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BLACK DEATHWAYS: AN AFRICAN METHODIST HISTORY, 1829-1916

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ABSTRACT

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Black Deathways: An African Methodist History, 1829-1916

Chairperson: Dr. Tobin Miller Shearer

This study will focus on the transformations of death practices and the shifting roles of death workers from 1829-1916. The Postbellum portion of this study will focus on African Methodist communities in the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee as practices and people moved West to the states of Montana, Colorado, and California. These practices experienced changes as a result of rising literacy rates, the establishment of Black churches, and from the movement of Black people within the South. More changes occurred with the creation of mutual aid societies and Black-owned funeral homes. Black funeral directors provided crucial services for communities whose needs were not being met by the white population. At the heart of these practices and changes to these practices is an emphasis on community building. This study will speak to larger scholarly works on the death care industry of the second half of the nineteenth century and offer insights into the current segregated state of the funeral industry.

Beginning with the enslavement of West and Central Africans and their Christianization, the journey by which Black deathways took root in the United States has been one of resilience and community. Enslavers had previously not wanted Christianity taught to enslaved people because of the moral dilemma it presented. In 1706, however, Puritan preacher and enslaver, Cotton Mather, advocated for teaching Christianity to enslaved people.[1] When white Christians introduced Christianity to the enslaved population, the enslaved people began to practice it in similar ways to their West and Central African religions. White southerners tried to discourage emotive religious services among the enslaved population because they connected communal religious services with threats of insurrection. Control over mourning and an attempt by white people to impose their customs on enslaved people were representative of their fears of rebellion and of the paternalistic nature of slavery. Attempts to control mourning and access to grief continued after emancipation. Among the enslaved people who were Christian there remained a hesitancy about the religion that condoned slavery. Christianity experienced a transformation among the enslaved Black people who practiced it. The transformation of Christianity from the customs of Europeans to the emotive practice of Black Americans allowed for the reconciliation of a colonizing faith to exist in a colonized body. By 1829, enslaved funerals were often working within a Christian framework of understanding.

Deathways, or the ways in which a culture confronts the logistical and spiritual needs of the dead, dying, and bereaved, offer unique insights into the growth of communities and political leadership as they show how community members advocate for each other in life and death. The decolonization of death practices began with the decolonization of faith. Richard Allen founded

[1] Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized: An Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity* (Boston: 1706); https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=etas; Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (Bold Type Books, 2016), 94.

the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church to this end to escape the persecution and control of the mainline Methodist church. In the years before emancipation the A.M.E. Church primarily operated in the free states of the North, however, many formerly enslaved people after the Civil War converted to African Methodism. African Methodism provided a way for formerly enslaved Americans to reclaim control over their religious and spiritual lives while rebuilding communities.

Death work cares for communities. Death work comprises the physical, emotional, and spiritual tasks necessitated by end-of-life care, dying, death, loss, and grief.[2] Study of the funerary and religious rites and the ways in which Black people conceived of their universe in the mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth century inform notions they held of their role in society. Enslaved Americans had to contend with colonization and dehumanization while still taking care of their dead, the lengths to which they went to provide proper burial inform understandings of their self-worth. After Emancipation the struggles of enacting power in death and fulfilling the needs of the community continued. Itinerant A.M.E. ministers spread literacy and built churches which would change the way Black Americans worshipped, mourned, and conceived of heaven. As the itinerant ministry spread, the West offered some Black Southerners new opportunities. Death in the West was different than in the South because the size and struggles of the communities had changed.

Historical discussions of death practices help illuminate the changing values of society. The study of the hybridization and syncretization of West African and Christian practices which occurred during the Antebellum period that affected funeral customs, grave decorations, and religious sermons contributes to the study of chattel slavery, Emancipation, and of the African

[2] Thomas W. Lacqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 10.

diaspora more broadly with its insights into forms of resistance taken by the enslaved and the influence on mutual aid societies and Black-owned funeral homes established during Reconstruction. Scholarly discussions of burial and mourning practices of Black people in the South often take place in one of two periods; either before emancipation or in the early twentieth century with the funeral industry already established. Studies pertaining to the burial and grief customs of enslaved individuals in the American South often take place as part of larger studies of religion or with a different geographic focus. Scholars tend to confine the discussion of death and burial practices to the British Atlantic or the Caribbean. This study expands the geographic range of burial studies to include the influences of the diaspora in the Mountain West. This study has also examined a small gap in the chronology of Black burial studies to include the period in time between Emancipation and the beginning of the twentieth century. Burial practices in the American South resulted from the African diaspora and colonization in the British Atlantic. Studying the inheritance of death practices builds on understandings of religious traditions as they changed over time and space and builds on existing literature.[3]

Literature pertaining to the African Methodist Church has similarly been under studied and it most frequently appears as part of a larger discussion of the Black Church. The most commonly studied period for the African Methodist Church is that of its founding. Biographies,

[3] See Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Karla F.C. Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Diane Miller Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind: Suicide and Suffering in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2018), Rana A Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Ana Lucia Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory: Engaging the Past* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); David R. Roediger, "And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, & Heaven in the Slave Community 1700-1865," *The Massachusetts Review* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1981); Robert Hall, "Tallahassee's Black Churches, 1865-1885," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (October 1979).

sections of books, and articles exist of the Church's founders Richard Allen and Daniel Coker.[4] Other topics in African Methodism explore the role of music, racial uplift, and education.[5] The geographic focus of A.M.E. scholarship tends to focus on Philadelphia where the denomination was founded and Wilberforce University in Ohio where many ministers studied. Scholar, Alwyn Barr writes about the missionary work of the A.M.E. Church in the years after the Civil War but does not discuss the importance of providing funerals services to the community or connect the literacy work to changing funeral styles.[6] Scholarship on the Black funeral home industry has been few and far between. Karla F.C. Holloway devotes a chapter to it in her book *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories*; however, her chapter covers the funeral industry in the twentieth century, whereas this study has examined the origins of the twentieth-century funeral industry.

The study of the migration of Black Americans often takes place within the confines of the Great Migration, especially when in a religious context.[7] With much of the historiography of the Black experience focused on the American South and the subsequent migrations to the North, the Black experience in the West is often glossed over and for a long time only had a handful of

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[4] See Eileen Southern, "Musical Practices in Black Churches of Philadelphia and New York, ca. 1800-1844," *Journal of the American Musicology Society* 30, no. 2 (Summer, 1977); Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 177-213; Rhondda R. Thomas, "Exodus and Colonization: Charting the Journey in the Journals of Daniel Coker, a Descendant of Africa," *African American Review* 41, no. 3 (Fall, 2007); Dennis C. Dickerson, "Liberation, Wesleyan Theology and Early African Methodism, 1766-1840," *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 3, (2011); Gary B. Nash, "New Light on Richard Allen: The Early Years of Freedom," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (April 1989).

[5] Christopher N. Phillips, "Versifying African Methodism: or, What Did Early African-American Hymnbooks Do?," *The Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America* 107, no. 3 (September 2013); Elise Kammerer, "Uplift in Schools and the Church: Abolitionist Approaches to Free Black Education in Early National Philadelphia," *Historical Social Research* 42, no. 1 (2017); V.P. Franklin, ""They Rose and Fell Together": African American Educators and Community Leadership, 1795-1954," *The Journal of Education* 172, no. 3 (1990).

[6] Alwyn Barr, "Black Urban Churches on the Southern Frontier, 1865-1900," *The Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 4 (Autumn 1997).

[7] Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

scholars devoted to its study. Scholars often write about Black history in the West under different labels, including as histories of the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, or the Great Migration. Historians rarely frame Black histories in the West as Western histories, making the implication that Black people are somehow excluded from or are outside of the Western experience.

The arrival and development of communities of Black Americans in the West was the culmination of centuries of colonization and hybridization of practices. The particular history of Black mourning in the mountain West traces a unique history of burial traditions which combine and layer elements of Central and West Africa, the Protestant slaveholding South, military influences, and changing conceptions of heaven and home. In general, historians have under-examined the lives of Black Westerners, but in particular, women, families, and communities have been overlooked in favor of singular, often male, historical actors. Black death in the West is absent from the historiography. Some Western historians, however, have pushed for a broader examination of Black life in the West in order to capture a more accurate snapshot of history. In so doing they have integrated both rural and urban experiences, the experiences of women, enslaved Westerners, families, and Black communities.[8] The primary push has been for a focus on community and community building as it relates to social organizations. Historians have furthermore striven for Western History broadly to be inclusive of Black History and for Black

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[8] See Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990 (*New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); Christina Dickerson-Cousin, *Black Indians and Freedmen: The African Methodist Episcopal Church and Indigenous Americans, 1816-1916*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2021); Tiya Miles, "The Long Arm of the South?," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (Autumn, 2012); Quintard Taylor, "A View of the Buffalo Soldiers Through Indigenous Eyes: A Response" *Raven Chronicles* 7, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1997); Quintard Taylor, "Comrades of Color: Buffalo Soldiers in the West, 1866-1917," *Colorado Heritage* 18:(Spring 1996); Quintard Taylor "The Black Towns," "African Americans in the American West" (2,000 word essay), and discussions of black communities in Idaho, Montana and Seattle in Jack Salzman, David Lionel Smith, and Cornel West, eds., *Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1995); Quintard Taylor, "Urban Black Labor in the West, 1849-1949: Reconceptualizing the Image of a Region," in Joe W. Trotter, Earl Lewis and Tera W. Hunter, eds., *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Quintard Taylor, "Facing the Urban Frontier: African American History in the Reshaping of the 20th Century American West" (Western Historical Association Presidential Address), *Western Historical Quarterly* 43:1 Spring 2012), 5-17.

History to include the West. Furthermore, within the study of Black history, the West is an overlooked region except when mentioning the larger cities. Within the historiography of the Black experience in the American West the figure of Quintard Taylor looms large. His publication of *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* marked a foundational moment for the study of Black history in the West.[9] A study of African Methodist communities and the ways in which their death practices changed to serve community needs expands discussions of Black history in the West.

The American West has historically been designated as Indian Country and as such, examinations of race relations in the West often include discussions of Indigenous Americans. Tiya Miles writes about the many confluences between the American West and South. Miles also fills in the gap left by Sherman Savage's choice to not include former slave states in his study of the Black experience in the West. Miles argues that economic, cultural, and political conditions in Indian Country of Oklahoma mirrored the economy, culture, and politics of the South.[10] Tiya Miles has also written a number of books about Black lives in Indian Country including *The Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* for which she won a Frederick Jackson Turner Award from the Organization of American Historians in 2006. Miles adds to a growing body of study on the participation of different peoples in settler colonial institutions. The settler colonial institutions, or institutions within the Euro-settler state, that Black people participated in the West, such as the Buffalo Soldiers or respectability and uplift politics, find a crossroads with death and the African Methodist Church in this study.

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[9] Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990 (*New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).
[10] Tiya Miles, "The Long Arm of the South?," *Western Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (Autumn, 2012).

The history of African Methodist Episcopal Churches in the West has similarly been overlooked. Most scholars of the A.M.E. church center their research on Richard Allen in Philadelphia and its movement South. Almost nothing has been written about the movement of the Church to the West or on the subsequent Conferences of Churches formed. Christina Dickerson-Cousin contends with the history of the A.M.E. Church in Indian Country, but a broader study of African Methodism in the West has yet to be written. Much like A.M.E. churches in the West, almost nothing has been written on the Black Baptist churches of the West. Charnan Williams makes mention of Baptist churches in her careful and delicate discussion of the Bridgewater family, but her article is by no means an examination of Black Baptist practices as they took shape in the West.[11]

The nature of slavery and of enslavers' control over religion means that it was difficult to postulate and generalize the experiences and faith of many enslaved people. Furthermore, the movement, warmth, and change over time of African Methodism in the post-Emancipation landscape is best gauged on local levels. For those reasons, the journey of death and mourning from slavery to African Methodism in the West will follow a handful of historical actors who embody the spiritual ideals of the Church. The first chapter discusses the influences of Central and West African religious practices on enslaved communities in the American South as well as the Christianizing influences of enslavers. The chronology begins in 1829 after the then-enslaved Reverend Thomas Jones has converted to Methodism and is allowed by his enslaver, Owen Holmes, to preach to the enslaved community. Following the narratives of Reverend Jones, Harriet Jacobs, Solomon Northup, and Frederick Douglass this chapter charts the different attitudes enslaved people had towards death, Christianity, and heaven using their stories as the

[11] Charnan Williams, "The Bridgewater Family: A History of an African American Family in the American West from Slavery to Civil Rights," *Western Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2020) 349-380.

primary evidence base. In the first chapter it was important to focus on Reverend Thomas Jones even though he did not remain in the South after emancipation because he represented the conversion from a colonizing religion to the African Methodist church. Slave narratives, furthermore, make up the bulk of the sources for this chapter because of their emotional content. The narratives also serve the purpose of zooming in a handful of historical actors in order to capture the intimacy of their lives, religion, and deaths.

The second chapter picks up with Bishop Gaines of the A.M.E. Church joining the Methodist Church, South and journeys through the missionary work of the A.M.E. Church and the work of Black funeral directors in the states of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama. Their dual commitment to their communities and the church shown through their work in literacy outreach, school building, ministry, political leadership, and finally undertaking demonstrate the centrality of death within communities and its ability to foster cohesion. The emergence of a Black funeral industry in the Postbellum South is unique in this study, as it did not occur in the West, and was not possible in the Antebellum South. For the second chapter it was important to use the experiences of a handful of ministers in order to create a more personal narrative of the Postbellum era. The undertakers examined here appear in the historical record only scantly before opening their respective businesses, which made it difficult to connect their religiosity directly to the African Methodist Church. For this reason, as well as the general compassion felt between Black churches of other denominations, it was important to include the experiences of Black Baptists in brief because of the camaraderie between the two denominations in the years after the Civil War. The sources of the second chapter are largely the memoirs of A.M.E. ministers published by the Church and newspaper clippings that offer glimpses into the businesses of the undertakers.

The third chapter begins with Reverend Theophilus Steward accepting a commission as Chaplain in the Army at Fort Missoula and charts the movement of Black communities to the mountain West. In the years after the Civil War, some Black people sought opportunities outside of the South and as a result some established settlements in the West. Reverend Jordan Allen began his Western career in Kansas before moving to California and finally Montana. The African Methodist communities of Montana are emphasized in this chapter. For the third chapter, it was important to show the political independence of the Black communities in the West and the ways in which they adapted to their new and rural settings. The burial practices in the West were the most difficult to gauge due to the small sizes of the communities, but their political impact was still notable. The source base for this chapter largely consists of newspaper clippings lending to the shift in focus of this chapter. Much of the explicit death work has dissipated by this chapter due to the source base. Instead, the political independence of the ministers, who were still performing funerals, comes to the forefront.

The historical actors of this study vary from enslaved people to ministers, to undertakers, yet in their lives they have acted as death workers and in so doing have helped keep their communities together. The Black people who ended up in Montana are part of a much larger history. Their stories are impossible to tell in their totality, however, this study seeks to bring an appreciation to the death workers in their past. Enslaved death workers faced compounding challenges of displacement and oppression, but they still forged a world for their descendants to find joy in going home to.

Chapter 1: A Southern Mourning: Resilient Burial Practices of Enslaved Americans, 1829-1865

In 1849 formerly enslaved abolitionist Frederick Douglass republished a short fictional story written by Nathanial Parker Willis to criticize Northerners who were sympathetic to slavery. The story published, "The Night Funeral of a Slave" describes an abolitionist's trip to a Southern plantation where he finds the love a master shows for his slave moving. Willis wrote "it was not the haughty planter, the lordly tyrant, talking of his dead slave as of his dead horse, but the kind-hearted gentleman, lamenting the loss and eulogizing of his good old *friend*."[12] This story paints a rosy picture of slavery and of death on the plantation; and while this perception of slavery is in conflict with the truth, his depiction of the funeral of an enslaved person raises some interesting questions. How were enslaved people buried? What religious rites did they practice? How was death regarded? Care of the enslaved dead on plantations in the Antebellum South reflected levels of access enslaved people had to mourning and burial customs as well as hybridization and syncretization of West African, African Methodist, and European Christian traditions. Black deathways in the Antebellum plantation South served to decolonize imposed European practices. Enslaved Americans decolonized death work through syncretization of religion, musicality, and a maintenance of rituals.

Nineteenth century Americans saw a monumental shift in their conceptions of death and an afterlife due in large part to the immense death brought on by the Civil War. To recognize historical traditions of burial and mourning that have persisted through centuries and continents is to form a human connection with people of the past. The burial, mourning, and death practices of Black people in the American South in the years leading up to emancipation created a way of

[12] Nathaniel P. Willis, "The Night Funeral of a Slave," *Home Journal*, 1849, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/acg1336.1-20.002/244:6?page=root;rgn=main;size=100;view=image.

mourning still seen today that combined West and Central African traditions with Christian narratives and practices borne out of necessity and created by the conditions of slavery which the enslaved and free Black people of the South used to resist white supremacy.

During the period of enslavement in the United States Black Americans experienced commodification and objectification while having their languages, customs, and families stripped from them. Despite this, they retained some of the West and Central African traditions of their ancestors which they combined with inherited practices from their enslavers to form a hybridized and syncretized culture borne out of necessity. The deathways of Black Americans served functional, spiritual, and societal purposes. Death was and is both a spiritual and mundane experience. One of the most vulnerable and defining moments of a person's life is the death of a loved one. Within enslaved communities care for the corporeal remains of loved ones and access to grief and mourning affirmed humanity. Conceptions of heaven and hybridized ecstatic religion further resisted enslavers' dehumanization. The communities forged in collective grief withstood the tests of slavery. Finally, this study seeks to center the humanity of the enslaved Black people in a way that more archaeologically focused studies have not. Every attempt has been made to bring the voices and feelings of enslaved people to the forefront. The primary narratives used in this chapter consist of Solomon Northup, Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglass, and Reverend Thomas Jones. Their experiences of slavery, while they should not serve as a generalization, illuminate the struggles enslaved people had with their faith and in obtaining access to a dignified burial. Their narratives moreover offer a look at their inner thoughts and feelings, something difficult to glean from newspapers or plantation records.

A crucial component of the funeral services of Black Southerners in the Antebellum period was the emotive and public nature of the grief and religious elements. The communal

nature of West and Central African religions survived the Middle Passage where in the United States it became an expressive form of Christianity in contrast to the more demure practices of the white slaveholding class.[13] Among the enslaved people who were Christian there remained a hesitancy about the religion that condoned slavery. Some “Africans in America felt obligated theologically and morally not to comply with what they viewed as the blasphemous racist practices of their oppressors.”[14] Christianity experienced a transformation among the enslaved Black people who practiced it. The transformation and hybridization of Christianity from the customs of Europeans to the emotive practice of Black Americans allowed for the reconciliation of a colonizing faith to exist in a colonized body.

