A PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF RELIGION IN
DENVER’S BLACK COMMUNITY
A CASE STUDY OF ZION BAPTIST CHURCH AND
SHORTER AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
by
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A Perspective on the History of Religion in Denver’s Black Community:
A Case Study of Zion Baptist Church and Shorter African Methodist Episcopal Church

Thesis directed by Professor Rebecca Hunt.

ABSTRACT

African American Christianity emerged from the depths of slavery and the intersection of African based phenomenology, and ideologies imposed by the Anglican Church, evangelical Protestant faiths, or Catholicism. The historiography of enslaved peoples as they moved toward freedom through the newly created religious beliefs also revealed its impact on African American migration and communities in the west. This movement west landed some African Americans in Denver, where a small population started two churches during the 1860s. A case study of Denver’s two oldest Black churches explored the efforts of their membership as they established an African American community, and pursued their right to self determination.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Rebecca Hunt
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As the journey from slavery to freedom has continued, people of African
descent in the Americas have had to reinvent the meaning of their lives, and either
adapt or commingle new ideologies as part of their survival and their intent toward
self-determination. They began to redefine their spirituality, perception of religious
ideals, but also ask the questions about their place in the composition of God’s
creation. They studied the scriptures, internalized, and in varying degrees began to
recognize that slaveholders were not following the laws of God. Teachings from the
Bible influenced the transition for some enslaved people to become free. They were on
a path with a newly shaped sense of independence and freedom as they escaped
slavery, oppression and racism. The religion that enslaved them became the religion
that freed them.

How has Christianity sustained African Americans through, as W. E. B.
Dubois framed it, double consciousness of being Black and being an American?¹ How
has their quest for freedom been influenced by Christian doctrine? The path of
voluntary migration out of the South, juxtaposed against their involuntary migration
across the Middle Passage highlights new paradigms for creating a newly defined
sense of self.

The western migration created communities scattered between the Mississippi
River and the California coastline, from Canada to Mexico. Across Colorado there

¹ W. E. B. DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. (1903 (NP); reprinted, New York:
Bantam. 2005), 148 – 149.
were more than fifteen Black settlements established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Some of those communities settled in and around Denver, the largest northeast of downtown Denver. It is especially interesting to note that churches or faith-based meeting spaces were at the foundation of their communities. Two of the oldest Black churches in Denver were organized in the 1860s: Zion Baptist Church, and Shorter African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. The African American community within their faith and within the support structure of their churches educated their children, took care of their neighbors, engaged in politics, and staged campaigns for human and civil rights. The church was a place of refuge, a place for social gatherings, and for spiritual, moral and emotional uplift. The churches were also places to forge legacies, and embrace future generations with spiritual guidance and teachings.

Research into the historiography of the broader spectrum of African American Christianity will add insight into the religiosity of Denver’s African American community. It will also shed light on the influence of religious ideals on the migration of African Americans, and the intersection of their communities and experiences in the West and specifically in Denver. This is a community rich with diversity of thought, beliefs and ideals. This paper will examine how the community members collaborated in pursuit of freedom, and self determination.
CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The historiography of slavery, the spirituality and religiosity of the enslaved people, the strategy toward self determination, and the intersection of these and other complexities of their daily lives have been examined as part of the overall conversation about African Americans and the Black churches. Churches were an integral part of these communities throughout the country, but the primary focus has been in the Eastern United States. This included research on the intersection of African Americans, religion, and slavery, especially along the East coast and in the Southern states.

Extensive research and multiple readings of the theories presented through West African paradigms narrowed the focus of African spirituality as it integrated with African American religion. One approach described in *An Eco-cultural and Social Paradigm for Understanding Human Development: A (West African) Context* by Dorris E. Ngaujah, counters the perspective of some western theorists, by engaging social, eco-cultural, and environmental frameworks.²


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³ Brenda E. Stevenson. “The Question of the Slave Female Community and Culture in the American South: Methodological and Ideological Approaches.” *The Journal of*
Brenda Stevenson traced the early accounts of African women enslaved from Angola, “(T)heir names bore the marks of Catholic baptism.” 4 The author investigated their circumstances, their survival, cultural transition, self-identification, and the intersection of their lives among other enslaved people and the slaveholders. In one example she focused on the ratio of Black women enslaved on the farms of two related men, and continued a discussion of the sociological variations in slave communities throughout the South. She also identified that gender and ethnic diversity in geographic regions of the South may have affected the degree of retention of traditions and cultural norms. 5 The brutality of slavery imposed on women of African descent not only forced the unreasonable demands of physical labor, but also chronic sexual denigration. Many women were subjugated by the slaveholders’ family as involuntary and abused nannies (the term used was “Mammy”), or nursing the slaveholders’ children. They suffered the trauma of forced denial of caring for their own children. If there were few or singular women on plantations, the loneliness and ability to survive the trauma of slavery was more difficult. The African women on plantations brought their own cultural histories and identities and created circles of support. The women within the slave community created their own theology within African belief systems,


layered with the necessity to formulate double consciousness strategies for survival through self-identity, social, group and individual dynamics.  

In the article *The Middle Passage, Trauma and the Tragic Re-Imagination of African American Theology*, the author, Matthew V. Johnson Sr., examined the evolution of African American Christianity through the psycho-traumatic and chronic process of enslavement. It was created out of chronic mourning, tragedy, loss, inhumanity, and incredible despair.  

Africans arriving in the new world already suffering from the debilitating effects of the sustained trauma of transport, complicated by violent separation from family and community and the shock of the threateningly unfamiliar were subjected to additional trauma and extreme stressors in the experiences of the auction block, further violent separations, slave breaking, sexual exploitation and abuse, and institutionalized violence to a degree that coercion defined and exhausted the quality of African American participation in the nomo-generative, hegemonic culture.  

Communities of enslaved Africans created new theological references to heaven, and other worldliness. The nothingness of their lives created a fatalistic vision. The Middle Passage was part of the journey that never ended, as African Americans suffered post traumatic stress of slavery and the effects of chronic oppression.  

Charles Joyner wrote that there were divergent belief systems throughout the landscape of Africa, and “they reinterpreted the elements of Christianity in terms of

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deep-rooted African religious concerns … The originality of African American Christianity, then, lies neither in its African elements nor its Christian elements, but in its unique and creative synthesis of both.”

John Roberts explained in his article *African American Belief Narratives and the African Cultural Tradition*, how culture evolves as it is practiced and repeated daily.\(^9\) Even as different cultural groups were situated together throughout slavery, their belief systems, cultural norms, and religious expressions were more similar than the unfamiliar and strange religious and cultural systems of the slaveholders. Additionally, the idea of embracing a system that imposed such brutality, while completely abandoning a lifetime of ritual and practices did not happen. Eventually, over time, the African belief systems, adapted, evolved, and integrated these new ideals into their own cultural and religious norms.

*The Great Escapes: Four Slave Narratives* illuminated the risks of escaping slavery, and pursuing freedom. The editor Daphne Brooks introduced each storyteller. In subsequent chapters, she transcribed four stories beginning with William Wells Brown, who had to leave behind his mother and sister when he escaped to freedom. Two narratives were written by Henry Box Brown, who packed himself in a large box and shipped himself to the north. The last narrative was the story of William and Ellen Craft, a husband and wife who traveled north. She passed as a white man with

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his male servant. The stories described their experiences while enslaved, and the strategy to gain their freedom.\textsuperscript{11} The common thread was their Christian belief and how it fueled their action of escape.

As tension rose between the North and South during the 1840s strategies in some churches and branches of government to end slavery spurred much debate. Some northern states enacted laws to protect the freedoms of runaway slaves. Congress, however, voted in the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, in an effort to reinforce and strengthen the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. The authors of \textit{African American Odyssey} detailed the fight of free labor versus slave labor. The story of William and Ellen Craft was written as an example of the effort to protect fugitive slaves from the journey back to Georgia.\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Creating Black Americans: African American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present} by Nell Irvin Painter detailed a timeline of newly enacted laws, Supreme Court decisions, and events that spurred the Civil War as the country expanded west of the Mississippi River.\textsuperscript{13} Both books addressed specific accounts of events that pushed or pulled African Americans west, and included stories about urban dwellers, homesteaders, cowboys, Buffalo Soldiers, miners, and their

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communities. Religion and the history of their churches were noted as part of their cultural fabric and foundation.  

