

Black **H**istory **M**onth

The black church

By Dan Bell

of the Portland Observer
 The Black Church may be said to be the "womb" of the African-American experience. It served as protective incubator preserving the heritage of the African diaspora. Consequently, it is the singular institutional vessel that carried the culture of Africa that has been retained by the African Americans and delivered it as the "Black experience" in its present state. One must recognize that it was in the context of Christianity that African slaves were able to preserve their culture, traditions, and rituals. Albeit in a disguised manner under the watchful eye of the slave master. It was in this form that the African culture and heritage survived. The existence of the Black Christian experience even preceded officially condoned marriage amongst African Americans. Moving beyond slavery, the Black Church became the fulcrum of the African-American experience.. It serves as a reservoir for education,



Backstage at the Apollo Theatre during the night of the National Deliverance of Prayer lead by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. on March 28, 1956. Clara Ward of the Ward Singers leads a prayer service while her mother, Mrs. Gertrude Ward, Apollo employee Russell Cooper and Ward Singer Katherine Parham, eyes closed, join in prayer.

political, economic, social, and artistic endeavors. Characteristically, the Black Church differentiates itself in its perception of the "Black sacred cosmos." In the African-American experience, this has come to be the amalgamation of European thought as well as African inherited perceptions. God is seen as Divine Father or "Great Creator Artist"

whose son, Jesus Christ, was mediator, brokering through love a freedom in which God's children would be able to serve Him. At the same time, there was the message of Moses whose wrathful God would, if necessary, violently free His people, as exemplified in the well-known Black spiritual, (Please see 'Church' page 5)

Christian and Christian-based denominations

By The Schomburg Center

Christianity has served a pivotal and complex role in African American history. Upon their arrival in the United States, enslaved Africans were denied the right to practice their own African faiths, while also being turned away from joining whites in their worship. They therefore found their own way to worship, incorporating mysticism and dynamic physical and oral expression, while developing their own perspectives on Christian faith. In the years before the Civil War, many Protestant clerics supported slavery from their pulpits, while others denounced it. After the Civil War, white churches often rejected black parishioners, leading black clergy and worshippers to form their own churches, which quickly became the backbone of black communities across the country. During the 1950s and 1960s, many of those churches and their clerics spearheaded the civil rights movement.

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