The hypocrisy of enslavers who professed to be Christians was evident for many enslaved people. Solomon Northup, who authored his narrative *12 Years a Slave*, remarked “I could not comprehend the justice of that law, or that religion, which upholds or recognizes the principle of Slavery.”[15] Black Americans saw Christianity as the religion of the enslavers, and some resisted it. Commenting on this reservation about God, Harriet Jacobs writes, “when a man is hunted like a wild beast he forgets there is a God, a heaven.”[16] Frederick Douglass also mirrors Harriet Jacobs’ reservations about God. While hiding out in a forest after an escape attempt, Douglass discussed how his spirituality shifted “from faith in the overruling providence of God, to the blackest atheism.”[17] Anger and bitterness at his situation left Douglass doubting a higher power. The human need for meaning in life conflicted with the harsh realities of living a life enslaved.

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[13] David R. Roediger, "And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, & Heaven in the Slave Community 1700-1865, " *The Massachusetts Review* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1981), 235.
[14] Peter J. Paris, "AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE: An Assessment, " *Cross Currents* (New Rochelle, N.Y.) 58, no. 3 (2008): 478.
[15] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017), 9.
[16] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (London: Penguin, 2000), 22.
[17] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2019), 167.

Other enslaved people, however, clung to religion fervently. Reverend Thomas Jones was born into slavery in 1806 in Wilmington, North Carolina. In 1818 he converted to Methodism, and in 1829 he was sold to the plantation of Owen Holmes.[18] While enslaved on the plantation of Owen Holmes, Reverend Thomas Jones began holding religious service with the permission of Holmes and the overseer.[19] The first service held by Reverend Jones was marked by its animation as it "continued in alternate prayer and exhortation until a late hour, when the meeting closed."[20] The ecstatic practices of enslaved people came through at his very first meeting. In a testament to the eagerness with which the enslaved people partook in Jones's religious instruction, the meeting went well into the night as they sacrificed sleep for salvation. While enslaved by Owen Holmes, Reverend Jones had relative freedom of movement to conduct religious services, including funerals, for the enslaved people on the same plantation as he and on neighboring plantations, some as far away as Clinton, North Carolina, a distance of sixty miles.[21] As a testament to Reverend Jones' dedication to the spiritual instruction of enslaved people, "I had to walk a distance of fifty-three miles in order to attend this meeting."[22] Reverend Jones's access to religiosity and mourning will be an exception in this study.

Contrasting Reverend Jones' experience is that of Solomon Northup. Northup was born in 1807 or 1808 in Essex County, New York to free parents, his experiences while enslaved inform discussions of religion and afterlife. While employed as a musician, slave traders kidnapped Northup from Washington D.C. and sold him into slavery in Louisiana where he

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[18] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones, Who Was a Slave for Forty-Three Years. Written by a Friend, as Related to Him by Brother Jones: Electronic Edition*, https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/jones85/jones85.html, 50.
[19] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 49-50.
[20] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 51.
[21] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 52.
[22] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 69.

would remain for twelve years.[23]Harriet Jacobs was born in 1813 in North Carolina. While still just a young teenager she became a victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her enslaver, James Norcom. Before the age of twenty she had two young children. She escaped from slavery in 1842 and reunited with her children. In New York she worked in the household of Nathaniel Parker Willis, the man whose story of a sympathetic slave master attending the funeral of his beloved slave Frederick Douglass harshly criticized.[24] Frederick Douglass was born enslaved in the state of Maryland in 1818 and escaped to freedom at the age of twenty. His narratives are especially helpful to shaping the discourse on the reconciliation of Christianity within slavery and of the concept of slavery as a living death. He learned to read by copying Methodist Hymn books.[25]

The moral conflict between slavery and Christianity created skepticism for some enslaved people. Speaking on the ability of Christianity to exist simultaneously with the institution of slavery, Frederick Douglass says, "I assert *most unhesitatingly,* that the religion of the south—as I have observed it and proved it—is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes... and a secure shelter, under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal abominations fester and flourish".[26] Douglass recognized the moral contradictions allowed by Christianity. Harriet Jacobs and Solomon Northup both critiqued the religious convictions of white people in their narratives. For enslaved people on plantations, Christianity both represented bondage but also for some it offered chance at salvation.

For enslaved people the idea of heaven offered hope for an end to their suffering. Scholar of theology, Margarita Guillory notes that the view of the human soul as eternal appealed to

[23] "The Kidnapping Case: Narrative of the Seizure and Recovery of Solomon Northrup," *The New York Times* January 20, 1853, https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/support1.html.
[24] Jacobs, *Incidents…*, 22; https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/bio.html.
[25] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 115.
[26] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom,* 188.

enslaved people as well as ideas of an end to suffering.[27] This promise of "life after life" gave enslaved people the hope and courage to continue another day.[28] Enslaved people also viewed death as a release from Hell. Ideas of heaven were also indicative of a desire to return to Africa.[29] Heaven for the enslaved, became central to their survival and to the maintenance of their humanity. They had to be able to believe that a better world existed for them. The belief in heaven meant an opportunity to decolonize their bodies if not tangibly during their lifetime, spiritually. Autonomy in funeral practices equated to a decolonized body which was no longer enslaved. One formerly enslaved young man wrote to *The Emancipator*, an abolitionist newspaper, in 1838 and disclosed the practice of white Methodist preachers around Charleston of preaching to enslaved men and women of Hell. The young man is adamant that he had never heard the white ministers preaching of heaven to the enslaved people.[30]

Enslavers attempted to teach those enslaved that they would not be going to heaven, or that if they did, they would not be equal in heaven. Frederick Douglass recalled one of his enslavers' confidences in the fate of his soul; Master Thomas defended his religion and his slaveholding "I will teach you, young man, that, though I have parted with my sins, I have not parted with my sense. I shall hold my slaves, and go to heaven too."[31] The moral contradiction of owning other people and professing to be a Christian was lost on most enslavers, but certainly not on the enslaved. The enslaved people often turned enslavers taunts of Hell around on them; they believed that the enslavers would in fact be going to Hell instead of heaven.[32] Reverend

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[27] Margarita S. Guillory, *Spiritual and Social Transformation in African American Spiritual Churches: More than Conjurers* (London: Routledge, 2017), 9.
[28] Karen E. Beardslee, "Through Slave Culture's Lens Comes the Abundant Source: Harriet A. Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," *Melus* 24, no. 1 (1999): 40.
[29] Roediger, "And Die in Dixie…," 177.
[30] "Recollections of Slavery by a Runaway Slave," *The Emancipator*, August 23, 1838.
[31] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 144.
[32] Roediger, "And Die in Dixie…,"179.

Jones held fast to his belief that he and his fellow enslaved men and women would in fact be going to heaven, saying of a fellow bondsman, "I expect to meet Father Baker by-and-by in the kingdom of God. He was a sincere Christian, and I doubt not he has entered into rest."[33]Enslaved people clung to the Christian faith and did not let white interpretations of the Bible make them believe that heaven was not for them. White Christians believed in a human hierarchy ordained by God which they believed made them justified in holding others in bondage.[34]

A poignant feature of enslaved people's conceptions of heaven was the recurrence of the expressed desire for rest. A life free from toil and constant back-breaking work was what heaven was for many enslaved people. When Northup wrote about Patsey, who was just seventeen, Solomon Northup says, "a blessed thing it would have been for her—days and weeks and months of misery it would have saved her—had she never lifted up her head in life again."[35] Death for Patsey would have been an escape from the brutal sexual and physical abuse she faced. When Northup wrote of what she knew of God and an afterlife he said, "She had a dim perception of God and of eternity, and a still more dim perception of a Savior who had died even for such as her. She entertained but confused notions of a future life—not comprehending the distinction between the corporeal and spiritual existence… her idea of the joy of heaven was simply *rest*."[36] Sadly for Patsey, her life was such that heaven and rest were one and the same. The control over religious education was also evident as Patsey apparently knew very little about the God of scripture. Being an enslaved woman Patsey was not educated but still, according to Northup, possessed conceptions of a life beyond her own. Elsewhere in Northup's narrative he explained

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[33] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 65.
[34] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America* (Bold Type Books, 2016), 17.
[35] Northup, *12 Years a Slave,* 162.
[36] Northup, *12 Years a Slave,* 163.

his own desire for rest, “I ask no paradise on high, With cares on earth oppressed. The only heaven for which I sigh, Is rest, eternal rest.”[37] After years of enslavement, Northup’s conception and desire for heaven has conformed to his fellow enslaved Americans.

Other examples of heaven as a world free from the toils of slave life include the spiritual “Run, Mary, Run” or sometimes, “Heavenly Land Up Yonder”, “I know the other world is not like this. Let God's children have some peace, I know the other world is not like this.”[38] Elsewhere in Northup’s memoir was Eliza, whose children had been sold from her. Eliza died after becoming useless in the cotton fields, “when the hands returned … they found her dead! During the day, the Angel of the Lord, who moveth invisibly over all the earth… had silently entered the cabin of the dying woman, and taken her from thence. She was *free* at last!”[39] The burden of slavery had been too much for Eliza. Her death meant her freedom and reunion with her family and home within enslaved people’s common conception of heaven. The sadness of her life made her death a mercy. Like Patsey, Eliza experienced compounding hardship of being a woman enslaved.

Coming out of the enslaved Africans’ conception of heaven is the idea of homegoing. Among enslaved people homegoing **“**meant a return to the homeland, the term suggests that amidst the sadness of a passing there is a kind of joy about the release from pain and the movement to a better place.”[40] The idea of Africa as heaven is indicative of a self-awareness of themselves as vessels of colonization. They knew that Europeans had taken their ancestors from their homeland, and though many enslaved people themselves never set foot in Africa, they

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[37] Northup, *12 Years a Slave,* 163.
[38] “Run, Mary, Run” https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/mallory/mallory.xml.
[39] Northup, *12 Years a Slave,* 98.
[40] Simon Stow, “Agonistic Homegoing: Frederick Douglass, Joseph Lowery, and the Democratic Value of African American Public Mourning,” *The American Political Science Review* 104, no.4 (November, 2010).

nevertheless possessed a desire to return to a time before their bondage in the United States. Reverend Thomas Jones recalls an elderly enslaved woman calling to him as he left a funeral, “"Hard trials, tribulations, Lord, I feel I'm on my journey home.”[41] The woman had gone out of her way to attend the funeral and hear Reverend Jones speak before her ‘journey home’. It’s not clear if the woman Reverend Jones met thought of Africa as heaven or as the South where other ancestors are. The idea of heaven as another world was rooted in the Western coast of Africa among the Bakongo people who conceived of two planes of existence. The first world included birth and death and the life in between. The other world was where ancestors, spirits, and other supernatural entities dwelled. The cyclical nature of life, death, and afterlife was central to this belief system.[42]

The association of heaven with Africa or with home continues in the memoir of Reverend Jones. Reverend Jones conducted the funeral service of another enslaved man called Uncle Billy. When discussing his funeral service, he noted that many other enslaved people became excited at its mention and said “we’ll meet him in the better land.”[43] Clearly the understanding of heaven as a metaphysical place without slavery and without colonization was appealing to enslaved Black Americans. One formerly enslaved man Lorenza Ezell recalled the words they used to sing in church “Our bodies bound to morter and decay, But us souls go marchin’ home.”[44]The eternal nature of the human soul is a concept found in religions across the globe, however, the distinct conception of the soul as bound to Africa is a phenomenon not found among other communities.

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[41] Reverend Thomas Jones, 68.
[42] Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 20-1.
[43] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 57.
[44] Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains,* 328.

Enslaved people were bound to an earthly existence in which they were never safe in finding or keeping home, but in death home was safe. They could find joy in going home in death.

The religious beliefs of enslaved people were complex. While many enslaved people found moral contradictions in their enslavers professing to be Christian, not all enslaved people believed that their enslavers were going to Hell. Reverend Jones offers some insight into his relationship with the white Christians he dealt with, including those who held slaves. Of his own enslaver, Owen Holmes, of the Crumpling family on a nearby plantation, and of Henry May he holds high opinions. Of Henry May, an enslaver, he even says, "I expect to meet him in the better land."[45] Here, Reverend Jones transposed his belief that death was a homegoing to an enslaver. Reverend Jones's benevolent outlook toward white Christian enslavers speaks to the complexity of experiences during slavery and to the capacity for human understanding.

The conditions of slavery brought about the practice of fictive kinship networks. Fictive kinship was a practice necessitated by the breaking up of families during sale and involved incorporating members of other families in ones' own network of social relationships. The networks of fictive kin obligated people to look after each other's children after death.[46] Families and kinship networks of the deceased believed in their rich spiritual lives.[47] Spiritual lives were just as important if not more important than earthly lives. Families and kinship networks were supposed to participate in these spiritual lives help the spirits of the deceased transition to the next world.[48] Death happened to communities rather than individuals. Networks of kin and the beliefs enslaved people held about their immortal souls were also rooted in West and Central

[45] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 57.
[46] Sergio A. Lussana, *My Brother Slaves: Friendship, Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 108.
[47] Holloway, *Passed On…,*210.
[48] Holloway, *Passed On…,* 210.

African cosmology. Kongo cosmologies possessed an interconnectedness between the worlds of the living and the dead.[49] This interconnectedness between worlds had the effect of binding enslaved communities together through generations.

While many of the rituals practiced by enslaved people were Christian in nature, some were wholly African practices that influenced beliefs of the spirit world. The most obvious non-Christian beliefs to enter enslaved cosmology were in sorcery, witchcraft, and in root men and women who used roots to conjure spirits for either good or harm.[50] Another feature of enslaved communities within the United States was the existence of the "hag witch". The hag witch was similar to a conjure woman and was the result of the combination of West African traditions with Christian superstitions.[51] Communities believed that hag witches were ghosts of witches and were meant to impart a lesson.[52] This belief in an animated and rich spiritual world influenced the Christian practices of enslaved Americans predisposing enslaved Americans to believing in supernatural occurrences. Part of the hag witch lore is rooted in the West African diasporic phenomenon of Obeah. Obeah is a spiritual belief system of healing and justice that could exist simultaneously with Christianity. Obeah practitioners were men or women and they inhabited similar roles as Black preachers.[53] Obeah men and women were thought by enslavers to be the cause of cachexia Africana, a wasting disease that enslavers believed was endemic to Black people. This disease was more likely caused by malnutrition.[54]

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[49] Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 25.
[50] Yvonne P. Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and The African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkely: University of California Press, 2003), 4-5.
[51] Alexis S. Wells-Oghoghomeh, "She Come Like A Nightmare: Hags, Witches and the Gendered Trans-Sense among the Enslaved in the Lower South," *Journal of African Religions* 5, no. 2 (2017), 241.
[52] Chireau, *Black Magic*…, 84, 88.
[53] Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackess,* 6, 85; Walter Rucker, "Conjure, Magic, and Power: The Influence of Afro-Atlantic Religious Practices on Slave Resistance and Rebellion," *Journal of Black Studies* 32, no. 1 (September 2001): 85.
[54] Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness,* 85.

Beginning with the tangible aspects of burial, African religions and the conditions of slavery influenced the coffin and the logistics of the funeral. A West and Central African tradition that survived the Middle Passage was that of holding a first and second funeral. Enslaved people on a plantation first buried the deceased individual in the first funeral which usually occurred very shortly after death either the same day or the day after death.[55] In a time before widespread effective embalming the purpose of the first funeral was purely practical. Then the secondary funeral took place days to a matter of weeks or even months later. Slavery often necessitated the use of the second funeral. A deceased person could be buried, and then celebrated at a date later in the planting season. This period of time between the first and second funerals allowed enslaved people the space to mourn and time for a preacher to be summoned if one was not already on hand. As enslaved African Methodist Episcopal Minister Reverend Thomas Jones recalls, “It was the custom in those days to bury the body at once, and have the funeral service at some future time. In this case, death had occurred several days previous to my going there to preach.”[56] The second funeral, which was often the one presided over by a plantation preacher, provided the sending off for the deceased person’s soul.[57] As is common with many traditions the first and second funerals serve both social and practical purposes, allowing for the expression of grief within a settler-colonial world.

Another tradition from West and Central Africa to survive is that of burying an individual with grave goods such as dishes, shoes, or branches which decorated the exterior of the grave (Figure 1). Within the fields of archaeology and anthropology grave goods are known to bring comfort and to make the spirit feel at home. They can also help the soul transition into the

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[55] Henryk W. Zimon, "BURIAL RITUALS AMONG THE KONKOMBA PEOPLE OF NORTHERN GHANA," *Český lid* 94, no. 1 (2007): 44.
[56] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…,* 62-3.
[57] Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 30.

afterlife. The items buried with the deceased are indicative of what that person and that society valued and also provide a glimpse into their spiritual and cosmological life. For enslaved people the "symbolic source of the broken crockery in grave decorations of the Bakongo region of modern Angola…broke up the possessions and burned the huts of their dead.[58] The people of West and Central Africa use grave goods to indicate a belief in a rich spiritual existence. If the belief that physical items can help the spirits of the dead move on then there must also be a belief in the agency and visceral connection with the spirits of the dead. Frederick Law Olmsted witnessed funerals in which mourners laid crossed beech branches over the graves of children.[59] This decoration of the graves of children with branches used as the grave goods was a continuation of their West and Central African heritage.

As one might assume, enslavers had no obligations to provide a decent burial for the people they enslaved, still some saw a benefit in allowing and attending funerals. Like the funeral written about by Nathaniel Parker Willis, some enslavers believed that "although grand gestures like weeping at funerals and providing stone grave markers were reserved by the masters for a small elite of slaves… his own presence and preaching at the burials were probably the greatest contributions that he could make."[60] Planters believed that their attendance at funerals might endear them to the people they enslaved and therefore mitigate any insurrection.

After an enslaved person died, there was no guarantee of what would happen to their corpse, and it often varied greatly from plantation to plantation. As there were not very many guidelines for how an enslaver should treat the people who were enslaved, a planter also was not

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[58] Roediger, "And Die in Dixie…," 176.
[59] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy* (Sampson Low, Son & Co.: London, 1856), 27.
[60] Roediger, "And Die in Dixie…,"165.

required to do much when an enslaved person died.[61]Speaking on the lack of protections for the bodies of deceased enslaved people Frederick Douglass says, "I speak advisedly when I say this,--that killing a slave or any colored person, in Talbot county, Maryland, is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community."[62] Burials of enslaved people, however, were characterized by their simplicity. They could be as simple as a hole in the ground and a cloth to wrap the body, or they could be a little more ceremonious. Sometimes the planter would attend the funeral, like in the opening story, or other times the enslaved people held the funeral against the wishes of the planter.