Many stories examined the migration west and Black communities including the establishment of their churches; but there is less discourse or scholarship on the intersection of spirituality, or religiosity within the African American community. Even fewer works focus on the history of Black churches specifically in Denver’s African American community. The role of the church is an important consideration in the movement and advancement of African American people and is important to this Denver community. How have Black Churches shaped the ideas and influenced or supported its members, especially in Denver’s African American community?

Quintard Taylor wrote *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528 -1990* and inspired a deeper look into the history of the western U S and the intersection of African Americans. It was a well-written overview of African descendants enmeshed in the history of Mexico, Texas, New Mexico, and California -free or enslaved - and later in other territories and states in the west, including Colorado. It included accounts of men, women and children who lived in and around the Denver area, within the overall context of African Americans in the west, but also within the context of the other people that occupied the west.

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16Quintard Taylor. *In Search of the Racial Frontier*. 
In 2002 Taylor co-edited with Shirley Anne Wilson Moore, *African American Women Confront the West 1600 – 2000* on the little known history of Black women who migrated west. Scholars from a variety of history departments across the western U. S. contributed stories in more than eighteen chapters.\(^\text{17}\) The book encouraged further research into the history of African Americans who migrated to Denver, a city that rests where the Great Plains converge with the Rocky Mountains. This has created a unique history among the people who have made it their home. Although the history of the people in this area began more than ten millennia ago, the focus is about the people of African descent - many of whom were formerly enslaved in other regions of the country – as they migrated to this region beginning in the late 1850s. *From Slavery to Affluence: Memoir of Robert Anderson, Ex-Slave,* by Daisy Anderson, chronicled the life of Robert Anderson through slavery in Kentucky, his military service during the Civil War, and his prosperity as a homesteader in Nebraska. He spoke about religion during slavery. At seventy nine years old he married a very young woman and school teacher, Daisy Graham and moved to Nebraska. After his death, Daisy moved to Steamboat Springs with her sister, and worked very hard as an unskilled laborer for many years. Throughout this story she and her husband professed their Christian beliefs.\(^\text{18}\) She never remarried nor had


In 1993, she moved to Denver and lived at the Amberwood Nursing Home. In 1997 at the age of ninety-six, she attended a Gettysburg Memorial and met a Civil War Confederate Widow. She died September 19, 1998, at the age of ninety-seven. A memorial service was held at Most Precious Blood Catholic Church in Denver on September 30, 1998.

These stories also revealed the political climate, the politics of hegemony, the influence of religion, the cultural dynamics, the disconnections and interconnectedness, but especially the stories from the storytellers, written from the bottom-up. Who were the people in this community of African descendants? Where did they come from? What were the circumstances that fueled their journey? How do their experiences fit within the framework of the neighborhood? Why do these stories need to be told? The research through church documents, Denver directories, journals, diaries, newspaper articles, letters, court documents, government documents and other resources, described a variety of ways the community worked to gain freedom, pursue their right to self determination, and raise their children in a relatively safe environment.

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21 Tillie Fong. “Daisy Anderson.”
The 1866 Denver City Directory listed nine churches, including an AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church and an African Baptist Church. Two of Denver’s oldest Black churches, Zion Baptist Church, organized in 1865, and St. John African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) - later changed to Shorter Chapel - organized in 1868, fueled the spirit of the new Denver residents. Both churches were meeting in the early 1860s, but each had different experiences as they continued to expand their congregations, and establish permanent facilities.  

Both churches have continued to be anchors in the Black community into the twenty-first century.

What was the impetus, and what influence was religion for their congregants to migrate west to Denver? The scholarship available examined the history of churches across the nation, and what may have influenced the number of churches founded by new Denver residents. Five books offered different perspectives into the lives of African Americans and some examples of the churches. Each book established a foundation with which to build research and created a roadmap for further inquiry. The first was Growing up Black in Denver, co-written by Billie Arlene Grant, Ernestine Smith, and Gladys Smith, and self-published in 1988. The authors interviewed a number of Black families and individuals who talked about their relatives’ or their own migration to Colorado. Many who were interviewed included

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important details about their church affiliations, while others provided very little information.

Lauren Mauck’s pictorial book, *Five Points Neighborhood of Denver* detailed histories of residents in this neighborhood northeast of downtown Denver from 1870 through 2000.\(^2^4\) Seven years later, another pictorial book, *African Americans of Denver*, written by Ronald J. Stephens, PhD, LaWanna Larson, and the Black American West Museum, expanded the list of African Americans in Denver and some in other areas of Colorado from the late 1850s through 2007.\(^2^5\)

Bibliographic information from both books led to research housed at the Blair Caldwell African American Research Library. Clementine Washington Pigford researched and compiled a nine-volume collection on Zion Baptist Church.\(^2^6\) It included biographies, letters, newspaper articles, interviews, excerpts from diaries, legal documents, membership lists and other data. A life member of the church, she researched the history of the church from the 1860s through 1999. She identified members involved in various events who affected church history, Colorado history, and U. S. history. The library is currently cataloguing boxes of Shorter A. M. E. Church materials, such as books, newspapers, pictures, diaries, letters, and other primary documents.

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\(^2^5\) Ronald J Stephens, PhD., et al *Images of America*.

Denver Public Library Western Genealogy Department has digitally recorded
pictures, legal documents, newspapers, books, diaries, Denver directories, Colorado
census, and other primary documents and research data from the 1850s to present day.
The Stephen Hart Library at History Colorado provided extensive research into the U. S.
Census for Arapahoe County Colorado. Ancestry.com has digitally recorded census
data from 1860s through the 1940s.

Researching the archives of Zion Baptist Church, and Shorter African
Methodist Episcopal Church, the biographies, newspaper clippings, and other church
records helped to frame the history of the African American community in Denver.
Their perspectives are critical to understanding the intersection of various cultures,
ideology and history of Denver. Studies and patterns of the movement west, and the
research of earlier and evolved practices on plantations, the northeastern U. S. and the
antebellum south, may also help to formulate the framework for discovering the
insights and histories of these two churches, their impact on the communities they
serve, and the impact of the communities on the churches.

Although, there were many Black churches that organized in Denver between
1865 and 1900, this paper will only include history leading up to the two oldest Black
churches. It is a study of the lives of the people in these two churches and as a result
will be a source about the African American community, and how it fits in the greater
discourse on Denver history. It is the beginning of an effort to record these stories
and this history in depth.
CHAPTER III
CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY

Christianity was the dominant religion of the Americas. The conquest of the Americas was formulated in the Doctrine of Discovery, endorsed by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, and propagated by Christopher Columbus during the fifteenth century, and by Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and George Peckham in the sixteenth century. Three popes during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries documented the need to bring infidels into the fold and convert them to Christianity for the higher good.

As the Portuguese invested in the Trans-Saharan slave trade and brought back slaves to the Iberian Peninsula, another opportunity opened in the Americas. Spain joined Portugal, and eventually so did the Dutch, the French, and the English. Skin color – (socially constructed) race - became a defining factor in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Christians deemed black-skinned peoples as infidels who should be enslaved citing the curse of Ham (Noah’s son).

The English gained control of the slave trade in 1713, and outlawed the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1807. The United States outlawed it 1808. The illegal


28 Robert A. Williams, American Indian in Western Legal Thought, 51, 159.


transport of Africans to the Americas continued however, through the 1840s in the U. S and 1860s in the Caribbean and South America.\(^1\) The domestic slave trade increased with the demand for more labor in cotton producing states. Breeding slaves for profit became an important base in the southern economy as African women were more and more brutalized, and their families sold away.\(^2\)

However, ex-slave testimony supplies abundant evidence that some owners coerced slaves’ sexuality in the interest of profitable reproduction. Virtually all owners engaged in eugenic practices, such as rewarding women who bore children regularly and pressuring and selling women who did not. Slave women bore their first children around age nineteen, some two years earlier than the white women who owned them. Slave women continued having children every two and one-half years until they reached about age forty. (Their mistresses, who could rely on wet-nurses, nursed their children for shorter periods, and bore children closer together.)\(^3\)

The southern economy was heavily dependent on slave labor on plantations, on some small farms, and as assignments in the cities and small rural communities. Slavery continued as an active system in the southern states until 1865, with the signing of the Thirteenth Amendment.\(^4\)

Slaveholders had different ideas about whether or not to teach the gospel to enslaved people. The Church of England pushed to change laws about teaching the Bible, but met much resistance from slaveholders fearing a baptized slave would be considered Christian and the doctrines would then allow their freedom. Until the late

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\(^2\) Nell Irvin Painter. Creating Black Americans, 97.

