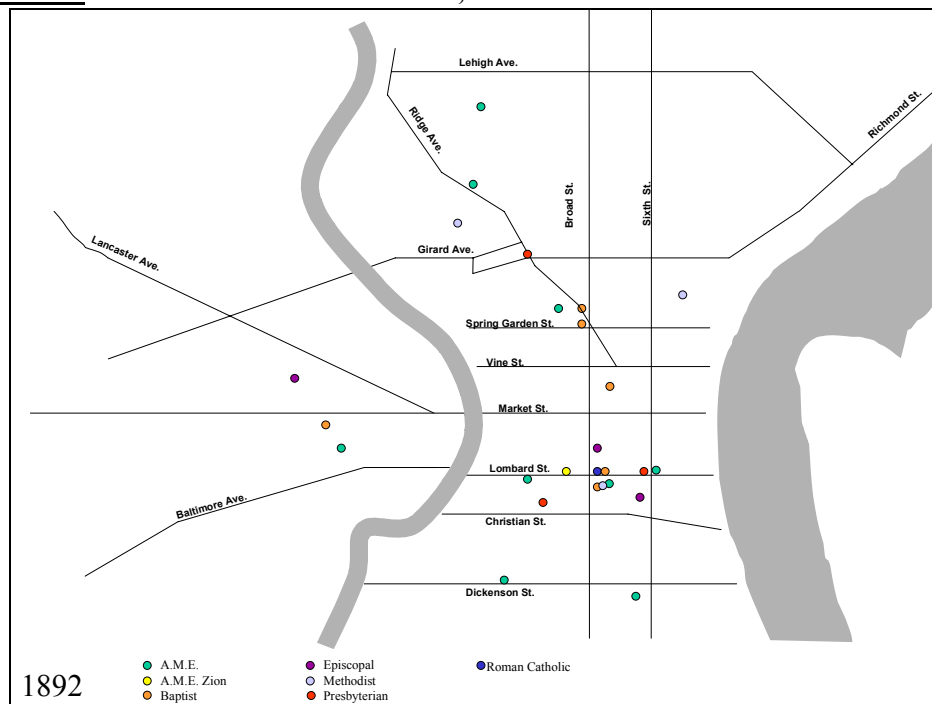
Philadelphia moved into new buildings between 1880 and 1923, with the majority of these moves involving the construction of new facilities.

While in 1857, when Rev. Catto of First African Presbyterian church recorded the locations of the city's African American congregations, there were only three black Baptist churches in Philadelphia, with no black Baptist church north of Vine Street (First African was near 11<sup>th</sup> and Vine), by 1896 there were 17 African American Baptist churches in Philadelphia. The five largest, Union, Shiloh, Cherry Street (First African), Zion, and Monumental accounted for 3,955 of the 5,583 African American Baptists in Philadelphia (about 71%).<sup>56</sup>

Baptist churches sprang up throughout the city, but were especially prosperous in the areas surrounding Ridge Avenue, which cuts diagonally through North Philadelphia from 8<sup>th</sup> and Vine in the southeast to the Strawberry Mansion district (near 33<sup>rd</sup> and York) in the northwest (before continuing due north). As the African American community migrated from its established center (in the Moyamensing and Southwark districts) to parts of the city to the north, a large part of the population settled within walking distance to Ridge Avenue, a growing center of business and industry with streetcar service.

Distinguished by its flashy yellow cars with red lights, the Ridge Avenue street car began horse-pull service from 2<sup>nd</sup> and Arch Streets in center city to Ridge and Columbia Streets to the north in March 1859 under the initiative of the Girard College Passenger Railway Company and was electrified in the 1890s by the Philadelphia Traction Company, which extended its service as far north as Dauphin Street. With the availability of the Ridge Avenue line, African Americans who migrated to North Philadelphia were never fully disconnected from relatives in parts of the city to the south, and also had access to a commuter route to downtown employment.<sup>57</sup>

**MAP 2: African American Churches, 1892**



Source: Directory of Colored Churches in Philadelphia, 1892, in *Scrapbook #25: Topical Focus: Colored Churches of Philadelphia, 1892*. William H. Dorsey Collection, Cheyney State College, Cheyney, PA.

<sup>56</sup> Catto, 1857., 105-111.

<sup>57</sup> Harold E. Cox, *Philadelphia Car Routes: Horse, Cable, Electric*. (Forty Fort, PA: Published by the author, 1982), 33-36, 101-102. The Ridge Avenue line

Zion Baptist is exemplary of the black Baptist churches near Ridge Avenue in this period. It was organized in December 1882 at 13<sup>th</sup> and Poplar Streets by two men from Washington, DC, who moved to Philadelphia with recommendation papers from their home church. The following year the church was recognized by the Philadelphia Council of the Baptist Association with a membership of 40. The congregation rented small buildings in immediate area before resolving to construct its own church building on Brandywine (a block north of Spring Garden) west of 15<sup>th</sup>. It entered the new building with a membership of 173, but by 1890 had out-grown it. It obtained a mortgage to purchase the old Spring Garden Baptist Church at 13<sup>th</sup> and Wallace Streets for \$16,000 in 1890 and within two years had paid nearly a quarter of its debt. Zion Baptist remained in its new building until 1955, when, under the leadership of Rev. Leon H. Sullivan, its membership increased ten-fold and it purchased a new building on Broad and Vernango.<sup>58</sup>

The other major black Baptist church in North Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century was nearby Ebenezer Baptist, which had been organized in 1885 at 11<sup>th</sup> and South Streets, where the small congregation of 42 members under the leadership of Rev. William Wallace rented an old Presbyterian church building for \$654 per month. In May 1886, under the leadership of a new pastor, the Rev. Alexander Childs, the congregation managed to pull together the necessary funds to purchase a new church building on Mt. Vernon Street just west of 13<sup>th</sup> Street, where it met into the 1920s before moving to a new building at 1248 12<sup>th</sup> Street and finally to 10<sup>th</sup> and Dauphin Streets after, in 1942, its building caught fire and was seriously damaged.<sup>59</sup>

Around the time Ebenezer Baptist was born, another congregation began to develop in North Philadelphia, which was later to become one of the largest and most influential black Baptist churches in the city. St. Paul's Baptist Church, as it later became known, did not build its own church buildings, but purchased them from existing congregations in actions which demonstrated its financial strength and growing congregational community. In 1883, Francis Fields and Mary Henryhand, two women who had attended Shiloh Baptist Church, were unable to continue to make their Sunday morning commute to Shiloh, and so began holding prayer meetings in their homes. By 1889 their prayer group had reached a membership of 16 and had adopted the name "Morning Star Baptist Mission." The following year, the group asked Rev. Edward William Johnson, organizer of the First Colored Baptist Church of Morristown (New Jersey), to begin preaching at its meetings, and within a year they had ordained him their pastor. By 1895, with the mission's membership considerably increased, the group managed to purchase the Christ Evangelical Church building on east side of 8<sup>th</sup> Street below Girard for \$21,000. The new church was granted its Baptist charter the same year and adopted the name St. Paul's.<sup>60</sup>

In its first years, young St. Paul's managed to raise as much as \$50,000 to renovate and maintain the new building, and by 1901 had paid off its first mortgage in full. In 1905, St. Paul's reached a membership of 1,769—making it the second largest Baptist Church the city, second only to Union Baptist (with 2,100). It was nearly twice the size of Shiloh, and had the third largest membership of black churches of any denomination.<sup>61</sup> Although a deadly fire caused severe damage to its building in 1906, the congregation was able to raise the necessary \$4,000 to repair it in the space of a year, and continued to use the building until 1916, when its sanctuary could no longer hold its swelling congregation. In 1916, a year after its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary

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<sup>58</sup> "Zion Baptist Church," July 4, 1891, clipping from unidentified newspaper in Dorsey Collection, Scrapbook #25.

<sup>59</sup> Clipping from unidentified newspaper, August 1891, in Scrapbook #25, "Topical Focus: Colored Churches of Philadelphia, 1892," Dorsey Collection, Cheyney State College, Cheyney, PA.

<sup>60</sup> Shirley A. Page, "History of St. Paul's Baptist Church" (unpublished manuscript prepared for centennial celebration, 1990), 1-2. [Copy in file 08038, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, Historic Religious Properties Program files].

<sup>61</sup> Philadelphia Colored Directory, 1905, 19-29.

celebration, the congregation paid \$40,000 for a building which had been built by the First Reformed Church of Philadelphia 34 years earlier at the corner of 10<sup>th</sup> and Wallace Streets.<sup>62</sup> Despite the economic collapse of its surrounding community (the West Poplar neighborhood—part of Philadelphia’s poorest census tract), St. Paul’s Baptist Church has remained at 10<sup>th</sup> and Wallace and has remained dedicated to helping its community.<sup>63</sup> Today it stands as a monument to an era when black Baptist churches dominated the growing city and possessed the financial means to acquire neighboring church buildings. Other black Baptist churches in North Philadelphia by 1905 were Antioch Baptist (16<sup>th</sup> & Thompson), Little Hope (16<sup>th</sup> & Parish), Nazarene (Germantown & Hunting Park), and Wayland Temple (Broad & Melon).<sup>64</sup>

Like North Philadelphia proper, Germantown’s black population began rapidly to increase at the end of the nineteenth century, and this population growth was accompanied by growth of black Baptist churches. By 1905 there were at least three black Baptist churches in the Germantown section of the city. Enon Tabernacle Baptist, founded in 1875, occupied a building at 224 West Coulter Street, Germantown, and by 1905 had a membership of 400. By 1914 it had outgrown its first building and commissioned architect Charles Henry Wilson to construct its new building on its property. The new building featured an impressive façade, battlements, a bell tower, and expansive stain glass windows. Mt. Zion Baptist, which was founded two years later than Enon, built its new building in 1893 with prominent architect, David Smith Grendell, and by 1905 reached a membership of 900, while Grace Baptist Church, which was founded in 1897, by 1905 claimed a membership of 150 and property on East Sharpnack Street. In 1915 it raised the modest gothic church building that it occupied until 1971.<sup>65</sup>