Simplicity most often characterized enslaved burials. In *12 Years a Slave*, Northup describes enslaved people "dying without attention, and buried without shroud or coffin—it cannot otherwise be expected, than that they should become brutified and reckless of human life."[63] He emphasizes that enslaved people were treated like animals both in life and in death. The uncertainty that surrounded the treatment of a person's remains is one of the foundational aspects of autonomy over death and dying that would change after emancipation. Sojourner Truth was critical of enslavers exercising control over slave funerals. In her narrative she writes "And now, gentle reader, what think you constituted a good funeral? Answer--some black paint for the coffin, and--a jug of ardent spirits! What a compensation for a life of toil…Mankind often vainly attempt to atone for unkindness or cruelty to the living, by honoring the same after death…"[64] Treatment of the body in death as a colonized body was an affront to the humanity of the enslaved. Enslavers denied access to a decent burial to enslaved people because the

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[61] Roediger, "And Die in Dixie…," 164.
[62] Douglass, *My Bondage My Freedom,* 94.
[63] Northup, *12 Years A Slave,* 127.
[64] Sojourner Truth, *Sojourner Truth, d. 1883 Olive Gilbert, and Frances W. Titus Narrative of Sojourner Truth; a Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from Her "Book of Life;" Also, a Memorial Chapter, Giving the Particulars of Her Last Sickness and Death,* https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/truth84/menu.html, 25.

objectification inherent in chattel slavery and settler colonialism allowed them total control over the bodies of the people they enslaved. Funerary customs persisted "for people living in what was essentially a liminal state between existence and the afterlife, final rites of passage and relations with the dead took on added significance."[65] The importance of funerary rites to enslaved people did not go unnoticed to their enslavers, however, and they further tried to control the activities of the enslaved.

Time and again the slave narratives and other sources have described the tangible aspects of burial as 'rough', 'rude', or otherwise minimal and primitive. The vessel in which an enslaved person would be buried in was typically a few boards nailed together.[66] The body of the enslaved person would be buried in a piece of rough cloth. This burial method was in sharp contrast to the burials of free people, even poor free people. A burial for a poor white person at this time would have involved a pine coffin lined with alpaca and burial, by a cabinetmaker turned undertaker, in a local cemetery or Potter's Field.[67] In Charleston, for example, there seems to have been a segregated cemetery for both free Black people and enslaved Black people to use.[68] The primitive nature of the burial instruments they were allowed access to speaks to their position in Antebellum society as sub-human. Thus, the ways in which the enslaved themselves took to care for their dead were ways of re-asserting that robbed humanity. There was some variation, however, to the amount of involvement by enslavers or of how much they allowed for at funerals. Frederick Law Olmstead observed a fairly standard pine coffin in use for a child in Virginia in 1853.[69]

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[65] Brown, *The Reaper's Garden,* 58-9.
[66] George W. Harris, *SUT LOVINGOOD YARNS SPUN BY A "NAT'RAL BORN DURN'D FOOL. WARPED AND WOVE FOR PUBLIC WEAR* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald Publishers, 1867.
[67] Robert W. Habenstein and William M. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* (Milwaukee: National Funeral Directors Association of the United States Inc., 1955), 246-7.
[68] "Proceedings of Council," *The Charleston Daily Courier,* August 7, 1856.
[69] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy*, 24.

Another feature of enslaved funerals is the presence of a cabin for the corpse to lay in before the funeral. While wakes were employed across the United States by both free and enslaved, white and Black, for the purpose of keeping watch over the body to ensure death had indeed paid a visit to the individual, the use of the practice by enslaved people is punctuated by the lengths enslaved people had to take to ensure the wake was done and by the informality of the wake. Harriet Jacobs, Sut Lovingood, Solomon Northup, and others all discuss sheds or rough cabins as the location of the body for the wake.[70] For white Americans, the wake would involve the body sitting up on a bed or a table covered with sheets. A family member or close friend would keep watch day and night to make sure their loved one was first, truly dead, and second, that nothing tampered with the corpse. Family members or friends lay the body upon a block of ice or with chunks of ice around the body to make sure decomposition did not come too soon. No such care could be afforded to enslaved dead. Instead, enslavers left their corpses to rot in front of their families or in shacks until they could be buried at night. Recalling her grandfather's experience enslaved, Septima Clark explained that the corpse of the deceased "stayed in this little shack all night long until they could get somebody to make a coffin, and then at night they went by night to bury it, through the woods. They didn't have time in the day. And they got back before sunrise and went right back to work."[71]

The majority of Africans kidnapped from their homes and imported to the Americas were from West Africa and it is their traditions that have the most influence on subsequent enslaved populations in the United States. Archaeological evidence confirms that enslaved populations buried their dead in an East-West orientation common in West Africa but also present in

[70] Harris, *SUT LOVINGOOD …,* 226.
[71] Oral History Interview with Septima Poinsette Clark, July 25, 1976. Interview G-0016, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Christian burial practices.[72] Historical archaeologist Ross Jamieson explains that "the mixing of ethnic groups brought about by the slave trade must have caused great changes in African-American burial practices in the New World. The African origin of first-generation slaves in a particular location is a very important factor to consider in research".[73] The slave trade created a conflux of cultures, languages, and religions in the American south which bred new traditions and combined old with new. The practice of East-West burial orientation was also rooted with the Bakongo people of the Congo-Angola region of West Africa. In their funeral practices the deceased were buried in an East-West orientation to follow the cycle of the sun which was thought to mimic the cycle of life, death, and afterlife.[74]

The preparation of the body for burial also varied from plantation to plantation. On some plantations the deceased's immediate family prepared the body, on others there was a specific group of people to attend to the body. After death kin, frequently women, washed and shrouded the bodies, and placed in a simple wooden coffin which was buried either in a cemetery specifically for the enslaved on the plantation or in a segregated cemetery in the city or town.[75] Care for the dead reenforces dignity and humanity. The freedom, or lack thereof, allowed to enslaved people to bury and mourn influenced their burial traditions. Much of the care given to the body of the deceased including the washing and shrouding reflected traditions practiced in West Africa.[76]

Women were so frequently the people tasked with preparation of the body for burial because of the gendered nature of slavery, of death, the spheres that women lived in, and their

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[72] Ross Jamieson, "Material Culture and Social Death: African-American Burial Practices," *Historical Archaeology* 29, no. 4 (1995): 43.
[73] Jamieson, "Material Culture and Social Death…," 44.
[74] Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 21.
[75] Roediger, "And Die in Dixie…," 169.
[76] Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 28.

proximity to death. Gendered divisions of labor meant that women filled caregiver roles including care for the sick and dying. Their caregiver roles continued after death into their work with the dead.[77] The coffins of enslaved people were often characterized by their simplicity. Enslavers had no incentive to provide proper burial for the people enslaved. Many only provided boards and nails for the coffin and a shroud for the body.[78] Funerals most frequently occurred at night due to the long workday and labor demands of the plantation. Furthermore, burial was often one of the only and certainly the last opportunity enslaved people had to be treated with dignity in the course of their lives and deaths.

The music that was present at funeral services served both functional and spiritual purposes. Poinsette Plantation in Georgia enslaved the grandfather of Civil Rights activist Septima Clark.[79] In 1976 Clark recalled her grandfather relating to her his mother's funeral. On Poinsette Plantation the enslaved people walked slowly from the fields through the slave cabins toward the location of the funeral singing about the location of the funeral, "I can remember him talking about that. He said that they lighted these flambeaus and went through the woods singing, and how they would sing while they were working to tell the people where they were going to be that night. That's the way they did it. That's the way they sent the message."[80] She also recalled how the songs told of the location of the funeral.[81]

The location of the burial ground varied from plantation to plantation. Some burial grounds were located on plantations while others were located outside of the city. Frederick Law Olmsted recalled that "while riding, aimlessly, in the suburbs of Savannah…I came upon a

[77] Braude, 53.
[78] Roediger, "And Die in Dixie…" 166.
[79] Oral History Interview with Septima Poinsette Clark, July 25, 1976.
[80] Oral History Interview with Septima Poinsette Clark, July 25, 1976.
[81] Oral History Interview with Septima Poinsette Clark, July 25, 1976.

square field, in the midst of an open pine-wood, partially inclosed with a dilapidated wooden paling. It proved to be a grave-yard for the negroes of the town."[82] In Georgia, Olmsted found that the Black cemetery was beyond the white cemetery. He also commented on the appearance and adornments of the graves, "Some of these were mere billets of wood, others were of brick and marble, and some were pieces of plank, cut in the ordinary form of tomb-stones. Many family-lots were inclosed with railings, and a few flowers or evergreen shrubs had sometimes been planted on the graves."[83] The use of railings and plants to encircle and cover the grave was seen frequently in enslaved burials. In Charleston, "The burying-ground was a rough "vacant lot" in the midst of the town. The only monuments were a few wooden posts, and one small marble tablet."[84] The funeral in Virginia witnessed by Frederick Law Olmsted took place at a cemetery beyond the principal cemetery of the city.[85] While the locations of enslaved burial grounds varied, they were in a position to exert power and to convey otherness.

Speakers at funerals were respected members of their community. The speakers recited memorized Bible verses which some white onlookers would mock because of their oration and pronunciation.[86] Funerals also "often employed gift giving and preaching practices as well as song and dance performances reminiscent of their African heritage."[87] The centrality of religion was often in the foreground at funerals of the enslaved and this influenced who the community chose as their speaker. Reverend Jones was often the speaker at funerals because of his status as a respected preacher. Funeral hymns enslaved people sang spoke of the soul's release to heaven. Reverend Jones wrote of the funeral hymn sung for another enslaved man, "And let the body

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[82] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy*, 406.
[83] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy*, 406.
[84] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy*, 406.
[85] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; With Remarks on Their Economy*, 24.
[86] Roediger, "And Die in Dixie…," 171.
[87] Beardslee, 42.

faint, And let it faint and die, My soul shall quit this mournful vale / And soar to worlds on high."[88] Reverend Jones acted as the preacher who released this man's soul to heaven and experienced the joy of his going home. Corporeal death was not feared.

Despite Reverend Jones's relative freedom of movement, the fact remained that he and the men and women he pastored to were still enslaved. This fact can be gleaned from the hymn Reverend Jones chose to end the majority of his religious meetings with, "Until we meet again, Until we meet again, I'll meet you in the heavens, When we'll part no more. So fare you well, So fare you well: God Almighty bless you, Until we meet again."[89] The ever-present specter of death loomed at his prayer meetings. Neither he, nor the other enslaved people he preached to, knew if they would see each other again due to the transient and brutal nature of slavery, therefore it became necessary for Reverend Jones to include mention of the next world in each meeting.

Fears of insurrection held by enslavers meant that one of the only times enslaved people could congregate was during religious services and funerals.[90] Within the first few decades of the nineteenth century there had already been several large slave revolts. One of those, that of Gabriel Prosser, was thought to have originated at a funeral of an enslaved child, thus white Southerners feared any occasion that Black people could congregate without much oversight.[91] Some enslavers tried to prevent any activity that would take place outside of their realm of observation, funerals included. While the enslaver of Reverend Jones allowed him to preach to other enslaved people, that was not always the case. Some enslavers violently opposed the

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[88] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 65
[89] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 55.
[90] Nicholas May, "Holy Rebellion: Religious Assembly Laws in Antebellum South Carolina and Virginia," *The American Journal of Legal History* 49, no.3, (2007), doi:10.1093/ajlh/49.3.237. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25664424., 255.
[91] May, "Holy Rebellion…," 252.

gathering of enslaved people for religious purposes. Reverend Jones, in fact, preached a funeral sermon for an enslaved man named Father George Baker. Father Baker had been whipped by his enslaver on many occasions for preaching the Bible. Reverend Jones recalled that "as a last resort, his master cut his heel-cords so that he could not walk. But even this did not prevent him from doing what he felt to be his duty. He once crawled on his hands and knees a distance of five miles, in order to attend a meeting. He died in the triumphs of Christian faith."[92] Reverend Jones made known Father Baker's religious convictions at the time of his death in the man's funeral sermon. Religious convictions often led enslaved people to go against their enslavers on moral grounds, despite the consequences. It was more important to claim and enact their spiritual value than it was to keep their physical bodies untouched.

Slave patrols also created obstacles to conducting funeral services. Reverend Jones recalled a funeral he had attended that a slave patrol broke up. He wrote that "There were nearly three hundred persons present... In dismissing the congregation, I remarked that it was useless to resist the powers that were, but we might still hold fast to Christ; there was nothing that need separate our souls from him."[93] The solace Reverend Jones offered his congregation at a time of fear and violence was found in God. Reverend Jones' faith allowed him to continue living in slavery and to continue giving dignified burials. In Smithville a prayer meeting was broken up by the slave patrol. This time the reason for the patrol's presence had to do with the noise. Reverend Jones wrote, "A large number came to the altar and knelt down. While we were praying, the patrol suddenly came in upon us, and said we must stop our noise."[94] Control over noise, and by

[92] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 65.
[93] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 69.
[94] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones…*, 64.

extension funerals as a source of noise and nuisance, led some enslavers to further restrict access to funerals.

The communal nature of Black religious practices were evident to the enslavers and other white observers at funerals of the enslaved. White observers of Black funerals often misinterpreted them.[95] Portrait artist George Fuller traveled to the Antebellum South twice during his lifetime to draw scenes of slavery.[96] In March of 1858 he witnessed a funeral and notes that during the ceremony the enslaved people "raised a hymn, which soon became a confused chant -the leader singing a few words alone, and the company then either repeating them after him or making a response to them.... "Unable to understand the words being said, Fuller continued, "The music was wild and barbarous, but not without a plaintive melody. A new leader took the place of the old man, when his breath gave out ... and continued until the grave was filled, and a mound raised over it."[97] Fuller's interpretation of the funeral exemplifies the white supremacy ingrained in the control and dehumanization of enslaved people's funerals. The judgement of noise, decorations, and of how Black people worship are continuing features of white interpretations of Black funerals.

While George Fuller found reason to judge enslaved funerals, other white onlookers had more empathy when attending burials. Father Baker, the man punished by his enslaver for preaching the Bible, had a son of his enslaver present at his funeral. Reverend Jones recalled that the young man wept having known of the cruelty his father inflicted on Father Baker.[98] Clearly, views of death and mourning varied even between generations of the same family.

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[95] Beardslee, 41.
[96] Sarah Burns, "Images of Slavery: George Fuller's Depictions of the Antebellum South," *The American Art Journal* 15, no.3 (1983), 49.
[97] Burns, "Images of Slavery…," 50.
[98] Reverend Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Rev. Thomas H. Jones*…, 65.

Of course, within the institution of slavery, mourning and grief were not always an option. Enterprising Southern doctors opened slave hospitals as business ventures to benefit planters. Enslavers utilized slave hospitals not out of concern for the people they enslaved but out of concern of their monetary investment.[99] One of the most extreme examples in which enslaved people lost autonomy over their dead was the cadaver trade. Medical schools purchased the bodies of enslaved people for study. Some of the bodies sold were exhumed after burial and some planters had the body transported directly to the doctor.[100] Known as the "Father of Gynecology", James Marion Sims studied on enslaved Black women, both living and deceased. Dr. James Marion Sims started the first women's hospital in 1844 on his plantation for enslaved women where he would experiment on their bodies, "the enslaved women Sims treated, however, possessed bodies and lives that were not contingent upon the advancement of gynecology. Black women would and did conceive of themselves and their worth without the inclusion of white men."[101]

Other circumstances that would take away an enslaved person's dignity in death were if the enslaved person had died while attempting to run away or during punishment for running away. Harriet Jacobs recounts an incident in which an enslaved man named James ran away but the slave patrol recaptured him. As punishment James received hundreds of lashes and he is tied to a cotton gin and left with only bread and water. After four days and five nights of not eating or drinking other enslaved people found him dead and rotted in the gin house. Rats had partially eaten his remains. He was buried without ceremony in a wooden box. [102] The man's enslaver

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[99] Hogarth, 163, 174.
[100] Daina R. Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 153.
[101] Deirdre C. Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 1, 80.
[102] Jacobs, *Incidents…,* 75-6.

robbed James of his life and dignity in burial. His enslaver, moreover, robbed the other enslaved people of access to their grief for James.

The enslaver's denial of Black people's humanity extended to the belief that Black people did not experience physical or emotional pain the same way white people did.[103] This fed into the denial of Black people's suffering under slavery and attempts by enslavers to cover up or otherwise hide the suicides of enslaved people. Antebellum Southerners understood suicide to be an indication of spiritual and emotional anguish, thus when an enslaved person took their own life it should have been an indication of the anguish of slavery. If, as it was believed by enslavers, Black people did not experience pain the same way their suicides would then not be the result of emotional anguish, but a failing of their character. In spite of this framing of Black suicides, enslavers still tried to hide the suicides of enslaved people from fellow planters for fear of charges of cruelty being leveled against them.[104] In the Antebellum South sympathy for suicide, which increased on the lead up to the Civil War, and "glorification of (white) suffering… required the denigration or denial of black suffering."[105] Suicide was more common among newly arrived Africans and first-generation American enslaved people than among subsequent generations.[106] What is known is that there was a gendered aspect to suicide in which enslaved women attempted suicide more often while enslaved men took their lives more often.[107]

One dimensional explanations of enslaved people's suicides often attribute the act to resistance and "gratification in denying masters their labor", the reality, however, is exceedingly more complex.[108] Enslaved people's lives were as complex as our own; their suicides could be

[103] Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind…*, 6.
[104] Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind…*, 89.
[105] Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind…*, 16.
[106] Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind…*, 93.
[107] Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind…*, 39.
[108] Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind…*, 97-8.

attributed to combinations of mental and physical suffering caused by the conditions of slavery, acts of resistance, and a desire to return to their homeland. Family separation, death of a child, postpartum depression, and rape could also trigger an enslaved person to take their life.[109] Returning to the narrative of Solomon Northup, he discusses how slavery drained him of life, "I felt I was growing prematurely old; that a few years more, and toil, and grief, and the poisonous miasmas of the swamps would accomplish their work upon me—would consign me to the graver's embrace to molder and be forgotten."[110]Frederick Douglass also echoes this sentiment when he calls living in slavery a "living death."[111]

Suicidal ideation also plagued the minds of enslaved people. Solomon Northup wrote in his narrative that "there have been hours in my unhappy life, many of them, when the contemplation of death as the end of earthly sorrows—of the grave as a resting place for the tired and worn out body—has been pleasant to dwell upon."[112] Death, for enslaved people, meant an end to their toils and was not usually feared. Solomon Northup also recalls the suicidal ideation experienced by an enslaved woman named Patsey, who was very cruelly treated on the plantation, "nothing delighted the mistress so much as to see her suffer, and more than once, when Epps had refused to sell her, has she tempted me with bribes to put her secretly to death and bury her body in some lonely place in the margin of the swamp."[113]Death for Patsey would mean an end to repeated sexual assaults and physically brutal punishments. Harriet Jacobs also struggled with suicidal ideation throughout her life. In her narrative she recalls a time where she fell sick and wished for death; "that night I was very hoarse; and I went to bed thinking the next

[109] Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind…*, 64, 109, 112-3.
[110] Northup, *12 Years a Slave,* 147.
[111] Douglass, *My Bondage My Freedom,* 220.
[112] Northup, *12 Years a Slave,* 81.
[113] Northup, *12 Years a Slave,* 116

day would find me sick, perhaps dead. What was my grief on waking to find myself quite well!'[114]Once again, death was not feared by Jacobs; rather she feared living another day in her condition.

