

1919 and the Rise of Black Adventism

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In the November 15, 1919 issue of the *Kansas City Sun*, columnist William H. Dawley, Jr. reported on a visit to the city's First Seventh-day Adventist church and discussed the "work accomplished by the Seventh Day Adventists" in "advancement...among Negroes."¹ Dawley, an 1895 graduate of Oberlin College and former principle of Lincoln High School in Kansas City, Missouri,² began the piece with sociological generalization: "Religion is the one field in which the Negro may act without let or hindrance." Then, with a touch of theological affirmation, he added that religion is "the one thing that may bring him into his own on earth as well as in heaven."

An implied question thus frames Dawley's report, a question that happens to be central to this essay and to a broader project I have begun pursuing with the help a McAdams research grant: What was it that drew black Americans to Adventism, resulting in the establishment of black Adventist churches in every major city throughout the nation during the first two decades of the twentieth century?³ In their analysis of African-American religious diversification during that era, Hans Baer and Merrill Singer asked the same question without attempting an answer.⁴

¹ William H. Dawley, Jr., "Washington, D.C.," *Kansas City Sun* (15 Nov. 1919), 2. Subsequent quotations from Dawley from this same source unless otherwise specified.

² Dawley's Oberlin degree is included in his listing as a teacher at Lincoln High School in the Fiftieth Anniversary Yearbook and List of Active Members of the National Education Association (Winona, Minn: Association Secretary's Office, 1907), https://books.google.com/books?id=gXo_AAAAYAAJ, accessed 26 April 2019. He is identified as principle in the "1915 Lincolnian," https://archive.org/stream/LHSAnnual1915/1915_Annual_djvu.txt, accessed 26 April 2019.

³ In reports of his extensive travels during 1919 published in the *Review and Herald* (issues dated February 20, 1919; August 14, 1919; September 11, 1919; September 25, 1919; October 23, 1919; November 27, 1919; and January 22, 1920), Green reports visiting or makes reference to black Adventist congregations in the following

Dawley's column opens a window on the status of black Adventism in 1919,⁵ a year freighted with significance in multiple ways. For black Americans generally, currents of terror and despair, opportunity and hope, crashed and swirled together in 1919 with an intensity rarely if ever concentrated in any single year. "Race riots on a national scale, the flight out of the South of hundreds of thousands of African-Americans, the explosion of labor strikes from coast to coast" combined to make "race relations far worse than they already were," writes historian David Levering Lewis.⁶ Yet while the "Great Migration" to the cities outside the South then at its peak added to the tumult of 1919, it was driven by hope for better opportunities. New forms of oppression often frustrated and sometimes crushed these hopes, yet pursuit of them also resulted in new forms of empowerment and transformed the nation's racial landscape.⁷

As for Adventism, 1919 stands midway between the point at which the church's previously desultory work among black Americans gained focus and momentum in the mid-1890s through the southern initiative led by J. Edson White, and the epochal establishment of black-administered (regional) conferences in 1944-1945. More than a chronological midpoint, I hope to

cities, given here in the order of appearance in his reports, followed by membership estimates, where given, in parentheses: Chicago, IL (235); Springfield, IL; Indianapolis, IN (50); Detroit, MI; Pittsburgh, PA; Cleveland, OH; Columbus, OH; Springfield, OH; Cincinnati, OH; Boston, MA (50); New York, NY (500); Brooklyn, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Washington, D.C.; Richmond, VA; Muskogee, OK; Tulsa, OK; Los Angeles, CA (100); Oakland, CA; Seattle, WA (16); Kansas City, KS (60); Kansas City, MO (50); Dallas, TX; Baltimore, MD; Charlotte, NC; Atlanta, GA; Birmingham, AL; New Orleans, LA; Denver, CO; Pueblo, CO; Omaha, NE; Louisville, KY (125); Chattanooga, TN; Houston, TX; Jacksonville, FL; Charleston, WV; Newport News, VA; Savannah, GA.