Of the black Baptist churches in Center City, the original center of the black independent church in Philadelphia, First African Baptist made the most dramatic move. Growing too large for its Cherry Street home, which had housed it from the end of the Civil War, it moved in 1902 to 16<sup>th</sup> and Christian, where it continues to meet to day. Its new building, which was designed by renowned Philadelphia architects Watson and Huckel, was completed in 1902 and by 1905 housed a growing membership of 1,700.<sup>66</sup>

By far the largest black Baptist church in Philadelphia in the early twentieth century was Union Baptist, which by 1905 had a membership of 2,100 and by 1916 could boast at being the largest black congregation in the United States.<sup>67</sup> In 1893, the congregation built a \$35,000 new building on the east side of 12<sup>th</sup> Street below Bainbridge using well-known New York architect Thomas Bennett, who had only recently opened his Philadelphia office.<sup>68</sup> But, by 1916 the congregation had outgrown the new church building and had raised the necessary funds to purchase lot at 19<sup>th</sup> and Fitzwater Streets (near Martin Street) for \$28,000 on which to build a new 80 by 113 feet church building. The new building, designed by Charles W. Bolton, the famous Philadelphia architect who designed several dozen churches in Philadelphia and other cities in the Northeast, could seat more than 2,000 people.<sup>69</sup> An article in one Philadelphia paper reported that the new building was necessary because the membership had multiplied exponentially under the leadership of Rev. Dr. W. G. Parks, who drew worshipers from great distances until the church gained more members than any other black church in the country. The paper claimed that Union Baptist had become “the favorite place of worship of the better class of colored people” in

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<sup>62</sup> Page, 2-6.

<sup>63</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (January 13, 1991), 6-B.

<sup>64</sup> *Philadelphia Colored Directory*, 1905.

<sup>65</sup> The 1915 building is now occupied by The Sanctuary Church, as Grace Baptist has since moved to property on West Johnson Street.

<sup>66</sup> Tatman and Moss, 837; *Philadelphia Colored Directory*, 1905, 24-27.

<sup>67</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, March 12, 1916, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, December 18, 1893.

<sup>69</sup> Tatman and Moss, 78-83.

Philadelphia, and the church's well-known choir and orchestra, which was composed of several professional musicians, attracted a number of white congregants as well.<sup>70</sup>

Central Baptist Church (now New Central Baptist), which was formed in May 1905, acquired a piece of property between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets on Lombard the year it was founded under the leadership of Rev. Charles Blackwell. At the time its membership was only 300. By 1922 the congregation had outgrown its existing site and hired architect J. Erle Drukenmiller to construct its new gothic-style building out of light sandstone on the site of its old.

Other black Baptist churches in Center City included Holy Trinity, which was founded in 1891 and used architect William H. Decker to build its new building at 18<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge in 1892 and by 1905 had 1,000 members.<sup>71</sup> Metropolitan, organized in 1891, which occupied a building at 20<sup>th</sup> and Tasker that held some 600 members by 1905, and Mt. Moriah, which had a small congregation at 16<sup>th</sup> & Catherine. Shiloh left its building at South and Clifton in 1885 when it bought a new building at 11<sup>th</sup> & Lombard.

With the rapid migration of blacks from south-central Philadelphia to parts of the city to the west, and with the influx of southern black migrants to West Philadelphia, Baptist churches boomed in the western reaches of the city as well. At least four influential black Baptist churches had emerged in West Philadelphia by 1905, whereas only one, Monumental Baptist, had stood in 1892. In the early twentieth century, Monumental remained the largest of these churches, but Mt. Carmel, Providence, and White Rock Baptist churches maintained significant memberships.

Monumental Baptist is the oldest of the black Baptist churches in West Philadelphia, dating back to 1826, and having occupied a building on its lot at 41<sup>st</sup> and Ludlow (formerly called Oak Street) since October 1829 under the name African Baptist. A new building had been built on the site at a cost of \$16,000 in 1846, and the church's name changed shortly after to Oak Street Baptist. It built a new church on an adjacent lot around 1877, where it remained until 1967, when it moved to 50<sup>th</sup> and Locust. In 1912, Monumental gave birth to Pinn Memorial Baptist after irreconcilable differences drove a segment of the population away to found a new church named after Monumental's former pastor, Robert Pinn, who oversaw the church's largest period of growth between 1869 and 1877. Monumental also gave birth to Mt. Carmel Baptist in 1880, which proceeded to build its own building at 58<sup>th</sup> and Race in 1915, using architect Henry E. Dehoff, who a year earlier designed St. Matthew's AME a few blocks away and a year later would design Elmwood AME in deep south Philadelphia.<sup>72</sup>

Black Presbyterian churches also witnessed unprecedented growth during this period. The First African Presbyterian Church temporarily moved from its building at Seventh and Bainbridge Streets to building called Magnolia Hall (or Keystone Hall) on Sixteenth and Lombard Streets in 1887 before moving into a more modern church building on 17<sup>th</sup> and Fitzwater in 1890. Its new building had been built in 1857 as a church known as Tabor Chapel.<sup>73</sup>

One of the most influential churches of any denomination founded in the last decades of nineteenth century was Berean Presbyterian Church, founded in 1880 by Rev. Matthew Anderson. In addition to founding the church, Anderson founded a bank in 1884, Berean Savings and Loan, which has remained open to this day, surviving even the crash of 1929 and the poverty of the Depression. He also founded a vocational training school, the Berean Institute, in 1899. At the dedication of the church's new building at 19<sup>th</sup> and College Avenue (near Girard College) in 1890, Anderson stated that his aim was:

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<sup>70</sup> Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, March 12, 1916, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Tatman and Moss, 202-203.

<sup>72</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 3, 1963, p. 2. Tatman and Moss, 205-06.

<sup>73</sup> Shelton B. Waters, We Have This Ministry: A History of the First African Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, The Mother Church of African American Presbyterians. (Philadelphia, PA: Gloucester Memorial and Historical Society, 1994), 31-33.

to cause men to act instead of being acted upon, to draw out the latent powers, which lie dormant within, instead of filling the mind with thoughts which will not be digested, and which will produce weaklings, instead of strong men, intellectual and spiritual activity and life instead of moral sickness and death.<sup>74</sup>

Anderson sought to build institutions that would meet the needs of the black community in Philadelphia as it transitioned through Reconstruction and prepared to meet the social and industrial changes facing the United States. In founding the Berean Institute, Anderson hoped to prepare black workers for the new jobs they would face as they neared the twentieth century. By training workers, he hoped to make them competitive in job markets dominated by whites, thus empowering the black community to break into and maintain its position in industry. The bank also offered empowerment to the black community, by offering loans to black personal and business endeavors.<sup>75</sup>

It was also toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a sizable population of blacks developed their own Catholic congregation in Philadelphia. Prior to 1886, black Catholics had worshiped in the parishes of St. Joseph, St. Mary, and St. Augustine in the city. In 1886, Holy Trinity Church, a traditionally German Catholic Church at 6<sup>th</sup> and Spruce, began holding a mass for blacks. The pastor of Holy Trinity, Father Hilberman, encouraged his black congregants to form their own union, which adopted the name St. Peter Claver Union, after the native of Catalonia, Spain, whose efforts in behalf of emancipation earned him the title, “Apostle of the Slave Trade.” In July 29, 1889, Rev. Patrick McDermott, arrived in Philadelphia to take charge of the burgeoning black Catholic congregation at the request of Mother Katherine Drexel, founder of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, after she visited Holy Ghost College (now Duquesne University) in Pittsburgh, PA. McDermott’s congregation began assembling in a small chapel in the second story of a home at 832 Pine Street in 1889, but it soon became too crowded, and the group began to look for a large church home. When in 1890, the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia offered its building at 12<sup>th</sup> and Lombard for sale, the congregation began to pool its resources to purchase it. When Patrick Quinn, treasurer of the Beneficial Savings Fund Society, one of Philadelphia’s largest banks at the time, died the same year, his will stipulated that \$5,000 of his fortune was to go to the “proposed Colored Catholic Church of Philadelphia.” With donations from other well-to-do Philadelphians and loan from a bank, the congregation managed to assemble the funds to purchase Fourth Presbyterian Church at 12<sup>th</sup> and Lombard, which was dedicated as St. Peter Claver’s Church, Philadelphia’s first black Catholic church, on January 3, 1892.<sup>76</sup>

More black churches were constructed or purchased in Philadelphia in the 1880s and 1890s than ever before. The combination of increased giving as a result of the rise in the mean income of African Americans in the city, combined with the increased size of church congregations, made the construction and purchase of new, larger churches both possible and necessary. As congregations out-grew their former buildings they purchased property on which to construct new church buildings, or they bought existing churches from congregations that had relocated or closed their doors. In some cases African American congregations purchased existing African American church buildings from congregations that had moved to larger buildings. In most cases buildings were purchased from historically white churches. But in both cases, the capability of African American congregations to move in to larger, and often elaborate,

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<sup>74</sup> C. James Trotman, “Matthew Anderson: Black Pastor, Churchman, and Social Reformer,” American Presbyterians 66, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 11.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-21.

<sup>76</sup> St. Peter Claver’s Catholic Church, Fifty Golden Years. (self-published history, c. 1942). Copy in Church File #01003, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

church buildings indicates the growing strength of the African American religious community in Philadelphia.

The late 1880s and early 1890s were part of renaissance in church building throughout the United States. In 1888 alone, more than 4,000 churches were under construction in the U.S.<sup>77</sup> Philadelphia was an active part of this renaissance. More churches were built in the 1880s and 1890s than in any previous time in the city’s history, and Philadelphia’s black churches became active participants. At least two dozen church buildings were built by black congregations between 1880 and 1910, several of which survive today.