Views and attitudes toward suicide reflect and emerge from widely held views of the meaning of death. Death provided access to rest for enslaved people. The conditions imposed on people by slavery often led to the view of death as a release from suffering. This can be seen in William and Ellen Craft's narrative of their lives as an enslaved couple. William Craft reflects on a scene of a mother losing her child through sale; "O, deep was the anguish of that slave mother's heart/ When called from her darlings for ever to part;/ The poor mourning mother of reason bereft,/ Soon ended her sorrows, and sank cold in death."[115] Enslaved people suffered many losses throughout their lifetime of friends, family, kin, and children through death or through sale. The sale of the woman's children felt like their death for her, and soon led to her own death. Colonization, through the commodification of enslaved bodies, allowed for many deaths and the colonized body experienced many spiritual and corporeal deaths.

With the coming of the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, formerly enslaved Americans found that their ways of understanding life and death were shifting. Black soldiers during the Civil War were not treated the same as their white counterparts in death. Often their bodies were desecrated. During the war the Black regiments, which were comprised of formerly enslaved individuals and free Black men from the North, were most frequently tasked with burying the dead after a battle.[116] One man enslaved in Georgia at the end of the period of enslavement was Wesley John Gaines. Gaines was born enslaved in Georgia and

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[114] Jacobs, *Incidents…,* 19.
[115] William Craft and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom: The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 19.
[116] Drew G. Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 215.

went on to become an African Methodist Minister after the Civil War where he represented the Georgia Conference.[117]

Traditions of public mourning continued into the present day. Death, burial, and mourning practices of West Africans survived the Middle Passage to be adopted and hybridized by their ancestors. The hybridization of these practices is a result of the human instinct for preservation. Enslaved people had to preserve their own humanity due to the dehumanizing nature of slavery. Some of the ways in which enslaved people preserved their humanity were in their burial, mourning, and death practices. Enslaved Americans freed in 1865 could little have imagined that by the end of the century their descendants would have formed Burial Associations and operated their own mortuary businesses for their communities. Death for enslaved people was often difficult and painful. It also forged and fortified communities while redefining conceptions of heaven, home, and family. Assertions of humanity are at the core of Black death practices.

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[117] W.J. Gaines, *African Methodism In the South; OR Twenty-Five Years of Freedom* (Franklin Publishing House: Atlanta, 1890), 10.

Chapter 2: African Methodism in the Postbellum South: Death Work as Community Work, 1865-1903

"They were poor--very poor. Freedom they had, and nothing more--nothing but muscle and sinew, and faith in God. ".[118]-Bishop Wesley Gaines, A.M.E.

In 1903 a fire destroyed the successful mortuary business of a Black Montgomery, Alabama resident named Elijah Cook. He believed his business was purposely set on fire and lamented his financial loss.[119] Arriving in Montgomery decades earlier having recently left slavery, Cook saw that the Black residents of the city were not receiving the care they deserved in death, instead white undertakers hauled their bodies to segregated cemeteries on wagons. Wanting to make a difference in the lives of the people in his community by providing dignified burial, Elijah Cook purchased a hearse and then a mortuary which he would operate for more than twenty years.[120]

The story of how he came to open his business raises questions about the histories of American funeral directing, Black churches, and of the postwar era. How were death and community tied together for Black people in the Postbellum South? What role did Black churches and Black undertakers play in keeping communities together? This study will focus on African Methodist communities in the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee from 1865 through the early twentieth century. Maintenance of a distinct way of death reinforced the humanity, collective identity and memory of the communities formed after emancipation. Examination of the shifting funerary landscape of the

[118] Bishop W.J. Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man* (Philadelphia: A.M.E. Publishing House, 1897), https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/gaines/gaines.html, 75.
[119] "Perry Street Fire", *The Montgomery Advertiser*, November 1, 1903, 7
[120] "Mr. Elijah Cook," *The American Star* (Montgomery, AL), September 1, 1905, 2; Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business* (Wichita, KS: DeVore and Sons, Inc., 1907), 73.

post-war era with emphasis on African Methodist religious traditions, mutual aid societies, and the creation of Black-owned funeral parlors reveals truths about home and community. The meaning of home shifted for Black Americans as more of their ancestors died on Southern soil. The communities of formerly enslaved people regrouped around kinship networks and chosen religious identities. In the years after the Civil War the factors of racism and segregation pushed Black people to form their own institutions for burial while syncretized and hybridized African Methodist religious and mourning practices persisted into freedom. This distinct burial culture propped up communities by fulfilling essential logistical and spiritual needs. It also redefined home to mean the South as the years from Emancipation grew longer and gave way to generations of Black leadership by empowering young men in ministry and in business. In their death work, the people of this chapter, performed community work.

The ministers and their congregants, who are the focus of this chapter, are Reverend Theophilus Steward, Bishop Wesley John Gaines, Reverend Jordan Early, his wife Sarah Early, and Sara Duncan. Their work in literacy, church building, and school building coincided with their work presiding over funerals and shaping their congregants spiritual lives. Their work also coincided with many Black undertakers who also found themselves engaged in church and school building after the Civil War. The literacy work of the ministers, moreover, paved the way for the rise of Black-owned businesses, including mortuaries, by providing access to education for their communities. Changing the way people lived changed the way that they died. As most undertaking careers of Black morticians were not started until the 1880s, and even as late as the 1890s, the work done by ministers provided the set-up to their death work. The undertakers Samuel Farris, Elijah Cook, and Preston Taylor were born enslaved, and in the decades after emancipation ended up in the mortuary business after trying their hands at steam boating, church

building, teaching, and pastoring. It is not clear if S.L. Long was ever enslaved, but he too turned to the mortuary business to serve his community. The fulfillment of death work was just one part of community uplift.

Immediately following the war Black soldiers and civilians played an integral role in locating, identifying, and burying the dead.[121] Near Savannah Georgia there was a "Negro Cemetery" where the dead soldiers of a unit of the U.S. Colored Troops was buried. Their graves were identified with painted headstones and well-tended to by the freed Black population in the area.[122]Black southerners also tended graves of white Union soldiers.[123] After the war there were 30,000 Black soldiers buried in National Cemeteries. Only about 10,000 were actually identified despite the effort US Colored Troops put into identifying Union dead.[124]

In 1865 there were more than four million newly emancipated formerly enslaved people. Questions about their futures plagued the minds of religious men and women in both the North and South. Benevolent societies, missionary associations, and the Freedman's Bureau made provisions for the immediate needs of the enslaved people. Perhaps most importantly, spiritual uplift was rooted in the culture, religiosity, and the living community of the formerly enslaved people themselves.[125] Among the formerly enslaved were Wesley Gaines, who went on to become a Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Elijah Cook, who went on to open his own mortuary establishment. There were others, too, like Theophilus Gould Steward, a northerner, who came from New Jersey to conduct missionary work on behalf of African Methodism. Women also played an important role in this new South and in the spiritual and

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[121] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering…,* 227.
[122] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering…,* 227.
[123] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering…,* 228.
[124] Faust, *This Republic of Suffering…,* 236.
[125] 'Spiritual uplift' is used here to mean the emotional healing and religious self-actualization of formerly enslaved people.

death work that Reconstruction entailed. Through religious benevolence, animated spiritual practices, and political leadership, death practices of formerly enslaved individuals in the South reaffirmed value and personhood. The missionary work spread literacy and bolstered community which in turn transformed worship and funeral practices. The men and women who chose death work also chose school and church building for their communities.

The establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Churches was foundational to Black people in the South being able to exercise agency over the treatment of their dead. Though these churches existed before emancipation, they were primarily located in the North until the end of the Civil War. During the war, A.M.E. ministers from the North were working in the South with the newly freed refugees.[126] A.M.E. churches would circulate subscription papers to help pay for burial of their members.[127] The centrality of the A.M.E. Church during Reconstruction cannot be overstated, "as freed people expanded… home ownership, built businesses, and invested their hard-earned wealth in fraternal organizations, schools, churches, and independent black settlements, they were laying a foundation both for community autonomy and a greater role in government."[128] The A.M.E. Church was a vehicle to fulfilling needs and becoming full citizens for people who had recently been held in bondage. The A.M.E. Church was the physical space created to fulfill community needs not being met elsewhere.

One of the needs not being met elsewhere was spiritual and emotional stewardship during the loss of a loved one and the actual burying process. The process by which Black Americans in the Postbellum South came to their burial and mourning tradition took a different path than mainline Protestants. The oldest mortuary serving white patrons opened in 1759 in Colonial

[126] Hall, "Tallahassee's Black Churches, 1865-1885," 185.
[127] Hall, "Tallahassee's Black Churches, 1865-1885," 188.
[128] Hall, "Tallahassee's Black Churches, 1865-1885," 188.

Williamsburg.[129] After emancipation the communal nature of death endured as cities across the South witnessed Black mourning customs practiced in the open for the first time. Black mourning, characterized by its animation, was in contrast with the much more reserved displays of grief enacted by white America. By the 1880s most mainline white Protestant funerals were characterized by their gloom and "stiff formality".[130] The tendency to outwardly display grief and sorrow, however, became more prevalent as the nineteenth century came to a close.[131]White families could choose to use the services of a funeral home, a church, or to take care of the remains themselves. This level of access to dignity for the physical remains and to spiritual stewardship were things that were a given for any middle class white American but had to be fought for most Black Southerners after the Civil War. In the years after Emancipation Black people were often left with limited choices for taking care of their dead, just as they had been during slavery. The value they placed on taking care of their community members presents itself in their religious conceptions of death and in the perseverance of the Black funeral industry.

The Black funeral industry took a little more than a decade to emerge after the end of the Civil War, but in the meantime, Black ministers administered to the needs of the dead and bereaved. By the beginning of the twentieth century individuals who had been left destitute less than fifty years earlier had spread literacy, built churches, transformed notions of heaven and home, and established a funeral industry to take care of their own. When formerly enslaved people were shut out by white establishments both spiritually and physically, they created their own institutions to serve the needs of their community. The time between the end of the Civil War and the establishment of the Negro Funeral Directors Association in 1907, a period of forty-

[129] Our History - Bucktrout Funeral Home and Crematory.
[130] Habenstein and Lamers, 391.
[131] Habenstein and Lamers, 393.

two years, holds changes in which the communities of formerly enslaved people made their own space for their dead. The Civil War had changed the country and the immense death had changed mortuary work.

The religious and spiritual lives of formerly enslaved people in the Postbellum South were rooted in the syncretized worship practices and tight bonds of kinship networks which continued after death and after emancipation. The importance of the endurance of distinct forms of worship and burial cannot be overstated. W.E.B. DuBois explains that it was the Black church that preserved African religious culture and that it was the last social institution to remain through slavery.[132] He continued by explaining that the tendency for ecstatic worship is rooted in the nature worship and sorcery practiced by West Africans.[133] The presence of these aspects of African religious traditions transformed understandings of death and afterlife for formerly enslaved people. They made the spiritual world alive for Black methodists.

After emancipation, white people no longer saw the use in Christianizing Black people or otherwise providing religious instruction. Here, Sara Duncan, wife of a Methodist minister explained, "The white people of the South, having lost their proprietary right in the black man as a slave felt that they were under no further obligation to help him religiously and otherwise… and the former religious protectorate over the black man became a thing of the past, he being left to shift for himself."[134] Once white southerners no longer felt they benefitted from the religious instruction of Black people, they stopped. Slavery had commodified their bodies and Christianity served as a potentially useful tool for white enslavers, but after emancipation, the Black people,

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[132] W.E. Burghardt DuBois, *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Under the Direction of Atlanta University; together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University May 26, 1903* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1903), ii.
[133] DuBois, *The Negro Church…,*1.
[134] Sara J. Duncan, *Progressive Missions in the South: With Illustrations and Sketches of Missionary Workers and Ministers and Bishop's Wives* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1906), 161.

having taken back ownership of their bodies, also took back access and ownership of religion and mourning. The missionary work of the A.M.E. Church continued through Reconstruction and included the building of schools to spread literacy and churches to spread the word of the Bible and was done for the purpose of racial uplift. Religious missionary work in the South conducted by Black Northerners and formerly enslaved people themselves allowed for autonomy over instruction and provided a sense of pride.

Exercise of control over worship affirmed humanity by incorporating practices of ancestors and refusing to conform to white standards. DuBois spoke on the importance of having autonomy over religion for Black people, "In the South the whites were in complete and absolute control, in church as in state. Colored people attended and held membership in the same church as the whites, though they did not possess the same rights or privileges."[135] Emancipation had granted Black Southerners autonomy over their physical existence, but the missionary work conducted by the African Methodist Church and other Black churches gave them autonomy over their spiritual lives.

The defiant spirit of African Methodism had a long tradition. Bishop Benjamin Tanner wrote that, "THE giant crime committed by the Founders of the African M. E. Church, against the prejudiced white American, and the timid black--the crime which seems unpardonable, was that they dared to organize a Church of men, men to think for themselves, men to talk for themselves, men to act for themselves."[136] Ability to worship and convene with the afterlife and spiritual world as one sees fit is integral to full freedom. Freedom of mind and spirit is equally as important as freedom of body for members of the African Methodist Church. The A.M.E.

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[135] DuBois, *The Negro Church…,* 33.
[136] Benjamin Tucker Tanner, *An Apology for African Methodism* (Baltimore: 1867), https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/tanner/tanner.html#p347, 16.

Church, moreover, advocated for political equality of Black men and full citizenship. This fierce independence translates into their worship service and how they conceive of death and afterlife and the emotionalism of worship service is evidence of the independence of mind of Black congregants to not conform to white standards.

One white standard to which the African Methodists did not conform was the manner in which they worshipped and how they conceived of the afterlife. The A.M.E. church engaged in Holy Ghost preaching which employed a more enthusiastic and musical church service than mainline Protestant denominations did. Speaking on the Holy Ghost preaching style Reverend Alfred Lee Ridgel writes, "preaching not characterized by the Holy Ghost is no preaching. Preaching of a mere theoretical nature is not the preaching that the world most needs to-day…we have always indorsed an educated ministry, but not a *dead* ministry."[137] This animation and musicality is what DuBois attributed as the last aspect African religion to survive slavery. The emotional nature of Holy Ghost preaching served to give people a closer and more visceral connection with God and with the spiritual community.

This emotional connection with God and the spirits can be seen in funeral practices of African Methodists. Similar, though they were to other Christian beliefs, African Methodist beliefs about connection with ancestors and the world of the dead is evident in recurring themes of meeting in a better land and also rooted in African conceptions of afterlife. This connection with the world of ancestors led the African Methodists to adopt community-oriented burial practices, as the deceased family member or kinsperson was still felt to be part of the community.

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[137] Alfred Lee Ridgel, *Africa and African Methodism* (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1896), 74-6.

Finding that they could now worship freely, formerly enslaved people formed their own congregations and practiced accordingly, "Hence, following the close of the Civil War, many of them broke away from such special ministrations and followed the leadership of men of their own race."[138] Baptists also began setting up congregations in the years after the war, and an interdenominational solidarity formed.[139] Thus, the Black church offered the first opportunity in freedom for political leadership within Black communities. While Black Baptist churches in the South also served to uplift the formerly enslaved population and bolster communities, it was, the African Methodist church which began explicitly in defiance of white supremacy.

Many of the African Methodist Ministers and formerly enslaved people embraced other denominations and there was great respect especially between the Baptists and the Methodists as they say that they were both working toward a common cause of uplift. Sarah Early wrote that "There was something wonderful about the amity that existed between the pastors of the various branches of the Methodist and Baptist churches. They conversed freely together on all vital topics concerning the advancement of the churches and the building up of the Redeemer's kingdom on earth, and the general interest of our oppressed people".[140] The Black churches of the South had united under common cause of uplift. Sarah Early also recalled how the Baptists had helped to construct their A.M.E. Church.[141]

In the direct aftermath of the Civil War the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) began missionary work with those formerly enslaved by sending itinerant ministers and their families to the South to administer to the spiritual needs of the formerly enslaved. Before

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[138] George F. Bragg, *History of the Afro-American Group of the Episcopal Church* (Church Advocate Press: Baltimore, MD, 1922), https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/bragg/bragg.html, 137.
[139] DuBois, *The Negro Church…,*40.
[140] Sarah J.W. Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W. Early, One of the Pioneers of African Methodism in the West and the South* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House A.M.E. Church Sunday School Union, 1894), https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/early/early.html, 81.
[141] Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 115.

the war the enslaved people of the South belonged to the same churches as their enslavers. In Charleston, the Black people of the city began forming their own churches and contributing to the Union cause as soon as it was occupied. There was, however, within Charleston a Black burial ground held in control of the white Methodist Church.[142] African Methodist missionary Sarah Duncan explained missionary work as the war came to a close, "During the war period, missionary work among the slaves of necessity declined in interest and extent, but did not wholly lapse until the relation of slave and master had changed as a result of the conflict between the States."[143] As evidence of the A.M.E. church's dedication to propping up communities, five decades after the founding of the A.M.E. Church it operated twenty-seven mutual aid and benevolent societies which spread literacy to formerly enslaved Southerners as well as administered to their corporeal and emotional needs in sickness, death, and bereavement.[144] The social institutions built by the A.M.E. ministers and benevolent societies in the immediate Postbellum period strengthened community ties and reinforced Black understandings of death and afterlife to allow for perseverance of spirit and custom. It was during the 1870s-1890s that benevolent societies and Burial Leagues reached their height.[145]

Bishop Daniel Payne, who was born free, made the first foray of African Methodism into the South, "In May, 1865, according to the act of the General Conference of the A. M. E. Church of 1864, calling for the establishment of the church in the South, Bishop Daniel A. Payne entered the city of Charleston, South Carolina, to plant the standard of African Methodism."[146] In the state which first seceded from the Union, Daniel Payne made the first inroads of African

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[142] "The Churches," *South Carolina Ledger* (Charleston, SC), December 16, 1865, 2.
[143] Sara Duncan, *Progressive Missions in the South…,* 161.
[144] Tanner, *An Apology for African Methodism*…, 50.
[145] Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 41.
[146] Gaines, *African Methodism In the South…*, 6.