\(^3\) Nell Irvin Painter. Creating Black Americans, 99.

eighteenth century when perceptions and attitudes began to change, most did not allow enslaved people to hear the gospel. If, however, the slaveholder allowed it, Christianity was enforced by scheduling time during the week for plantation services.

Some slaveholders continued to believe if any slave was baptized, their status would elevate, and they could be sued for enslaved people’s freedom. Some slaveholders’ required white preachers, while others enlisted slaves as preachers. Of course there were varying ranges of what enslaved people were allowed or not allowed to hear. The preachers were required to focus on passages that encouraged enslaved people to be docile or compliant, and to never speak passages that alerted them of their equal status in the world. Eventually, laws were passed to exempt slaves from the religious laws in the Bible; “baptism did not alter slave status.”

Methodist and Baptist preachers had anti-slavery agendas that in the late eighteenth century had to be curtailed in order to gain better access to enslaved people. Still their sermons were interpreted with the idea “that they were ‘friendly toward freedom’.” A large number of Black men were licensed to preach in the late eighteenth century, and some had gained more autonomy when preaching on plantations. Their sermons encouraged ways to live through slavery, and to have independent thought. A number of independent Black churches with free and enslaved memberships organized throughout the south.

35 Charles Joyner, “‘Believer I Know.’” 21 23.


In many areas enslaved people aligned Christianity with some western African based ideologies. Some Catholic saints aligned with Orishas in Yoruba traditions. European Christianity interpreted a narrative from the Bible that explained their Exodus out of Egypt into Israel. However, enslaved people saw their own fate as being kidnapped out of Israel and “the Middle Passage had brought them to Egypt land, where they suffered bondage under a new Pharaoh.”

Enslaved people in Georgia and South Carolina Sea Islands had little contact with the slaveholders, and were able to practice their traditional beliefs with little interference. Known as the Gullah in the South Caroline Sea Islands and the Geechee in the Georgia coast islands, they began to integrate their West African Muslim practices with Protestant traditions, and eventually “embraced” a creolized Christianity.

During the late eighteenth century evangelical preaching influenced more enslaved people to embrace Christianity. Many had hoped that with accepting Christianity, it might get them closer to freedom. Early in the nineteenth century, in some areas Black preachers gained more freedom to travel and preach. Many used the Bible passages to inform their congregations about other events, family members, planned uprisings or escapes. The call by the preacher and the response by the

congregation was a traditional African based form of communicating, and proved effective on plantations.  

Daisy Anderson recorded and published her husband Robert Anderson’s memoirs, *From Slavery to Affluence*. He recounted his experiences with religion and church services on the plantation where he was enslaved. The slaveholders in the region attended church on Sundays, “and it was a social event as well as religious.” He described the sanctuary having church pews for white congregation, and benches upstairs for the enslaved people who were taking care of horses and carriages, or the slaveholders’ children. He took care of the horse and carriage for his slaveholder, and was able to attend the church service. It also gave him time to visit with enslaved people from other plantations before the service started.

He also spoke about the religious beliefs and church services on the plantations. “The colored race is, as a whole, a very religious people. We people on the plantation had our church services the same as the white folks.” He also described the details of the service and what was covered during the sermon.

The religion was one largely of enchantment and fear, which fitted in very nicely with the African religion of witch doctors and fear. The side of religion as typified by Christ is his compassion for the sick, the poor, and the little children, was not known in those days…


43 Daisy Anderson. *From Slavery to Affluence*, 20.

44 Daisy Anderson. *From Slavery to Affluence*, 21.

45 Daisy Anderson. *From Slavery to Affluence*, 22.

46 Daisy Anderson. *From Slavery to Affluence*, 22.

Music was also part of many African traditions. Enslaved people sang about their despair or passed covert messages through the words about hope for freedom or planned escapes.\(^{48}\) Robert Anderson spoke about the congregation taking Bible stories and creating songs, and keeping rhythm through chants, swaying bodies, or patting feet and hands.\(^{49}\) Music and Bible stories woven with African folktales provided a forum for double consciousness; learn the ways to be and behave around slaveholders, while holding on to the actual self.\(^{50}\) Learn to feign respect and passivity, while holding on to the truth of their experiences and resisting their circumstances; learn to live in the consciousness of a slave, and preserving the consciousness of the whole person while strategizing their path toward freedom. This was a religion all their own; separate and distinct from American Christianity.\(^{51}\)

\(^{48}\) Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 56.

\(^{49}\) Daisy Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence*, 24.


\(^{51}\) Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 102/3.
African Based Theology

Within the hopelessness and brutality of slavery, unexpected glimmers of hope infiltrated the system. African spirituality traveled the oceans, as the slave trade transported millions of souls to the Americas. Languages and cultures, families and identities were devastated, but African descendents retained their religious beliefs and connection to some part of their heritage. Within this system communities developed, families were created, and churches were established. The enslaved people valued other people, not materialism or hierarchy.\(^{52}\) African based theology evolved a new paradigm: African American Christianity.

The peoples of African ancestry represent more than four hundred major language groups, and within that, thousands of dialects that identify the diversity and spectrum of the cultures and ideologies. Religiosity and spiritual beliefs are as complex and diverse as language.\(^{53}\) John S. Mbiti wrote in his *Introduction to African Religion* stated:

“Because African Religion developed together with all the other aspects of the heritage, it belongs to each people within which it has evolved. It is not preached from one people to another. Therefore a person must be born in a particular African people in order to be able to follow African Religion in that group ... African Religion functions more on a communal than individual basis... Since African Religion belongs to the people, no individual member of the society concerned can stand apart and reject the whole of his people’s religion.”\(^{54}\)

\(^{52}\) Nell Irvin Painter. *Creating Black America*, 103.


These are not separate, compartmentalized entities; each is collectively part of daily life. African religion does not have a beginning, is not founded, or started by an individual; it does not have a written history or scripture.\(^55\) It is taught through conversation and example - oral tradition; it is lived through daily experiences, and events, and evolves over time as circumstances, environment, and life experiences change. Cultural heritage and standards, morality, personal accountability, work ethic, interaction with nature and stewardship, choices, and beliefs are taught through African religion. \(^56\)

Most have a monotheistic belief in a Supreme Being, and believe their ancestors are part of the spiritual realm in this world. Some societies have spirits as intermediaries leading up to God, who are in charge of various aspects of the societies’ existence.\(^57\) They honor their ancestors, respect and reflect their influences, and may express that with a shrine or with rituals and ceremonies; but they do not worship their ancestors.\(^58\)

External observers, who do not fully understand the theology of African Religion, mislabeled or misidentified some aspects as animism and fetishism.\(^59\) In African Religion, objects are not worshiped. As they worship God through rituals or celebrations, they may include natural or man-made objects in the ceremonies, and


\(^{57}\) John S. Mbiti. *Introduction to African Religion*, 68.


may believe “that some of the spirits are thought to inhabit objects like trees, ponds, and rocks… This is, however, only a small part of the many beliefs held in African religion.”

Family or community celebrations, rituals or festivals mark events such as birth, circumcision, harvests, weddings, or deaths, or practice community prayers for rain, to end droughts, or to change circumstances affecting their group.

African religion is everywhere, and every part of everything and every person. It can be in sacred places, or in shrines, man-made or natural, where sacrifices or offerings are made to God, or prayers are made to God. It is part of the art, in symbols, in crafts, music and dance, storytelling, oral histories, myths, names of people and places, culture, customs, mysticism, and every aspect of their belief systems.

Witchcraft, sorcery, and spells are also part of African religion, but not its main focus. It is a supernatural energy that can be used for healing, and can explore beyond the scope of our three-dimensional being. It can also be used for evil and impose harm and/or danger on some one.

Christianity and Islam have been part of many societies, especially along the Mediterranean coast and Eastern regions, for hundreds of years. Areas in Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and parts of Chad were Christian two thousand years ago. Islam converted some Christian regions of Chad and north-central Africa and has dominated

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the Mediterranean regions and West Africa since the late seventh century.\textsuperscript{65} The spread of these two religions have continued, with Islam primarily in the Northern third of the continent, and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar. African religion is still practiced in most areas simultaneously with Islam and Christianity; however, many rituals and ceremonies were lost during colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some communities are resurrecting past practices, while others are reworking rituals and ceremonies in conjunction with current systems.\textsuperscript{66} Conflicts are prevalent as African Christian cultural and belief systems are not necessarily aligned with Western Christian cultural and belief systems and the missionaries who attempted to enforce these systems.\textsuperscript{67}

**African Baptist Church**

Black preachers experienced a wide range of challenges during slavery. They faced persecution, punishments, or ridicule during the late eighteenth century from slaveholders. The Baptist churches in the south authorized ordained Black preachers, who preached in front of mixed congregations, and eventually in all Black churches. Some Baptist churches “conducted literary training and instruction of its Negro members.”\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{65}Mario Azevedo, *Africana Studies*, 410.