Despite the growth in membership and citywide influence experienced by black churches, it should be noted that the new churches constructed by black congregations at the end of the nineteenth century were in no way architecturally different from those constructed by white congregations. In fact, most new black churches were designed by prominent white architects in styles identical to those adopted by major white congregations of the period. From the outside, the new church buildings built by black congregations looked identical to those built by white congregations. Black churches sought not to identify their differences from white churches in their architecture, but to prove their parity with white churches. It was only in the fenestration and the arrangement of the rostrum that black churches differed from white ones. Art Historian Julian Smith Peasant has argued that the AME churches on the East Coast during this period differed from white churches of the time in only three ways:

1. “A physical accommodation for additional Elders and church officials as well as visitors on a widened platform/stage, whose major occupant is the minister,” which generally required the altar to be removed or placed behind the pulpit. The effect of the arrangement served to broaden the focus, which “hints of shared responsibility in the operation of the ministry.”
2. An interior setting which created an “‘in house’ didactic experience of Christianity and church history.” And,
3. An interior setting that established “a warm environment and ambiance of color, ornament, and accommodation calculated for succor against a conservative, hostile, sterile, and austere exterior.”<sup>78</sup>

The design of the fenestration accounts for most of the differences between black and white church buildings of the period. AME churches in particular consistently used approximately 13 symbols in their stained glass designs. These symbols were as follows:

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Anchor	Hope
Caliper and Square	Measure , Exacting, Fraternity
Commandments and Tablets	Law
Crown	Victory, Success in Cause
Cross	Christianity
Dove	Holy Ghost
Fount	Rebirth
Memorials	Historical Note
Holy Bible	The Word
Lamb	Jesus

<sup>77</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art Exhibition, Louis Comfort Tiffany (August 1998). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

<sup>78</sup> Julian Smith Peasant, “The arts of the African Methodist Episcopal Church as viewed in the architecture, music, and liturgy of the nineteenth century.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio University, 1992), 138-140.

Lamp  
Lily  
Keys

Light  
Virtue  
Passport to Heaven, Liberty<sup>79</sup>

By using these symbols within the confines of a church that was designed like any other prominent white church of the time, Peasant argues, black congregations attempted to “provide a cover for the struggle to survive.”<sup>80</sup>

A survey of the church construction that took place in Philadelphia between 1880 and 1910 indicates that black churches from all denominations participated in the building boom. By 1890, St. Thomas Episcopal had outgrown its original building at 5<sup>th</sup> and Adelphi, and so sold it for \$46,500. It used the money from the sale to purchase a lot on 12<sup>th</sup> Street below Walnut for \$25,000, where it constructed new church building at a cost of \$30,000. The congregation commissioned prolific architect Thomas Francis Miller to design its new building.<sup>81</sup> Mother Bethel also built a new church building—that which it continues to use today. Bethel commissioned Hazelhurst and Huckel, one of Philadelphia’s premiere architecture firms to design its new building in 1889. Samuel Huckel, Jr., one half of the duo was so well respected by 1900 that he was commissioned to remodel New York’s Grand Central Station. Hazelhurst and Huckel also designed the new building for the growing Holy Trinity Baptist Church on 18<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge in 1893. The fact that some African American churches were capable of employing Philadelphia’s finest architects to design their new houses of worship demonstrates the growing economic strength of Philadelphia’s black churches. The tradition of using prominent Philadelphia architects continued into the early twentieth century, as well. When a fire destroyed the black Episcopal Church of the Crucifixion in 1902, the congregation commissioned Pursell and Fry, a prolific architecture firm that had built several dozen churches in the Philadelphia area, to design the new building. The same year Union A.M.E. Church (16<sup>th</sup> and Fairmount) commissioned the prominent firm Watson and Huckel to remodel its building.<sup>82</sup>

Other Episcopal churches participated in the building boom of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as well. The Church of the Crucifixion built a spacious church around the corner from its former home in 1883 and occupied it in 1884. St. Mary’s Episcopal Church hired renowned architects Hazelhurst and Huckel to build their new home on Bainbridge Street near 18<sup>th</sup> in 1897. Its building still stands today and the congregation continues to meet there. St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church hired William Masters Camac, an architect with Furness, Evans, and Co., to design its new structure at 43<sup>rd</sup> and Wallace, which still stands today as the home of Victory Baptist Church.<sup>83</sup>

It is important to note that wealthier congregations in the Episcopal and Presbyterian denominations were not alone in their ability to raise funds to build new church buildings and commission respected architects. During this period, as African American churches rose to prominence in Philadelphia, Baptist and Methodist churches grew and constructed new elegant church buildings. Union Baptist Church built its new building at 12<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge Streets using architect David Smith Gendell (best known for his cast iron spire on Berean Baptist Church at 40<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut Streets) as their architect. By 1904 First African Baptist Church was able to commission Watson and Huckel to design its new building at 16<sup>th</sup> and Christian Streets.<sup>84</sup> Several AME churches were able to build or buy new buildings as well. In 1885 AME Wesleyan (also

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>81</sup> Philadelphia Record, 18 June 1894; also see Evening Bulletin (Philadelphia), n.d., ca. 1923, p. 10; clipping in file for St. Thomas Episcopal in Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>82</sup> Sandra L. Tatum and Roger W. Moss, Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930. (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co. for The Athenaeum, Philadelphia, 1985), 350-356; 533-35; 636-37.

<sup>83</sup> Tatman and Moss, 127-28.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 301-302; 832-839.

known as Murray Chapel, and later known as Mt. Olive and finally as Waters AME) bought Shiloh Baptist's former home at Clifton and South Street when the Baptist congregation grew too large for its building and moved to 11<sup>th</sup> and Lombard.<sup>85</sup> Campbell AME Church in Frankford used a black contractor as early as 1870 to build its new building at Paul and Kinsey Streets (near Oxford Street). In North Philadelphia, Emmanuel (later Temple and finally Trinity) AME Church was organized as a store-front church in 1879 before a Mrs. Horces, a white sympathizer who owned a candy store at 26<sup>th</sup> and Cumberland, donated a lot and a building at 24<sup>th</sup> and Sedgley Avenue for the church's use. Morris Brown AME, which had been organized in 1881, managed under the leadership of Rev. Solomon Hood, to purchase a building at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century at 25<sup>th</sup> Street and Ridge Avenue, where the church stands today. In 1921, it built a new building on the same site, and then built a new sanctuary in 1953.<sup>86</sup> The Elmwood Mission AME Church began meeting in the deep southern part of Philadelphia (near today's international airport) in the home of a man named John Thomas. In 1905, the small congregation (about 50 regulars) managed to purchase lot near the corner of 85<sup>th</sup> and Tinicum Streets and construct a small wooden building in which to meet. In 1913, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia offered the congregation two nearby lots and \$600 cash to give up their property. The congregation agreed, and moved their wooden structure to its new property, sold one of the two lots, and in 1917 built a new brick church building in which it continues to meet today under the name St. Paul's AME Church.<sup>87</sup> Finally, in 1914 Varick Memorial AME Zion raised the necessary funds to purchase the old Fourth Reformed Presbyterian Church building at 19<sup>th</sup> and Catherine Streets (built in 1889), where it continues to meet today.

### **A CHANGING ROLE, 1916-1929**

The period between 1916 and 1929 represents a time of change in the role of the African American church in Philadelphia, in which churches shifted from primarily serving the spiritual needs of their congregations and meeting the physical needs of individual members, to adopting bold social programs and serving as centers of political organization for the wider black community. In this period, black churches became crucibles of political protest and organizational centers for movements that pushed for racial equality and constitutional rights. Black churches became centers of Garveyism, women's suffrage movements, and fights for equal rights in education, as well as meeting places for social organizations like the NAACP. Black churches no longer sought mere parity with white churches, they sought to become vehicles of freedom and equality by using their limited resources to organize the city's growing black community. By the end of the 1920s Philadelphia's black church had adopted a new assertive character that stood in stark contrast to the city's black church of the prior century.

The first three decades of the twentieth century formed a period of sensational and unprecedented growth in both the African American population and the African American church in Philadelphia. The number of black congregations in the city leapt from 29 in 1892 to 78 by 1905. This growth continued through the 1910s and 1920s. In 1914 there were 92 African American churches in Philadelphia and by 1923, there were 98.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> "Waters Memorial AME Church: Church History," n.a., n.d., copy in Church File #06029, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>86</sup> "The History of Morris Brown African Methodist Episcopal Church," n.a., n.d., copy in Church File #07035, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Al Connally, Church Historian for St. Paul's AME Church, July 1, 1998. Notes in Church File #17020, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

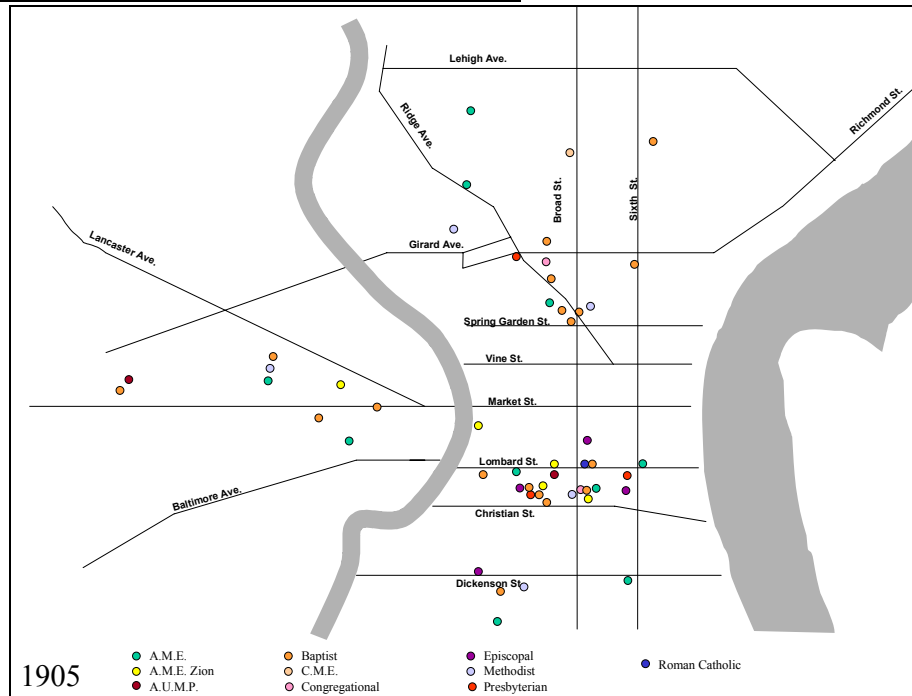
<sup>88</sup> Philadelphia Colored City Directory, 1905, 1914, and 1923.