Methodism with his call to the formerly enslaved men and women of the South to join the church. Wesley John Gaines was one man who joined the itinerant ministry after spending the preceding years of his life enslaved. Speaking of the moment in May that he learned of his freedom he says, "In a moment the pent-up tears flooded my cheek and the psalm of thanksgiving arose to my lips. 'I am free,' I cried, hardly knowing in the first moments of liberty what and how great was the boon I had received. Others, my companions, toiling by my side, caught up the glad refrain, and shouts and rejoicings rang through the fields."[147] After gaining his freedom, Bishop Gaines became licensed to preach by the Methodist Church, South, but within two years joins the A.M.E Church, "The writer was licensed to preach in the M. E. Church, South, by the Rev. Mr. Davies, Presiding Elder of that church; but he joined the A. M. E. Church under the administration of William Gaines, in Columbus, Ga."[148] By joining the itinerant ministry for the African Methodist Church as opposed to the Methodist Church, South, Bishop Gaines is making a clear choice for an anti-racist theology to affirm the humanity of his fellow formerly enslaved Southerners (Figure 2).

The ministers from the North also reinforced the Black communities of the South. Reverend Theophilus Gould Steward was born free in Gouldstown, New Jersey, in 1843. In 1864 he joined the itinerant ministry and after the Civil War he began missionary work with the African Methodist Episcopal Church and accepted a commission to teach from the Freedman's Bureau.[149] On April 30, 1865, just days after the close of the war, Reverend Steward who was just twenty-two at the time was called on by Bishop Daniel Payne to begin his itinerant ministry

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[147] Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man…*, 72.
[148] Gaines, *African Methodism In the South…*, 10.
[149] Theophilus Gould Steward, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry From 1864 to 1914* (Philadelphia: A.M.E Book Concern, 1921), 22.

in Charleston, South Carolina.[150] Upon arriving in Charleston, Reverend Steward found the formerly enslaved population destitute, "hundreds of thousands of men, women and children just broken forth from slavery, was, so far as these were concerned, lying under an almost absolute physical and moral interdict. There was no one to baptize their children, to perform marriage, or to bury the dead."[151]

In December of 1865, Reverend Steward met his wife, Elizabeth Gadsen who was a cashier at a store in Charleston (Figure 3).[152] After his marriage to Elizabeth, Reverend Steward went to Marion, South Carolina to set to the work of forming a congregation of a church and school. Unfortunately, unhappy white residents burned down the donated church and school buildings. The congregants were undeterred and continued their worship practice.[153] In Marion, South Carolina, Reverend Steward assembled a second school of one hundred students. At the beginning of the year only two could read. By the end of the school year "in June, practically all of the one hundred school children could read and many could write."[154] Thus, just a year after the end of slavery, Reverend Steward had taught nearly one hundred formerly enslaved children to read, filling a community and spiritual need. He was apparently quite proud of this class of students and when writing nearly fifty-five years later hoped to still hear from them, "If these pages should fall under the eye of any one who was a member of my school in Marion in 1866, I would be very grateful to receive a letter from any such person."[155] The ties of community transcended space and time for Reverend Steward. Reverend Steward, who engaged in death work in the South, also engaged in educational uplift of his community which brought him

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[150] Steward, *Fifty Years ...,* 25.
[151] Steward, *Fifty Years...,* 33.
[152] Steward, *Fifty Years*…, 65.
[153] Steward, *Fifty Years*..., 67-8.
[154] Steward, *Fifty Years...,* 68.
[155] Steward, *Fifty Years*..., 69.

emotionally closer to the community in which his death work took place. Death work comprised the uplift of the community.

An incident which speaks to the benevolent and compassionate spirit of the African Methodist church which happened between Reverend Steward and an imprisoned white man occurred in 1866. When passing by the Marion jail, a white man called to Reverend Steward from his cell window. Reverend Steward went over to the man and found he was kept in appalling conditions and condemned to death. He read from the Bible with the man and prayed with him each day until his execution. The condemned man's sister also sought comfort from Reverend Steward from the spirits she believed were plaguing her house. Here again he obliges and accompanies her to her house and prays with her until she is satisfied the spirits are gone.[156] The sense of community obligation and compassion felt by Reverend Steward was plain is his regard for the condemned man and his sister.

The itinerancy assigns Reverend Steward to Macon, Georgia in 1868, the same year his oldest son James is born. The first church Reverend Steward pastors at in Macon was burned down in February of 1868.[157] In Macon he sets to work building another church, Steward A.M.E., which he and the congregation completed in 1869 (Figure 4). The congregation had been holding service in an armory while they built their church. It was at this church that he had a group of congregants so fervent he called the portion of the church they occupied his "Amen corner."[158]

Concern over the immortal souls of others is a remarkable feature of African Methodism and continues in the figure of Jordan Early. The minister Jordan Early began preaching in

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[156] Steward, *Fifty Years…*, 68-9.
[157] Steward, *Fifty Years…,* 122.
[158] Steward, *Fifty Years…,* 136.

Tennessee in 1866 (Figure 5). Reverend Early's wife writes, "So tenderly did he care for the sick and dying that perhaps he was called upon to preach a greater number of funeral sermons than any other minister in the Connection. He was called by special request to perform the burial rites for hundreds of his own members, besides many friends who were members of other churches."[159] Reverend Early extended his services beyond his own congregation to other members of his community, further linking the provision of a dignified burial with ties of community.

Lewis Givens, a condemned Black man, was hanged at Shelby County Jail in Tennessee with 6,000 onlookers. The day before his execution ministers from local churches baptized him. Reverend Early was one of those who comforted the condemned man, "During his incarceration he was waited on ceaselessly by the Revs. J.W. Early, Robert Talley, Blackwell Williams, William Armour, W.C. Anderson, and Joseph Ross of the African Methodist Church. They labored with him, and had at last had the satisfaction of making him not only resigned to his lot, but even "glad to go," as he said to us in his cell an hour before execution."[160] The paper reported that there were white women present and that it was improper. Lewis Givens was brought out for execution at 2:15 in the afternoon. For two hours before his execution he was accompanied by Reverend Early who was heard singing and praying.

The paper reported on the demeanor of the man, "His step was firm, and his eye wandered around the crowd as he passed through them to see, apparently, if he could find a friend—which he did as he reached the steps, at the foot of which stood an old fellow-servant of his, once a slave of the same master…A nod of recognition and a brief good-bye was all that was

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[159] Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 156.
[160] "The Gallows. Execution of Lewis Givens, the Negro Murderer" *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, October 9, 1869, 4.

exchanged between them."[161] Although the man was trying to appear stoic, the sight of a familiar face would have likely given the man a last comfort. Reverend J.W. Early joins him on the scaffold and read the 85th psalm. Reverend Blackwell prayed and many of the Black onlookers joined in. When at first Givens was silent upon being asked for his last words, Reverend Early encouraged him "speak out like a man."[162] He used his last words to profess his innocence and believed he would be going to heaven. The man had been convicted of the axe murder of his lover's husband. Givens' body was left to hang for twenty minutes before being cut down. There had apparently been an earlier incident in which a condemned man was cut down before being fully dead, thus leading Sherriff Curry to leave Givens hanging an extra eight minutes after reporting that his limbs had gone cold. Givens was buried in a "rough poplar coffin" from McCaffrey and Cornelius undertakers, paid for by the county, and buried in the Potter's Field.[163]

The criminal cases of Black men led some ministers to engage in political activity. Reverend Steward was politically active on the matter of fair treatment of Black Americans in courts of law. In the summer of 1870, *The Georgia Weekly Telegraph* reported on a speech that Reverend Steward and another man named Jeff Long made calling out the unfair treatment that Black people received in court. The newspaper was not sympathetic to Reverend Steward and his cause, instead it listed several instances where Black men had stolen from or murdered white people and escaped with what the paper thought were light sentences. The paper denounces Reverend Steward, Long, and their propositions as a "threatening demonstration."[164] The paper further claims that "nobody seeks to injure the negro if the negro will behave himself…when a

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[161] "The Gallows…"
[162] "The Gallows…"
[163] "The Gallows…"
[164] "Just the Reverse," *The Georgia Weekly Telegraph* (Macon, GA), July 5, 1870, 5.

negro makes a violent assault upon a white man…he may expect to be killed."[165] Just as Black people's lives had been dispensable to much of the white South during slavery, it was still so five years after its abolition. The white people of the South had not and were not going to value the lives, deaths, and communities of Black people, so the Black people had to take political action to enact their own value.

In 1873 a cholera epidemic swept Nashville killing many of Reverend Early's congregants. The death toll increased rapidly to coincide with the General Conference of A.M.E. Churches which was held in Nashville that year. Citizens of Nashville and members of the conference were dying faster than coffins could be made.[166] The emotional toll of this disaster is hard to tell from the sources, and the evidence of how it was mourned has yet to come to light, but the dual traumas of recent enslavement and loss must have required spiritual fortitude for Reverend Early's congregation. In 1876 Reverend Early was assigned to a different church, Bethel A.M.E., in Nashville, one which was extremely worn down without windowpanes, heating, lighting, or a bolted door.[167] Little else is mentioned of this church.

At the District Conference of 1876 in Pulaski, Tennessee, Reverend Early met with Elder W.J. Burch who had a foreboding feeling as recalled by Reverend Early. A few days later, while giving the funeral of one of his congregants, Elder Burch and his wife were killed by lightening in a thunderstorm.[168] It was around this time, in 1878, that Samuel Farris started his Memphis undertaking establishment.[169] Farris was born enslaved in 1845 in Kentucky. During the Civil

[165] "Just the Reverse,"
[166]Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 15693-5.
[167] Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 156, 113, 129.
[168] Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 156, 149.
[169] James T. Haley, *Afro-American Encyclopaedia; or, the Thoughts Doings, and Sayings of the Race, Embracing Addresses, Lectures, Biographical Sketches, Sermons, Poems, Names of Universities, Colleges, Seminaries, Newspapers, Books, and a History of the Denominations, giving the Numerical Strength of Each. In fact, it teaches every subject of interest to the colored people, as discussed by more than one hundred of their wisest and best men and women* (Nashville: Haley and Florida, 1895), https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/haley/haley.html, 207.

War his enslaver took him to Mississippi and then to Alabama to avoid Farris's freedom. At the end of the war Farris walked to Memphis where he found work on a steamboat. In 1872 he married Emilene Yose.[170]

Memphis, like Nashville, also dealt with an epidemic. Yellow fever came to the city in 1878, with Sam Farris employed as an undertaker at that time. Black people were used as grave diggers, "Undertakers are pressed to bury the dead…dozens of coffined dead were lying on top of the ground waiting for interment, it being a difficult matter to procure enough colored grave-diggers."[171] The value white people placed on the lives of Black people was evident by their willingness to treat them as dispensable. The use of Black people as grave diggers as favorable over white grave diggers was rooted in racist beliefs about Black pathology.[172]

Death work for a long time was classified as domestic work as most people died at home, under the purview of women caretakers. With the professionalization and monetization of the funeral industry, women slowly found themselves phased out of death care. Despite this, they still played integral roles in caregiving for the sick and administered to the spiritual needs of the bereaved. They furthermore worked tirelessly in spreading literacy for the A.M.E. Church. Duncan writes that "It is largely to the credit of woman that the hundreds of missionaries are out to-day that are doing good work and building up the Master's kingdom in all parts of the globe. What would they do were it not for the missionary women who have a missionary spirit and go forth to raise money to help them?"[173] Black women also experienced discrimination in their caregiving. It was often thought that Black mothers did not care as much about their children as

[170] Haley, *Afro-American Encyclopaedia…*, 207.
[171] "The Deadly Scourge," *The San Francisco Examiner,* September 2, 1878, 1.
[172] Interestingly, a similar incident occurred to Reverend Richard Allen in 1793 when yellow fever swept Philadelphia, see *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793: And a Refutation of Some Censures Thrown Upon Them in Some Late Publications.*
[173] Sara Duncan, *Progressive Missions in the South…,* 166.

white mothers. This prejudice was shot down by Bishop Gaines who said, "They [Black women] are attentive to their sick and show often to the afflicted in their households a tender consideration that is admirable and beautiful. No more gentle, soothing, sympathizing nurses can be found in the world than the best type of our colored women"[174]

As the years after Emancipation wore on, the nature of A.M.E. worship changed for some congregations. For Reverend Early's in Nashville he saw his congregation take on a more refined nature. His wife, Sarah, recalled that "A higher form of church ordinances was developed, and refinement and elegance was attendant in the house of God. The boisterous, demonstrative mode gradually disappeared in most instances, and the worship became of a more rational and elevated character."[175] She emphasized that this change came most prominently from the younger generation. It seemed the more removed from enslavement the religion became the further from ecstatic practice it also became. As more people were born free and more formerly enslaved people learned to read, the nature of worship changed, "It was an excellent proof of the advancement of our people, both religiously and socially, that they were willing to give so liberally of their hard-earned pittances for the establishment of the Gospel and the enlightenment of the race."[176] Literacy represented a freedom forbidden in slavery, thus the combination of this freedom with freedom over religion served to uplift Southern Black spiritual communities.

As literacy rates increased for formerly enslaved people across the South, opinions of worship style began to change. While some started to move away from ecstatic worship service, others still saw its benefit, including Bishop Gaines who remarked, "Of the two extremes--dead formalism and a mere religious emotionalism--I should prefer the latter, worthless though both

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[174] Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man…*, 181.
[175] Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…,* 79.
[176] Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…* 146.

may be… Beneath his deep feelings there are often a spiritual and a divine energy and power, which take hold upon the heart and life, and give them uplift and inspiration and purity. I, for one, am proud of the emotional warmth and susceptibility of my people."[177] The schools built served two purposes, to spread literacy but also to prop up communities as defense against unlivable living and to fill emotional and spiritual needs.

Also commenting on the changing worship style, W.E.B. DuBois noted that ecstatic practice is a relic of the past, "The supreme element in the old system was emotionalism…Of course we all understand that it has always occupied first place in the worship of the Negro church; it is a heritage of the past."[178] Continuing though, he admitted that the ecstatic nature of worship played a role in the spiritual uplift of the South; "In the absence of clearly defined doctrines, the great shout, accompanied with weird cries and shrieks and contortions and followed by a multi-varied "experience" which takes the candidate through the most heart-rending scenes--this to-day in Thomas county is accepted by the majority of the churches as unmistakable evidence of regeneration."[179]

DuBois also attributed the change in worship style to rising literacy rates. He wrote that, "Now, the preachers who have had some advantages of study, who have come into contact with the learning of the schools, and have in their intelligence gotten above the ignorant preacher of the country, know that the old order of things is wrong."[180] Literacy guided the hymns and psalms that had previously been committed to memory. The control over information exercised by enslavers was gone and Black Southerners could now seek out their own spiritual information, "It was an excellent proof of the advancement of our people, both religiously and

[177] Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man…*, 187-8.
[178] DuBois, *The Negro Church…*, 58.
[179] DuBois, *The Negro Church…*, 58.
[180] DuBois, *The Negro Church…*, 58.

socially, that they were willing to give so liberally of their hard-earned pittances for the establishment of the Gospel and the enlightenment of the race."[181] Though literacy led A.M.E. ministers and their congregations to begin pulling away from purely emotional worship services of the past, it also led to more intentional and proscribed funeral services.

In Georgia, Bishop Gaines experienced the emotionalism that DuBois reported on firsthand, he noted that "The worship of the negro is one of the simplest sort. He has no appreciation of elaborate rituals, of services consisting of forms and ceremonies. Hence, the great mass of the colored race have united either with the Methodist or Baptist Churches."[182] Pageantry in worship service was not important for connecting with a higher power, rather for the feelings of unity and celebration of life. This contrasted with the elaborate funeral rituals which emerged during this time, in which it was the spirits of deceased loved ones which warranted more elaborate rituals in order to be grieved and celebrated properly. Also central to conversion and spiritual health of formerly enslaved people were revivals and awakenings. Revivals and awakenings were central aspects to A.M.E. creed at this time, "The intensity and effectiveness of that religious awakening will never be forgotten by those who partook of its benefits until their latest hour."[183]

White control morphed after emancipation but attempt to limit access to Black forms of worship and grief persisted. In 1867 *The Orangeburg News* of South Carolina published a poem lamenting the end of slavery and the love enslavers had for the people they enslaved. The poem read, ""Beneath the ashes of this simple grave, Repose the ashes of a faithful slave. Finished his

[181] Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 146.
[182] Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man…*, 185.
[183] Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 139.

work; his earthly labor o'er."[184] Here the author recognized the simplicity of enslaved burials, and, like Nathan Parker Willis, is keen to point out the fidelity of the enslaved person and the centrality of labor to his existence. Continuing, the author wrote, "He was not starved and kicked and beat through life, Then hacked and mammocked by the student's knife!...He has received his hard-earned, and all-deserved 'Well Done.'"[185] Here the author references and then disputes claims of grave robbers taking the corpses of formerly enslaved individuals to sell to medical colleges. For white people in the Postbellum South the best afterlife they could conceive of for formerly enslaved people was one in which they were praised by white people.

Threats of white supremacy and white control of worship and mourning continued after the Civil War. Sarah Early, the wife of Reverend Jordan Early, recalled the violence her congregation faced from the Ku Klux Klan in Nashville after the war. On one particular instance Klansmen had attacked the home of a Black family and in the ensuing scuffle the father had shot and killed a Klansman in self-defense. Enraged, the Klan threatened violence if any Black people should gather to meet. Defiant, Mrs. Early and Reverend Early held service anyway Sunday, the following day.[186]

Bishop Gaines and other Black Southerners had violent run-ins with the Ku Klux Klan, "In many instances, their humble homes were invaded by these lawless bands, and colored men were shot to death, or, if their lives were spared, they were cruelly beaten."[187] Mirroring the end of Federal Reconstruction, by the end of the 1870s persecution of Black churches had slowed, "Instead of persecution and abuse, we now receive general favor. No church is now held in

[184] "Old Bob. Well Done, Thou Good and Faithful Servant" *The Orangeburg News* (Orangeburg, SC), April 13, 1867, 1.
[185] "Old Bob. Well Done…"
[186]Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 65-6.
[187] Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man…*, 78.

greater esteem by the public than the A. M. E. Church."[188] While Reverend Steward no longer felt at risk of white supremacists burning his church down, judgement and other attempts to control or influence Black grief and Black joy continued.

