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TRAILBLAZER: THE LEGACY OF BISHOP HENRY M. TURNER DURING THE CIVIL
WAR, RECONSTRUCTION, AND JIM CROWISM

BY

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Abstract: When the Civil War began in 1861, the conflict evoked feelings of pride, patriotism, and hatred in both blacks and whites. As the war raged on, Reverend Henry McNeal Turner ministered to his brethren serving in the United States Colored Troops (USCT), segregated units of the Union Army. Although slavery ended in 1865 with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, Lincoln's plans for Reconstruction died with his assassination. The Ku Klux Klan and ex-Confederates not only regained control of the South but also resisted the federal government's early attempts at civil rights legislation by intimidating, murdering, and disenfranchising ex-slaves. In response to the brutality and the rise of Jim Crowism, Turner served as a beacon of hope for thousands of freedmen while respectively serving in state and local politics. Bishop Henry M. Turner's story deserves more attention because he is an overlooked transitional figure in American history. A gap remains in the historiography as it relates to Turner's legacy. Turner sorely deserves recognition. After all, he helped lay the foundation for the early civil rights movement. His outspokenness against segregation and his rivalry with contemporary Booker T. Washington served as a stepping stone for Dr. W.E.B Du Bois's work in later years. Ultimately, Turner influenced civil rights leaders such as Ida B. Wells, Marcus Garvey, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Stokely Carmichael. Similarly, he was influential to people in political power. Thus, Turner's influence was widely felt throughout the

black and white communities. His legacy warrants a new discussion of his life, work, and the role of Christianity in the early, as well as the latter, civil rights movement.

Christian Worldview Integration: My Christian worldview enables me to critically examine how Turner's faith played an integral role in his outspokenness and support for the early civil rights movement. Furthermore, I discuss his contributions to the African-American community while not overlooking his sins or issues. Even though Bishop Turner fought valiantly for the cause of civil and political rights, he nevertheless struggled with sins that all Christians face. As a Christian historian, I am obligated to speak the truth, which not only pertains to the Bible but is also critical when applying biblical principles to address issues such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Essentially, Turner combined biblical principles with powerful rhetoric and symbolic actions to motivate blacks to fight for their civil and political rights. As I integrate my Christian worldview, I do not make assumptions but merely interpret the evidence and allow my readers to draw conclusions for themselves. Furthermore, I want Turner to have more of a voice because his story has been neglected for over a century. In designing my research, I want my readers to understand Turner's complexities as he protested for blacks' freedoms on the Civil War battlefields, in the pulpits of AME Churches, and in the halls of the Georgia state legislature during his brief tenure as a state representative. My Christian worldview enables me to communicate the social, political, and economic problems during Turner's day into a scholarly, understandable format for both the academic and the average reader. Moreover, I want my readers to walk away with a greater knowledge of Turner, inspiration to combat societal issues from a biblical perspective, and a deeper commitment to social justice.