During the Eighteenth Century African churches emerged throughout the south. In 1773, the First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia began meeting and by 1777 was officially organized.\(^{69}\) In 1773 or 1775 the Negro Baptist Church in Silver Bluff, South Carolina organized, and in 1776 the Negro Baptist Church in Williamsburg, Virginia was organized.\(^{70}\) The Black churches were places of refuge from the indignities and brutality of slavery. Members were taught scripture, taught to read, forged relationships and built communities.\(^{71}\) Some church memberships included enslaved people and free people of color. The Southern churches received help and support from Northern churches when enslaved people transitioned to freedom.\(^{72}\)

**African Methodist Episcopal Church**

The first African Methodist Episcopal Church was established for African Americans in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1787, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones founded the Free African Society, and began the framework for African Methodist and Episcopal theology.

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Richard Allen was born into slavery in 1760 in Delaware, and purchased his freedom in 1777. He converted to Methodism and was a member and a minister at St. George Methodist Church.

Absalom Jones was born into slavery in 1746 in Delaware, and purchased his freedom in 1784. He was also a member of St. George Methodist Church and was the minister in charge of increasing Black membership. Church members were alarmed by the increase, and demanded segregation of the Black members to the upstairs balcony. When ushers tried to move them upstairs, Allen and Jones refused, and led the Black members to walk out of church.


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and became the first African American Episcopalian Priest in 1804.\textsuperscript{77} James Forten, a Founding Member of the American Antislavery Society, and American Moral Reform Society, joined with Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in establishing the African Masonic Lodge of Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{78}

Allen, Forten and Jones signed up to fight in the War of 1812.\textsuperscript{79} They started the Black Brigade in Philadelphia, but never saw combat because the English stopped fighting when they did not capture Baltimore.\textsuperscript{80} Within their community, each worked diligently to end slavery and change the course of history.


\textsuperscript{78} Darlene Clark Hine, et al. \textit{African American Odyssey}, 110.

\textsuperscript{79} Darlene Clark Hine, et al. \textit{African American Odyssey}, 114.

\textsuperscript{80} Darlene Clark Hine, et al. \textit{African American Odyssey}, 114.
CHAPTER IV
AFRICAN AMERICAN MIGRATION

Slave resistance, revolts, and efforts to escape occurred throughout the country. Individuals devised plans and ran away, or gathered small groups to escape, conducted mass insurrections, killed their own children, killed the slaveholders or committed suicide.\(^{81}\) In her book, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History*, Darlene Clark Hine wrote that the combined influence of rape (or the threat of rape), domestic violence, and a desire to escape economic oppression born of racism and sexism are keys to understanding the hidden motivations of major social protest and migratory movements in African American history.\(^{82}\)

The Underground Railroad moved enslaved people out of the south to Canada, New England, Philadelphia, areas north of the Ohio River, or west beyond Missouri until slavery ended in 1865. Harriet Tubman, known as “Moses of her People” journeyed back to Maryland numerous times to free several hundreds of enslaved people over ten years.\(^{83}\)

Free African Americans such as William Still and Frederick Douglas, religious groups such as the Unitarians, Quakers and Black churches, and other abolitionist groups and organizations scattered throughout the United States and Canada, actively protested slavery, or assisted enslaved people finding safe routes, places of refuge,

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\(^{81}\) Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 103.


food and shelter during their journey out of the south.\footnote{Darlene Clark Hine, \textit{African American Odyssey}, 200/1.} Black ministers led anti-slavery activities in their churches and in other churches in their areas. They, along with several anti-slavery newspapers and journalists, activated a rigorous campaign to end slavery. Thousands escaped on their own without help.\footnote{Nell Irvin Painter, \textit{Creating Black Americans}, 105.}

Frederick Douglass believed that Christianity, as it supported slavery ideology in the United States, was vastly different than the “Christianity of Christ.”\footnote{Frederick Douglass. \textit{Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself.} Harriet Jacobs. (New York, Modern Library Mass Market Edition, 2004), 113.} He stated “I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women whipping, cradle plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land.”\footnote{Frederick Douglass. \textit{Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass}, 113.} He believed that the American form of Christianity in many cases preached a false and malevolent gospel, and contradicted the truth of pure Christianity.\footnote{Frederick Douglass. \textit{Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass}, 115.}

William Craft escaped slavery with his wife Ellen Craft in 1848. They belonged to different slaveholders, and their fear of possible separation loomed over their lives. He wrote in his diary:

Having heard while in Slavery that ‘God made of one blood all nations of men’ and also that the American Declaration of Independence says, that ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are
life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;’ we could not understand by what right we were held as ‘chattels’.89

Migration West

A new chapter in American history began in the nineteenth century as the lands west of the Mississippi River were opened to mass migration. The indigenous peoples who lived on these lands for thousands of years were soon to experience the encroachment of new inhabitants.90 European explorers, political leaders and militia had carved paths throughout the continent, and continued to move toward the west coast. In order to facilitate their endeavors and to confiscate the lands, the U. S. government enacted a number of new laws, issued proclamations, and established new treaties to validate their intentions. They purchased the land claimed by the French - The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 - between the Mississippi River and the Rio Grande River. Mexico outlawed slavery in 1829. Texas fought for their right to own slaves and gained independence from Mexico in 1836. Congress annexed the territory at President Polk’s insistence in 1845. Slavery dramatically increased in Texas as new slaveholders entered the territory and purchased land.91 The U. S. declared war against Mexico in 1846 to protect its acquisition of Texas. As the Mexican-American War concluded in 1848, the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and then the


Gadsden Purchase of 1854 brought on significant changes in the westward movement.\textsuperscript{92}

The California Gold Rush in 1849 spurred the movement west through the regions that are now Wyoming and Utah, or on the southern route, through what is now New Mexico and Arizona.\textsuperscript{93} While heading west to California, some heeded the rumors of gold in the western Kansas Territory.\textsuperscript{94} As one of the bands of Arapahoe Nation moved back to their winter station, they encountered these new inhabitants setting up permanent shelter at the confluence of the Cherry Creek, and the Platte River.\textsuperscript{95} November 24, 1858, men who had traveled west realized their dream of chartering their recently established homestead.

As territories opened west of the Mississippi river, debates loomed over the issue of free states versus slave states. The Kansas – Nebraska Act in 1854 nullified the Missouri Compromise of 1820, and allowed “popular sovereignty” or the right of the people to determine whether a territory would become a slave state or a free state.\textsuperscript{96} Violence erupted in Kansas territory resulting in a Kansas Civil War, nicknamed Bleeding Kansas.\textsuperscript{97} This was one of several major events to spur the American Civil

\textsuperscript{92} Richard Griswold del Castillo. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 5-7.

\textsuperscript{93} Dee Brown. \textit{An Indian History of the American West: Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee}, (New York: Picador; Henry Holt and Company, 1970), page 8, 23.

\textsuperscript{94} Carl Abbott, et al. \textit{Colorado}, 44.


War. Court cases such as the Dred Scott Decision in 1857 set off a firestorm of debate about slavery. The Supreme Court ruled that he was not a citizen of the United States, and therefore could not sue for his freedom.98

Meanwhile in the west, African Americans were fighting for anti-discrimination laws, and encouraging protests against slavery moving to California and western territories.99 In 1859, “Forty-nine delegates representing ten of California’s twenty-seven counties attended the convention at St. Andrews AME Church in Sacramento.”100

Civil War

The expansion west prompted debates on the expansion of slavery in the west. President Lincoln was sworn into office March 1861, and faced the Civil War as it began in April 1861. His intention was to end the Confederate hold on the south, and reunite the secession states to the Union, not to end slavery. The war continued much longer and with more casualties than he anticipated. The majority of enslaved people walked away from their plight during the war, and many were captured by Union Troops as “Contraband of War.”101

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100 Quintard Taylor, In Search of the Racial Frontier, 91.
In 1862 President Lincoln convened a meeting with Black abolitionists to plan the relocation of enslaved people to Central America. Eventually, as pressure mounted he allowed the enlistment of Black men into the military, and abandoned his push for relocation. “On September 22, 1862, five days after the Union forces won the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln issued a preliminary proclamation that demanded that the rebelling states return to the Union by January 1, 1863, or their slaves would be ‘forever free’.” The Emancipation Proclamation took effect January 1, 1863, and freed enslaved people in the states seceding from the Union, but not the border states of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri. In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States declared all people were freed (with the exception of those who commit crimes).

