

‘The land of our fathers’: Global Visions in African American Churches, 1870-1970.

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Introduction

Tucked away in a battered copy of the July 1895 edition of *The AME Church Review* (hereafter *The Review*) lies an advert for Edmund Thomas, a general retailer in Bathurst, The Gambia, and the ‘Bathurst Agent of the A.M.E Church Review’ (Fig.1). This easily overlooked advert subtly illustrates the structures which enabled the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church to be a global church in a tangible sense. These core structures include: the Church’s hierarchical structure; the technological and financial means to send missions and print and disperse *The Review*; and structures of colonialism (the imposition of English) facilitating readership of *The Review* across the globe. These structures allowed for the transition from imagination or discourse, i.e ‘African’ in the name of the church only, into practical engagement such as missionary work. I will therefore focus specifically on the AME Church, which held the capacity to facilitate this transition in a manner which less organised Black churches could not.

Facilitators of international connections, including technologies, colonialism, and print culture, changed over time. Thus the term ‘global’ is fluctuating, unstable, and affected by wider developments. Therefore, I will use a broad definition of global: looking outwards and creating international connections. This allows me to focus instead on the unique purpose of global visions as they developed in this era of globalisation. I argue for the multiplicity of global visions, which fluctuated from 1870 to 1960, but that ultimately their purpose would remain the same: to rework ‘local’ identity, that is to understand African American experiences. Robin Kelley argues that ‘black historians had to write a history of “homeless” people... In such a context, how could anyone not write histories that are transnational?’¹ I hope to extend Kelley’s work further, by recognising that churches themselves, specifically the AME Church, were also ‘writing’ global histories of ‘homeless people’. The profound discontinuity in African American history as a result of slavery, transportation and migration was not just dealt with by educated historians, but by those at all levels of Black churches. They negotiated theological ideas of redemptive suffering or Ethiopianism, carried out missionary work, and even read adverts for shops in countries which they could only dream of. African Americans were embodying and enacting narratives of themselves as a chosen people, as a glorious people, part of a wider international network. The AME Church, both theologically and practically, then, would ‘write’ or enact a history of destiny, of hope, of freedom and perhaps most significantly, of home.

¹ R. D. G. Kelley, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883-1950.” *The Journal of American History*, 86/ 3 (1999), p. 1077.

Creation of a diasporic identity

The 1880s saw various debates over the presence of 'African' in the title of the AME Church. Some argued for 'African' to be maintained as a form of racial pride; for others, the sooner 'African' was removed the sooner they could 'content [themselves] with being Americans'.² At the heart of these conflicting opinions lies a negotiation of identity between considering themselves as part of an African diaspora alongside identifying as American. I will draw on Stuart Hall's conception of a 'diasporic identity', that is, an identity constantly shaped by the positioning and repositioning of different traces of identity, to illustrate how the AME Church developed global visions in order to rework their own 'diasporic identity'.³ Diasporic identity is less related to fixed variables like ethnicity; it is purposefully constructed over time through religion, history and culture. I will illustrate these negotiations by considering key figures, their global outlooks, and AME responses. Analysing as such demonstrates how numerous global visions simultaneously developed, providing new lenses through which to construct the diasporic African American identity. Black churches were involved in a constant negotiation of what it means to be American, part of the African diaspora, and, as became evident in the more global 1960s, part of an international minority.

'Emigration of the Colored People of the United States': late-19th century

By the 1890s, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, or at least his caricature, became a stand-in for all arguments for Black emigration.⁴ Turner's beliefs fluctuated over the course of his career: from missionary work to mass emigration to Haiti and Africa.⁵

In 1879, set on emigration to Africa, Turner presented a defence of his views on emigration to the National Conference of Colored Men (a convention held in Nashville); his foremost argument was that 'we are all descendants of Africa... the land of our fathers'.⁶ This speaks to the way Turner was 'writing' a history; by advocating for emigration on ethnic grounds, he creates a narrative in which Africa would become the heart of Black identity, suggesting an inevitable homecoming in African American history. However, Turner suggests that 'we are the most impotent...of the United States...We can never acquire power sitting here quietly as menials'.⁷ In fact, of Turner's nine reasons to support emigration, seven concerned racial issues prevalent in America. Given the racially

² J. Bailey, *Race Patriotism: Protest and Print Culture in the AME Church*, (Tennessee, 2012), p. 79.