**Table 4: Number of Congregations by Denomination, 1892-1923.**

	1892	1905	1914	1923
A.M.E.	11	17	16	28
A.M.E. Zion	2	5	5	10
A.U.M.P.	0	2	2	1
Baptist	6	31	45	32
Congregational	0	2	2	0
Colored Methodist	0	2	1	1
Episcopal	3	6	8	8
Methodist	2	8	8	8
Presbyterian	3	4	4	5
Roman Catholic	1	1	1	2
U.A.M.E.	0	0	0	3
TOTAL	28	78	92	98

Source: Philadelphia Colored City Directory, 1905, 1914, and 1923.

**MAP 3: African American Churches, 1905**



Source: Philadelphia Colored City Directory, 1905

The great African American migration to the urban North was a phenomenon that began around 1916 and continued through the 1920s. Prior to 1916 the vast majority of the nation's African American population was rural and southern. In 1910, 73% of African Americans in the United States lived in rural areas, and 89% lived in the South. The entry of the United States into World War I created a new labor market in the nation's great industrial cities, and southern blacks, many of whom had been displaced from farm work by the boll weevil epidemic of the same era, sought to fill the Northern job vacancies by migrating to Northern industrial centers. The post-war industrial boom provided further opportunities for African Americans, and the migration continued at a greater rate into the 1920s.<sup>89</sup>

Philadelphia experienced a tremendous influx of African Americans in the years surrounding the First World War. In 1910 there were 84,459 African Americans living in Philadelphia, approximately 5.5% of the city's total population. By 1920, the African American population had grown to 134,224, 7.4% of the city's total, with the greatest influx between 1916 and 1919. By 1930, there were 219,599 African Americans in Philadelphia, 11.3% of the total population. The migration reached its peak in the years between 1922 and 1924, when more than 20,000 African Americans arrived per year. Census returns from 1930 reveal that only 30% of Philadelphia's black population had been born in Pennsylvania; the vast majority had immigrated, mostly from Virginia (18.9%), South Carolina (13%), and Georgia (10.6%).<sup>90</sup>

The years of the First World War were years of migration followed by dramatically increased racial tension. Although periods of war generally create a spirit of unity in domestic circles, WWI was an exception. Lynching in the United States increased dramatically during the war, jumping from 38 documented cases in 1917 to 68 in 1918. When it was discovered that German war propaganda posters included statistics of American domestic hostilities, President Woodrow Wilson decided to address the nation. His statement against domestic unrest was published in newspapers nationwide in July 1918. On the day the Philadelphia papers printed the president's message, one of Philadelphia's worst riots broke out.<sup>91</sup> Although African American churches were spared the worst of the violence, many black individuals were beaten and many more had their property destroyed. Regardless of the destruction, the violence of 1918 did not curb African American migration to the city as the riots of the 1840s had. The greatest migrations to Philadelphia occurred in the 1920s.

Many of the African American migrants to Philadelphia in the 1920s settled in North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia, areas that had previously been almost exclusively white. Historian Robert Gregg has concluded that black settlement into these areas was only possible after wealthier middle-class blacks had broken the neighborhood color-line by moving in earlier. Many white Philadelphians chose to leave their homes once their neighborhoods had been racially integrated. "White property owners and real estate agents," Gregg concludes, "realized that vast profits could be made from buying up houses owned by whites who wished to flee the area and then selling or renting them at inflated prices to black people." Thus new immigrants settled in North and West Philadelphia neighborhoods and the racial demographics of those neighborhoods continued to change.<sup>92</sup>

African American churches emerged where new African American neighborhoods grew. A look at the concentration of black churches in 1923 shows an increased concentration in West Philadelphia and a far greater number of churches in North Philadelphia, especially in the area

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<sup>89</sup> Frederick Miller, "The Black Migration to Philadelphia: A 1924 Profile," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 108 (July, 1984): 315-16.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 316-317.

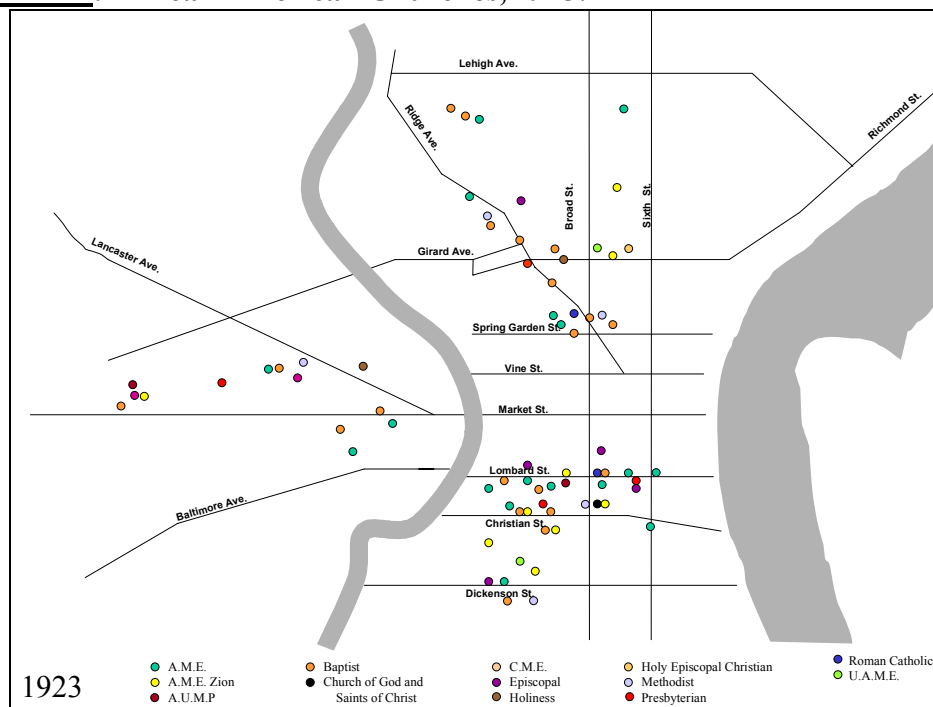
<sup>91</sup> Vincent P. Franklin, "The Philadelphia Race Riot of 1918," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 99 (July, 1975): 336-350

<sup>92</sup> Robert Gregg, Sparks From the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890-1940. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 25-27.

surrounding Ridge Avenue. As with other real estate in those neighborhoods, church buildings that had historically housed white congregations were put up for sale and were purchased by black congregations. With white members moving from the area, many historically white congregations moved to new locations or dissolved altogether. Their former buildings were made available to emerging black churches. Thus, unlike the nineteenth century, a great number of black congregations in the 1920s and 1930s met in buildings that were not constructed by their own body or members of another black congregation, but by much older white congregations that had relocated and abandoned their buildings as a result of shrinking memberships.

The greatest change in the concentration of African American churches in Philadelphia during the Great Migration occurred in Center City. The concentration of black churches that had once surrounded Mother Bethel A.M.E. had virtually disappeared by 1923. Mother Bethel stood alone as the only African American church in central Philadelphia west of 6<sup>th</sup> Street in 1923. The other churches had moved west or north with the growing black population. Wesley A.M.E. Zion, for example, had been a close neighbor to Mother Bethel on Lombard Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. In 1921 Wesley moved to a building that had previously been occupied by a white congregation at 15<sup>th</sup> and Lombard Streets. Other churches made similar moves.

**MAP 4: African American Churches, 1923.**



Source: Philadelphia Colored Directory, 1923.

As the Great Migration progressed, Philadelphia's African American churches rose to meet the spiritual and material needs of the growing migrant community. Some churches even catered their services to immigrants and actively encouraged migration to Philadelphia. In early 1917, Rev. Robert J. Williams of Bethel AME Church sent hundreds of leaflets to churches in the Southern states inviting their members to move to Philadelphia and to let Bethel AME be their home. In response, at least two hundred Southern AME members made a pilgrimage to Bethel that year, enough to necessitate the church's forming a reception committee as well as a bureau of information to assist the new migrants when they arrived. Unlike earlier migrations of blacks from the South, in which black migrants moved from southern urban centers to the North, the

Great Migration saw a dramatic rise of black migrants who had never lived in a city before and came literally straight off the farm. The black church of the period had to adopt the role of teacher, real estate agent, and even job trainer. Church welcoming committees like that of Bethel AME helped newcomers to Philadelphia adjust to their new environment.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to assisting the immigrant community, Philadelphia's black churches hosted numerous social organizations, which aimed to improve the lives of African Americans throughout the city. Some of the positions taken by church leaders and heads of social organizations were controversial and even radical for their time. Some church-related organizations sought to improve the lives of church-members and members of the surrounding communities, while others pressed for universal equality on both local and national levels.