³ William H. Dawley, Jr., "Washington, D.C.," *Kansas City Sun* (November 15, 1919), 2

⁴ Baer and Singer did not include "white-controlled religious organizations" in their typology but, mentioning Adventism as an example, asked, "[W]hy do Blacks join predominantly white congregations, or why do they establish congregations affiliated with white-controlled religious groups?" See Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, "Religious Diversification during the Era of Advanced Industrial Capitalism," in Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., eds, *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 522-523.

⁵ Caution is in order because Dawley cast his portrayal in an idealized gloss. He leaves out less flattering parts of the picture and seems to take aspirational claims by his Adventist sources at face value. Awareness of such factors in some ways enhances the article's value as evidence when examined with care alongside other sources.

⁶ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1993), 579.

⁷ Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 9-10.

show that 1919 also marked the turning of a new page in the black Adventist story. It is a vantage point for gaining clarity on how Adventism grew and thrived among Americans of African descent, a development that, more than any other single factor in the century that followed, would eventually make the Adventist church the nation's most racially diverse religious body, according to a 2015 Pew Research Center study.⁸

Dawley's report offers clues to three questions: (1) why a seemingly disproportionate number of high-achieving, well-educated African Americans dedicated to racial advancement found Adventism, despite its obscurity, to be an appealing path toward that goal;⁹ (2) why they found a stake in Adventism worth fighting for despite the unjust and condescending constrictions imposed by white church leaders; and (3) why they could, as of 1919, bring a relatively hopeful outlook to their mission and to prospects for improved race relations within the church.

One way that Dawley's piece informs all three questions is simply by directing attention to the central and formative significance of developments in Washington, D.C. around the turn of the twentieth century. Though marginal or nonexistent in most accounts of the rise of black Adventism, these developments entailed Adventism's first major racial crisis, in which racism first became structural in church institutions, resulting in the denomination's first brush with racial schism.

One draw for black converts that Dawley's report highlights was Adventism's variation on the restorationist theme in American Christianity, reinvigorated by the holiness enthusiasm of the 1890s. Among the strengths of Adventism, he pointed to "an indefatigable search and surprising

⁸ Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups," Factank (July 27, 2015), Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/> (accessed February 6, 2019); *2015 Annual Statistical Report*, Office of Archives, Research and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 18, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2015.pdf> (accessed February 6, 2019).

⁹ See Appendix A for a partial list of such individuals.

knowledge of the Scriptures” and “the simplicity and tenets of the Apostolic Church.” It was the ideal of gospel purity in both doctrine and communal praxis that James H. Howard, whom Dawley identifies as “pioneer and pillar of the truth here,” found compelling in Adventism.

Howard had been an academic superstar during the early decades of Howard University, primed for prominence in the educated, professional black elite of Washington, D.C., then the cultural center of black America with the largest black population of any city in the nation. Yet, in 1887, Howard joined a religious movement nearly invisible in black society, and so marginal in American society in general that it lacked a congregation of any kind in Washington, D.C. He was one of the first few new believers of any race and almost certainly the very first black Washingtonian won through the efforts of the small city mission that established Adventism’s first organized presence in the national capital in 1886.¹⁰

According to Kelly Miller, long-time professor and dean at Howard University and an influential public intellectual, James Howard’s embrace of Adventism “created a sensation among the [Howard University] faculty, student body and alumni” causing “the same sort of shock and disappointment among his friends and admirers as would happen today if a well known Methodist should suddenly turn Mormon.”¹¹

James Howard’s voice, preserved in a few remarkable letters to church leaders, expresses passionate conviction that Adventism offered the “purest light of the gospel.”¹² What he saw

¹⁰ Dr. Howard’s initial acquaintance with the Adventist message came through literature he received from Georgia Harper, one of young mission workers, who later married future General Conference president William A. Spicer. See Daniel A. Ochs and Grace Lillian Ochs, *The Past and the Presidents: Biographies of the General Conference Presidents*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1974), 132-133. See also Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of American Seventh-day Adventists with an African Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: Review Herald, 1984), 269-271.