³ Hall, Stuart. "Cultural identity and diaspora." (1990).

⁴ Bailey, *Race Patriotism*, p.105.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 72.

⁶ H.M. Turner, 'Emigration of the Colored People of the United States', ed. H.M Turner, *Emigration of the Colored People of the United States: Is It Expedient? If so Where To?* (Philadelphia, 1879), p. 7

⁷ *Ibid*, p.10

significant location of Nashville - the location of various independent Black institutions such as Fisk University - this convention featuring delegates from across the country found itself in a setting of Black aspiration and empowerment. Turner's focus on tangible American issues allowed him to engage better with attendees by encouraging them to relocate their desire for justice from within America to Africa. Whilst this might appear to present a repudiation of any identification with America, Turner would go on to describe his 'kindred' in Africa, 'awaiting' the return of her 'better informed children'.⁸ By 'better informed', Turner refers to American civilisation in the form of art, education, and technology. This speaks to the ways in which American identity is bifurcated by culture in its conventional sense, and negative structures of racism. Turner's choice of 'informed' serves as a subtle nod to theological notions of redemptive suffering; Turner 'wrote' a history of destiny and hope, implying that African American experiences in the United States had been beneficial for the eventual return to Africa. To that end, Turner's global vision created an African-American (as opposed to African) centred diaspora. This is reflected in his beliefs on missions to Africa: 'the only way to civilise a people is to move into their midst and live among them'.⁹ While solidarity with his 'kindred' is clear, these global visions of migration back to Africa ultimately reasserted local identity. The 'Africa' that Turner constructed provided African Americans the space to select which aspects of 'African' and 'American' they would identify with.

Turner's 1879 speech was in such demand that one thousand copies were printed, testament to the AME Church's print culture which encouraged dialogue across the Church and thus facilitated a variety of global visions.¹⁰ The official AME Church position opposed Turner, citing practical reasons, and asserting that Black Americans were 'as truly American as any on the Continent'.¹¹ Similarly, individuals opposed Turner's advocacy of mass emigration in the *Christian Recorder*, suggesting that 'What Africa wants is...that missionaries should be sent'.¹² Again, we see a multitude of global visions concerning Black emigration. However, I argue that at the core of these differing arguments lies local identity.

What did the AME Church mean by 'truly American'? Post-Reconstruction racism? An idealised democratic nation? Evidently, AMEs were purposefully reworking and reconciling the contradictory aspects of what it meant to be American when necessary. Similarly, the apparent ability of African Americans to speak for Africa ('What Africa wants is...') illustrates how global visions of an 'imagined Africa' provided the theoretical space for Black churches to experiment with and negotiate different facets of their diasporic identities.

⁸ Ibid, p. 8

⁹ G. J. Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel*, (London, 2015), p. 52.

¹⁰ Turner, 'Emigration of the Coloured People of the United States', p. 1.

¹¹ Bailey, *Race Patriotism*, p. 83

¹² Ibid, p. 96

‘Africa for Africans’: early-20th century

By the 1920s, African Americans had lived through a global war, facilitating exposure to cries for self-determination, anti-colonial rebellions and race riots.¹³ The new challenges to white supremacy would naturally alter global visions within the AME Church. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born activist, drew on the ‘Peoples in Ireland, in Egypt, in India, [who] were demanding their right to nationhood and self-determination, [believing that] negroes must likewise organize’.¹⁴ By 1922, Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which advocated emigration to Africa in a bid for ‘nationhood and self-determination’, had blanketed the country.¹⁵

On 18 April 1922, Garvey, speaking to the New York division of his UNIA, advocated for ‘a great nation in Africa’, arguing that there was ‘No difference between the native African and the American and West Indian Negroes... descendant from one common family stock’.¹⁶ Garvey obfuscates American identity by constructing an identity through shared ethnic origin. This is reminiscent of Turner’s global vision of returning to ‘kindred’ in Africa.¹⁷ However, while Turner described African Americans as ‘better informed children’ (suggesting a slight difference), Garvey’s vision is more radical, attempting to eradicate difference: ‘brotherly cooperation’ rather than ‘an overlordship over the natives’.¹⁸ This may demonstrate fraternal love, but this eradication simplistically puts aside the profound discontinuity that slavery and migration created within the African diaspora by using ethnic origin to overlook resulting cultural differences. This speaks to the ways in which African Americans were ‘writing’ what Robin Kelley calls ‘a history of the homeless’.¹⁹ These global visions of Africa based on shared ethnic origin reveal a desire to strengthen the connection to Africa within the African American identity given the serious rupture and dislocation in African American history. It is worth noting, however, that this speech was published days later in the *The Negro World* (the UNIA periodical), which through the efforts of migrant workers and activists had a global audience, extending to Africa and the Caribbean.²⁰ Thus, Garvey sought not only to place African Americans into a glorious history, but also to include those of African descent across the globe, speaking to the serious dislocation in the histories of all those of African descent. This is suggestive of a development away from Turner’s global vision of an African-American centred diaspora, towards a more global