The Freedman’s Bureau provided assistance to the newly freed Black people, and to educational institutions. Black churches, with the support from missionary associations, the AME church, and other religious institutions throughout the north and the south also supported the transition from slavery to freedom.

The years after slavery, the church became the most important institution among African American other than the family. Not only did it fill deep spiritual and inspirational needs, it offered enriching music, provided charity and compassion to those in need, developed community and political leaders, and were free of white supervision.

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105 Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 146.

Western States

As African Americans migrated out of the south, so did their spirited activism, desire for freedom, commitment to thrive, and their religious beliefs. The push of segregation, racism, violence, and the pull to perceived better opportunities, and hope for a brighter future were part of the equation in the mass migration of African Americans throughout the United States. In their attempt to move West, and escape various forms of oppression, violence, racism, and unethical rules, many were confronted with a gradual shift in attitudes, such as de facto segregation, limited resources, restrictive housing covenants, and imposed borders. 107 New laws in California restricted homesteading, denied voting rights, and imposed other exclusions. Oregon imposed laws excluding Black folks from most of regions in the territory. Utah legalized slavery in 1850. 108 New Mexico was part of Mexico, until the United States occupied it 1846. A few wealthy land owners maintained indentured servitude for life, by increasing debt beyond the ability for those in service to pay. 109 In 1850 New Mexico there were more than 3000 enslaved Indians, and a large number of enslaved Africans. Eventually legislation was passed to restrict free Blacks, and enforce stricter slave laws. Many states such as Kansas, Nebraska and Utah continued to impose restrictions on free Blacks. 110

107 Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 82.
110 Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 82.
**Exodusters**

The Thirteenth Amendment in the U. S. Constitution legally abolished slavery in 1865. The Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship in 1868, and the Fifteenth Amendment granted Black men the right to vote in 1870.\(^{111}\) Attitudes and behaviors however, continued that these citizens with their newly established freedom were not entitled to the rights and privileges guaranteed in the Constitution.\(^{112}\) Many had left the south to escape slavery, and later Jim Crow Laws and Black Codes – oppressive laws and imposed rules that enforced separatist and segregationist access to accommodations, transportation, services, schools and housing.\(^{113}\) The laws and rules dramatically increased during the decline of Reconstruction Era (1865 – 1877).\(^{114}\)

Lynchings and other forms of extreme brutality coupled with the effort to push Black folks backward as closely to slavery as possible without calling it slavery, spurred migration north and west. Some of these laws imposed impossible or unreasonable limitations on their livelihood and access to resources. Sharecropping left many in deeper debt and few options to improve family or living conditions.\(^{115}\)

It also included people with adventure on their minds, desire for military duty, to escape share-cropping and farm their own land, establish businesses, or to rear their


\(^{112}\) Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans*, 141-2.  

\(^{113}\) Quintard Taylor. *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 138.


children in a place of freedom. Many people loaded up their belongings and moved to the west-African coast of Liberia, moved north into the industrial cities, or west of the Mississippi River, looking for their own land to farm, or settlements to start a new life.

Several waves of post-slavery African American migration from the south occurred from 1865 through 1945. One of the earlier waves of migration, from about “1865 to 1880, 40,000 black people known as the ‘Exodusters’ moved to Kansas.” Leaders of the migration included, W. R. Hill, one of the founders of Nicodemus, Kansas, and Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, formerly enslaved in Tennessee. The end of the Reconstruction Era spurred African Americans to leave the south en masse fearing re-enslavement.

The migrations of 1879—in which 6,000 African Americans settled in Kansas—took on a religious tone. African American migrants saw themselves as taking part in a biblical exodus, with Kansas as the Promised Land. In 1879, often referred to as the Exodus Year, more than 20,000 black men, women, and children passed through St. Louis to Kansas and points west.

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121 Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating African Americans*, 152.
Ida B. Wells Barnett, a member of an A. M. E. church, an activist, and a journalist for thirty or more years, wrote news articles and publications in Nashville, New York and Chicago that urged black people to leave the south to get away from lynchings and violence, and more than 7,000 took heed and moved west. As one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, she brought national attention to lynchings and justice system.

There were settlements in Indian Territory such as Boley, Liberty, and Langston, Oklahoma; and the migration continued throughout the western states, including large settlements in Nebraska, New Mexico, Colorado, California, British Columbia and other Canadian and Indian territories. Smaller settlements or families scattered across most of the western states.


Jacqueline Jones Royster, Ed. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*. 17/19
CHAPTER V

ZION BAPTIST CHURCH AND

SHORTER AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

DENVER’S OLDEST BLACK CHURCHES

November 22, 1858, several men who had traveled west established Denver City Town Company at the confluence of the Cherry Creek, and the Platte River. Three Russell brothers from Georgia named an earlier settlement Auraria, after their own home town, and the name on the Periodic Table for gold. Nearby, the Saint Charles Settlement, and Denver City were also established in 1858. Along the west side of the Platte River, Highland was established in 1859. The boundaries for the Jefferson Territory defined the area in the western Kansas Territory as a separately governed entity, Arapahoe County, K. T.

The House of Representatives and Colorado Territory were established in 1861, with intended plans for state-hood in 1864. The area continued to expand northeaster along the grid originally established in Auraria and Denver City. Henry Brown platted Capitol Hill on a compass grid – north, south, east, west - starting at Broadway Street and moving east. As the streets running northeast converged with


the new grid, and eventually when the neighborhoods intersected it created several corners with five points.\textsuperscript{129}

As the area continued to grow, the common denominators were houses of faith. The 1866 Denver City Directory listed nine churches, including an African Methodist Episcopal Church and an African Baptist Church.\textsuperscript{130} The directory lists both the A. M. E. Church on Holladay Street between H & I (between 17th and 18th Streets), and the African Baptist Church at Holladay Street between H & I and William Norrid as pastor. Zion Baptist Church, organized in 1865.\textsuperscript{131} St. John African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) - later changed the name to Shorter AME Church - organized in 1868.\textsuperscript{132}

In Eugene H. Berwanger’s article, “Hardin and Langston: Western Black Spokesmen of the Reconstruction Era” he commented that the Black churches were slow to be established and, “…not the influence of black ministers; extant sources indicate that the black clergy did not play a prominent role in the civil rights movements in Kansas and Colorado…” although members and the clergy of both Zion

\textsuperscript{129} Lauren Mauck, \textit{Images of America}, 17.


\textsuperscript{132} Shorter A. M. E. Church. \textit{Centennial Celebration 1868-1968: 100 Years of Progress}. 12.
and St. John signed the petition in 1864 to grant Black men voting rights.\textsuperscript{133} He also suggested that the delay in establishing the churches was possibly due to the “parent churches” focus on the Civil War, its aftermath, and emphasis was placed on supporting churches in the south.\textsuperscript{134} It is a possible explanation of why the delay in church activity. However, Clementine Pigford stated in her article that William Norrid was formerly enslaved and led a rebellion against slavery.\textsuperscript{135} He was one of the founding members of the Colored Masons, a member of the Republican party, a party delegate, and he signed the petition for the United States to withhold Colorado’s statehood to gain voting and equal rights. Reverend Norrid actively pursued civil rights issues and worked on the idea of starting a “colored” colony.\textsuperscript{136}

Population may have also been a determining factor starting the churches.

According to the 1860 U. S. Federal Census, fourteen mulatto or Black men, and seven mulatto or Black women lived in Denver.\textsuperscript{137} The population increased to 146


\textsuperscript{134} Eugene H. Berwanger. “Hardin and Langston,” 110.


\textsuperscript{136} Clementine Pigford. \textit{Beautiful, Beautiful Zion}. 3.

mulatto or Black men, and ninety-one mulatto or Black women in Denver by 1870.  

A slow, but steady increase in the number of residents began to fill the memberships in the churches.

**Zion Baptist Church**

Zion Baptist Church was organized November 15, 1865, with a membership of 9 persons. The founding members were Minister William Norrid, his wife Rachel Norrid, William and Jane Bosier (Bozier), Emma Green, Thomas J Riley, Jane Jackson, Carrie Armstrong, and Lucy Boyd.

After renting space for more than two years, the congregation built a church on the corner of 20th (L street in 1873) and Arapahoe Streets in 1868. Another building

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141 Clementine Washington Pigford, They Came to Colorado, Draft 3 v 3, 1089.
with a brick façade replaced it in 1881. They purchased the Calvary Baptist Church on Twenty-Fourth Avenue and Ogden Street in 1913, where it is still located today.\(^\text{142}\).