Public displays of grief, joy, singing, crowds, and brass bands were all features of Black funerals during this time period with which white Southerners took issue with. One white Tennessean observed a Black funeral in 1884 and wrote of the offensive extravagance he saw. He also noted that the mourners were not typically gloomy as he would have expected, writing that, "I got a good look at their faces. They all seemed to be expressly jubilant, as now and then they looked out and back at the tremendous following, for the funeral was really a great success."[189] This kind of judgement of Black funeral services pushed many mourners to the margins to seek humane and dignified care for their dead. The Black undertakers themselves also faced discrimination from white Southerners as "It is the undertaker who is responsible nine times out of ten for the unexampled extravagance and absurd displays at funerals ordered by those who can ill-afford such folly."[190]

When the living community of the A.M.E. Church was translated to doctrine and care of the dead it manifests itself in compassionate practices. The 1817 published doctrines of the A.M.E. Church states unhesitatingly that "We will on no account whatever receive a present for administering baptism, or for burying the dead."[191] The availability of dignified religious burial should be open to all. It goes on to discuss the duties of the minister at funerals. African Methodist ministers had many of the same duties at funerals as white ministers but also had to

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[188]Sarah Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W…*, 146.
[189] Joaquin Miller, "A Negro Funeral: A Protest Against Lavish Extravagance and Absurd Displays at Burial Ceremonies," *Leaf-Chronicle Weekly* (Clarksville, TN), March 18, 1884, 3.
[190] Joaquin Miller, "A Negro Funeral."
[191] Richard Allen and Jacob Tapisco, *The Doctrines and Disciplines of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Madison, NJ: Methodist Center, 1817), 91.

contend with the dual trauma of loss and slavery. As such some of what the minister is supposed to say at the grave is representative of an enslaved past, "I HEARD a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write; From henceforth blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit: for they rest from their labours."[192] Emphasis on an afterlife free from labor has been a consistent feature of Black Christian cosmologies and speaks to the spiritual community believed to exist beyond the physical world.

Belief in heaven was pervasive among Black Americans at this time, and it took on the form of a better land with ancestors. Bishop Gaines wrote that, "It has been said that man is a religious animal. It is pre-eminently true of the negro. Whatever may be the personal character of an individual of this race, he never questions the existence of a Supreme Being, or doubts the existence of a future state of rewards and punishment."[193] This belief in heaven had been a holdover from the period of enslavement.

Something strange and unintended happened during slavery. Black Americans, isolated from their distant relatives and from their homeland, began to think of the South as their place of origin. Bishop Gaines explains, "Many ship-loads left for Africa, and hundreds braved the dangers of a bitter climate and turned their faces toward the North and West. These schemes of emigration were at length found to be, for the most part, impracticable and ill-advised. After many unsuccessful attempts to leave his Southern *habitat*, and after the expenditure of a vast amount of unnecessary talk and enthusiasm, the negro, as a race, reached the conclusion to remain where he was."[194] Slavery and the ensuing emancipation had redefined home for Black Americans.

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[192] Allen and Tapisco, *The Doctrines and Disciplines of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 146.
[193] Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man…*, 185.
[194] Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man…*, 79.

In 1887 a man who had been enslaved on the same plantation as Bishop Gaines passed away. His obituary read "Uncle Billy Toombs was buried in the colored cemetery here in the presence of a large number of the best white citizens as well as almost the entire colored population."[195] In contrast to Bishop Gaines who welcomed freedom gladly, Billy Toombs apparently hated abolitionists and refused to leave the man who enslaved him.[196] Billy Toombs was apparently respected by the white population for his loyalty to the South, yet they still buried him in the Black graveyard.

Through the 1870s and 1880s as funeral parlors became more common, Black Southerners increasingly found themselves shut out by white undertakers. David T. Howard of Atlanta started his undertaking business as a direct response to the mistreatment of Black corpses and mourners by white undertakers and subsequently became quite successful.[197] Elijah Cook started his business in Montgomery for the same reason. Elijah Cook's parents died before his third birthday and his brother was separated from him by age twelve.[198] At some point he married and had two children. Unfortunately, one of his sons died young before emancipation. While enslaved Cook learned carpentry and would use this in his life after the war. After emancipation he joined with two other men and built a school in the basement of a Montgomery A.M.E. Zion church before entering politics and finally the mortuary business.[199]

As an undertaker, Elijah Cook did not stop tending to the needs of his community. Cook put in the lowest bid to furnish the city with pauper coffins.[200] He advertised his business as providing Black residents of Montgomery with "First Class Coffins" with the use of "First Class

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[195] "Uncle Billy Toombs," *The Intelligencer* (Anderson, SC), September 8, 1887, 1.
[196] "Uncle Billy Toombs."
[197] G.F. Richings, *Evidences of Progress Among Colored People, 8th ed.* (Philadelphia: Geo S. Ferguson Co., 1902), https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/richings/richings.html, 273.
[198] "Mr. Elijah Cook," *The American Star* (Montgomery, AL), September 1, 1905, 2.
[199] "Mr. Elijah Cook."
[200] R.B Snodgrass, "An Ordinance," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, (Montgomery, AL), June 5, 1885, 2.

Hearses" at rates he promised would be affordable.[201] Undertakers sometimes also served as ministers and would lead interdenominational funeral services connecting their work to the ministers and mutual aid societies.

David T. Howard became an undertaker in Atlanta, Georgia after the Civil War. He was born enslaved and took his name from his enslaver, Colonel T.C. Howard. After emancipation David Howard became a hotel waiter. Born in 1849, he was freed on the morning of May 30, 1865. Howard never received any formal education. Howard believed social equality was political propaganda. [202] In 1883 he opened the first Black-owned funeral home in Atlanta, which his daughter took over after his death.[203] Like Elijah Cook, David Howard also went out of his way to provide decent burials for his city's paupers. In 1901 he placed the lowest bid of $1.24 per body to bury the Black Atlantans unable to afford their own burial.[204] Also like Elijah Cook, Howard went into business because he was displeased with how the Black dead in the city were treated by white undertakers. Explaining to G.F. Richings in 1901, "I can only mention a few of these. I met in Atlanta a very successful colored undertaker in the person of David T. Howard, who was prompted to go into that business because of the way white undertakers treated the colored people when they had their funerals in charge."[205] Undertakers across the South cited this reason as theirs for going into the undertaking business.[206]

In another example of the compassion with which Black undertakers brought to their work, Samuel Farris, rather than any other white undertaker in Memphis, buried the body of an

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[201] Elijah Cook, "Notice," *The Colored Citizen*, (Montgomery, AL), October 16, 1886.
[202] "From Slavery to Riches, Pioneer Negro Points Way to Racial Understanding," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 17, 1920.
[203] "David Howard Firm Started 59 Years Ago," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 1, 1942.
[204] "Will Bury Negro Paupers: David Howard, Undertaker, Agrees to do so at $1.24 per Head," *The Atlanta Constitution*, March 31, 1901.
[205] Richings, *Evidences of Progress Among Colored People…,* 488.
[206] Richings, *Evidences of Progress Among Colored People…,* 542.

eight-month-old white infant. In one particularly poignant example of compassion Black people exercised toward death, a newspaper article reporting on the death of a white child who passed away as a result of criminally neglectful parents stated that "Samuel Farris, colored, the undertaker, came in and bore the mite of mortal clay away to a grave unknown and unstained by loving tears in Zion, a cemetery where only colored people are buried."[207] In 1894 Samuel Farris converted to the A.M.E. Church.

S.L. Long of Winston-Salem, North Carolina also fit a similar benevolent pattern. He opened a furniture store which also sold coffins in 1883 and began his mortuary establishment in the 1890s. There were six months between December 1893 and November 1894, S.L. Long was the only undertaker in Winston-Salem burying paupers. No other undertaking establishment reported burying paupers during that time to the Forsyth County Office of the Register.[208] By 1907 Black funeral directors from both North and South started the National Negro Funeral Directors Association as an offshoot of the National Negro Business League.[209]

Finally, Reverend Preston Taylor owned Taylor and Sons mortuary company and was a minister at a church. In 1888 he bought land and established Greenwood Cemetery, a cemetery for Nashville's Black residents. Through his undertaking establishment and his ownership of the cemetery, he serviced the needs of the families of Nashville's deceased Black residents and their families' regardless of faith. There were several funerals that Reverend Taylor conducted for A.M.E. Churches in town, including one that had previously been pastored by Reverend Early. George Hooper died in February of 1907 and was a member of St. Johns A.M.E. in Nashville.,

[207] "The Child Died From Want," *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, TN), September 24, 1894.
[208] Henry E. Keehln, "Forsyth County Exhibit 1894," *The Western Sentinel* (Winston-Salem, NC), January 17, 1895, 5.
[209] Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 51.

Reverend Taylor took “charge of the funeral arrangements.”[210] Just a couple months later, Carrie Cable died at her family home in Nashville when she was fifty-eight. St. Paul’s A.M.E. conducted her funeral services, Reverend Taylor and his mortuary took care of her remains, and she was buried at Greenwood Cemetery in April of 1907.[211]

Ministers and undertakers both engaged in death work to support their communities. The spiritual health, emotional health, and logistical barriers of dying Black in the South were overcome and fulfilled by death workers. The South had been their home for generations, but some Black Americans found home elsewhere. Black death work continued and spread. Ministers left the undertakers in the South and forged new communities in places as far away as Sacramento and Helena. Every place they went they took their warmth and work with them.

[210] “Died,” *Nashville Banner,* February 26, 1907.
[211] “Died,” *The Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), April 9, 1907.

Chapter 3: African Methodism in the Mountains: Afterlife in the West, 1854-1916

"Assurances were given me that I should enjoy perfect freedom in preaching the gospel as I understood it; and on July 21, 1891, I accepted the appointment and was soon on my way to join my regiment then stationed in Montana"[212] - Reverend T.G. Steward, A.M.E.

By 1891 the itinerant ministry was flourishing in the South, literacy rates were up, and the worship and mourning style of Black Americans had been transformed once again in just a few short decades.[213] The American West remained a holdout for African Methodism in the United States due in part to its rural patterns of settlement and the scattered small communities of Black Americans that created but also due to work which attracted the first Black settlers to the West. Back in his home of New Jersey, Reverend Theophilus Gould Steward accepted an appointment of Army Chaplain for the Buffalo Soldiers stationed at Fort Missoula as his next service to the ministry (Figure 6). In a bit of a misunderstanding, Reverend Steward arrived in Missoula alone, without his family, apparently unaware that he could bring them with.[214] He made no mention of when they joined him but at some point his wife and minor children joined him in Missoula.

The frequent movement of itinerant ministers, especially in the West, made the chronicling of specific communities difficult; therefore, the A.M.E. churches of Montana, Colorado, and California in particular have been examined. Reverend Jordan Allen who pastored in California as well as Helena, Anaconda, and Butte, and Reverend Steward who pastored at Fort Missoula are central characters to this chapter. Congregant Clara Crump also ties the

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[212] Steward, *Fifty Years…*, 268.
[213] Transformations in response to colonization but transformations on their terms.
[214] Steward, *Fifty Years…*, 268.

congregations of Montana back to slavery. Other congregants in Colorado have provided glimpses into their grief and their shifting conceptions of home.

The itinerant ministry proselytized and taught formerly enslaved Americans across the South. As the years grew further from emancipation more Black people began to leave the South; "Many ship-loads left for Africa, and hundreds braved the dangers of a bitter climate and turned their faces toward the North and West."[215] They were leaving racism, violence, and poor economic opportunity. The A.M.E. Church was at this time divided on the question of emigration to Africa. Some ministers, Bishop Gaines included, opposed the measure, but others, such as Bishop Gaines' friend Reverend Stanford supported emigration to West Africa as a solution to the Jim Crow segregation and violence they faced in the South. There was a smaller faction within the A.M.E. Church which supported movement to the West.

Many churches back East, Baptist and African Methodist alike, had been burned down, including those pastored by T.G. Steward. These factors pushed some to leave their secondary homeland. Others, however, saw moving away from the South as yet another unpleasant and involuntary displacement. Still, people went West. One such Black Westerner to take the trek West was eleven-year-old Clarissa Crump. Her ending up in the West, however, had not started as her choice. Crump, who went West with her enslaver, Phil Evans, learned of Emancipation along the way and was subsequently freed. Clara's enslaver subsequently ended up as Sheridan's Postmaster.[216] Ending up in Helena, Montana, she met and later married Union Army Veteran James Crump in 1869.[217] Clarissa Crump and her husband were two of the first Black residents of Montana but more followed, primarily in the mining and railroad camps around the state.

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[215] Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man…*, 79.
[216] "Sheridan Post Office," *The Montana Post* (Virginia City, MT), October 6, 1866.
[217] National Historic Landmark plaque

In the first years of Federal Reconstruction, Black people began moving around the South before leaving the South entirely. Black men, in particular, began to leave the South for places in the distant West. *Blacks in the West* by Sherman Savage argues that, though small in number, Black men and women impacted the settling of the West. He chooses to exclude western states which were also slave states except for Texas because of its roots in the cattle industry.[218] By excluding slave states, however, Savage is making the implicit argument that slavery was not a western phenomenon, which primary sources prove wrong. He also models his book in the fashion of the Prairie Historians, focusing on the Black contribution to the settling of the West and the closing of the frontier, beginning with fur trappers and ending in 1890.

There existed a gendered nature to the first waves of Black Americans to move West as Black publications across the country tied Black manhood to the ruggedness of the West. Just as in the South women had been shut out of the monetized death industry, women were also shut out of the pursuits leading Black men West. *The Christian Recorder* published several articles urging Black men to go West.[219] In one such article they connected "THE vastness, bountifulness, and inviting capacity of our United States ..." to the opportunities that "the Northwest presents an opening such as no section of the earth affords for the exercise of manhood and the acquirement of fortunes." [220] The politics of the A.M.E. Church leaned toward racial uplift and respectability in the years after the Civil War which also meant that women of the A.M.E. Church, though often times the backbone of causes, held little real power and were mostly held in support of their husbands. It would not be until the next century before the A.M.E.

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[218] Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1976), 2.
[219] *The Christian Recorder* during this time period re-printed articles from Black publications across the country. They also published letters and sermons sent by A.M.E Ministers.
[220] "The Moving West," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), August 12, 1897.

Church started ordaining women as members. The A.M.E. Zion Church did ordain women as ministers at this time, but had very little presence in the West.[221]

The gendered nature of death work and worship were affected by the nature of migration to the West. *The Christian Recorder* noted that in Montana, there were 16,771 men and 3,824 women.[222] Black men served in the Army, worked as cowboys, in mines, and on the railroad. Formerly enslaved Black men who knew how to work with horses became cowboys. While they had many forces pulling them to move to the West, there were also very real and dangerous forces pushing them out of the South. Some formerly enslaved Black people found themselves facing violent backlash to emancipation in the only home they had ever known. Violence in border states, particularly in Tennessee, Missouri, and Kentucky was so bad after emancipation that some Black people who ended up in the West may have done so for their own safety. Montana's Black population in 1870 was primarily from those three states.[223] Black migration westward came in two waves, one immediately following the Civil War and one after the collapse of Reconstruction.[224]

After the end of the Civil War the U.S military's next priority was relegating Native people to reservations as part of the Reservation Era of Federal Indian Policy. Occurring concurrently with Black Americans' move out West, the Indian Wars presented an opportunity for Black men to join the armed forces and fight in segregated units. These units, the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry and Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry, were established in 1866. These regiments would go on to be known as the Buffalo Soldiers. The Indian Wars of the nineteenth

[221] Dickerson-Cousin, 22, 40.
[222] Rev. Elisha Weaver, "Distribution of the Sexes," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), June 5, 1873.
[223] Barbara Carol Behan, "Forgotten Heritage: African Americans in Montana Territory, 1864-1889," *Journal of African American History* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2006), 24.
[224] Behan, 28.

century were part of the Reservation Era of Federal Indian Policy in which Native peoples in the West were relegated to reservations through treaties and military campaigns. By most accounts, Buffalo Soldiers in the military were able to have full military honors upon their deaths.

The communities that cropped up in the West were not as numerous nor as populous as they were in the South, yet they possessed unmistakable characteristics of Black worship and mourning including ecstatic practice and joy in homegoing. The small size of the communities endowed them with a self-reliance and benevolent attitude similar to what happened in the South immediately following the Civil War. The African Methodist communities and the journeys their pastors took getting here provide a snapshot of African Methodist worship and mourning in the mountain West. Due to the communities' small sizes, no independent Black-owned burial establishments have been established in Montana. The men and women settling in the West faced new barriers to worship and dignified burial but would thrive in their communities and forge new conceptions of home for themselves.

Methodism came to Montana in the years after the Civil War where at Fort Benton, Van Orsdel gave the first Methodist sermon in 1872.[225] The African Methodist church, tending to its flock in the West, sent pastors on missionary work to all corners of the country to support burgeoning Black communities and build churches and schools. Among these pastors were the Reverends P.A. Hubbard, Jordan Allen, J.W. Early, and Scott B. Jones. The first foray African Methodism took into the West, however, was actually in 1854 when Reverend T.M.D. Ward began work in California and the California Conference was started April of 1865.[226] Reverend Jordan Allen also pastored in California almost twenty years after Reverend Ward. After

[225] Nolan B. Harmon, *Encyclopedia of World Methodism Volume II* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1974), 1625.
[226] Christina Dickerson-Cousin, *Black Indians and Freedmen…,* 63.