¹¹ Kelly Miller, “Howard of Howard.” *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 Jan. 1936: 4. Also appears in variously edited forms in Miller’s column “Kelly Miller Says,” syndicated in black newspapers throughout the nation.

¹² J.H. Howard to O.A. Olsen, 3 Nov. 1889, Presidential Incoming Correspondence, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives, Silver Spring, MD (hereafter cited as GCA)..

more clearly than those from whom he learned the message, was that the problem of the color line constituted a telling test of that purity. In 1889 he wrote to General Conference president O.A. Olsen that “if we compromise with this worldly hatred that Americans call ‘prejudice,’ while professing to have the love of Christ in our hearts, to have the purest light of the gospel, to be looking for the early advent of the Savior, and to be keeping the commandments, they [African Americans] would consider us the most pronounced hypocrites of all professing Christians.”¹³

In his study of the rise of “Black Israelite” religions in America, historian Jacob Dorman discusses a variety of radical holiness movements that drew black adherents as they sprang up in the late nineteenth century, combining “interracialism” with biblical literalism, come-outism, and millennial expectation in seeking “to re-create the apostolic church.”¹⁴ These features describe James Howard’s Adventism rather well. They found embodiment in the first Adventist congregation in Washington, D.C., formally organized with an interracial membership of 26 in 1889. Albion Fox Ballenger’s “Receive Ye the Holy Ghost” revivals disseminated the holiness-interracialist link more broadly in Adventism during the late 1890s, emphasizing victory over racial prejudice as evidence of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ For several months in 1899,

¹³ J.H. Howard to O.A. Olsen, 3 Nov. 1889, Presidential Incoming Correspondence, GCA.

¹⁴ Jacob S. Dorman, *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), Introduction, Chapter 3.

¹⁵ Ballenger’s understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit bears resemblance to that of a holiness group known as the Evening Light Saints, which became the denomination known as the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) or the Church of God Reformation movement, that regarded “interracial worship was a sign of the true church and gave racial prejudice a theological critique.” In contrast to the typical holiness testimony to being “saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Ghost,” the Evening Light Saints spoke of being “saved, sanctified, and prejudice removed.” Ballenger also seemed to parallel the Evening Light Saints in seeing a much larger purpose than individual sanctity in the work of the Holy Spirit. Ballenger taught that the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit prepared the believer for the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit as a separate and distinct phase. The primary purpose of the latter was to empower witness, mission, and service for the salvation and betterment of others. On Evening Light Saints see Estrelida Y. Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 82-83. On Ballenger, see Calvin W. Edwards and Gary Land, *Seeker After Light: A.F. Ballenger, Adventism, and American Christianity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2000); Gary Land, “At the Edges of Holiness: Seventh-day Adventism Receives the Holy Ghost,” *Fides et Historia*, Summer/Fall 2001: 13-30

Ballenger served as pastor-evangelist for the Washington, D.C. congregation, which by this time had grown to a membership of 150, at least 50 of whom were African-American. Ballenger pronounced the church to be a “living miracle of the power of God, composed as it is of the two races. The harmony which prevails is a great surprise to the members of other churches.”¹⁶

In part, Adventism’s claim to have disentangled pure apostolic teaching and practice from centuries-long corruption in state-established churches held the same appeal for black Americans as it did for anyone else. Yet, for black converts the race-transcending and race-affirming implications of a pure gospel were crucial. James Howard put it all together this way: “It seems to me that the more nationalities we can have in the church the more like the future state the church will be, and the more evidence there will be of the influence of the Holy Spirit which alone would harmonize all these. This would be a strong evidence in favor of the truth.”¹⁷

The Washington church’s gospel interracialism would be defeated as a model for the denomination in the dramatic developments during the first decade of the twentieth century that constituted Adventism’s first major racial crisis. But these events also point to a second dimension of Adventism’s appeal to idealistic African Americans -- the potential that its emphases on health and education held for bringing an oppressed people “into [their] own on earth as well as in heaven,” as Dawley phrased it.