¹³ A. Ewing, *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*. America in the World, (New Jersey, 2014), p. 133-38.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 133.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 135.

¹⁶ M. Garvey, ‘Africa for Africans’, ed. M. Garvey and R. Blaisdell (eds.). *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*, (Dover, 2004), p. 72.

¹⁷ Turner, ‘Emigration of the Colored People of the United States’, p. 8.

¹⁸ Garvey, ‘Africa for Africans’, p. 72.

¹⁹ Kelley, “But a Local Phase of a World Problem”, p. 1077.

²⁰ Ewing, *The Age of Garvey*, p. 93

‘African’ or ‘Negro’ diaspora. This is furthered in Garvey’s theological engagement with Ethiopianism in his autobiography: the UNIA will ‘... bring about the restoration of Ethiopia’s ancient glory.’²¹ Ethiopianism linked Africa to the historically powerful Ethiopian civilisation; by the 19th century, Ethiopia was one of few African nations free from colonial rule, and thus not only fought against Euro-American histories which negated African history, but also embraced Ethiopian ancestry as evidence of Black capacity for self-rule.²² By invoking Ethiopianism, Garvey inserts members of the African diaspora into a historical narrative of a chosen people, further evidence of this ‘writing’ of history. Garvey’s engagement with the spiritual grammar of Ethiopianism and redemptive suffering demonstrates deep continuities with religious figures in the late 19th century who sought to rework African American identity through stressing ethnic African origins and the glory of Ethiopia.²³

As Randall Burkett has shown, Garvey’s dreams of Ethiopian glory proved to be popular in Black churches, especially the AME Church, despite the Church’s longstanding opposition to mass emigration.²⁴ In 1922, J.G. Robinson (editor of the *Christian Recorder*) exclaimed that if Garvey were to succeed he ‘[would] have achieved the greatest thing in Negro history since Richard Allen established the AME Church’.²⁵ That members of the AME Church could negotiate between Garveyism and the official Church position, to find Garveyism as complementary to their religious affiliation, reveals the multiplicity of global visions. Emma Kinch, an AME from New Jersey, in 1919, believed that Garvey could take AMEs ‘to the Promised Land’.²⁶ Kinch’s choice of this phrase inserted African Americans into a transnational biblical narrative, asserting them as God’s chosen people (as in Genesis), and reflecting a reworking of local identity, away from the scorned, heathen ‘Negro’ to a glorious, chosen people.²⁷ This opposed both biblical justifications of African Americans as slaves and inferior peoples through the Myth of Ham, as well as radical negations of the biblical origins of African Americans.²⁸ By drawing on divinely sanctioned narratives of redemptive suffering to advocate for a return to the diasporic homeland these mid 20th century remarks display a striking continuity with the global visions developed during Turner’s vision of the return of Africa’s ‘better informed children’.

²¹ M. Garvey, “Garvey Tells His Own Story,” E. Sernett (eds.), *African American Religious History*, (Durham, 1999), p. 461.

²² R. Shilliam, “Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God”, D. Orrells, G.K. Bhambra, T. Roynon, *African Athena: New Agendas*. (Oxford, 2011), pp: 107-114.

²³ See A. Crummell, ‘The Destined Superiority of the Negro,’ (1877) and J. T. Holly, ‘The Divine Plan of Human Redemption,’ (1884), ed. Anthony Pinn, ed, *Moral Evil and Redemptive Suffering*, (Gainesville 2002), pp: 111-140

²⁴ R. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, (New York, 1978), pp 134- 149

²⁵ D.C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church : A History* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 286

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 298.

²⁷ Gen. 15:18–21.