California, it took three years for another Conference to be established in the West with the Texas Conference in 1868. It was not until 1887 that the Colorado Conference was established which included Montana.[227]

The African Methodist Episcopal Church was the heart of the community for many Black people in the West. Removed from the South where their ancestors had spent generations, Black people in the West were surrounded by unfamiliar faces and a new way of life. The A.M.E church stood at the heart of this isolation and offered a gathering place for community activities, it also continued tending to the spiritual needs of the community. As the years continued on from Emancipation the function of the itinerant ministry shifted slightly. One A.M.E. preacher reflected on the role of the Church in 1889, "while the uses to which our Churches are put are more exclusive than they were years ago, they are still used as news disseminators... there are announcements of socials fairs, festivals, cake-walks, harvest homes, excursions, parades, installations, theatrical combinations, lectures, weddings, funerals rallies, etc."[228] Social functions of the Black communities in the West are evident in the newspapers started here. Announcing funerals and other social functions at churches speaks to the community-oriented nature of Black mourning. In Montana, the A.M.E. Churches did not have their own separate burying grounds, but still the Black Montanans buried in majority white cemeteries still had their deaths announced at Black-ran institutions. Though the Christian church began as a colonizing tool it was later embraced by many Black Americans, but with some differences to white Protestant services and beliefs.[229] The Reverend J.P. Watson of St. James A.M.E. in Helena

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[227] Christina Dickerson-Cousin, *Black Indians and Freedmen…*, 63.
[228] "The Church to the Colored People," *The Christian Recorder*, May 2, 1889.
[229] Kendi, *Stamped from the beginning…*, 17.

remarked in 1893 that the African Methodist Church was the only Black church in all of Montana.[230]

Speaking on the fortitude of the African Methodist church in binding Black people together in the context of Westward migration, Reverend Scott Jones said that anyone who is "familiar with the difficulties of new work, will readily understand the situation. But now that the mist is clearing away, and light is exchanging with darkness, we feels to give the necessary time to a short communication, and exclaim in words of truth, that African Methodism leads while other denominations follow."[231] By the late 1880s the work of African Methodism in the West had started to bear fruit. There were numerous Conferences west of the Mississippi River and the denomination had even established the Indian Mission Annual Conference.[232] From the perspective of the African Methodist leaders such as Reverend Scott Jones, Reverend Elisha Weaver, and Reverend T.M.D. Ward, the movement into the West signified a flowering of Black culture, theology, and community. Urging Black easterners to find their homes in the West Reverend Scott Jones continued, "There are many things of interest in this North-west to write about, and thousands of opportunities which, if embraced by the struggling masses in the east; would aid in solving many of the grave problems in life."[233] Reverend Jones acknowledges the struggles Black people had faced back East and sought to assuage the struggles his people faced.[234]

The Twenty-Fifth Infantry stationed at Fort Missoula from 1888 until they deployed to the Spanish-American War in 1898. Reporting not long after his arrival, Revered Steward

[230] Revs. J.P. Watson and Elisha Weaver, "From All Parts of the Compass," *The Christian Recorder*, October 12, 1893.
[231] Rev. Scott B. Jones, "A Word From Helena, Montana," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), June 6, 1889.
[232] Dickerson-Cousin, *Black Indians and Freedmen…,* 63.
[233] Dickerson-Cousin, *Black Indians and Freedmen…,* 63.
[234] Scott B. Jones, "A WORD FROM HELEN, MONTANA," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), June 6, 1889.

recalled his first encounter with death at Fort Missoula, "A few days ago we had our first military funeral since I have been here. It was of private Walter Brown, of Company G., who shot himself, killing himself instantly."[235] Reverend Steward spoke no more of the funeral arrangements for the man so it is difficult to say if his death was treated differently than others. In the post-Civil War world the plight of battle and anguish of suicide was more sensitively handled than in the Antebellum years. Some Southern Black people began to develop new attitudes toward suicide in the years after Emancipation to view it as a squandering of their new "commitment to life," but it is hard to say this attitude was manifest in Fort Missoula.[236]

News of deaths in the East also often affected people in the West. In 1872 as Horace Greeley was dying, news of his condition reached the congregation at newly established St. James A.M.E. in Helena. The congregants were concerned and distressed by the news.[237] Another incident which occurred was the death of Henry Waggoner. Editor of the *Denver Star*, Henry O. Waggoner Sr. lost one of his sons in 1878. News of his son's passing was published in *The Christian Recorder*, "This young gentleman died at Lyons, France… at the early age of 26 years."[238] It is unclear from his obituary if his body was returned home to Colorado, the South, or remained in France. His obituary went on to detail the accomplishments of his short life with a condemnation of discrimination at the end, "Perhaps no young "colored" man in America has achieved so much in the way of culture, travel and office, at so early an age as Henry O. Wagoner, Jr.… And all accomplished under the peculiar disadvantages, known only to men who are the oppressed of the worst system of caste known in the civilized world, and characterized by

[235] "News of the Week," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), March 23, 1893.
[236] Sommerville, *Aberration of Mind…,* 121.
[237] "Telegrams: Death of Horace Greeley," *Helena Weekly Herald,* December 5, 1872.
[238] David Creamer, "HENRY O. WAGONER JR.," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), April 11, 1878.

himself as 'colorphobia.'"[239] Highlighting his accomplishments while articulating the systemic factors working against Black Americans, the death and memory of Henry Wagoner Jr. serves as an example of the social impacts and implications of death and death practices.

The beloved schoolteacher, Felix H. Mabson, died in Colorado in 1890 after moving there from Texas. His body was returned to Texas for burial. Publishing a reprinted article from Texas, *The Christian Recorder* read, "his death is a loss to his race … The remains arrived here last night for interment. Out of respect to his memory the colored schools of the city were closed yesterday and will close again at noon to-day to afford the school children an opportunity of attending the funeral."[240] Although Mabson called Colorado home for the latter part of his life, his eternal and spiritual conception of home remained in the South. He and his ancestors were removed from the continent of Africa long enough that Mr. Mabson thought of the South as his ancestral home. Furthermore, his death reveals the closeness of the Black community in the West. Mr. Mabson departed Galveston two years before his death, yet the school closed so that the children could attend their former teacher's funeral.

The cultural differences between the new migrants from the South and the people settled in the West was sometimes more obvious than others. Rev. J.H. Childus, who in 1891 was pastoring in Great Falls, noted that it was not a "a city of churches, neither a city famed for religion", but that it was known for its drinking.[241] Even so, Reverend Childus encouraged Black Southerners to hear the call and to come West. In an earlier issue of *The Christian Recorder*, A.M.E. Reverend Scott B. Jones, who at that time was pastoring at St. James A.M.E. in Helena,

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[239] David Creamer, "HENRY O. WAGONER JR."
[240] "DEATH OF FELIX H. MABSON. A WELL KNOWN AND POPULAR COLORED EDUCATOR," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), January 23, 1890.
[241] Rev. J.H. Childus, Rev. Elisha Weaver, ""Gathered From all Points of the Compass," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), July 16, 1891.

simply wrote, The West says come, come, young man."[242] Here, the romanticization of the West as a wide-open personified place came through. The allure of the West pulled Black men from their homes in the South for the potential of a better life with more freedoms in the West. While the A.M.E Church was politically anti-racist, it still expected traditional gender roles of its members and felt more paternalistic of its more destitute members. Judgement over the mourning practices of Black people continued in the West. Though their practices were not as in the open as they had been in the South due to the small sizes of their communities, white-ran newspapers of the West still printed articles critical of funeral customs of Black Southerners.

Reverend T.G. Steward suffered two heartbreaking losses while stationed in Missoula. The first was the death of his oldest son, James, in the summer of 1893 and the second loss followed five months after with the death of his wife in November. His oldest son, James, who had been born while Reverend Steward was just starting out his life in the itinerant ministry in Macon, Georgia in 1868, died in the summer of 1893 in New Jersey. His wife Elizabeth Gadsden Steward died while living in Missoula with her husband (Figures 7 and 8). The body of Elizabeth Steward was returned to New Jersey and interred next to her son.[243] It is not indicated whether Elizabeth Steward was embalmed, but judging the distance her corpse travelled before her interment she probably was.

Reverend Steward took leave from the army in order to attend his wife's memorial service in New Jersey. Elizabeth Steward's memorial service took place at eleven in the morning and was presided over by a number of different bishops in the A.M.E. Church. An account of her life was read and a eulogy given. Her last words "Look to Jesus" were read for the crowd of

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[242] Scott B. Jones, "A WORD FROM HELEN, MONTANA."
[243] Rev. Elisha Weaver, "Obituary," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), November 16, 1893.

mourners.[244] It's notable that her last words were an urging to others to maintain their faith. Present for the funeral were the Reverend T.G. Steward and a large number of their family as well as several members of the A.M.E. clergy. Resolutions from her husband's regiment in Missoula were read, indicating her favor among the soldiers and the community.[245]

In August of 1893 J.P. Ball, prominent Black Helena resident, went to Allen Chapel in Butte and Fort Missoula where Reverend Steward was then stationed for the purpose of beginning a fraternal organization for the Black residents of Missoula.[246] Clara Crump's husband, James, was involved with the organization in Helena.[247] Clara Crump herself served as secretary of the Juneau Club.[248] J.P. Ball was also involved with the Afro-American Republican Club and served as delegate for the Fourth Ward in Helena.[249]

Also involved in politics was Reverend Jordan Allen. Reverend Jordan Allen first went to California in October of 1887.[250] Reverend Allen was then transferred to the church in Sacramento where the church had been in decline for 10-12 years until he was sent there. In August of 1888 Reverend Jordan Allen is in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, California Reverend Allen was involved in the Republican Party. He spoke on the Prohibitionist and Democratic

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[244] Rev. Weaver, "Obituary," November 16, 1893.
[245] Rev Weaver, "Obituary," November 16, 1893.
[246] "The A.O.H.P., Colored Organization to be Established in the City and Fort Missoula," *The Missoulian* (Missoula, MT), August 29, 1893; "A.O.H.P., Adams Council No. 2 Instituted Last Night," *The Butte Miner* (Butte MT), August 26, 1893.
[247] "The National A.O.H.P."
[248] "Juneau Club Organized," *The Independent-Record* (Helena, MT), April 30, 1898.
[249] "Notice," *The Independent-Record* (Helena, MT), March 29, 1893, 5; "Republican Primaries," *The Independent-Record* (Helena, MT), March 28, 1893, 8.
[250] "A Colored Pastor, Received by His Congregation With Open Arms," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1887.

Parties.[251] Before the California Conference, Reverend Allen Pastored in Arkansas.[252] He spoke out against the Democrats of the South.[253]

Even after leaving the itinerant ministry for the 25th Infantry, Reverend Steward kept close ties with the leadership of the A.M.E. church. Writing frequently to *The Christian Recorder*, Reverend Steward reveals his ties with Reverend Chusenberry at this time. They both participated in an Emancipation Day celebration in Butte of 1894.[254] Reverend Steward also found common cause with the white ministers of Missoula. When the Methodist ministers of Missoula were granted one month leave, Reverend Steward filled in for them in their absence.[255] When the pastor of Methodist Church of Missoula spoke of Reverend Steward he said "he is an accomplished speaker and handles his subjects in masterly manner, but because he is a faithful preacher of the old Gospel. He 'hews close to the line, no matter where the chips fly.' Forcible, persuasive and convincing, it is always to the edification of believers. His teachings show that he ;is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."[256]

By 1894 the Black community of Butte had established itself enough to host an Emancipation Day celebration inviting the Black population of Montana. Black people of Montana organized an Emancipation Day celebration on September 24, 1894 and there were 800 in attendance. Reverend Chusenberry spoke as did Reverend Steward. They both spoke to the

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[251] "The City In Brief," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1888.
[252] Jordan Allen, "Church News," *The Christian Recorder,* April 19, 1877, https://go-gale-com.weblib.lib.umt.edu:2443/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=34&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=32&docId=GALE%7CEIUDXB933816253&docType=Article&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZCEB&prodId=NCCO&pageNum=2&contentSet=GALE%7CEIUDXB933816253&searchId=R6&userGroupName=mtlib_1_1195&inPS=true
[253] "Colored Voters," *The Record-Union* (Sacramento, CA), October 26, 1886.
[254] Rev. T.G. Steward, "Western Letter," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia), November 15, 1894.
[255] Rev. T.G. Steward, "Western Letter.".
[256] Rev. T.G. Steward, "Western Letter."

uplift of the race.[257]. Also present at the Emancipation Day celebration was Clara Crump, who after growing up, in her adult life joined Reverend Jordan Allen's congregation at St. James A.M.E. in Helena. Clara Crump served as a singer and pianist for St. James A.M.E. and participated by singing in St. James' Church choir for the Emancipation Day Celebration in Butte.[258] Furthermore, the family and community basis of the A.M.E. Church was evident in their call for the wives of ministers to join them at their annual conferences. The Colorado Conference of A.M.E Churches met in Helena, Montana in August 1894.[259]

The A.M.E Church at this time also bought into the politics of respectability. They believed that if they uplifted their community enough through education, literacy, and jobs that they would in time be accepted by the white populace. The A.M.E church propagated the politics of respectability by its "service in teaching lessons of refinements, charity, foresight, address, eloquence, cooperation, diplomacy to a people who would otherwise be much more largely than it is without these."[260] Black communities in the West, influenced by their local A.M.E Church, often upheld this view with participation in benevolent and fraternal organizations and Sunday School services. By 1891 *The Christian Recorder* was publishing articles chronicling the successes of the ministry in the West, reporting that "African Methodism in the West is really and truly growing in those elements which go to make up true progress. It is developing good and useful men who are employing the best measure, and as a consequence is reaping fine and large results."[261]

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[257] "It Was a Grand Success. The Celebration by the Colored People of Montana," *The Anaconda Standard*, September 25, 1894, 3.
[258] "It Was a Grand Success."
[259] Revs. J.P. Watson and Elisha Weaver, "Notice," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), August 23, 1894.
[260] "The Church to the Colored People," *The Christian Recorder*, May 2, 1889.
[261] Reverend D.P Brown, "Real and True Progress in the West," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), April 2, 1891.

The Alpha Delta Club, apparently an A.M.E fraternal organization of ministers, issued several objections to customs they had been seeing often at funerals. Many of their objections had to do with punctuality of the bereaved family and ensuring that they bereaved family has a Bible and hymn book handy. Their other objections had to do with respect for the dead at funerals. They took issue with mourners not removing their hats or standing up during the service. Another custom that they disliked was that of eating after a funeral service in the same room as the coffin. This they "protest against it as a practice most revolting to every refined mind; as one that is expensive; as one that frequently leads to gluttonous indulgence… as one which often causes the holy Sabbath to be desecrated; as one, in a word, which is utterly carnal, heathenish, devilish loathsome to all good men, and hateful to a holy God."[262] African Methodists believed that strict funeral customs should be observed so as to not offend Christian sensibilities or the spirit and memory of the deceased. African Methodists also condemned expensive funeral trends, such as that of wearing mourning attire, which was in fashion at the time.[263] Furthermore, African Methodists believed that a regular sermon should not be preached at a funeral, "I object to it, first, on the ground that there is not the least Scriptural authority for it. I object to it, secondly, on the ground that it is very rarely, indeed, that any permanent good is thereby accomplished."[264]

While living in Butte and pastoring at Schaffer Chapel, Reverend Allen developed a different view of pauper burials than many had closer to the end of the war. He wrote in 1901 to *The Butte Daily Post*, rather than *The Montana Plaindealer*, the city's Black publication, and gave a full-throated denunciation of charity for funerals. Reverend Allen contended that the

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[262] "Objectionable Funeral Customs," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), March 28, 1863.
[263] "Objectionable Funeral Customs."
[264] "Objectionable Funeral Customs."

public is “harassed” for donations any time a Black person in Butte dies.[265] Speaking to the uplift of the race, Reverend Allen said, “I believe I speak the true sentiment of the better class of the colored people of the city of Butte…those of our people who throw away their lives and money in a reckless way with little moral inclinations are only fit to fill a pauper’s grave.”[266] While Elijah Cook and David Howard were putting in the lowest bid on pauper coffins, Reverend Allen was denouncing the Black citizens of Butte.

The Colored Burial Association became active in Colorado at the beginning of the twentieth century. Norman Bruton was a young Black man who died from heart disease and dropsy in the summer of 1916. The day after his death his family paid for an advertisement in the *Canon City Record* to thank the Colored Burial Association in their help burying Bruton.[267] Bruton’s obituary reveals that his funeral took place at Mount Olive Baptist Church, an all-Black congregation, and that he was buried at Lakeside Cemetery. His mother and father and another male relative were buried in another section of the cemetery.[268]

Norman Bruton’s funeral was taken charge of by the Colored Burial Association and his funeral took place at a Black church. Naomi Howard, while she did not have the benefit of the Colored Burial Association, had her funeral presided over by a Black minister in an A.M.E. church. In contrast to the funeral of Norman Bruton or of Naomi, Cassie Frye, of Butte was a Black Baptist living in a town with neither a Black Baptist Church, nor a Black undertaker. As a result, her funeral was presided over by Reverend J.E. Noftsinger and there were many white

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[265] Reverend Jordan Allen, “The Pastor Protests,” *The Butte Daily Post,* January 10, 1901.
[266] Reverend Jordan Allen, “The Pastor Protests.”
[267] “Card of Thanks,” *Canon City Record* (Canon City, CO), July 13, 1916, 7
[268] “Norman L. Bruton Died Wednesday,” *Canon City Record* (Canon City, CO), July 13, 1916, 6; https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/57381/memorial-search?firstname=&middlename=&lastname=bruton&cemeteryName=Lakeside+Cemetery&birthyear=&birthyearfilter=&deathyear=&deathyearfilter=&memorialid=&mcid=&linkedToName=&datefilter=&orderby=r&plot=.

people in attendance at her funeral.[269] While it is uncertain what Frye's wishes were for her funeral, and this may have very well been her desired send-off, it does still speak to the ability of the A.M.E. Church to provide Black Montanans with a community in the West where they were so isolated from other Black people and communities, especially, after having left their secondary homeland so recently. The Black residents of Butte, like the rest of Montana, could not rely on a Black undertaker to take care of their dead, instead they sometimes put their trust in white undertakers. The Black residents of Butte apparently felt comfortable enough with the white residents of Butte to use and advertise the services of Joseph Richards, who advertised in *The New Age*, Butte's Black-owned newspaper.[270]

The rich spiritual lives of Black Americans endured in the West. Conceptions of heaven and home continued to evolve. Heaven under slavery very frequently included themes of rest and sleep and home was still West Africa. In the West conceptions of heaven more closely aligned with mainline Methodist ideas.[271] For many Black Americans after emancipation, the South remained home. For others, "The liberal terms of citizenship and support have made these sections more preferable to thousands, but still the rank and file of the race cannot be shaken in their adherence to the South only by the most vigorous blasts of adversity."[272] Sporadic evidence of the continued use of grave goods and grave ornamentation exists. Some graves of Black people in the West were found to have adorned their graves in ways that white people found peculiar. In Deer Lodge there were reports of an old Black man's grave having been fenced in.[273] At some point the practice of adorning graves with decorations made its way out West.

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[269] "Big Eva" Laid to Rest," *The Butte Miner,* May 20, 1901, 8
[270] "Advertisement," *The New Age* (Butte, MT), June 13, 1902, 4.
[271] For examples see "Essay Read by Mrs. J.R. Alexander at St. James A.M.E Church," *The Montana Plaindealer* (Helena, MT), March 20, 1906; "The Funeral," *The Montana Plaindealer* (Helena, MT), April 20, 1906.
[272] "THE MOVING WEST," *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), August 12, 1897.
[273] "Mrs. Clement Clay Clapton," *The New North-West* (Deer Lodge, MT), January 13, 1888, 1

By 1915 the need for a Black-owned funeral home in Denver was made known in a Denver newspaper.[274] No such advertisement was placed in Montana newspapers. Before then, however, Black people had made do by relying on their community members and churches. The new century promised changes on the fronts of Civil Rights and death care, but one thing was certain; the Black community would be involved.

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[274] "Building for Future—Let Us Think on These Things," *The Denver Star* April 10, 1915, 4.