In 1912 Rev. Charles Tindley of Calvary Methodist (Bainbridge Street Methodist) founded the Second Emancipation League, a non-denominational organization for Christian women that endorsed women's suffrage and aimed to improve the lives of black women in the greater Philadelphia area. At the league's first annual convention in October 1912 at Holy Trinity Baptist, members gave papers and reports on child rearing methods, the condition of black children, missionary work, and women's suffrage, and enjoyed musical entertainment by some members, including contralto solos from Mrs. Arthur Pollard of Shiloh Baptist, who was president of another volunteer group, the Pastor's Aid Society.<sup>94</sup>

Of particular concern to Philadelphia's black churches in the early twentieth century was the dissemination of knowledge on proper care of young children. The Mothers Club, one organization formed for such purposes met regularly at Zion Baptist Church to hear lecturing on topics such as child training and discipline.<sup>95</sup>

Understanding that white racism against blacks permeated all aspects of black life in the city, especially housing, certain middle-class blacks developed organizations to help black individuals purchase, sell, or rent homes in the city. One of the best known of these early twentieth century institutions was the Banner Real Estate Company, founded by Rev. Dr. G. L. P. Taliaferro, pastor of Holy Trinity Baptist. Named for the religious publication, the Christian Banner, of which Rev. Taliaferro was editor, the company helped black Philadelphians find homes and business property in the city. In eulogizing Rev. Taliaferro after his death in 1914, the Philadelphia Tribune reported that "in business there are people in this city who would not have owned a brick or a foot of lumber had it not been for the Banner Real Estate Company."<sup>96</sup>

To older organizations for black women, Philadelphia's black churches added new life. The nineteenth annual convention of the Northeast Federation of Women's Clubs was held at Allen AME Church on 17<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge in July 1915. Women in the city's local committee prepared for weeks to make a favorable impression on the visiting delegates, who passed resolutions supporting suffrage and committing to further petition President Woodrow Wilson for a personal interview regarding the organization's support for the passage of an anti-lynching law.<sup>97</sup>

As the United States prepared to enter the first World War and black soldiers from Philadelphia trained for duty, the black church provided moral support for their efforts. Colonel Hart, who commanded a new regiment of black soldiers training in Philadelphia in 1916, ordered the new regiment to attend a sermon by Rev. W. Spencer Carpenter one evening at a very patriotically decorated Allen AME Church at 17<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Robert Gregg, "Philadelphia's African Methodist Churches and the Great Migration," in Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, Let This Be Your Home: The African American Migration to Philadelphia. (Philadelphia, PA: Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, 1991), 24-28.

<sup>94</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, October 26, 1912, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, December 20, 1913, p.2.

<sup>96</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, August 22, 1914, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, July 10, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, July 1, 1916, p. 1.

As national organizations for African American civil rights developed, Philadelphia's black clergy took leading positions in them. When the Negro Sanhedrin, a large African American civil rights think tank and activist group, met in Chicago in January 1924, Bishop J. S. Caldwell of the AME Zion Church in Philadelphia was among the presenters.<sup>99</sup> The Philadelphia chapter of the NAACP held its regular meetings at black churches in the city. In the inter-war period its primary meeting place was Allen AME Church at 17<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge, although other churches hosted as well.<sup>100</sup>

Several prominent black clergy in Philadelphia allied with Marcus Garvey in his controversial efforts to elevate the condition of blacks around the world with his organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. George Alexander McGuire, a West Indian who migrated to Philadelphia from the island of St. Croix in 1894 at the age of 28, and worked for four years with Dr. Henry L. Phillips, the prominent rector of the Church of the Crucifixion at 8<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge. He was ordained to the ministry in Philadelphia before leaving for his first post at an Episcopal church in Cincinnati, Ohio. He later returned to Philadelphia to serve for five years as the rector of St. Thomas Episcopal. McGuire would later become the Chaplain General of Garvey's UNIA and later the head of the African Orthodox Church.<sup>101</sup>

Several other of the city's black clergy became involved in Garvey's UNIA. Among the most prominent of these was William Henry Moses of Zion Baptist Church. Moses began speaking on behalf of Garvey and the UNIA in mid-1923, although his ideology paralleled Garvey's much earlier. As early as 1919, Moses published a book titled The White Peril, which stated in its preface, "The White Peril is, that the darker races in general, and the black race in particular, is in danger of political, industrial, social, and economic slavery or extermination by the white Christian nations of the world."<sup>102</sup> Moses gave speeches at various churches to spread the ideas in his book. An advertisement for an address he was to give at Allen AME church on 17<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge on the evening of Thursday, December 11, 1919, stated that the speech would "make you think, think, and then think some more," and that it was "without doubt the Greatest, most Original and most Instructive address being delivered today on the American platform."<sup>103</sup> In 1922, Moses was one of five candidates for president of the National Baptist Convention, but, although he was endorsed by the UNIA's Negro World newspaper, he was not successful in his campaign. Moses was unwavering in his support of Garvey even in the years when the leader was in legal trouble after being accused of mail fraud for selling stock in his failing Black Star Line. Moses spoke out in defense of Garvey in Harlem at the National Baptist Church and at the UNIA's Liberty Hall. His Liberty Hall speech, which was reprinted in its entirety in the Negro World, revealed his true commitment to Garvey. He stated that the spirit of God was truly on Garvey, and then proceeded to endorse the spirit of protest that Garvey embodied. He proclaimed:

There comes a time when the Spirit of God takes the form of protest, and anything besides protest is a mockery of God and a mocker of justice. What are you going to say Glory Hallelujah for, when somebody is beating your boy? That is the spirit of the devil. Somebody has taken your homeland and is dominating the whole earth . . . . And you stand grinning. Any spirit that makes you submit to that is the spirit of cowardice and the spirit of the Devil. . . . There is a spirit of protest , and the man who stands for that, the

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<sup>99</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 26, 1924, p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, April 25, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Randall K. Burkett, Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion. ATLA Monograph Series, No. 13. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc. & American Theological Library Association, 1978), 71-77; 112.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-18.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

Spirit of God is upon him, and he has proclaimed the era of opportunity . . . .<sup>104</sup>

Moses proclaimed further that Garvey had “taught us how to pray.” He argued that African Americans had not been asking for anything worthwhile, but Garvey, he said:

has taught us to pray for stores, mills, factories, railroads, and ships. He has taught us to seeks our salvation here and now, rather than in the far off tomorrow. He has begun to force the preachers to wake up to the fact that the negro wants to know not where he is going to spend eternity, but where he is going to spend the night . . . .<sup>105</sup>

Another prominent Philadelphia clergyman Richard R. Wright, Jr., who later became a bishop in the AME Church, was an ardent supporter of Garvey. Wright earned his Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania in 1911 and followed in the footsteps of his father, Richard R. Wright, Sr., by preaching in AME churches in Philadelphia. From 1909 to 1936 the younger Wright edited the *Christian Recorder*, the AME Church’s weekly paper, which he used frequently to print editorials favorable to Garvey’s movement. At the UNIA’s Second Annual Court Reception of the Potentate, Wright was presented with the honorary title “Knight Commander, Order of the Nile” for his “Faithful and distinguished service to the Negro Race.”<sup>106</sup>

Together with other Philadelphia clergymen, William Henry Moses and Richard R. Wright, Jr. founded the Colored Protective Association in 1918 for the purpose of “Carrying on propaganda, and securing legal defense for Negro-Americans who were unjustly arrested, or attacked, in trying to lawfully occupy their homes, and to help adjust themselves.” The fact that these principles were adopted by black clergy and were endorsed in black churches demonstrates the changing role of the church in the early twentieth century.<sup>107</sup>

Some of the greatest social contributions to the black community in Philadelphia by any black church in the early twentieth century came from First African Baptist Church under the leadership of Dr. William A. Credit. From the time Credit took over the pulpit in 1898 until he resigned in 1916, the church took a leading role in the community by creating a series of social programs designed to provide services largely denied to blacks at the time because of white prejudice. Credit helped establish the Mutual Aid Insurance Society, which became the first insurance company to serve the black population in Philadelphia, and he later helped create the Cherry Building and Loan Association, which offered mortgages that encouraged blacks to buy and own their own homes. During the same period, the church created the Downingtown Industrial School, which helped train workers with contemporary industrial skills.<sup>108</sup>

At the end of the Great Migration, Philadelphia’s 7<sup>th</sup> Ward (bounded by Spruce and South Streets, 7<sup>th</sup> Street and the Schulykill River), still had the highest concentration of African Americans in the city, and according to the 1920 census, was home to some 777 illiterate African Americans above the compulsory school age. In 1924 under the auspices of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, the Armstrong Association of Philadelphia, another humanitarian organization, began a literacy campaign there. Of the seven captains of the effort, five were leading officers in the city’s African American churches: Rev. Charles Young, pastor of Phillip Brooks Episcopal, Adolphus Lewis, clerk of Shiloh Baptist, Rev. H.P. Anderson, Pastor of Bethel AME, Rev. W.L. Imes, pastor of Central Presbyterian and Maude Morrisette, president of the

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-20.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>107</sup> Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*. ATLA Monograph Series, No. 13. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc. & American Theological Library Association, 1978), 117.

<sup>108</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 1, 1963, p. 2.

