

**MILESTONES OF THE BLACK
PRESENCE
AT YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL**

by

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**(in consultation with
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Milestones of the Black Presence at Yale Divinity School

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The following booklet was prepared and distributed in conjunction with the first Yale Divinity School (YDS) Joint Reunion and Convocation of African American, Asian American, and Hispanic Latino Alumni, Alumnae, and Friends, held on May 1-3, 2003. It is an attempt to highlight the more than 150-year history of blacks at Yale Divinity School. It is not intended to be definitive or comprehensive but rather part of a belated and ongoing effort to document their presence and contributions at YDS. We invite you to become actively involved in this important project by adding your memories and memorabilia as well as corrections as we attempt to recall and reclaim this rich and unique heritage.

My Soul Looks Back . . . The Antebellum Era

Although Yale Divinity School was established in 1822, racial, social, and legal proscriptions prevented people of African descent from enrolling until the 1870s. However, during the 1830s and '40s, James W. C. Pennington and Alexander Crummell, despite being denied regular enrollment and library privileges, managed to circumvent Connecticut's

Black Laws¹ and attend lectures by YDS divines such as Nathaniel William Taylor. Although not officially enrolled, Pennington's determination to attend classes at YDS made him Yale University's first black student.

In 1834, Pennington, an escaped slave, known as the "fugitive blacksmith," also became the first black minister of Temple Street Congregational Church. He succeeded the white New Haven activist Simeon Jocelyn. Jocelyn and black parishioners of Center Street Church, disgruntled over its racial restrictions, founded Temple Street Congregational Church in the late 1820s. Temple Street Church would subsequently become Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church and play a crucial role in the spiritual and intellectual nurture of generations of black seminarians at YDS.²

In 1839, a related milestone in black theological education at Yale occurred as a result of the "Amistad Affair." When West African captives aboard the Amistad were jailed in New Haven, YDS Professor Josiah Gibbs along with students from the Divinity School came to their assistance. They not only served as interpreters but also instructed the incarcerated

¹According to Connecticut's Black Laws, no black student from another state could attend school in Connecticut without the permission of the town in which the school was located. This law, combined with the controversy surrounding efforts to establish a "Negro College" in New Haven, doomed any hopes that Pennington, Crummell, or other blacks could officially enroll at Yale during this era.

² Other historically black churches in New Haven such as Immanuel Baptist Church and St. Luke's Episcopal Church would also provide spiritual and intellectual nurture for YDS black seminarians.

Mendi in English and the tenants of Christianity. With the assistance of local clergy such as Pennington, this event led to the establishment of the Mendi Mission in Sierra Leone in the mid nineteenth century. According to oral history, almost a half century later Albert Burton Jowett, believed to be the son of Amistad captive Sarah Kenson, would become one of the first Africans to enroll in YDS.³

My Lord, What a Morning . . .
Postbellum Era

Despite the unofficial matriculation of Pennington and Crummel in the antebellum era, blacks were not allowed regular enrollment at Yale Divinity School until the 1870s. The change in the Divinity School's exclusionary racial policy was influenced by the success of Edward Bouchet, who in 1870 became the first black student regularly admitted to Yale University.⁴ Bouchet's presence and success inspired Mrs. Mary A. Goodman, a black New Havener, to make provisions for future black ministerial students at Yale in her will. Upon her death in 1872, the *New Haven Palladium* reported that Mrs. Goodman, who spent her entire adult life working "in such hard toil as washing and domestic service," left her entire estate to Yale. Her farsighted generosity created the first scholarship for black students at Yale. A report accompanying

³Albert Burton Jowett graduated from Fisk University in 1889 and entered Yale Divinity School in 1893. However, he did not graduate. Definitive documentation regarding Jowett's linkage to Sarah Kenson or any of the Amistad captives has not been located.+

⁴Edward Bouchet is acknowledged as the first black graduate of Yale University.