Efforts to include Negro suffrage in the Constitution when the Colorado filed for Statehood in 1864 were futile.\(^\text{143}\) William J Hardin, a local barber and Black community leader was the spokesman on behalf of the Black community when he engaged politicians. Hardin, along with Henry O. Wagoner, and Edward Sanderlin organized community members to interfere with Colorado becoming a state until they gained voting rights. Church members were also actively involved in civil rights issues and believed that Negro Suffrage should be included in the Colorado Constitution... In 1864, 137 men signed a petition to the U. S. Congress, including members of Zion and Shorter, such as Reverend Norrid, Lewis H. Douglass, and Frederick Douglass, Jr., sons of Frederick Douglass, Denver entrepreneurs and civil rights activists, and Barney (B. L.) Ford.\(^\text{144}\)

To The Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the United Stated, in Congress assembled – Your petitioners, Colored Citizens of the Territory of Colorado, would respectfuily represent, That, since the passage of the law of Congress, enfranchising our people in the territories, we have fully and freely, and without molestation, exercised the Elective franchise in this Territory.


And we have full confidence that if the State of Colorado be admitted, into the Union, …

President Andrew Johnson vetoed the bill to grant Colorado statehood, and Congress did not address the petition. However, in Washington, U. S. Senator Charles Sumner learned of their agenda, and advocated for their right to vote.  

Barney Ford was born in 1822, enslaved in Virginia, and walked away from slavery when he was sent on an errand in a free state. He arrived in Denver in 1860. He was an entrepreneur, and worked as a barber, and later opened the Inter-Ocean Hotel in downtown Denver. He was also voted into the state legislature in the 1870s.

A local newspaper, the Denver Daily News wrote an article Mar 16, 1874 (no author listed) entitled Sumner, that the African Baptist Church had a memorial service for U. S Senator Charles Sumner, an antislavery and human right activist. The Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870, which affirmed for Black men the right to vote.

Clara Brown, who traveled to Denver in 1859 on a wagon train, forged her way to a decent living in Central City. Black women in Denver, had almost no

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145 Clementine Washington Pigford. *They Came to Colorado*, Draft 3, v. 3. 1086


political clout, nor did they have much power or influence in other areas, such as their working lives. A very small percentage of Denver’s population, many of the working Black women were employed as cooks, maids, laundress, and in other service rolls.\textsuperscript{149} Some were able to push the boundaries and become entrepreneurs or work in hotels and restaurants.\textsuperscript{150}

Working women also supported their families and their communities. At home they cooked, cleaned and cared for their family. Through their church affiliations many women set up missionary societies or other faith based organizations to educate their families, to take care of the needs of neighbors, and to provide mutual support among the members.\textsuperscript{151} African Americans began migrating to Denver at a much increased rate, and “as the population increased from fewer than 500 in 1870 to over 11,500 in 1910, demands for race reparation increased.”\textsuperscript{152} During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as Jim Crow laws became more and more restrictive, Black people pushed back through self help and national organizations.\textsuperscript{153}

As for the Afro-Americans, they were not strangers in the city either. They were among its first citizens in 1858 and by the late 1880s approached 4,000 in number, out of a population of slightly over 100,000 persons. They had a well-


\textsuperscript{150} Glenda Riley. “American Daughters,” 22


\textsuperscript{152} Carl Abbott, et al., Colorado, 215.

\textsuperscript{153} Moya Hansen, “Try Being a Black Woman!” 147/8.
defined, albeit segregated, community replete with a number of social institutions, the strongest of which was the black church. And although as a group they were clustered in the lower socio-economic strata, there were a few exceptional individuals of rather handsome means.\footnote{William King. “The End of an Era, Denver’s Legal Last Public Execution July 27, 1886.” \textit{The Journal of Negro History}, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Winter, 1983), 37-53. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2717458?origin=JSTOR-pdf, 41 Accessed: May 6, 2013.}

The duties and responsibilities of church members followed along gender lines. The men of Zion and Shorter were in charge of the Pastorate, Board of Trustees and the Deacons, while the women were responsible in large part, the choirs, and various missionary and benevolent groups.\footnote{Shorter A. M. E. Church. \textit{Centennial Celebration 1868-1968: 100 Years of Progress}. 22-25. Robert Pratt III Collection.}

In 1885 Reverend William Gray ministered to Andrew Green, who was tried and convicted of robbing and killing Joseph A. Whitnah, a trolley driver.\footnote{William King. “The End of an Era,” 41.} Several women in the church choir joined Reverend Gray, to make sure that Green had a proper service. Andrew Green was visited by two other ministers, Reverend Dr. I. W. Triplett of Shorter A.M.E. Church, and Reverend Dr. Lewing of a Pueblo, Colorado, A.M.E. Church, and other church members.\footnote{William King. “The End of an Era,” 41.}

Women in their church ministries supported the endeavors of the minister’s work, through outreach, prayer services, the choir, and collection of food and clothing for community members needs.\footnote{Clementine Washington Pigford, \textit{They Came to Colorado}, Book 2, v2, 963.} During celebrations or special events, the women provided the feasts. The ministries expanded outside of the churches and created

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separate clubs and organizations to work for women’s suffrage, equal rights and challenge racism, sexism and sexual harassment, and to improve other social and civic issues.  

In 1892, Elizabeth P. Ensley and her husband moved to Denver, and helped organize the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association. She was the treasurer of this non-partisan group, and helped gain the votes in favor of women’s suffrage in the Colorado Legislature in 1893. She was a journalist for the National Association of Colored Women’s newsletter *Women’s Era*. Their motto was “Lifting as We Climb.” Ensley and Ida DePriest, a member of Zion, later started the Colored Women’s Republican Club, and garnered enough support to elect the first Black Colorado legislator, Joseph Stewart in 1897. DePriest, who was the first Black woman to work at the Denver U S Mint as a weigher, was also a member of the Women’s League of Denver.

In 1891 minister W. P. T Jones and thirty members left Zion and with permission from Reverend John Ford and started Central Baptist Church. In 1912 Central built a new sanctuary at 2400 California Street, where it is currently located.

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159 Jacqueline Jones Royster, Ed. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*.


160 Autry National Center of the American West, *Women of the West Museum*.

162 Autry National Center of the American West, *Women of the West Museum*.

163 Lynda F Dickson. “Lifting as We Climb,” 374.

164 Clementine Washington Pigford, *They Came to Colorado*, Book 1, v1, 4.
Attorney Edwin Hackley and his wife Emma Azalia Hackley, the first Black graduate of the University of Denver, were church members. Hackley was the owner and editor of the Statesman, and sold half of his interest to Joseph D. D. Rivers, who renamed the paper to the *Colorado Statesman*. Azalia Hackley was an accomplished singer and lead the choir as Zion Baptist Church. July 1898 she directed a program held at Shorter A. M. E. Church, and the “choral union,” members of several churches, sang several songs, including ‘Steal Away,’ and ‘The Redemption.”

A new minister to Denver, Reverend John Ford joined Zion in 1899 and served until 1907. He was credited with increasing the membership from 200 to 525, and reduced the church’s debt while he increased the amount of property they owned. He was married to Denver’s first Black woman physician, Dr. Justina Ford, who ushered in a new perspective on women and their role in their community and in the

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church. She, like most of the women at Zion, believed in service to her community.

Reverend John Ford resigned in April 1907, and left Denver for a several-month tour of Europe. When he returned to the United States, he accepted a position with a Baptist church in Florida. Their marriage ended, and Dr. Ford remained in Denver. In 1911 she married Albert Allen, also a member of Zion Baptist church. During her fifty year career in Denver, she delivered more than 7,000 babies, from more than thirty-seven nationalities, and could speak many languages and dialects.