²⁸ For interpretations of the Myth of Ham see: S. Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 82. Conversely, for more radical reinterpretations see “Ariel”, *The Negro; What is His Ethnological Status* (Cincinnati, 1867).

Despite these continuities, there were important developments concerning global visions of emigration. By the 1920s, the opposition to emigration within the AME Church became less reliant on claims of how ‘American’ African Americans were, focusing instead on the realities of migration (illness and cultural differences).²⁹ I argue that this is a reflection of years of hardening Jim Crow laws since Turner. The climate of increased racial injustice led to disillusionment with the American ideal, evident in the criticisms by religious leaders including Francis Grimke and Reverdy Ransom.³⁰ Despite this dissatisfaction, no emigrationist movement would mobilise popular support at this level again. However, Garveyism demonstrated the ways in which global visions, though fluctuating, allowed individuals to draw on spiritual grammar to better understand their own experiences, history and identity.

‘The world is small’: mid-20th century

The mid-20th century saw anti-colonial rebellions and nationalist movements across the world, with the Cold War providing an avenue of identification with other oppressed people globally. Thus far, I have presented the ways in which Black churches negotiated diasporic African American identities, positioning and repositioning the traces of ‘African’ and ‘American’ against each other. I will now explore how Black churches identified African Americans as members of a global oppressed minority - a key development in global visions transitioning from identification by shared ethnic origin toward a shared experience of oppression. This movement was enabled by technological changes which facilitated more international connections. Whilst connections to Africa through Ethiopianism and redemptive suffering would continue, travel abroad and global communications facilitated solidarity in an increasingly international manner. This would build the foundations for liberationist movements, to which I will return to in the next chapter.

Major global identification with other minorities first took place in 1956: the first Afro-Asian meeting, the Bandung Conference, where leaders met ‘to declare their alignment against European imperialism’.³¹ In the subsequent episcopal address in 1956, AME bishops endorsed this meeting: ‘let the world know that the darker peoples are determined to free themselves from the yoke of colonization by imperial powers’.³² The phrase ‘imperial powers’ connected African American racial struggles to global structures of capitalism and colonialism. This illustrates how global visions of identification with ‘darker peoples’ allowed African Americans to understand their own experience

²⁹ E. Engel, *Encountering Empire : African American Missionaries in Colonial Africa, 1900-1939*, (Stuttgart, 2015), p. 158.

³⁰ For more see: F. Grimke, ‘God and the Race Problem, 1903’, C. G Woodson and F. Grimke (eds.), *The Works of Francis Grimke*, (Washington, 1942) p. 600- 630; Reverdy C. Ransom, “*The Race Problem in a Christian State, 1906*,” in Sernett, *African-American Religious History*, pp. 337-34.

³¹ Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 426.

³² *Ibid*, p. 426.

better as part of a shared global experience of racial oppression and thus 'write' their history into an international fight against imperialism and white supremacy. However, the significance of reworking local identity should not detract from the genuine compassion and solidarity that Black churches have shown to other communities across the world.

This new global identification continued into James Cone's radical rethinking of African American oppression in the 1970s. Cone's reworking of Black oppression as necessarily global emerged from a long history of global solidarity. Thus, his suggestion that 'we must enlarge our vision' was rooted in the sustained dialogue of 'coloured internationalism' following World War One.³³ For example, Marcus Garvey was in contact with Éamon de Valera and Mahatma Gandhi, expressing solidarity with the Irish and Indian.³⁴ In some ways, this extends back to the AME Church's inclusion of Chinese Parishioners in California in the 1880s.³⁵ This was not necessarily global in a spatial sense, but the inclusion of other ethnic identities indicates that while 'global' tended to take an 'African' focus, threads of solidarity with other oppressed peoples can be found long before its radical heights in Cone. Changing global structures of travel and increasing communication allowed African Americans to look beyond Africa, imagined or real, and identify with other minorities. This reflects the development of global visions of diaspora, rejecting construction solely by ethnicity in favour of broader shared experiences of oppression.

Vehicle for liberation

The AME's missionary periodical *Voices of Missions* was established in 1892.³⁶ Hidden in its logo (two globes) lies a reworking of the local, of African American identity (Fig.2). That we find one globe of the Americas, and the rest of the world squashed onto the other side, suggests a global vision with a local anchor: one rooted in the United States and looking outwards. The handheld torch, a popular symbol of liberty, illustrates how AME missionaries hoped to liberate the world and not just Africa, resonating with the historic identity of the AME Church as a 'liberationist' church.³⁷ These global visions of liberation driven by Christianity demonstrate that at the very least, the AME Church, as early as the 19th century, desired to encompass more of the world.

