National Caucus of the Black Aged receive Living Legacy Awards

A number of federal and local dignitaries gathered at the Museum of African Art here on the first day of Black History Month to pay tribute to the nation's black elderly and to endorse the National Caucus on the Black Aged's Living Legacy Awards program.

"Black Americans have made significant contributions and have achieved in all fields of endeavor in the American society. Yet many live and die as unsung heroes," Dr. Aaron Henry, NCBA's chairman, told those assembled in the Henry O. Tanner room at the original home of Frederick Douglass.

The Living Legacy Awards Program is designed to promote a positive view of Black Aging in America, to increase the nation's awareness of the significant contributions older black persons have made and continue to make, and to provide a "Living Legacy" of recorded experiences of these outstanding black citizens, Henry explained.

"It is important to let the light of recognition shine upon these older Americans while they are living and to continue to utilize their expertise in our communities across the nation. It is equally important that older black Americans serve not only as 'Living Legacies,' but as role models for the black youth of our nation who will become tomorrow's leaders in black America," he added.

Cong. Harold Ford concurred with that viewpoint: "If it had not been for the solidifying influence provided by the black elderly, the current achievements of young blacks like me would not have been possible today," the Tennessee congressman said in a prepared statement delivered on his behalf by Ron Walter, Ford's chief administrative officer. Illness prevented Ford from attending the ceremony.

NCBA invited more than 100 national black organizations throughout the country to participate in the Living Legacy Awards program by nominating persons from their membership rosters who have distinguished themselves in various fields.

Cong. Ron Dellums described America as a chauvinistic society. "One of the worst and most blatant forms of crimination is that practiced against the elderly in our society." The California congressman, who is the new chairman of the House District Committee, said Americans have made a national fetish out of the worship of youth spending billions of dollars trying to prolong the aura of youth and in the process have denigrated and demeaned our senior citizens.

"Fortunately, many in the black community have not succumbed to this myopic fetish . . . Because of our heritage of the continuing struggle for freedom and equality we have been taught to revere our elders and to learn from the wisdom and example of their struggle against social and economic adversity," he said.

Dellums called on others in public life to make a firm commitment to work to improve the quality of life for the elderly "to guarantee them, if they so desire, a life of retirement with dignity and self-respect."

President Carter and D.C. Mayor Marion Barry issued proclamations recognizing February as Black History Month. The proclamations were read by Louis Martin, special assistant to the President and Mrs. Effi Barry, respectively.

Others who participated included Nelson H. Cruikshank, counsellor to the President on Aging; Robert Benedict, commissioner on Aging; Dr. Rupert Picott, executive director of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History; David Affeldt, representing Sen. Lawton Chiles, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Aging; Nadine Winter, of the District of Columbia City Council and Nsenga Warfield Coppock, Association of Black Psychologists.

National organizations interested in obtaining additional information about NCBA's Living Legacy Awards Program are invited to contact Dr. Dolores A. Davis, executive director, National Center on Black Aged, 1424 K St. N.W., Suite 500, Wash., D.C. or call 202-637-8400.

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A year ago Delta Sigma Theta, Inc. announced the establishment of the Distinguished Professor Endowed Chair. This unique effort represents one firm step to show that the walls of black colleges shall not crumble. Moreover, this far reaching innovative, yet programmatic, project rewards and fosters academic excellence.

Donations received from Delta chapters and individuals will enable Delta Sigma Theta to pay the salary of a professor to teach at a United Negro College Fund (UNCF) institution for one year.

The first holder of the Distinguished Professor Chair is Tuskegee Institute. The professor is in the area of business administration.

The Delta Sigma Theta Endowed Chair is a trust that will render perpetual support to black colleges. In order to reach the financial goal that would insure the perpetuity of the chair, contributions are needed from individuals, organizations businesses, etc.

Some "walls" crumble, but the walls of black colleges must hold on! Building upon the past and the present, Delta Sigma Theta reaffirms its support to black colleges and will continue to support their existence, their pursuit of excellence, their survival. The Distinguished Professor Endowed Chair shall endure!

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Churches represent historical self-help

By James S. Tinney

Black churches represent one of the first attempts of Afro-Americans to affirm independence and management of black affairs.

The black denominations which resulted were, in fact, the major social institution in the black community. Together with the black press and the black school (particularly black colleges), they represent the great "black triumvirate."

They still are today. The largest black organization of any kind is the church. In fact, membership of any one of the six largest black denominations is many times over the membership of the largest black secular organization — the NAACP.

Baptists

The very first black person in America to be recorded as a member of any church was a man known to us only as Quassey — listed as a member of the Newton, Rhode Island Baptist Church in 1743.

The first black Baptist church organized anywhere was the Silver Bluff Baptist Church, set in order in 1773 in Aiken County, South Carolina.

The first national organization of Black Baptists was the American Baptist Missionary Convention, organized in the famed Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City in 1840.

In 1866 this convention was expanded to include Baptists in the South and West, but it ceased to convene after 1877.

Several of the largest conventions continuing until [illegible] date their origins from either 1880, the date of the first Baptist Foreign Mission Convention which met in Montgomery, Ala.; or 1880, the date of the consolidation of several missions and educational conventions into the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A.

The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., is the largest of all, with more than 6 million members.