Conclusion

Since the period of enslavement Black Americans have been renegotiating their relationship with death and fighting for access to mourning. Care of the dead is still a central feature of Black Christian cosmology. Death care, however, remains one of the most segregated and inequitable public service. This creates prejudice and lack of understanding for the deathways of Black Americans and fuels the continued inequity.[275] Discussions of hybridization and syncretization are common in diasporic studies. The inclusion of death practices into the larger study of the African diaspora provides one more piece in the story of Black people in the United States. The hybridization of West African traditions and Protestant Christian teachings resulted in a wholly unique conception of death as a joyous transition from life to the spirit world. This allowed for the maintenance of humanity and for the practices to continue for generations. Dignity in death was preserved through generations by the hybridization that occurred during the period of enslavement. The resilience of these traditions has resulted in their continuation into the present day with Black-owned funeral homes and deep reverence for ancestors. The community created by funerary and mourning practices resisted and rejected white supremacist teachings about the humanity of Black people. The centrality of ancestors in historical and present African diasporic studies demonstrates a throughline from past to present.[276]

Today, as we live in a death-phobic society, it is even more important than ever to confront death and to become acquainted with the cultural practices of the past. To recognize historical traditions of burial and mourning that have persisted is to form a unique burial tradition

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[275] See Racial Disparities and Discrimination in the Death Care Industry - TalkDeath

[276] See LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant, *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory Among Gullah/Geechee Women*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Ana Lucia Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory: Engaging the Past* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

distinct from anywhere else in the world. The twentieth century brought new challenges for achieving equitable death care for Black Americans. Plessy v. Ferguson legalized the discrimination in public services based on race, meaning that the treatment Black individuals received by white undertakers was allowed to continue.

The Black owned funeral home industry through forties continued to grow, including the emergence of Jazz funerals of New Orleans. Jazz funerals continued the tradition of joy in public mourning. The National Museum of Funeral History included a new permanent exhibit on New Orleans Jazz funerals.[277] Benevolent aid and missionary societies also continued to tend to the needs of their community. In Atlanta one Black journalist writes that "Some of these societies own their own lots in the cemetery, and I wish they could all have their burying ground assigned them. They do much good in keeping colored people out of distress and in burying them when they are dead".[278] Death work filled crucial logistical and spiritual needs for burgeoning free Black communities. The ties of the living to the dead also bound communities together. People trusted ministers and undertakers with their dead loved ones. Undertakers in these communities became influential in political and church life.

One A.M.E. Church in Atlanta had eighty-five members and was bordered by Oakland Cemetery, which is the same cemetery Bishop Gaines was buried in a segregated section in 1912.[279] The Black section of Oakland Cemetery is separate from the white section with a Confederate burial ground in between and adjoins the potter's field.[280] As the nineteenth century began to wind down a distinct way of mourning had taken shape.

[277] JAZZ FUNERALS OF NEW ORLEANS - The National Museum of Funeral History (nmfh.org)
[278] "Colored Benevolence", *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 13, 1883, 7
[279] W.E. Burghardt DuBois, *The Negro Church,* 75.
[280] Map – Oakland Cemetery

In the West the Black community began to decline. In 1920 Naomi Eudora Howard, the granddaughter of Clara Crump and daughter of Clarinda, died at her grandmother's home at the young age of fourteen. No cause of death was listed. Her funeral was held at St. James A.M.E. and she was buried at Forestvale Cemetery (Figures 9-12).[281] Just twenty-one years later, her grandmother Clara, was buried in a plot near to Naomi, but instead of St. James A.M.E. conducting the funeral services, Opp and Conrad Undertakers did.[282] Opp and Conrad, who were white, had come to Helena in 1926.[283] It is unclear as to why Opp and Conrad conducted the services for Clara Crump when St. James A.M.E. was still an established church at this time, just a year earlier, in 1940 a Mexican fisherman had his funeral service at St. James A.M.E.[284] The transfer of death work from St. James A.M.E. to the hands of Opp and Conrad marked a decline and eventual surrender of religious and death control in Helena. St. James A.M.E. dissolved its congregation in March of 1945 with Z. Caldwell then acting as pastor.[285] The building today stands as an apartment building. While in the South segregated cemeteries were the norm, it seems that Texas is the only Western state to have developed segregated cemeteries.[286]

Redefining conceptions of home allowed for colonized people to survive and persist. The African diaspora and the forces of colonialism removed millions from their ancestral home. Generations removed from those homelands, Black people in the mountain West forged new communities while preserving their heritage. The community created by funerary and mourning practices resisted and rejected white supremacist teachings about the humanity of Black people.

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[281] "Naomi Eudora Howard is Dead at Age of 14" *The Independent Record* (Helena, MT), February 16, 1920, 5.
[282] "Pioneer Montana Resident Succumbs," *The Billings Gazette* (Billings, MT), March 11, 1941, 10; "Clarissa Crump, Who Came to Last Chance Gulch in Gold Rush Days, is Dead," *The Independent Record* (Helena, Montana), March 11, 1941, 1.
[283] "Opp and Conrad is New Undertaking Firm Here," *The Independent Record* (Helena, MT), January 1, 1926, 5.
[284] "Aged Man Dead," *The Independent Record,* January 20, 1940.
[285] "City Briefs," *The Independent Record,* March 26, 1945.
[286] Alexa Ura, "Texas Cemetery Scraps 'Whites Only' Policy," *Texas Tribune*, July 25, 2016; Noam Hassenfeld "Segregation in Texas Cemeteries Proves Hard to Undo," *Latino USA*, July 19, 2017.

Death can be difficult to comprehend. For Black Americans making their home in the West, it also forged and fortified communities while redefining conceptions of heaven, home, and family. Assertions of humanity are at the core of Black death practices. Death work took different forms in the years leading up to Emancipation and in the years immediately following it. Death workers spread literacy, built coffins, built schools, and started businesses. Death workers were enslaved men and women, A.M.E. ministers, and Black undertakers. They fulfilled essential needs of their community and allowed for the preservation of a decolonized understanding of self.

The graves of enslaved people continue to be rediscovered. Due to the nature of their burials, often unmarked and away from the white burials, it is unknown how many have yet to be discovered.[287] Reaffirming connections with the past, Black Americans are decolonizing the ways their ancestors are remembered in public memory. Today movements to remove barriers to equitable death and end-of-life care continue. The care and regard Black people receive in death, however, is shifting. The website, Blackmorticians.com works to connect Black funeral directors across the country to each other and to patrons in need. They also work to connect bereaved family members with organizations dedicated to helping cover the costs of funerals.[288] Other organizations such as Radical Death Studies and The Order of the Good Death work to break down barriers to dignified and affordable death care. These two organizations formed out of the death positive movement, which began in the 1970s as an offshoot of the palliative care movement.[289]

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[287] Tamica Jean-Charles, "Forgotten no more: Descendants of family enslaved at Pen Park plantations visit their unmarked graves for the first time," *Charlottesville Tomorrow*, n.d.xx, https://www.cvilletomorrow.org/articles/forgotten-no-more-descendants-of-family-enslaved-at-pen-park-plantations-visit-their-unmarked-graves-for-the-first-time/;

[288] Black Morticians

[289] https://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/history-of-death-positive-movement/, https://radicaldeathstudies.com/about-crds/,

With state-sanctioned violence against Black people continuing, the performance of death practices and reclamation of histories remain vitally important. Professor Ruha Benjamin ties reproductive justice to the body over the course of a Black person's life and death, the body, she explains as a "site of trauma."[290] Structural racism affects how Black people live, but it also affects their deaths and afterlives. The memories of Black people are often hi-jacked by settler-colonial institutions, which Dr. Benjamin has cited recent police killings of George Floyd and Terence Crutcher as evidence.[291] Grief for the families of Black people killed violently is often difficult to access because of the structural racism found in the media, courts and law enforcement, and healthcare.

The establishment of Black-owned funeral homes was a turning point in taking back control of the dead for Black Americans. Many of these funeral homes are still in business today and they trace their lineage back to the traditions of West Africa. The centrality of A.M.E Churches and affiliated funeral homes cannot be understated: "They [the ministers] married them, christened their babies, aided them in distress, and buried them."[292] No Black-owned funeral home exists in Montana today.

The son of Clara Crump's enslaver, John Evans, went on to become a Congressman from Montana. Meanwhile, Clara Crump's descendants opened businesses and engaged in social clubs.[293] The last of Clara Crump's descendants from Helena, Montana, Raymond Crump Howard, died in 2013 and wrote his own obituary. In a beautiful bookend to this study, he wrote that, "One of the advantages of being in Hospice… is that you have time to write your own obituary. Working on this obituary has been a highly emotional journey that is now coming to

[290] Dr. Ruha Benjamin, Black AfterLives Matter - Boston Review.
[291] Dr. Ruha Benjamin, "Black AfterLives Mater."
[292] Reverend Jones, 62.
[293] Montana Historical Society, accessed March 2, 2023, Crump/Howard House | Historic Montana (historicmt.org).

an end. The journey being a review of my 78 years of life, all my experiences and the people I have known."[294] Raymond Howard, apparently at ease with death, penned his obituary in the winter of 2013.

The years of syncretization, resilience, and community building were evident in Raymond Howard's obituary. When Raymond Howard reflected on his life he wrote that, "During the first years of my life, we all lived at the family home at 1003 9th avenue."[295] He also spoke of how grateful he was to have known Clara Crump, "My great-great grandparents, James Wesley & Clarissa (Powell) Crump built the family home in 1885. As a child, I was very curious about my Crump ancestors and wanted to learn everything about them…Clarissa lived until I was six years old and I was fortunate to know her."[296] Raymond Howard also demonstrated a love for learning throughout his life which mirrored the literacy efforts of the A.M.E. Church, "In 1958, after graduation from the University of Montana, I continued my education. I received master's degrees in Education and Psychology and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of South Dakota."[297]

The realization of his own mortality and the role death work played in families and communities was on his mind. On death work he wrote, "Caring for a loved one with a terminal illness certainly challenges a family. Living with my terminal illness has given me the opportunity to think about what is really important in life-which is spending time with family

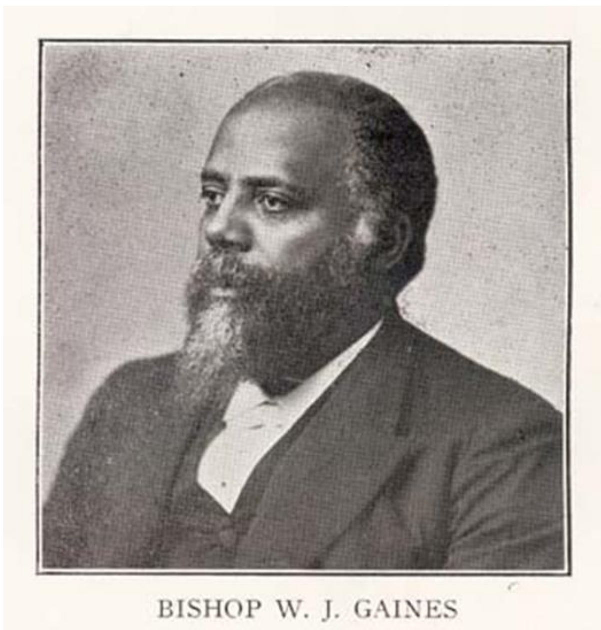
[294]Raymond Crump Howard, accessed April 28, 2023, Raymond Crump Howard, age 78, of Helena (helenafuneralhome.com)
[295] Raymond Crump Howard, accessed April 28, 2023, Raymond Crump Howard, age 78, of Helena (helenafuneralhome.com)
[296]Raymond Crump Howard, accessed April 28, 2023, Raymond Crump Howard, age 78, of Helena (helenafuneralhome.com)
[297] Raymond Crump Howard, accessed April 28, 2023, Raymond Crump Howard, age 78, of Helena (helenafuneralhome.com)

and friends. It is with sadness that I leave you. There is still so much I want to do."[298] His family and community were what was important to him, just as it had been for Clara.

[298] Raymond Crump Howard, accessed April 28, 2023, Raymond Crump Howard, age 78, of Helena (helenafuneralhome.com)

Figure 1

African American Grave Decoration – Art of the American South (ua.edu)



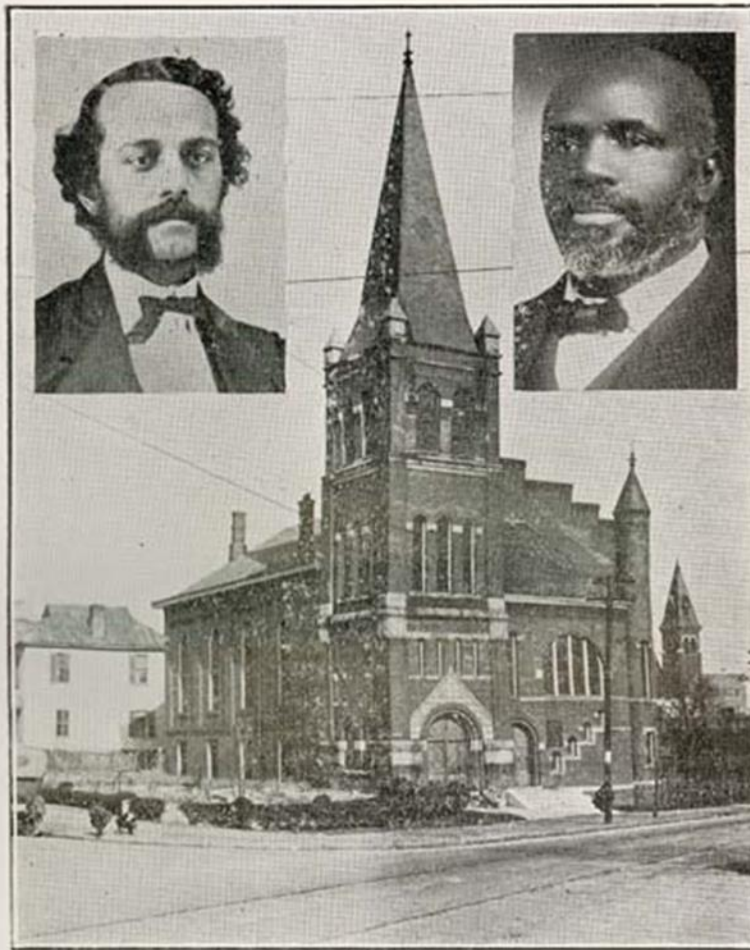
BISHOP W. J. GAINES

Figure 2

https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/haley/haley.html

Figure 3

T. G. Steward (Theophilus Gould), 1843-1924. Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry from 1864 to 1914. Twenty-seven Years in the Pastorate; Sixteen Years' Active Service as Chaplain in the U. S. Army; Seven Years Professor in Wilberforce University; Two Trips to Europe; A Trip in Mexico. (unc.edu)



STEWARD A. M. E. CHURCH, MACON, GA.
Erected by T. G. Steward, 1869. Tower added later by Rev. L. H. Smith.

Figure 4

[T. G. Steward (Theophilus Gould), 1843-1924. Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry from 1864 to 1914. Twenty-seven Years in the Pastorate; Sixteen Years' Active Service as Chaplain in the U. S. Army; Seven Years Professor in Wilberforce University; Two Trips to Europe; A Trip in Mexico. (unc.edu)]

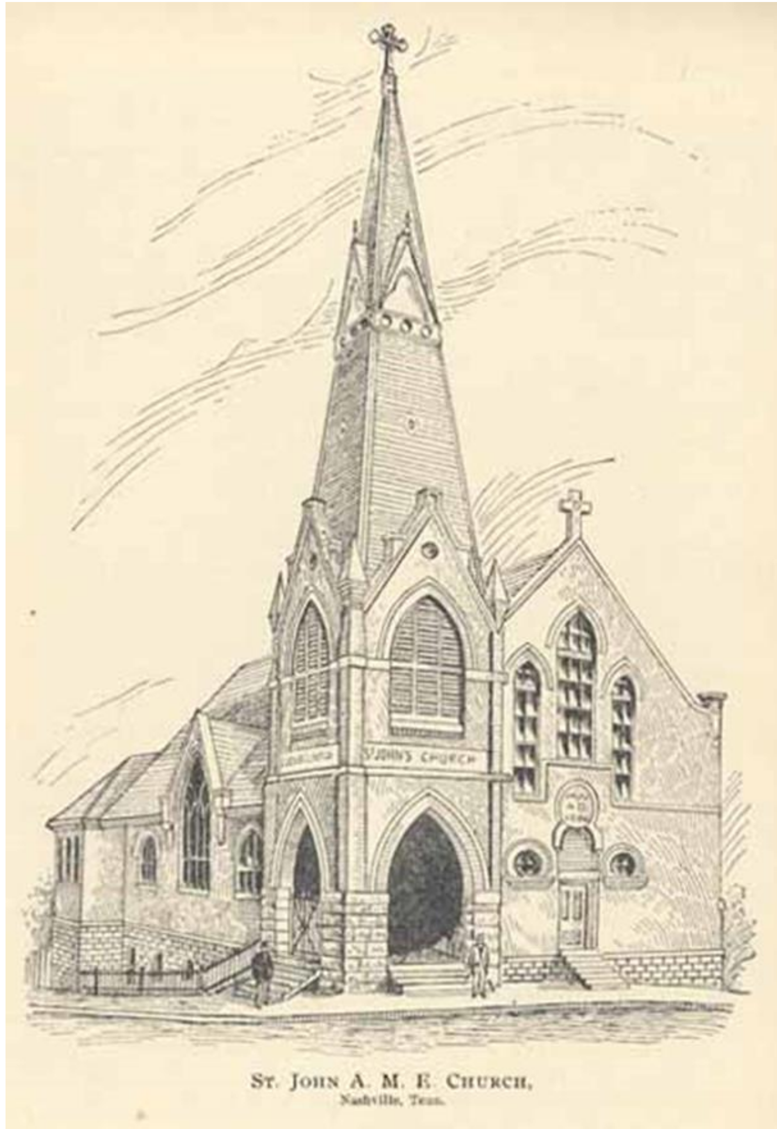


Figure 5

https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/haley/haley.html

Figure 6

[T. G. Steward (Theophilus Gould), 1843-1924. Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry from 1864 to 1914. Twenty-seven Years in the Pastorate; Sixteen Years' Active Service as Chaplain in the U. S. Army; Seven Years Professor in Wilberforce University; Two Trips to Europe; A Trip in Mexico. (unc.edu)]

Figure 7

[Photos of James Steward - Find a Grave Memorial]

Figure 8

Elizabeth Gadsden Steward (1843-1892) - Find a Grave Memorial

Figure 9

Clara Crump, family matriarch, mother to Clarinda and Emma, and grandmother to Naomi.

Photo Taken by Author, March 2, 2023

Figure 10

Photo Taken by Author, March 2, 2023

Figure 11

Photo Taken by Author, March 2, 2023

Figure 12

Mother to Naomi

Photo Taken by Author, March 2, 2023

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best men and women. Nashville: Haley and Florida, 1895. James T. Haley. Afro-American Encyclopaedia; Or, the Thoughts, Doings, and Sayings of the Race, Embracing Lectures, Biographical Sketches, Sermons, Poems, Names of Universities, Colleges, Seminaries, Newspapers, Books, and a History of the Denominations, Giving the Numerical Strength of Each. In Fact, it Teaches Every Subject of Interest to the Colored People, as Discussed by More Than One Hundred of Their Wisest and Best Men and Women. (unc.edu).

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