I turn to Crummell, Garvey and Cone, considering how the AME Church responded to these figures and their ideas. Global visions of liberation would, as they did with visions of diasporic identity,

³³ J. Cone, 'Black Theology and the Black Church', Sernett, E (eds.), *African American Religious History*, (Durham, 1993), 576-8.

³⁴ Ewing, *The Age of Garvey*, p. 133.

³⁵ Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 151.

³⁶ Engel, *Encountering Empire*, p. 66.

³⁷ Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 105.

grant Black churches a stage on which to script, refine and act out histories of freedom and hope, depicting African Americans as protectors and liberators.

‘The Destined Superiority of the Negro’: late-19th century

Following 20 years of missionary work in Liberia, Alexander Crummell’s 1877 Thanksgiving Day sermon, ‘The Destined Superiority of the Negro’, comes as no surprise. In this sermon, he presented a global vision of redemptive suffering. This divine narrative culminates in the glorious destiny of African Americans who, as Turner would argue two years later, would take their enlightenment, and experience of civilization, to Africa. In Crummell’s global visions to Africa lies the reworking of African American identity, away from ‘heathen’ and towards a future of freedom and victory.³⁸

‘The Destined Superiority of the Negro’ was deeply spiritual. Years of missions to Africa would reveal to Crummell that the ‘wilderness of disasters’ that African Americans had endured (slavery and racial discrimination) had truly meant something.³⁹ To Crummell, Black Americans were chosen people destined to play a deeply spiritual, Christian role in the spreading of God’s word. The specific choice of the biblical phrase ‘wilderness of disasters’ resonates with the Israelite experience prior to their becoming God’s chosen people. Thus, Crummell ‘located’ African Americans’ racial selves in biblical narratives of redemptive suffering. As early as 1865, he appealed for support for Black American missionaries, who, by virtue of their ‘contact with Anglo-Saxon culture and religion’ (Christianity), could now plant the gospel ‘amid the heathen population of Africa’.⁴⁰ This demonstrates Crummell’s belief that it was the duty of African Americans to civilise and Christianize Africa and that through this they could find evidence of their ‘elevation’ from heathenism. In other words, global visions of liberation through missions sought to rework or quite specifically empower African American identity by ‘writing’ a history of a glorious people, of a ‘destined superiority’.

However, Crummell’s global vision of missions to Africa did not always align with that of Black churches in the 1860s and 1870s. Whilst the mid-19th century AME Church did send missions and try to expand its denomination into other places including Haiti and Cuba, it was initially hesitant to send missionaries to Africa; they were afraid this act could be interpreted as affirming African stereotypes of backwardness and savagery.⁴¹ Whereas Crummell empowered Black Americans as a chosen people by drawing on Christian spiritual grammar, the AME Church would empower African Americans by distancing them from the negated ‘Darkest Africa’ in Euro-American historical narratives. Whilst these appear different, both Crummell and the AME Church developed global visions which

³⁸ A. Crummell, ‘The Destined Superiority of the Negro’, p. 122.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 186.

⁴⁰ S. Johnson, *The Myth of Ham*, p. 82.

⁴¹ E. Engel, *Encountering Empire*, p. 65.

ultimately located Black Americans in American culture, albeit picking different aspects to identify with. As has become a recurring theme, at the core of these differing global visions of liberation lies a desire to affirm local African American identity.

By the 1880s, however, the rise of Turner and other Black nationalists in the AME Church pushed for more missions and denominational growth in Africa.⁴² Campbell, discussing the establishment of the AME Church in South Africa in 1896, argued that: ‘Africans... existed primarily as abstractions [and] imaginative foils around which African Americans could define their own identity and destiny’.⁴³ Campbell’s phrase ‘imaginative foils’ gestures towards the complexities of global visions; in early years of limited travel, visions of missions to a ‘heathen population’ were barely based on reality, but did facilitate African Americans to experiment with their identities and development from their roots in Africa. This is certainly evident in Turner’s aforementioned speech concerning Africa’s ‘better informed children’ (African Americans), bearing a resemblance to Crummell’s ‘destined superiority of the Negro’. However, Campbell’s argument could just as easily apply to white missionaries.