African American women in the Denver area started more than twenty two clubs and organizations between 1900 and 1925. Lynda Dickson extensively researched Black women’s clubs in Denver, and noted in her article, “Toward a Broader Angle of Vision in Uncovering Women’s History: Black Women’s Club Revisited,” the challenges she experienced looking for evidence of their work in the community. What she discovered was that these clubs needed to be examined through an unfamiliar point of reference. Previous research suggested negative, dehumanizing ideology to express the behavior of people of African descent, or


reflected the racist attitudes and biased anti-Black opinions of the time. Other scholarship looked strictly through the lens of how oppression affected the clubs. Much of the commentary continued down a path of categorizing Black women as socially deviant, highly sexualized and a low moral compass. As part of the reaction to these ideas, and the increased experiences with discriminatory rules and laws, Black women sought ways to change some of these perceptions, or to create a circle of support. In some cases, women did not reference the experienced discrimination, but sought only to enjoy the company of other women in various activities. Still in other cases, they actively engaged issues of homelessness, education, employment opportunities, politics, and access to resources, but they also focused on uplifting their community, especially the children. Some projects were perceived as small or insignificant, while others appeared to have higher expectations or results. They worked at improving the lives of their families, and acquiring or enhancing their skills. In some cases it was in the face of oppression, but in other cases oppression was not included as an issue. It was important to combat racial and sexual stereotypes of Black


women’s images in the local and national spotlight, but to also have a social outlet, and fellowship with other women.  

The members of Zion and Shorter were also active in social clubs and organizations. They endeavored to thrive within their community, operate and support local businesses, educate their children, and support philanthropic events. Dr. Joseph Henry Peter Westbrook, later to become a member of Shorter A.M.E. Church arrived in Denver in 1906 and started his medical practice. A few months later his best friend from college, Dr. Thomas Ernest McClain, later to become a member of Zion Baptist Church, arrived and started his dental practice in February 1907. Both were activists in the Black community.

The Glenarm Branch of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) were started to support social engagement of the young people in their communities during the 1920s. Members from Zion, Shorter and other Denver churches supported the programs and annual memberships. Members of both churches and

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179 Darlene Clark Hine. Hine Sight, 14.
180 Denver Public Library, Western Genealogy Department, Central Library, Level 5 Microfiche. Colorado Statesman Newspaper, February 9, 1907.
182 Denver Public Library Western Genealogy Department, Digital Images. YMCA Glenarm Branch Members List.
other churches in Denver area were interconnected through clubs, organizations, special church events, and opportunities to support and/or uplift their communities. The church still holds a strong membership and active ministries.

**Shorter African Methodist Episcopal Church**

Mrs. Mary Smith, and Mrs. Mary Randolph, who became friends when they met in Denver, worked together to form the first Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Denver. Ms. Smith visited gambling establishments to raise funds to start a church, and accumulated enough to build a church on land donated by Civil War Union army officer, Major Fillmore, near the Platte River. According to Shorter Community AME Church website their first building was a log cabin, and members of St John were meeting as early as 1864 but did not formally organize their charter until 1868. With Mrs. Randolph’s partnership, they built the church in 1866. Bishop Thomas M. D. Ward and Reverend John Wilkerson formally organized St. John African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in July 1868, as the first A.M.E. Church in Colorado, on Stout Street and K (Nineteenth) Street.

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The July 14, 1873 edition of the *Denver Daily Times* published a brief article about Shorter A.M. E. Church. Reverend James Madison was soliciting donations to complete the new church structure. He had so far raised $1000, and needed $1200 overall to complete the project. In 1878 at the cost of $2000, the church built a new structure at Stout Street and Nineteenth Street, and changed their name in 1880 to Shorter Chapel in honor of the Right Reverend James A. Shorter, ninth Bishop of the A. M. E. church. In 1886 they sold the building for $15,000. Over the next year, Shorter purchased land in several locations to build their church, only to meet with resistance from the local residents. “For almost a full year and at three different locations, Shorter Chapel experienced considerable opposition from neighbors against having a Black Church in their community.” They bought land at California Street,

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and Twenty-fourth Street for $10,000, then sold it soon after for $12,000. They bought land at Glenarm Place and Seventeenth Street for $10,000 and started construction, when neighbors opposed, so they sold it for $14,000. They bought and sold property at the corner of Lincoln Street, and Nineteenth Avenue.

The church purchased land at Cleveland Place and Twenty-Third Street (Twenty-first Avenue and Park Avenue West) with two homes, for $9000 and later one became the parsonage. In 1887 they erected their new church at a cost of $24,000, but because of all their land sales in the previous year, only had an outstanding debt of $7000.


194 Cleo Parker Robinson Dance. cleoparkerdance.org
The church was burned down April 9, 1925, allegedly by the Ku Klux Klan.\textsuperscript{195} Clementine Pigford’s research included a copy of an article, the May 16, 1925 edition of \textit{The Denver Star}, which noted that Shorter A.M.E. church was the conference headquarters for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP) sixteenth annual national conference, but because of the fire, the conference had to be moved to Zion Baptist church. Nationally recognized attorney Clarence Darrow of Chicago, and Judge Ben Lindsey of Denver were guest speakers at the conference. “…Judge Lindsey, whose recent re-election was contested by the Ku Klux Klan.”\textsuperscript{196}

Shorter A.M.E. shared space in another Black church, Peoples Presbyterian Church while building a new sanctuary at the same site, and moved back in April 4, 1926, where they remained through 1994.\textsuperscript{197} They moved into a new church in 1994 at 3100 Richard Allen Court, near Colorado Blvd and Martin Luther King Blvd, where they are today.\textsuperscript{198} Cleo Parker Robinson’s Dance theatre owns and occupies the former Shorter Church building.\textsuperscript{199}

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\textsuperscript{196} Clementine Pigford, \textit{They Came to Colorado}, Book 2, v2, 853.
\textsuperscript{198} Mrs. Justina Grizzard. \textit{Shorter Community A.M.E. Church 125th Anniversary}, 10.
\textsuperscript{199} Lauren Mauck, \textit{Images of America}, 121.
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The first of Denver’s schools was established in December 1862. The first school rented space at 16th and Market, and operated about a year and a half, then ran out of money. In 1866 two schools opened, one a German school and the other rented space from J. H. Kehler at the Windsor Hotel. By 1868, the schools were re-organized to accommodate as many as 500 students. Denver residents required separate schools for the 42 black children, so they attended school in rented space at Zion Baptist Church (African Baptist Church). In 1873 the school was moved to Shorter AME Church. The Arapahoe school was built in 1874 on Arapahoe Street between Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets, and all of Denver’s students attended.

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201 Denver Public School History http://www.dpsk12.org/aboutdps/history/dps_history_no1.shtml

202 Denver Public School History http://www.dpsk12.org/aboutdps/history/dps_history_no1.shtml

203 Denver Public School History http://www.dpsk12.org/aboutdps/history/dps_history_no1.shtml
The school closed in 1881 and the building was demolished in 1955 to make way for the new Federal Reserve Bank.\footnote{Old Arapahoe School. Denver Public Library, Western History/Genealogy, Digital Collections. http://digitaldenverlibrary.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15330coll22/id/59932/rec/28.}

George and Gertie Ross were members of Shorter A.M.E. Church. He was a local attorney, and she was music teacher and the church organist. Both were active in civil rights and members of various organizations.\footnote{Denver Public Library Western Genealogy Department, The Denver Star Newspaper 1913. 1/3 http://cdm16079.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15330coll1/id/868/rec/10} They led a protest in 1915 against the film \textit{Birth of a Nation}.\footnote{Lynda F Dickson, “Lifting as We Climb,” 378.} He was the first president of the Denver Chapter N.A.A.C.P.\footnote{Ronald Stephens, et al, \textit{Images of America}, 42.}

Dr. Joseph Henry Peter Westbrook was a beloved physician and activist. He and his wife, Mildred, were members of Shorter A.M.E. Church. He was credited with naming Dearfield, Colorado, an all Black settlement east of Greeley. He stated “the fields are dear to us.”\footnote{Ronald Stephens, et al. \textit{Images of America}, 53.} He infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s, and kept the Black community abreast of their plans.\footnote{Ronald Stephens, et al. \textit{Images of America}, 53.}
George Morrison, Sr., his wife Willa Mae, and children were members of Shorter. 210 He was a bandleader and professor. He owned two night clubs, one in Golden, and one in the Five Points Neighborhood. The Ku Klux Klan had threatened to burn down his club in Golden, but burned down the foundation of his new home on Gilpin Street. 211

Joseph D. D. and his wife, Richie J. Rivers were members of Shorter. He bought the *Colorado Statesmen* from Edwin Hackley in the 1890s.212 During the next twenty years, his paper merged with the *Denver Star*, and continued publications until 1961. He kept his audience updated on daily events in politics, race relations, church programs, and human interest stories in the Denver community and surrounding areas, but also published national and international articles. After he died, his wife married William Greenwood. Their son William Greenwood, Jr. married Marie Anderson Greenwood, the first black tenured teacher in Denver Public Schools. 213

Addye Hall Lightner, president of the Denver Federation of Colored Women’s Club was also a member of Shorter. She worked in the real estate industry and later worked for American Woodman in their real estate department. She was a civil rights


212 Clementine Pigford, *They Came to Colorado*, Draft 1, v 1, 113/4.

213 Clementine Pigford, They Came to Colorado, Draft 1, v 1, 113/4.
activist focused on fair housing, and worked with the Urban League.\textsuperscript{214} Her brother – in – law was the Supreme Clerk at the American Woodman.\textsuperscript{215}

Shorter’s congregation continued to grow and the church continued to prosper. In 1979, they purchased land and a building from the Denver School Board north of Barrett Elementary School, in the 2900 block of Jackson Street in northeast Denver.\textsuperscript{216} The building currently houses their day-care facility.