School Workers Club of Wesley AME Zion Church. After the first months of the effort, a full 25 per cent of the illiterate African Americans identified in the ward had volunteered to enroll evening literacy classes. With its early success, the Armstrong Association made plans to extend its efforts to other wards.<sup>109</sup>

Another African American improvement organization, the John Brown Memorial Association, had a local chapter in Philadelphia. Like many organizations of its kind, it regularly used church facilities to hold its meetings. These churches thus helped foster protest movements by providing meeting places for early civil rights groups. Some of the addresses given to the Philadelphia chapter of the John Brown Memorial Association in the inter-war period bordered on revolutionary. In a speech to the group in 1925 at Union Baptist Church at 19<sup>th</sup> and Fitzwater, Dr. J. Max Barber told the crowd of some 200 Philadelphians, who had braved the inclement weather to hear him, that “The Negro stands dumb and bound before his oppressors,” and that, as John Brown had done, “Somebody has got to stick a lance in foul bigotry and prejudice and let the fester drain once more.”<sup>110</sup>

On week days, Philadelphia’s black clergymen used their churches as platforms for speakers who addressed non-religious issues that they felt were important. Dr. Richard R. Wright, still a strong supporter of Marcus Garvey, invited speakers to give addresses on black economic liberation in Bethel AME Church at 6<sup>th</sup> and Lombard. Bishop R. C. Ransom of the AME Church in Tennessee visited Bethel in 1926 to give a lecture supporting the Citizens and Southern Bank at 19<sup>th</sup> and South Streets, a black-owned savings and loan founded by clergymen in Philadelphia. “The Spirit of Slavery damns the Negro race in America,” Ransom told his audience. “If black people in America can not stand on their feet economically the black race is doomed throughout the world. A bank is the background of economic success. Without strong banking institutions the colored race is bound to wander unassisted, unaided through the wilderness of despair and sorrow.”<sup>111</sup>

A few years later, a meeting “held in the interest of business expansion for colored people of [Philadelphia]” at Holy Trinity Baptist Church, 18<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge, presented a similar message. Attorney Raymond Pace Alexander, a newly elected trust officer of the Citizens and Southern Bank and Trust Company, who would later gain fame in his fight against school segregation in Pennsylvania, urged a boycott on white banking institutions that refused to employ blacks and treated black depositors discourteously. “There are many Negroes who deposit large sums of money every year in the Girard Trust Company,” Alexander told his audience, “and yet if a colored man owned City Hall he would be unable to get a first mortgage on it at this bank. They absolutely refuse to lend money, in any manner, to Negroes.” He further complained that Girard Trust refused to hire blacks for even the most remedial tasks. He criticized financially successful blacks who kept their money in white banks instead of supporting black-owned banking institutions. Richard Wright, who was also present, urged blacks to develop faith in themselves and in their institutions.<sup>112</sup>

In 1921, Major Richard Robert Wright, Sr., founded the Citizens and Southern Bank and Trust Company, the one of the most successful black business endeavors in Philadelphia history. Based on South Street between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets, Citizens and Southern actually prospered during the Depression. When the bank opened its doors in 1921, it had assets totaling \$24,000, but by 1933 it had assets of over \$510,000, and by 1936 it claimed assets of \$735,000. Wright remained president of the bank, which encouraged black investment and sponsored numerous black causes, until his death in 1947. Among the bank’s numerous causes were the establishment of “National Freedom Day,” an annual celebration of the adoption of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and

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<sup>109</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, October 28, 1924, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, February 14, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 2, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>112</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 19, 1928, p. 1.

creation of the Booker T. Washington postage stamp, the first U.S. stamp honoring an African American. In 1965, the bank changed its name to Citizens Bank. By then it had resources exceeding \$5.8 million.<sup>113</sup>

Perhaps the most important of the black church's activities between the first World War and the Depression was its effort to achieve educational equality for black children. Public schools in Philadelphia had always been segregated, but in the 1920s, at the conclusion of the Great Migration, the black community had gathered sufficient strength and energy to raise its voice against the inequality of education between black and white children. With black Philadelphians accounting for a significant percentage of the city's population and its tax base, and with the conditions and standards of black schools drastically below those of whites, black activists, centered largely within black churches, began to speak out against inequality of education. The Intellectual Club of Philadelphia's 14th Ward, joined forces with the Philadelphia Tribune, the city's premiere black newspaper, to host protest meetings on the issue of educational inequality and organize fundraisers for the Tribune Defense Fund, a trust fund for furthering the protest movement against racial inequality in education.<sup>114</sup>

The AME Church had passed a resolution stating that the state should take responsibility for educating black children as early as its annual conference in May 1876,<sup>115</sup> but with the increased power that accompanied the growth of black churches during the Great Migration, black churches became the cornerstones of community protest movements against racial inequality in and around Philadelphia. A case from 1933 exemplifies the role the church played in social organization in the inter-war period. In the Berwyn School District in Montgomery County about 20 miles west of Philadelphia, a new school was constructed at a cost of some \$250,000, but black parents of Easttown and Tredyffrin Townships were told that their children would not be able to attend on account of their skin color. They were told instead that the district would place their children in a smaller segregated school for black children. Complaining that the new school had been built with the help of their tax money, and that the Jim Crow school for black children would be inferior to the new Berwyn school, the parents refused to send their children to school at all, an act of defiance which cost the school district money, and flouted the traditions of the primarily white communities on the Montgomery County's Main Line. Police arrested several parents for their violation of state law, and many chose to spend nights in prison than pay their fines. Compounding the problems was head of the school boards, Norman Greene, a notorious racist, who believed that integrated schools would lead to integrated marriages, which would thus degrade white communities. He was quoted as saying, "I would not like to see my children and grandchildren married to niggers," and further that, "Niggers are like parrots, and they have to be led and we are only striving to make better citizens of them by keeping them segregated and together." The Philadelphia Tribune followed the story each week on its front page to keep the black population abreast of the events. Black residents of Philadelphia were outraged by the treatment of blacks the city's western suburbs and began organizing a protest campaign, which was centered in the city's black churches.<sup>116</sup>

The Bryn Mawr and Philadelphia branches of the NAACP sponsored a mass meeting in May 1933 at Union Baptist Church on 19<sup>th</sup> and Fitzwater. The giant rally featured Rev. James E. Kirkland, Pastor of Union Baptist and an outspoken opponent of segregation, as the principle speaker. At the meeting, which drew some 2,000 participants, the crowd unanimously adopted resolutions denouncing segregation in Pennsylvania and urging the Attorney General to "join with the parents in their fight for basic American principles." At regular Sunday morning services that week in black congregations in the city similar measures were taken. At Mt. Olivet

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<sup>113</sup> Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September 30, 1936; July 3, 1947; May 10, 1965.

<sup>114</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, March 12, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, May 17, 1876, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, March 30, May 5, May 25, and March 8, 1934

Tabernacle Baptist at 42<sup>nd</sup> and Wallace, the congregation passed a resolution urging the Attorney General to protect the black parents in the Berwyn district, and forwarded their message to him via telegram. As the protest moment continued into the following year, Union Baptist held another protest with an estimated 5,000 participants, many of whom marched silently through Germantown past the home of the State Attorney General. Although their efforts were only partially successful, it is important to note that the main vehicles of protest for the movement were the black churches, which served as both meeting places and conduits for the dissemination of knowledge about the movement.<sup>117</sup>

Continuing education for adults was also a priority for Philadelphia's black churches in the first half of the twentieth century. Beginning in 1906, the AME Zion Churches in the city held an annual educational event on the New Jersey shore each September. The annual "Chautauqua," as it was called, included free educational seminars on both religious and secular topics for congregants, and served as a means for members to relax, fellowship, and form community.<sup>118</sup>

Black churches hosted numerous other social programs for youth in the early twentieth century including the Boy Scouts of America. By 1916, at least four troops, Philadelphia Troops 55, 108, 109 and 144, were organized among black youth centered around black churches.<sup>119</sup> By 1913, Zion Baptist Church at 13<sup>th</sup> and Wallace had a complete boys band.<sup>120</sup>

The church continued to be a vital part of African American community life in Philadelphia, but beginning in the 1920s new secular organizations and leading individuals inside and outside of the church began to replace the organized church as the center of black leadership. With the dissolution of itinerancy, the system of constantly shuffling ministers between churches within a denomination, African American ministers remained with congregations for longer periods of time and grew to new heights of popularity. With more influence,<sup>121</sup> many ministers became social as well as religious leaders.<sup>122</sup>

One such leader was Rev. Charles Albert Tindley, long-time minister of Bainbridge Street Methodist (formerly known as John Wesley Methodist and later known as Calvary Methodist and Tindley Temple). Tindley had been born a slave in Maryland in 1856, but he taught himself to read and moved to New Jersey, where he became a Methodist minister in 1885. When he accepted the pastorate at Bainbridge Street Methodist in 1902 the church had a mere 130 members and property that valued only \$10,000. Before his death in 1933 Tindley saw his congregation grow to over 10,000 and its property value increase to more than \$500,000. In 1906, under Tindley's leadership the church moved from its location at 12<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge Streets to a church building on Broad Street at Fitzwater that formerly housed Westminster Presbyterian Church, a historic white congregation. After acquiring adjacent property the congregation began the construction of a new enormous sanctuary that was completed in 1924. In the midst of the roaring twenties and the height of the Great Migration, the new building stood as a monument to African American achievement. Occupying most of a block on Philadelphia's longest and most trafficked street, Calvary Methodist, drew congregates from far and near. Radio broadcasts brought Tindley's messages to surrounding communities and his original gospel hymns became popular around the country.<sup>123</sup> The inter-war period witnessed a rise in the use of radio for ecclesiastical purposes, and Rev. Tindley was a pioneering practitioner of radio ministry. Congregants who were unable to come to church could listen to Tindley's sermons and

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, September 25, 1926, p. 1

<sup>119</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, May 6, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, June 14, 1913, p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> Boyer, 42.

<sup>122</sup> Robert Gregg, Sparks From the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890-1940. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 46-50.

<sup>123</sup> Boyer, "Philadelphia and the Gospel Sound," 42-43.

hymns on the radio as a means of remaining a member of the church community despite their inability to come to church.

Tindley's musical talents were recognized in his own time, but his tunes and lyrics live on even today. His most famous hymns, "I'll Overcome Someday" (believed to be the mother of the civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome"), "Go Wash in the Beautiful Stream," and "We'll Understand it Better By and By" can be found in Evangelical Christian hymnals of all races and denominations. Tindley's popularity during the first decades of the twentieth century was due largely to his ability to relate to the poverty and the daily struggles of the growing black immigrant community. He was able to communicate this understanding through both his preaching and his music. Many of his gospel songs (he published more than 40) spoke of the promise of God's deliverance and the glory of heaven. His classic hymn, "We'll Understand It Better By and By," begins:

Trials dark on every hand,  
And we cannot understand  
All the ways that God would lead us to that blessed Promised Land;  
But He'll guide us with His eye,  
And we'll follow till we die;  
We will understand it better by and by.