Postcolonial scholar Homi. K. Bhabha has written extensively on the ‘colonised/coloniser’ identity formation: the coloniser in the colonial land shifts into someone with privilege and authority dependent on the subordination of the colonised.⁴⁴ Thus Campbell’s argument could easily apply to white missionaries abroad, but in the African American context greater nuance is required: where do *Black* churches and *Black* Christians fit into this exactly? Black churches may have developed visions to ‘civilise’ Africans with Christianity, but they equally wanted to see them free from colonial rule. This is evident in the AME Church’s sympathy with Black slaves in Cuba in their struggle for independence as early as 1877.⁴⁵ Campbell’s argument is certainly broadly true, and I have thus far argued that at the heart of global visions lies a reworking of local identity. However, this cannot discredit the genuine, albeit often seemingly contradictory, compassion found in these international visions of liberation and diaspora.

‘The World Gone Mad’: early-20th century

Global visions of liberation, however, were not always envisioned through the vehicle of a church. Marcus Garvey saw his UNIA organisation as a vehicle for liberation but, while deeply imbued with religious imagery, it was certainly not a Black church. Whereas I have argued that Garvey sought to create an ‘Africa’ centred diaspora, drawing on the shared ethnic origins of all those of African descent and obfuscating cultural differences, his belief in the liberating power of the UNIA would

⁴² Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 192.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 211

⁴⁴ H. K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”, 1984

⁴⁵ Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, p.147.

specifically empower African Americans (who made up the majority of his movement).⁴⁶ Garvey stressed the need to redeem Africa, in striking continuity with the theological visionaries of the late-19th century such as Crummell and Holly. Garvey's theological engagement enabled him to 'write' a history of freedom and glory for African Americans as chosen people, as redeemers of Africa.

In a 1923 speech entitled 'The World Gone Mad', published days later in *The Negro World* for broadcast to the global African diaspora, Garvey hoped to 'throw off the shackles... in the name of an emancipated race and African redemption' in his hopes for 'a new Ethiopia, a new Africa'.⁴⁷ This bears strong similarities to Crummell's contemporaries. For instance, Holly preached of a 'plan of Redemption' for Africa, paraphrasing Psalm 68:30- 31: 'Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God'.⁴⁸ Holly, like Crummell, embraced a Christian identity informed by a desire to distance themselves from the conditions of spiritual darkness, thus writing themselves into a divine narrative. This had a deeply American character: Sylvester Johnson notes that even before the Independence War, Americans understood themselves as God's new Israel, chosen to lead the world in a progressive Christian civilisation.⁴⁹ This identification as chosen people was therefore part of a longstanding American trend. In other words, these theological engagements with redemptive suffering and Ethiopianism affirmed an imagined, heroic African identity in a deeply American manner. Therefore, Garvey's appropriation of religious imagery and American Christian traditions places him in a long trajectory of religious thinkers who created global visions of liberation powered by Christianity. Garvey however, does reflect a development from the visions as envisioned by Crummell and Holly. As Garvey did not explicitly claim to convert Africans to Christianity, the role of Black churches as vehicles of global liberation might seem to be undermined.

Unsurprisingly the official AME Church response to Garveyism was negative, however most AME missionaries, especially those in the Caribbean, agreed with Garvey's nationalist racial uplift scheme.⁵⁰ This speaks to the rise of secular movements in the post war years. In the early 1920s, Black independent churches acutely felt the rise of secular movements, demonstrated by falling membership; between 1916 and 1926, AME Church membership plateaued at about half a million, with a decrease of 0.5 percent compared to the years between 1906 and 1916.⁵¹ We must not, however, assume that secular movements were independent drivers of change. That AMEs could agree with Garveyism's non-denominational global vision of an African redemption suggests that secular movements did not

⁴⁶ Ewing, *The Age of Garvey*, p. 93

⁴⁷ M. Garvey, 'The World Gone Mad- Force Only Argument to Correct Human Ills', ed. M. Garvey and R. Blaisdell (eds.). *Selected Writings and Speeches of Marcus Garvey*, (Dover, 2004), pp. 124-125

⁴⁸ Holly, 'The Divine Plan of Human Redemption', p. 137

⁴⁹ S. Johnson, *The Myth of Ham*, p. 76

⁵⁰ E. Engel, *Encountering Empire*, p.135.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.134.

necessarily undermine religious organisations but could work alongside them and influence the global vision of Black churches. The development of global visions may have moved away from the Black church as an institutional vehicle for liberation but certainly drew on its teachings.