In 1902, A.G. Daniells and the General Conference Committee assigned Lewis C. Sheafe, who had been a highly-regarded black Baptist preacher before embracing the Adventist cause, to conduct a summer-long evangelistic campaign in Washington, in tandem with a white counterpart, Judson S. Washburn. Regarding his conversion to Adventism he could not only testify, in the typical fashion, to finding “the truth” but also to finding “a truth” with remarkable

¹⁶ A.F. Ballenger to L.A. Hoopes, 25 Dec.1899, GCA.

¹⁷ J.H. Howard to O.A. Olsen, 27 Jan. 1890, GCA.

potential as a lever for racial uplift and advancement. Through its educational and medical missionary work it was, he declared at the 1899 General Conference, “a truth that can do more in this field [the black South] to demonstrate the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ” than that held by any other people.¹⁸

According to the plan devised by A.G. Daniells, the evangelistic effort in Washington in 1902 was to be followed by a division of the existing congregations into two churches -- one white and the other black. The intent was to implement a denominational model for handling the race question. Sheafe agreed not to oppose those “on the ground” who wished implement such a separation. But it turned that close to half of the white church members on the ground sided with Dr. Howard and the congregational elder, Andrew Kalstrom, in adamant opposition to such a division. As racially-mixed crowds at his meetings swelled into the thousands by late summer and his work received laudatory press coverage, Sheafe threw another monkey wrench by winning noticeably more white people than did Washburn at his “white only” tent.¹⁹

Nonetheless, just at the point where Adventism was receiving unprecedented, favorable public attention in the nation’s capital, denominational officials arrived in September to carry out the racial division of the church, an event that also drew extensive press coverage corresponding to the interest generated by Sheafe’s meetings. James H. Howard’s experienced the agony of seeing his lofty aspirations for Adventism sabotaged on the cusp of realization. The 46 white believers who remained with 122 black members in the original Washington congregation, now known as

¹⁸ *General Conference Daily Bulletin* (February 16, 1899): 5; Douglas Morgan, *Lewis C. Sheafe: Apostle to Black America* (Review and Herald, 2010), 142-144. As a seminary-educated minister, active in a wide range of national and local organizations for civil rights and race advancement, and well-read in history and politics, Sheafe had context for making this assessment.

¹⁹ L.C. Sheafe to H.E. Osborne, 1 Feb. 1903, GCA; L.C. Sheafe to A.G. Daniells, 13 Feb. 1903, GCA. Approximately 30-35 white members remained with black members in the First Church after the September 1902 split; the number of white members was reported to be 46 at the end of March 1903, with nearly all of the increase attributed to Sheafe’s evangelism. See Morgan, 258-260.

the First church, sustained their anti-racist witness, withstanding for a few more years the tide of pressure from both church and state in the “capitulation to racism” that swept the nation as a whole to a new low in race relations.²⁰ But the die had been cast for the denomination. Its work for the different races would be conducted along separate lines in Jim Crow America.

Though the decisive moves were thus made without any anticipation of the relocation of denominational headquarters in the summer of 1903, that move heightened the significance of Washington, D.C. as the arena in which the church’s handling of race relations would be modeled both for the denomination and as part of its public profile in the society that it sought to evangelize. In fact race was a significant if secondary factor in the exchange of correspondence among church leaders about the move. All involved seemed to recognize in some sense how institutions for education and health care in Washington, D.C. could, as nowhere else, showcase to the nation the transformative possibilities Adventism’s holistic mission held for African Americans.²¹

What the white leaders did not recognize, however, was “the fierce urgency of the now,” of pressing to full advantage the interest galvanized by Sheafe’s work, of giving the work among black Americans genuinely equitable priority in their considerations, or of empowering black leaders such as Sheafe to direct and shape that work. In 1905, the People’s church, a new congregation approaching 150 members planted under Sheafe’s leadership, acquired, entirely on

²⁰ A. Kalstrom to A.G. Daniells, 30 March 1903, GCA; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 67.