By and by, when the morning comes  
When the saints of God are gathered home,  
We will tell the story, How we've overcome;  
We will understand it better by and by.<sup>124</sup>

### **PERSEVERING THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES, 1929-1948**

The trends of growth and increased social involvement that began in the early twentieth century continued after 1929, despite the Depression and the U.S. entry into the Second World War. Black churches continued in their trend of following the movement of Philadelphia's black population as the city's demographics continued to change. With white migration to Philadelphia's suburbs continuing at an increased rate at the close of the Second World War, more church real estate became available to black congregations, prompting the moves of several major black congregations to points of the city to the West and North. Baptist and AME Churches continued to carry the largest portions of the city's black Christian population, but new denominations and independent churches developed amidst the tragedy of the Depression.

The Depression that hit the United States after the stock market crash of 1929 affected all Americans, regardless of race or religion. African Americans in Philadelphia suffered with the rest of the country, and even the churches that had flourished in the early twentieth century felt the heavy weight of the depressed American economy. Every church in Philadelphia suffered financially and the African American churches of the city were no exception. Ministers who had labored for little pay prior to the depression often had to work for reduced wages or as volunteers because of exhausted giving.

Many of America's hard-hit working class turned to new and burgeoning religious faiths as a way to find hope during troubled times. Some of these new faiths were led by demagogues, who offered hope for salvation from both spiritual and material want. Several of these new religious bodies, often referred to as "cults," grew rapidly in Philadelphia among members of all races and backgrounds. Five such organizations were especially popular among African

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

Americans in the city; these were the Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America, Inc., United House of Prayer for All People, Church of God (Black Jews), Moorish Science Temple of America, and the Father Divine Peace Mission Movement.<sup>125</sup> Alternative religious bodies were nothing new to Philadelphia. Black alternative churches began to emerge in the city at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the new alternative bodies that typified post-1929 Philadelphia placed more emphasis on the immediate realities of poverty and racial inequality than earlier varieties.

An early alternative form of worship for African Americans outside of the traditional Protestant denominations were “Holiness” churches, a series of breakaway revival churches that emerged out of Baptist and Methodist congregations. The largest of these was the Church of God in Christ, which was founded in 1897 by Bishop C. H. Mason, who was rejected by Baptist groups in Arkansas for his emphasis on “holiness.” Adopting a Trinitarian doctrine with stress on repentance, speaking in tongues, and the gift of healing as evidence of baptism of the Spirit, the Church of God in Christ reached Philadelphia in the early part of the twentieth century and gained popularity in the largest church of its kind in Philadelphia, Holy Temple at 60<sup>th</sup> and Callowhill Streets, led by Bishop Ozro T. Hones. The denomination continued to grow and became extremely popular in Philadelphia. By 1960 there were at least 40 such congregations in Philadelphia, each with a very youthful membership. It is today the largest Pentecostal denomination, claiming some 6.5 million members in over 12,000 churches worldwide.<sup>126</sup>

Another alternative church had a strong presence in Philadelphia in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Church of God and Saints of Christ, part of a religious sect known more generally as the “Black Jews,” occupied a building on Fitzwater near Broad Street as early as 1923.<sup>127</sup> Founded in 1896 by William S. Crowdy, a black Baptist deacon in Lawrence, Kansas, who claimed to have a prophetic mission from God, the Church of God and Saints of Christ claimed “Jesus the Anointed” as their chief cornerstone, while averring a foundation on the patriarchs of Jewish tradition as well. The emerging sect celebrated traditional Jewish feasts and holidays, but emphasized “prophetic Judaism” over “legalistic Judaism” and maintained a blend of Jewish and Christian theology.<sup>128</sup> In 1900, Crowdy arrived in Philadelphia to preach his message, and he had more success there than anywhere else in the world. By 1902, he had established a congregation of (by one estimation) 1,300 people in Philadelphia, in addition to several businesses, including a general store, a barber shop, a restaurant and a printing plant. Crowdy stayed in Philadelphia for about five years, but his presence was not well-received by ministers of traditional denominations. In February 1902 several ministers held a meeting in which they determined that “this so-called Negro prophet must be stopped.” Believing other ministers to be jealous, Crowdy told one newspaper, “I teach my people to love one another, keep the Ten Commandments, pay their honest debts and abstain from alcohol and tobacco. If that’s anarchy and false doctrine, I am willing to take a back seat.” By one estimation, Crowdy’s congregation peaked at around 3,000 congregants in the first decade of the twentieth century. The congregation continues to meet today at Temple Beth El at Broad and South Streets.<sup>129</sup>

A more mainstream group of black Christians worshiping in Philadelphia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were the Seventh Day Adventists. Deviating only slightly in theology from traditional Protestant denominations, but incorporating more Old Testament tradition, including holding church services on the official Sabbath, Saturday, the Seventh Day Adventists began meeting

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<sup>125</sup> Arthur Huff Fauset, Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 1-12.

<sup>126</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 1, 1963, p. 2; and Frank S. Mead and Samuel S. Hill, Handbook of Denominations in the United States. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 114.

<sup>127</sup> Philadelphia Colored Directory, 1923., p. 40.

<sup>128</sup> Mead and Hill, 113.

<sup>129</sup> Moses Farrar, “Temple Beth El Celebrates Its 88<sup>th</sup> Year! (November 8, 1896-November 8, 1984).” (Philadelphia, PA: NinTab Enterprises, 1984). Self-published pamphlet; copy in Church File #06032, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

above a drug store on Fairmount Avenue near 18<sup>th</sup> Street in 1908. The original church was multiracial, but the First Negro S.D.A. Church broke away and began holding services at 1700 Woodstock Street with 16 members. Around 1917, the congregation purchased a church building on Lombard Street between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets. By 1930 the congregation changed its name to Ebenezer, and bought a new building at 15<sup>th</sup> and Christian. The Seventh Day Adventists grew by bounds through the inter-war period and started several community service programs including the First Practical Nurses Class of Philadelphia, a retreat near Pottstown, and a boarding school for boys and girls.<sup>130</sup>

One of the first of the growing alternative groups of the inter-war period was Mt. Sinai Holy Church on Oxford Street. Organized in 1924 by Bishop Ida Robinson, Mt. Sinai required strict moral and behavioral standards of its members, prohibiting drinking, smoking, fancy clothes and contemporary entertainment. Robinson's church was founded on basic Christian and humanitarian tenets, emphasizing feeding the sick, helping the poor, and establishing schools for poor children, but focussed its organization on central leadership in Ida Robinson, and emphasized emotionalism and faith-healing in its services.<sup>131</sup>

The United House of Prayer for All People, founded in 1925 by Charles Emmanuel (better known as "Daddy") Grace, offered an alternative form of worship that emphasized the leader's central authority, a principle that was accented by his claims to divinity. Daddy Grace clothed these claims in scripture quotes like "salvation is by Grace alone," but also made more blatant claims to be God incarnate. The United House of Prayer for All People was not marked by social service, as other alternative religious bodies of its day were, but it provided a more emotional and charismatic religious experience than mainstream churches accompanied by the perception of being in the physical presence of God.<sup>132</sup>

Perhaps the best-known personality of the mid-twentieth century alternative religious bodies was Father Divine. In the early 1930s, Father Divine founded the Harlem-based Peace Mission Movement, which spread throughout the urban north and found a strong multi-racial following in Philadelphia. The movement later spread as far as California, accompanied by Father Divine's moral and religious teachings, which included racial equality, mild asceticism, and a strong emphasis on helping the poor. Some members of this developing movement attended worship services and meetings and used the organization as a means to find food and shelter in times of need. Other members took Father Divine's message more seriously, believing him to be a prophet of God or to be immortal. Many of these members gave all of their belongs to Father Divine and chose to live with other members in communal housing, depending entirely on their him for their provisions. In this manner Father Divine amassed a sizable fortune, which he used to further his message of racial equality, to build shelters and meeting places, and to provide for his expensive taste in clothing, automobiles, and other luxuries. Among the many things Father Divine provided for his followers and the black community at large were hotels and restaurants, which offered extremely discounted rates and were built in areas where such facilities were ordinarily closed to blacks in an era of strict segregation. During the Depression, Father Divine's communion feasts offered free meals to members with menus that rivaled those of America's richest citizens, and provided a glimmer of hope during a period of extreme poverty. Father Divine's efforts had a strong influence on hundreds of people, but especially among his diverse and multi-racial membership, which believed wholeheartedly in racial equality and participated in numerous civil rights demonstrations. In 1942, Father Divine moved permanently to Philadelphia from New York and, although hounded by law-suits and plagued by bouts with diabetes, he maintained a large following in the city until his death in 1965. Today Philadelphia

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<sup>130</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 1, 1963, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 1, 1963, p. 2; Fauset, 12-14.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* Also see Fauset, *op cit.*

is home to three congregations of the United House of Prayer for All People at 40<sup>th</sup> and Haverford, 467 W. Queen Lane, and 16<sup>th</sup> and Fitzwater.<sup>133</sup>

Another well-known alternative black religious leader of the mid-twentieth century was Bishop Sherrod Johnson of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith. Sherrod began preaching in 1920 and by 1938 had amassed a large congregation that met at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Montgomery and a regular radio program that broadcast on WDAS. At the peak of his career, his church had at least 100 member congregations around the country and his sermons were broadcast on 70 radio stations around the world. His teachings, which were based on the basic tenets of Christianity, also restricted his adherents from even touching such taboos as ash trays, liquor glasses, and TV sets.<sup>134</sup>

Emphasis in the early historiography of these groups has focussed on the manipulation of members by their leaders, and has placed more emphasis on the personality of the leader and his or her misdeeds than on the contributions of these organizations to society—especially poor urban black society—during times of financial hardship in the urban north. Despite the tendency for these leaders to misuse the authority entrusted in them by their congregations, their contributions to needy members of Philadelphia’s black community during the Depression, can not be overlooked. From food and shelter, to job-training and business-networking, to entertainment and religious instruction, Philadelphia’s alternative religious organizations provided invaluable service to their communities and left their marks on the city in through their service as well as their architecture. Several of the buildings used by such organizations are in use today.