That Garveyism could be complementary to the AME Church's visions of global liberation is further illustrated in how both global visions presented African Americans as heroic saviours and redeemers on the world stage. In the aforementioned speech, Garvey hoped for '400,000,000 Negroes to march forward to the sacred duty' in redeeming Africa.⁵² The militaristic language, also prevalent in his autobiography, and his elaborate costumes helped to identify African Americans as loyal, courageous reformers.⁵³ Similarly, in the April 1922 edition of *The Review*, the editor claims to 'let us count ourselves to be God's last reserve among the races...a new civilization where men shall forever abide in plenty and peace'.⁵⁴ Whilst the AME Church's methods differed from Garvey's, both global visions of African redemption would 'write' a history of African Americans as heroic, the 'last reserve' 'march[ing] forward'.

'Liberation knows no colour bar': mid-20th century

Cone, like Garvey, did not conceive of Black churches as institutions as a vehicle for liberation, but rather drew on Christianity more broadly to fulfil this purpose, an attitude that culminated in his *Black Theology*, which located Black experience as central to his reworking of Christianity.⁵⁵ By 1977 Cone argued that 'Liberation is not a process limited to Black-white relations in the United States; it is also...applied to the relations between rich and poor nations...This global perspective in Black theology enlarges our vision regarding the process of liberation'.⁵⁶ Cone's radical global visions of liberation certainly expressed compassion but crucially that it 'enlarges *our* vision', illustrating the ways in which global visions were used to reflect back and rework African American experience and their own liberation.

This notion of global networks as beneficial to local identity is evident in Cone's argument to his fellow churchmen that 'we can learn from people in Africa, in Asia and Latin America, and they can learn from us'.⁵⁷ This vision of learning from others globally to rework national visions of liberation extends back through the civil rights movement and back to Garvey. Garveyites welcomed guest speakers at divisions throughout the country from West and South Africa, Japan, China, and most notably India.⁵⁸ Again, real, tangible networks and technological change hastened this development

⁵² M. Garvey, 'The World Gone Mad', p. 126.

⁵³ M. Garvey, 'Garvey Tells His Own Story', p. 463.

⁵⁴ E. Engel, *Encountering Empire*, p.135.

⁵⁵ J. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and Black Power*, (New York, 1969).

⁵⁶ J. Cone, 'Black Theology and the Black Church', Sernett (eds.), *African American Religious History*, pp. 576-8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 574.

⁵⁸ E. Engel, *Encountering Empire*, p. 133.

from the words of missionary men to their congregants (as in Crummell and Turner), to genuine sustained conversation between oppressed minorities across the world. This identification with international struggles was also endorsed by Martin Luther King Junior, who Cone applauded in his 1977 essay.⁵⁹ King visited a newly independent Ghana in March 1957, and would explain that ‘both segregation in America and colonialism in Africa were based on the same thing - white supremacy and contempt for life’.⁶⁰ This speaks to the tensions of ‘global’ between being Afro-centric and encompassing more of the world. However, it does show that global visions of liberation connecting the Black American struggle to international struggles allowed African Americans to rework their struggle as part of an international struggle against white supremacy, which evidently extended back well past Cone.

Black churches, however, could not officially take such a bold stance on global liberation. Though individual AME missionaries participated in Northern Rhodesia’s nationalist movement, there was scarcely any institutional involvement.⁶¹ Similarly, the AME Church in South Africa accommodated the white minority.⁶² This difference between individual AMEs who supported anti-colonial rebellions and the official church organ (reliant on government support for denominational growth) reflects a recurring theme in this essay: the complexities of the term ‘Black churches’. One key constant throughout the development of global visions has been the multiplicity of global visions and the ability of individuals to negotiate divergent viewpoints presented by institutions and radical visionaries. Underlying all of these varying visions of liberation, be that church missions, emigration movements, or even involvement in foreign nationalist movements, is a sentiment to ‘write’ a history of hope and of freedom for African Americans, increasingly entangled with histories of global oppression.