²¹ See, for example, J.S. Washburn to E.G. White, 5 June 1903, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence; W. C. White, “Another Surprise,” *New York Indicator*, Oct. 4, 1905, pp. 1, 2. The course already charted meant that such institutions would function under the terms laid out by the nation’s most influential black leader, Booker T. Washington, and thus not involve direct confrontation with the nation’s hardening racist norms. Yet, if conducted in accordance with principles and spirit that suffused the admonitions given by Ellen White to guide the “southern work” just a few years before, and given the resources and care necessary for excellence, such institutions could be a powerful means of pushing back against racial injustice.

its own resources, an ideally-located building and property that could facilitate establishment of a school, a clinic (“treatment room”), and a small publishing enterprise. Yet, while more than \$150,000 had been raised to fund the move to Takoma Park and launch a new school and sanitarium there, not a dime had been directed toward institutions of similar purpose for black people in the city. At the same time, the General Conference response to a petition from the People’s church in 1906 made the *de facto* exclusion of black people from the Takoma Park institutions unmistakably clear.²² The establishment of the new center in Takoma Park was the moment when racism became structural in denominational institutions.

Not surprisingly, the People’s church withdrew from the denominational connection. In view of the glaring injustice and the staggering loss of opportunity, an independent, separate form of black Adventism would seem the most logical and predictable way forward.

Yet in his 1919 article, William Dawley, an admirer of Sheafe who knew of the preacher’s conflict with the white Adventist leadership, glosses over these and other blights on the denomination’s racial record. In fact, he asserts that the General Conference-led Adventist work “does not yet encourage the color line.”

The fact that James Howard appears to be a major source for Dawley’s article adds to the enigma presented by this seemingly counterfactual assertion. But if we rewind to 1907 when Adventism for the first time faced racial schism, it may become more plausible that Dr. Howard could be the source for such a claim, despite the devastating blows dealt to his interracialist vision. If the Washington First church had joined the separatist move of the People’s church, the denomination would have lost about one-fifth of its overall black membership, and momentum could well have

²² Morgan, 284-311.

built towards a separate black Adventist denomination.²³ Signs appeared to point that in direction, but at a meeting held March 30, 1907, to decide the matter, Dr. Howard is reported to have said:

No condition brought about by the errors of our Conference brethren would justify Brother Sheafe in taking the extreme position that he did.

Don't separate from the cause. Men don't own the cause nor the denomination. Don't let us move one peg from the organized work. I shall not move, even if all others move.²⁴

The following year Dr. Howard's influence again was decisive in yielding to counsel from Ellen White to the churches in Washington, D.C., resulting in a lasting rapprochement between the General Conference and the dissident congregation. The counsel called upon the interracialists to back off from insistence that racial integration must be an intentional, visible feature of every Adventist congregation. Ellen White contended that in order for the church's mission to advance among both races amidst a racist social order, racially separate, albeit not rigidly exclusive, congregations must be allowed as a temporary expedient.²⁵

Had Dr. Howard simply surrendered the principles that he had for nearly twenty years advocated with such eloquence and passion, now submitting to the bare authority of the church's hierarchy and its prophet? It would be wonderful to discover further documentation explaining his view.

But since his position adumbrated that taken by the large majority of African Americans who

²³ Sydney Scott estimated the total black Adventist membership at the beginning of 1907 to be 1,300 in "Work in the South for the Colored," *Gospel Herald* (February 1907), 2. Sheafe reported a membership of 130 at the People's Church as of 1905, a number that likely increased slightly by 1907, in Lewis C. Sheafe, "People's Seventh-day Adventist Church of Washington, D.C.," *Review and Herald* (24 Aug. 1905), 15. The black membership total of 122 reported for First Church in 1903 probably decreased somewhat through transfers to the People's Church, though precise data is elusive. So, the total number of black Seventh-day Adventists in Washington, D.C. in early 1907 likely exceeded 200 and may have been close to 250.