In 1980 Shorter member Iris Slack canvassed the neighbors across the street from the land to change the name from Jackson Street, to Richard Allen Court.\textsuperscript{217} She worked with community members, including Macedonia church members and city agencies to change the name of East Thirty-Second Avenue to Martin Luther King Boulevard.\textsuperscript{218} Over the next ten years, they built a senior housing apartment building, and their new sanctuary.\textsuperscript{219} “The new Shorter is now located at ‘Freedom Crossroads’ and the impact is overwhelming.”\textsuperscript{220} Shorter remains financially sound, and are

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\textsuperscript{214} Billie Arlene Grant, et al. Growing Up Black in Denver, 68.
\textsuperscript{216} Shorter Community A.M.E Church. Shorter Community A.M.E Church 125th Anniversary, 9/10.
\textsuperscript{217} Shorter Community A.M.E Church. Shorter Community A.M.E Church 125th Anniversary, 9/10.
\textsuperscript{218} Shorter Community A.M.E Church. Shorter Community A.M.E Church 125th Anniversary, 9/10.
\textsuperscript{219} Shorter Community A.M.E Church. Shorter Community A.M.E Church 125th Anniversary, 9/10.
\textsuperscript{220} Shorter African Methodist Episcopal Church, 117th Year Anniversary, 11.
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working on expanding their reach, by building a Justice Center on their property in the near future.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{221} “About Shorter.” \textit{Shorter African Methodist Episcopal Church.}\nhttp://www.shorterame.org/pc/about.html.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

African American Christianity for many has been the foundation of their survival through slavery, reconstruction, and beyond. A closer look at the evolution of this ideology revealed that African religious ideals were not lost during the Middle Passage, but in fact most people enslaved found a way to merge new religious doctrine into their belief systems. The double consciousness of Africans was a requirement to survive a brutal system with virtually no option to change. Christianity in its truest form became distorted and mutilated when preached to enslaved people as a matter of maintaining false beliefs in their humanity, and in order to reinforce slavery. The unexpected outcome was that people enslaved recognized through scripture, the words of God did not enslave them. The word of God and scriptures paralleled many of their own beliefs before their enslavement, and supported their ideas about their freedom, their spirits, their humanness, and their right to dictate their own lives.

As they created opportunities to escape slavery, their Christian beliefs supported and encouraged their transitions. When slavery ended, their transition to a new way of living was still supported in their Christian beliefs. Some settled in Denver before, during and after slavery, and continued fighting for their right to self determination, sometimes with the support of others, sometimes as a concession by others, and sometimes with intense opposition by others. The fight, nonetheless, never diminished.

The two oldest Black churches in Denver, revealed that wherever the journey, the members brought with them a strong faith, and a determination to move forward in
their lives, with spiritual support. Their Christian faith, as it has evolved, carried them through many challenges and turmoil as they built churches, and increased membership. The challenge has been to learn more about the individual contributions and memberships between 1865 and 1900 as continued research reveals many gaps in the data. The research provided greater details about women’s clubs and ministries during the twentieth century than in the nineteenth century. The Colorado Statesman recorded church members and church events in every published issue, whether it was a concert, a special guest minister, a church picnic, political meetings, or community based events. This was especially helpful aligning the church records with the newspaper articles.

Zion Baptist Church archives had been thoroughly researched by Clementine Washington Pigford, who assembled nine volumes (almost 3000 pages) of historical records and interviews. Shorter was much more difficult to research. Unfortunately, many of the Shorter archives are in a private collection, and the staff at Blair Caldwell Library have continued their efforts to acquire these documents. Some documents and records have been donated to the library by other church members, but it has created a long term project of organizing the data in a chronological and efficient format.

This paper has barely scratched the surface of these histories. This is only the beginning of a multitude of long and fulfilling research projects still ahead.

In the Twentieth Century both Zion Baptist Church and Shorter A. M. E. Community Church have had dynamic and spirited members who were poised to take on the challenges of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Within that effort, they were also about making their lives meaningful, embracing their communities.
socially, and supporting or uplifting their neighbors. Tuskegee Airmen, former Buffalo Soldiers, politicians, Black fraternities and sororities, and other organizations were founded, organized or supported by church members. Men and women worked to sustain the churches and support their community. They started various clubs and organizations to challenge laws, civil and voters’ rights, and supported or enrolled in political campaigns. In addition, many of the women’s organizations also focused on improving their own lives, improving the perception of Black women beyond their communities, educating or teaching skills to their members, and uplifting their communities. Men managed the church money and deacon boards, while the women led most of the outreach ministries in their community, prepared food for the picnics and special events, and managed many of the church administrative functions. The members supported the churches and the churches supported their members. The church helped to support and sustain their sense of community, their financial struggles and other challenges, as well as their emotional and spiritual needs.

Both churches have continued to be anchors in the Black Community, with large memberships, into the twenty first century. Ministries are currently led and supported by both men and women, whether it is the deacon board, the trustees, the music and the choir, the children and family, or outreach ministries.

The history of the two churches illuminated the beginnings of the African American community in Denver, but this story also reached back into African theology as it transformed into African American Christianity. It is an encouraging story about their spiritually invigorating their pursuit of living full and productive lives, and the legacy for their descendants to honor.
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APPENDIX

1. Appendix 1:

Official Website of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

THE MISSION

The Mission of the AME Church is to minister to the social, spiritual, and physical development of all people.

THE VISION

At every level of the Connection and in every local church, the AME Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the AME Church evolved: that is, to seek out and save the lost, and to serve the needy. It is also the duty of Church to continue to encourage all members to become involved in all aspects of church training.

THE PURPOSES

The ultimate purposes are:

1. make available God’s biblical principles,
2. spread Christ’s liberating gospel, and
3. provide continuing programs which will enhance the entire social development of all people.

THE OBJECTIVE

In order to meet the needs of every level of the Connection and in every local church, the AME Church shall implement strategies to train all members in: (1) Christian discipleship, (2) Christian leadership, (3) current teaching methods and materials, (4) the history and significance of the AME Church, (5) God’s biblical principles, and (6) social development to which all should be applied to daily living.
2. Appendix 2

First African Baptist Church, Savannah, GA
http://firstafricanbc.com/history.asp

3. Appendix 3

Denver Daily Times, Friday, December 5, 1873

The policeman’s ball will take place on the evening of the 15th, at which time the boys will appear for the first time in their new uniform. The ball has not yet been selected.

Shawls at 75 cents; prints 10 cents; elegant costumes 50 cents; shawls at $1, worth $2; elegant line of Empress cloths and pure French merinos; full line table linen and toweling, cotton; everything very low. D. G. Peabody, 224 and 226 15th St.

The concert at the African M. E. church last night was well attended, and the different pieces were well rendered, all present seeming to enjoy especially the music from that little but wonderful instrument, the concertina, which quite spell-bound the audience with its clear and brilliant notes.

4. Appendix 4

Gettysburg Times, Wednesday, July 2, 1997, by Robert Holt

Civil War Widows,
Confederate Soldier Widow Alberta Martin, 90, of Elba, Alabama
Union Soldier widow Daisy Anderson, 96, of Denver Colorado
5. Appendix 5
Denver Public Library Western Genealogy Department:
Cosmopolitan Club

WH1270
Title Cosmopolitan Club Group Photo
Creator(s) McCloud, Burnis, 1908-1990.
Date undated
Notes Item Located in Photo Box 1 Folder 78
Physical Description 1 photographic print: b&w
Is Part Of Clarence and Fairfax Holmes papers, 1911-1974, 1890-1978.
Subject (topic) African Americans--Colorado--Denver.
Clubs--Denver--Colorado.
Subject (name) Holmes, Clarence F., 1892-1978.
Cosmopolitan Club (Denver, Colo.)
Subject (geographic) Five Points (Denver, Colo. : Neighborhood)
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