Conclusion

‘...no other nation on earth has a greater capacity to shape that global system...Like it or not, if we want to make America more secure, we are going to have to help make the world more secure.’⁶³

(Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*, 2007)

In then-Senator Barack Obama’s second book, he powerfully draws together the local and global in the context of national security. His focus on the national implications of global policies is testament to the enduring ability of global visions to have domestic impacts equal or greater to global ones. While in the post-9/11 context Obama’s global visions of security differ vastly from the emigrationist zeal of Turner and Garvey, the former President’s comments place him within a long history of thinkers who saw the power of global visions to rework the local. Just as Obama sought to understand America’s

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 575.

⁶⁰ S. T. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (1982), p. 117.

⁶¹ Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, p. 430.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 430.

⁶³ B. Obama, “*The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*”, (New York, 2007), p. 304.

place in the twenty-first century world, so too did African Americans in the late-19th and 20th centuries. The global visions of Black churches were a key part of this process, allowing Black Americans to reconsider and rewrite their histories in order to better understand their contemporary experiences.

Returning to Robin Kelley's argument that African American history has always been naturally transnational, I argue that Black churches had always had global visions through the creation of diasporic identity and the church as a vehicle for liberation. That said, the development of these visions varied according to the structures of knowledge and technology which would develop global visions from 'imagined' to 'real'. Theological engagement, including Ethiopianism and redemptive suffering, would remain throughout, from Crummell to King. However, the increasing identification with minorities across the world, in both visions of diaspora and liberation, demonstrates a movement away from identification by ethnicity to identification with a shared experience of white supremacy, racial injustice, and American capitalism. This shift could only have taken place in the context of particular technological and political advancements, such as increased ease of international travel and the Cold War climate. The global visions of Black churches and African Americans developed from an Afro-centric 'global' to one that encompassed more of the world. That said, 'Africa', whether real or imagined, theological or tangible, would always remain a cornerstone of cultural identity for Black churches.

Illustrations

Fig. 1: *The AME Church Review*, July 1895. Library of Congress online archives. Accessed here:

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/lcrbmrp.t8018/?sp=9&r=-0.495,-0.007,1.83,1.643,0>

(my own photograph/screenshot, 10/02/2021).

Fig. 2: *Voice of Missions*, October 1939. Accessed here:

[http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv_pdfo/AD843/AD843-S38-6-001-
jpeg.pdf](http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv_pdfo/AD843/AD843-S38-6-001-
jpeg.pdf), (my own photograph/screenshot, 10/02/2021).

Fig. 1

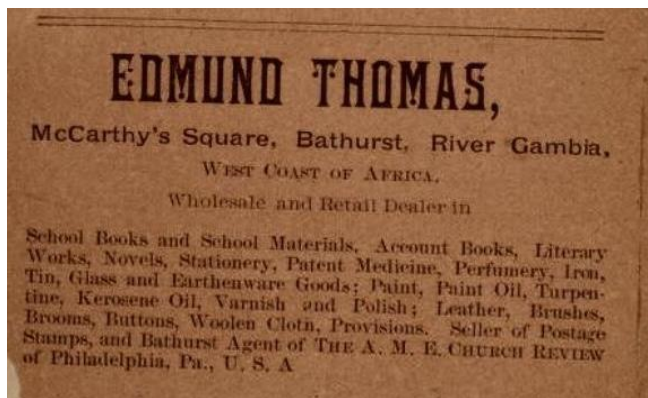
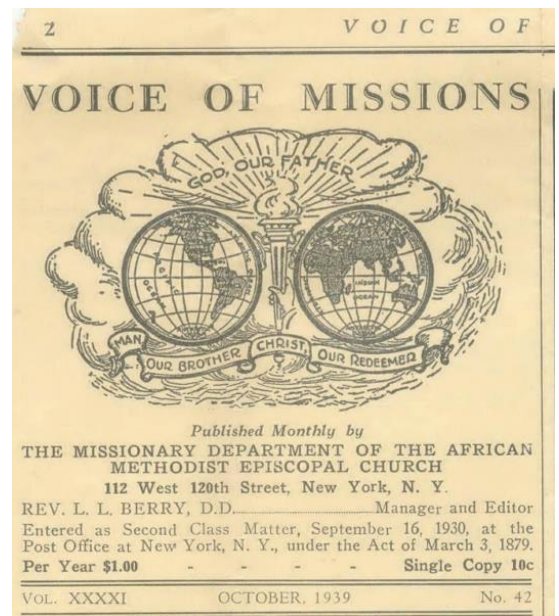


Fig. 2



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