²⁴ Untitled transcript of Dr. Howard's statement dated 30 March 1907, GCA.

²⁵ Ellen G. White to "Our Churches in Washington, D.C.," Letter 304-B, 19 Oct. 1908, Ellen G. White Estate, A.G. Daniells to W.H. Green, 23 Nov. 1908, GCA.

would come into the orbit of Adventism during the coming decades, it is worth the effort to explore the question based on what we have.

Adventism's function as an identity, I suggest, is of critical significance. In 1889, as Dr. Howard grappled for the first time with disparity between Adventist practice and the purity of its principles on race relations, he had affirmed: "I am more a Seventh-day Adventist than a colored man."²⁶ He in fact was a self-respecting black man — intensely dedicated to the well-being of his race. He was also an American who made a career of federal government service. But, to race and nationality, he had added Adventism as a third source of identity that took priority over rather than fusing easily with the other two. That identity both transcended and affirmed his racial identity. It was constituted by a sacred vocation that emerged from apocalyptic scripture, in which the prophetic authority of Ellen White and the visible organization she mothered could not be detached from the doctrinal content of the church's message.²⁷

No mistakes by church leaders could shake or redefine the identity by removing the race-transcending principle at its core. No particular set of leaders could claim ownership over it. Accepting Ellen White's counsel in 1908 could not have been easy. But Dr. Howard, years before, had allowed for the possibility of a divine concession to the condition of the people like that made by the prophet Samuel when Israel persisted in demanding a king.²⁸ In their disputes with the General Conference leadership, Dr. Howard and the First church racial idealists had

²⁶ Howard to Olsen, 3 Nov. 1889.

²⁷ Despite major differences, a re-configured identity may have held critical significance for black Adventists in some ways comparable to the new urban religious movements analyzed by Judith Weisenfeld in her highly-acclaimed *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2016). As with the devotees of these movements, Adventism spoke to those who often felt "that Protestant churches had failed to address their material needs and spiritual longings" and thus "set aside long-standing ways of thinking about black identity, claiming different histories and imagining new futures" (Introduction, Kindle loc. 250). Adventism offered black Americans a new identity and sense of "sacred peoplehood" that transcended racial and national identities.

²⁸ J.H. Howard to E.G. White, 23 March 1902, Ellen G. White Estate Incoming Correspondence.

placed considerable weight on Ellen White's words. Though her counsel in 1908 ran contrary to one of the principle points, it also made clear that God doesn't draw color lines, there would be none in heaven, and that churches claiming to be headed toward that destiny, must in the here-and-now be advancing in the "Christ-life" toward the point of eradicating prejudice. It is plausible that they also found in it basis for hoping that the distinction between *encouraging* the color line and allowing for it as a temporary provision would prove meaningful.

Dawley's article also indicates that black believers were finding resources for enhancing the race-affirming side of the Adventist identity, such as the Ethiopian Christian heritage that preserved fidelity to the biblical seventh-day Sabbath that European Christendom forsook.²⁹

Extensive black press coverage of the arrival of an Ethiopian government delegation led by Prince Dejazmatch Nadeo in the summer of 1919 to meet with President Woodrow Wilson provided black Adventists a striking opportunity to highlight their distinctive sense of identification with the ancient African Christian kingdom.³⁰ In his November 15 column, Dawley reported that the "distinguished Abyssinian Mission" had received Elder [J.K.] Humphrey, the successful New York Adventist pastor, for a visit in the Waldorf Astoria just before leaving the country.