## **CONCLUSION:**

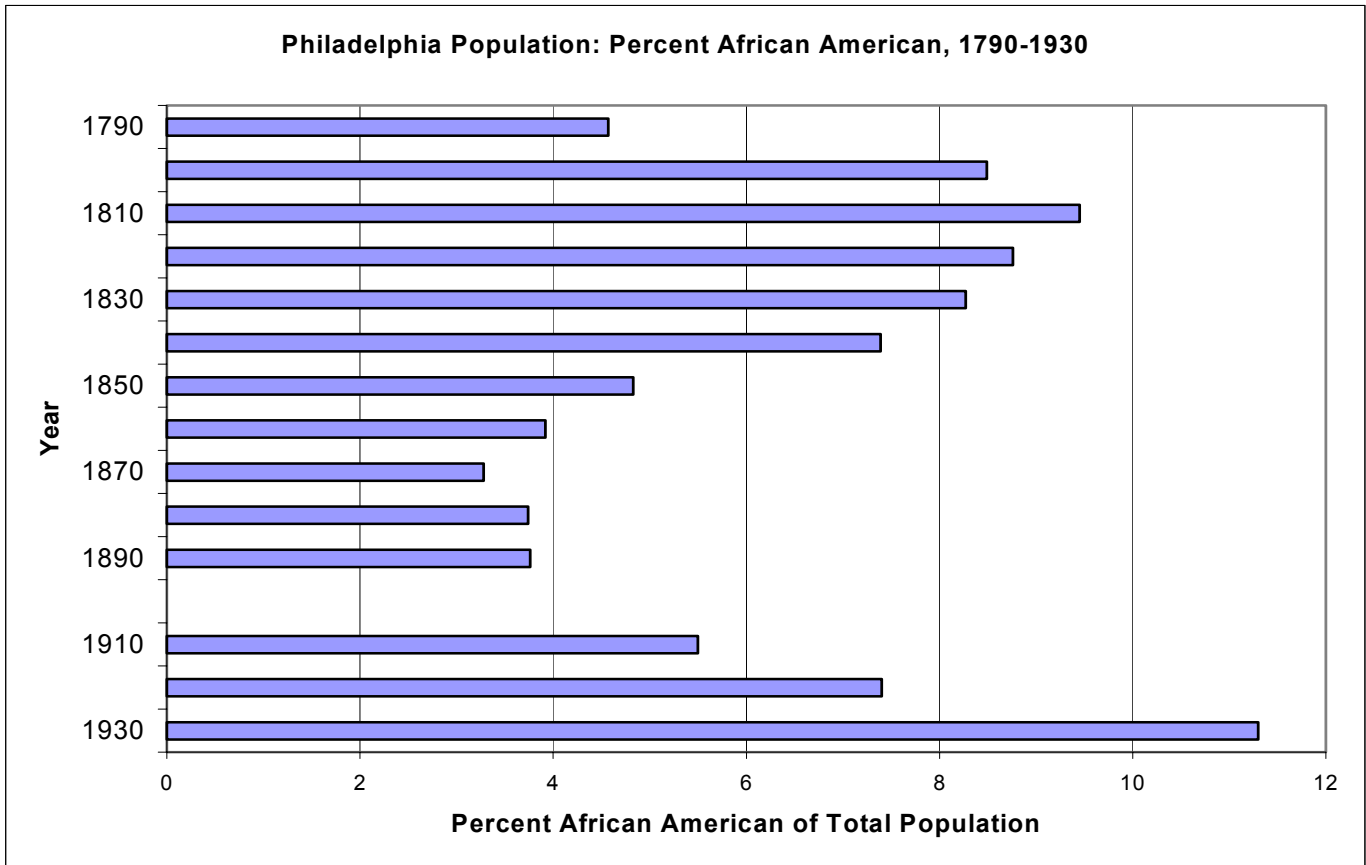
Through more than two centuries, Philadelphia has seen the rise of a community of flourishing, independent African American Christian churches which have met the spiritual and physical needs of their congregations, served as bases for community organization, and fostered energetic movements for racial equality. These churches have developed with time from the first separate Episcopal and Methodist churches of the late eighteenth century to the vast community of churches, large and small, of many different denominations, that blanket the city of Philadelphia. The past two centuries have witnessed the growth of Philadelphia’s black population and, with it, the growth of independent black churches. The church buildings of modern African American congregations in Philadelphia, both those that were built by black congregations and those that were purchased, tell the stories of religious institutions that grew with their communities, relocated over time, and remained at the heart of black social, political, and religious life through times of prosperity and despair. Vital parts of their communities, these churches speak to the resilience of a black community that has persevered through racial prejudice, poverty, and exclusion. From their humble beginnings as havens of refuge amidst a difficult and oppressive climate, to their growth into pillars of strength and centers of community organization, Philadelphia’s African American churches have left behind a powerful legacy for posterity to cherish and preserve.

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<sup>133</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 1, 1963, p. 2; and Robert Weisbrot, Father Divine: The Utopian Evangelist of the Depression Era who became an American Legend. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 3-8, 209-221.

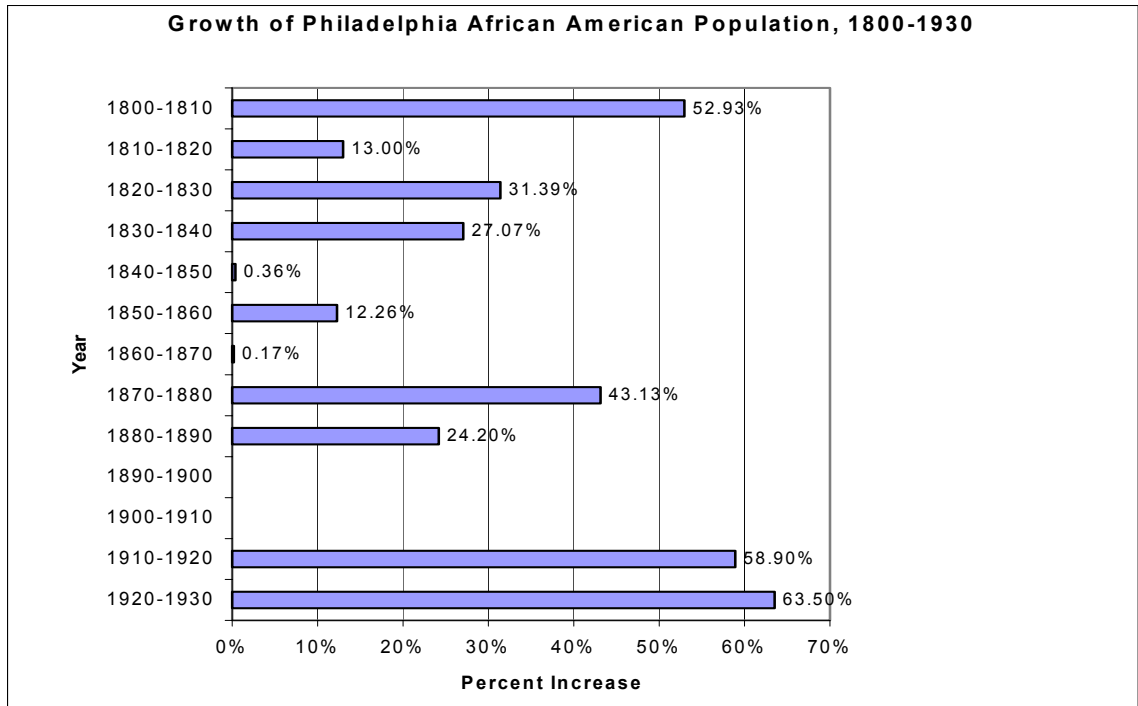
<sup>134</sup> Philadelphia Tribune, January 1, 1963, p.2.

## Appendix A



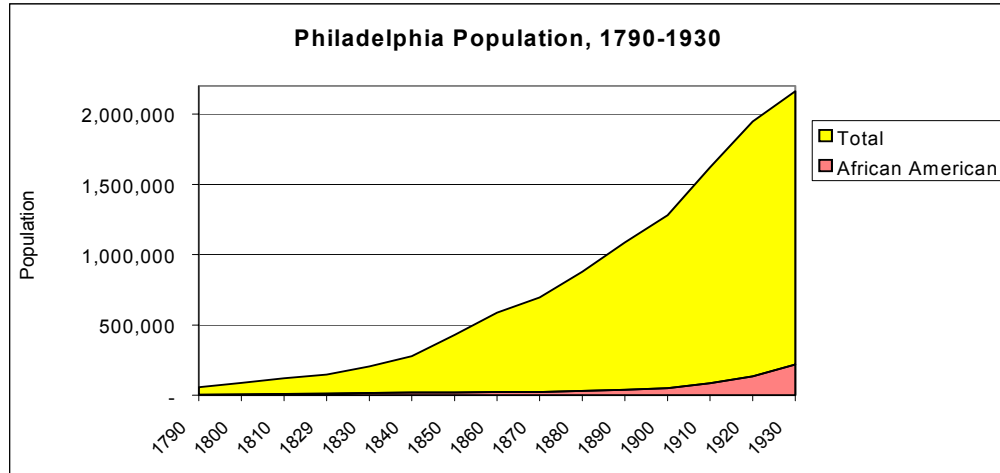
Source: W.E.B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899, reprint 1996), 48-50; data for 1910, 1920 and 1930 from Frederick Miller, "The Black Migration to Philadelphia: A 1924 Profile," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 108 (July, 1984), 315-318.

## Appendix B



Source: W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899, reprint 1996), 48-50; data for 1910, 1920 and 1930 from Frederick Miller, "The Black Migration to Philadelphia: A 1924 Profile," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 108 (July, 1984), 315-318.

## Appendix C



Source: W.E.B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899, reprint 1996), 48-50; data for 1910, 1920 and 1930 from Frederick Miller, "The Black Migration to Philadelphia: A 1924 Profile," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 108 (July, 1984), 315-318.

Source: W.E.B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899, reprint 1996), 48-50; data for 1910, 1920 and 1930 from Frederick Miller, "The Black Migration to Philadelphia: A 1924 Profile," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 108 (July, 1984), 315-318.

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