It dates back to 1886 when three missionary and educational bodies merged to form the one convention. It was not incorporated until 1915, however.

It was at that time that a split in the Baptists occurred, with an argument over who should own and control the publishing house.

The national convention officials and the publishing house officials came to a parting of ways, and the publishers formed a new denomination with a name very similar to the older one, except that it is unincorporated and called the National Baptist Convention of America.

The present head, the Rev. T. B. Boyd Jr., is the grandson of the original publisher, R. H. Boyd.

The most liberal convention, though, is the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. which has its headquarters here in Washington, D.C. on Georgia Avenue.

The men who founded this body were dissatisfied over the largest Baptist group's (National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.) refusal to endorse the demonstration tactics of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1960, during a stormy and argumentative session in Kansas City, a group of the more politically conscious ministers attempted to elect a successor to Dr. J. H. Jackson and change the conservatism of his rule. After failing to obtain Jackson's compliance, they organized their own Progressive convention in Cincinnati in 1961.

Other Baptist denominations include the National Primitive Baptist Convention Inc., which forbids pianos and musical instruments in the churches, and was organized in 1907; the United Free Will Baptist Church, which is more like Methodists in doctrine, and was founded in 1901; and the National Baptist Evangelical Life and Soul Saving Assembly of the U.S.A., begun in 1935.

Methodists

In actuality, blacks have been a part of American Methodism since its arrival on these shores.

As early as 1766, six years after the first Methodists landed here, recorded history mentions the presence of a black woman, known to us simply as "Betty," as a participant in the Methodist meetings in New York City.

Of course, there were others as well. The Methodist society to which this black woman belonged became known as the John Street Church, the mother church of American Methodism.

By 1795, this local church alone had more than 155 blacks as members. The names of some of these persons are listed as financial contributors to the building of the first Methodist "meeting house" (as churches were then called) in that city.

Blacks also were encouraged to follow "the Methodist way" by Francis Asbury, the first Methodist bishop ordained in this country; and records of early camp meetings list the presence of large numbers of blacks despite the restrictions on travel characteristic of those times.

The largest Methodist body is the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It was started in 1787 after Richard Allen and other black members of a white church in Philadelphia, walked out of a Sunday service in protest.

They had been pulled off their knees from prayer after kneeling in a spot reserved for whites. Seven years later, in 1794, the first black Methodist church was formally set in order.

In 1816, five independent, black Methodist churches joined together and the AME Church was officially organized. Later that year, Allen was officially ordained by the famous white bishop Asbury.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was founded similarly to the AME group, except it grew out of blacks leaving white churches in New York City, rather than Philadelphia.

As early as 1780, blacks in New York had begun holding separate prayer meetings. After white Methodists in that state refused to ordain black ministers or to permit a separate black annual conference, schism developed.

In 1820 a formal AMEZ discipline was written; in 1821 six churches selected their own superintendent; and in 1828 the first annual conference convened.

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church was formerly known as the Colored ME Church. After the Civil War, many blacks in the white southern Methodist churches left to associate with the northern black Methodist denominations.

In order to prevent other blacks from leaving, the white Methodists in the South decided to permit blacks to hold their own general conference in 1870 — thus beginning the CME Church.

Other denominations

Other black Methodist denominations include the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church, started in 1813; the Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal Church, begun in 1885; the Reformed Zion Union Apostolic Church, started in 1889; and the African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church, originating in 1907.

The Pentecostals represent the third largest family of black denominations. There are more than 4 million black Pentecostals, who trace their beginnings to 1906.

That year in Los Angeles, a black minister (formerly a Methodist) began to preach a new doctrine called "baptism in the Holy Ghost" which was claimed to result in speaking in tongues and other miraculous "gifts."

Eventually, his preaching led to a revival which continued daily for more than three years.

It became known as the famous Azusa Street Revival — similar in nature to the Great Awakening and Kentucky Cane Ridge revivals of earlier years in the East.

The largest Pentecostal denomination is the Church of God in Christ, with more than 3 million members.

Its founder, the late Rev. C. H. Mason, traveled to Los Angeles to receive "the experience" in the revival led by Seymour. He came back to Memphis, Tenn., where he officially organized the COGIC in 1907.

Bible Way Churches of Our Lord Jesus Christ Worldwide is another large Pentecostal group. It was started in 1957 as a distinctly separate organization, founded by Washington, D.C. bishop Smallwood E. Williams.

Bishop Williams had for 30 years been a minister of another Apostolic Pentecostal body; but Bibleway churches became a denomination of their own when Williams and 70 other churches left the former organization because of its lack of progressive policies.

The United Holy Church of America is another significant, though smaller, Pentecostal church. It was formed in 1886 as a Holiness church which did not believe in tongues-speaking.

After the 1906 Azusa revival, however, it changed its doctrine; in 1918 its present name was formulated.

There are literally scores of other pentecostal denominations, most of which are, however, extremely small. They differ in many matters of doctrine and practice (some are Trinitarian and some are non-Trinitarians, known as Apostolics), but they all practice speaking in tongues.

Some others are the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, begun in 1914; the Deliverance Evangelistic Centers, founded in 1952; the United House of Prayer For All People, started in 1925; and the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God, begun in 1908.

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