"Since the days of the Ennudi and Philip, the Abyss[in]ians have been keeping the Seventh Day," wrote Dawley. "So Elder Humphrey's story interested the Commission. The Prince bought

²⁹ Ellen White lauded the African role in retaining adherence to the biblical Sabbath, emblematic of the "primitive" faith, during the centuries when its practice was suppressed by the church of Rome in *The Great Controversy* (1911), 63, 577, Ellen G. White Writings online, egwwritings.org. She drew on fellow Adventist pioneer John N. Andrews' voluminous *History of the Sabbath and the First Day of the Week*, 2nd ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1873), which contains a substantial section devoted to Abyssinia (423-427).

³⁰ For example, "Abyssinian Mission Arrives in U.S.," *Chicago Defender* (12 July 1919): 1; "Abyssinian Mission Visits Harlem," *Chicago Defender* (9 Aug. 1919): 6. The National Democratic Club on Fifth Avenue in New York, refused the Africans dinner there when members protested their presence, sparking editorials such as "Democracy at the Democratic Club," *New York Age* (9 Aug. 1919): 4.

his available literature and invited him to come to Abyssinia to preach his glad tidings.” Both Humphrey’s alertness to the opportunity and the fact that the Washington, D.C. Adventists with whom Dawley interacted made sure he knew about this incident suggest a sensibility that their faith could not be reduced to a European hand-me-down but had a distinctive significance for people of African descent.³¹

Structural adjustments conceded by denominational leadership may also have contributed to the relatively buoyant outlook for black Adventists conveyed by Dawley’s article. In 1909, the General Conference, recognizing the importance of forestalling further losses to Sheafe’s independence movement, responded to an appeal from the leading black ministers loyal to the organization for creation of a North American Negro Department.³² However, the appointment of white men to direct the department tempered enthusiasm for the welcome development. Renewed turbulence surrounding Sheafe and J.W. Manns of Savannah, Georgia, in 1916 and 1917 no doubt once again contributed to the denominational leadership’s receptiveness at the 1918 General Conference to a further request from its black ministers -- this time that one of their own be appointed to lead the department.³³

³¹ Humphrey’s plans for a mission to Africa never came to fruition. Dr. Howard, however, following his wife’s death in 1923, pursued his own interest in the Abyssinian connection by spending a year there developing a school for girls; Webb, “James H. Howard, M.D.”

³² “An Appeal in Behalf of the Work Among the Colored People,” May 1909, Box A825, GCA; “Thirty Fourth Meeting,” *General Conference Bulletin* (2 June 1909): 286-288.

³³ W. Hawkins Green, an attorney who converted to Adventism under the influence of Sheafe’s evangelism in 1902-1903, was appointed to the position in 1918 and gave the department indefatigable leadership for a decade. Green’s published report, “A Word Regarding the North American Negro Department,” *Review and Herald*, 30 May 1919, omits the following in a manuscript of the same title in the General Conference Archives (Box A825): “The General Conference in session at San Francisco, Cal. — from March 29th till April 14th — 1918 — after hearing appeals from our brethren, which were given due and prayerful consideration, made an advance move by electing a secretary for the department, who by nature brings the operation of the same more closely in touch with the people for whose advance and salvation it was organized.” Upon his death at age 57, an obituary jointly-submitted by three of his leading colleagues paid tribute to his leadership; G.E. Peters, J.K. Humphrey, A.E. Webb, “Elder W.H. Green,” *Review and Herald* (27 Dec, 1928), 22.

Re-grouped from the tumults of the previous two decades with deepened commitment to Seventh-day Adventist identity and organization, black Adventists in 1919, approaching 5,000 strong, brought new if measured hopes to a new era of mission in a landscape already being transformed by the accelerating migration of African Americans from the South to the cities of the North and West. Though realistic about the obstacles they faced, they believed that ongoing struggle for equal status in the denomination was worthwhile, and that continued growth would improve their chances for gaining the resources and decision-making authority necessary to remove impediments that handicapped their work.

They did not anticipate that over the next twenty-five years, while race relations in the American nation began a slow and partial yet meaningful turn toward the better, race relations in the church would take a turn for the worse, entrenching racism in denomination institutions,³⁴ and bringing about the most serious threat ever to black Adventist unity and denominational loyalty, centering on the aforementioned J.K. Humphrey. The resources of faith and identity forged during the 25 years previous to 1919 would be tested to the maximum during the next 25 years. Their success amidst numerous competitors, in establishing a stable and steadily growing presence in urban black communities outside the South would prove critical to realizing the decisive if flawed breakthrough of 1944 in which black Adventist leadership was empowered through the mechanism of black conferences to lead their people into their own on earth as in heaven.

³⁴ In 1954, W.H. Branson, the General President, acknowledged this reality in a letter sent to all union and local conference presidents, managers of SDA institutions in North America, April 13, 1954, quoted in Roy Branson, "Adventism's Rainbow Coalition," in Delbert W. Baker, ed., *Make Us One* (Boise, Id: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1995), 78-79.

Appendix A (still under construction!)

Prominent Black Converts to Adventism, ca. 1875-1905

Alphonzo Barry (d. 1914):	Temperance lecturer; minister
Mary E. Britton (1855-1925):	Educator, physician, social reformer
James R. Buster (1857-1907):	Restaurateur; colporteur, minister
Franklin H. Bryant (1877-1909):	Author, educator, attorney
James Alexander Chiles (1860-1930):	Attorney; argued civil rights case in SCOTUS
William Hawkins Green (1871-1928):	Attorney, minister
James H. Howard (1861-1936):	Physician; federal government clerk
James K. Humphrey (1877-1952):	Minister/evangelist
Charles M. Kinney (1855-1951):	Minister, colporteur, church planter
Anna Knight (1874-1972):	Educator, medical missionary
Lewis C. Sheafe (1859-1938):	Minister/evangelist
Rosetta Douglass Sprague (1839-1906):	Social reformer/advisor to Fredrick Douglass
Matthew C. Strachan (1875-1951):	Minister, educator, social reformer
Franklin W. Warnick (1868-1942):	Minister, educator

When Mary Britton joined the church in 1893, the total membership of the handful of black Adventist churches organized in the South was under 50, with the overall denominational black membership likely totaling under 100. When Lewis C. Sheafe joined the church in 1896, he became just the third officially-credentialed black Adventist minister. Growth over the ensuing dozen years established a strong and lasting foundation for the black Adventist work, with membership reaching approximately 1,400 by 1909. The estimate is pieced together from Richard Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, rev. ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Department of Education, 2000), 234-235; Reynolds, 113; Sydney Scott, "Work in the South for the Colored People," *Gospel Herald* (Feb. 1907), 6-7.

Among the approximately 1,400 African Americans who embraced Adventism during this formative phase, a sampling of those from the relatively small well-educated and professional segments of the black population includes, in addition to Britton, Sheafe, and the Troys: Franklin W. Warnick, a friend of Sheafe and fellow graduate of Wayland Seminary; Amy Temple of the Furlong Tract church, a nurse and graduate of Shaw University; James H. Howard, graduate of Howard University medical school and one of the most highly-placed African Americans in federal government service during the late nineteenth century; Rosetta Douglass Sprague, Oberlin graduate and daughter of Frederick Douglass; J. Alexander Chiles, attorney and like Britton a member of the Lexington church; W.H. Green, attorney converted through Sheafe's evangelism in Washington; Franklin H. Bryant, author and educator; Matthew C. Strachan, educated at both Fisk University and Battle Creek College, effective writer and political organizer, both in the denomination and the public square; James K. Humphrey, though born and

educated in Jamaica where he graduated from Colbar College, his influential ministry was in New York City, where he joined the Adventist movement and began establishing congregations during the pre-1909 era. To these examples we might add Jessie Dorsey, a second generation Adventist from Ohio who, before marrying Green in 1908, was the close associate of Elizabeth Wright in establishing what became Vorhees College in Denmark, South Carolina.

Anna Knight came from a humble background, but learned about Adventism as a precocious reader, and then through education rose to leadership as a missionary and educator.