her obituary noted that Mrs. Goodman, "a member and regular attendant of the College Street Church, and thus accustomed to intelligent preaching, felt that the time was coming, in the rapid progress of her race and people, when they would require a more highly educated ministry. . . ." Consequently, Mrs. Goodman intended that her estate, valued at \$5,000, would benefit Yale's "Theological Department." Mrs. Goodman's unselfish generosity precluded provisions for her own burial, and thus Yale would arrange for her interment in Grove Street Cemetery. When vandals destroyed her grave marker in 1998, university, community, and church leaders erected a new monument that retained the original inscription. It reads:

Mary A. Goodman

Died, January 26, 1872

Aged 68

**Of African descent, she gave the earnings of her life
to educate men of her own color in Yale College for the
Gospel Ministry.**

In the wake of Mrs. Goodman's remarkable gift, it appears that Solomon Coles, a former slave, was the first person of African descent to be officially enrolled at YDS. He entered the Divinity School in 1871 and graduated in 1875.⁺

⁺ However, James William Morris rather than Solomon Coles was the first student of African decent to officially graduate from Yale Divinity School. Morris was born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1847 and like Coles was a graduate of Lincoln (formerly Ashmun) University. Morris enrolled in YDS in 1873 but presumably courses previously taken in Lincoln

After graduation, he pastored Nazarene Congregational Church, the first black Congregational church in Brooklyn, New York. In 1877, Coles left Brooklyn to pastor “Freedom Congregational Church” in Corpus Christi, Texas. His ministry included establishing the first school for blacks in Corpus Christi. An historic marker commemorating Cole’s expansive ministry has been place where “The Public Free School for the Colored” once stood.

Another pioneering black graduate was Albert President Miller, a native of Ripley, Mississippi. Miller completed his undergraduate education at Fisk University in 1878 and was ordained in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1881, after serving for three years as a missionary in West Africa, Miller enrolled at YDS. While still a student he began a fourteen-year ministry at Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church (1882-1896) that would extend the historic linkage between Dixwell and YDS. From 1896 until 1901, Miller served Lincoln Memorial Church in Washington, D.C., and then completed a shorter term as pastor of the Lincoln Memorial Congregational Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He went on to pastor two African Methodist Episcopal Zion Churches in New Jersey. The first was the Fifth Avenue AME Zion Church in Jersey City,

University’s theological program allowed him to graduate in 1874 after only one year of study. Thus Morris’ distinction as “the first student of African descent who was ever graduated from the Theological School.” Morris subsequently preached and taught in Beaufort and Aiken, South Carolina before dying in 1876 of consumption. See *Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale College Presented at the Meeting of the Alumni, June 28 1876* and Judith Ann Schiff, “Pioneers,” *Yale Alumni Magazine*, January/February 2006: 80-81.

followed by the AME Zion Church of Somerville. He also served at Saint Thomas Methodist Church in Newark. From 1910 until 1918, Miller was the pastor of Nazarene Congregational Church in Brooklyn and remained Pastor Emeritus until his death. The last several months of his life he was also the associate pastor of Grace Congregational Church in Harlem.

By the early 1890s, YDS had a small but continuous stream of students of African descent. This group included Orishatukeh Faduma (from Sierra Leone, West Africa), Henry H. Proctor, Bernard Tyrell, Thomas Nelson Baker, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., and the previously mentioned Jowett. Significantly, Faduma, who graduated with honors in 1894, spent most of the next half century in the American South as an African missionary to African Americans whom he referred to as his “kit in kin.”

Faduma’s classmate and lifelong friend, Henry Proctor, was a graduate of Fisk University. His YDS graduation thesis, “Theology of the Slave Songs,” was one of the earliest theological interpretations of the spirituals and is still considered a valued scholarly resource.⁵ Upon graduation from YDS in 1894, Proctor became the first black pastor of First Congregational Church in Atlanta, which he served until 1920. His vision of the “Social Gospel” helped convert First Congregational into an “Institutional Church,” whose expansive and innovative ministry included a dormitory for

⁵ Henry H. Proctor, *Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches* (1925; reprint, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971) 57-86.

single women, an effective prison ministry, the only public library for blacks in Atlanta, and the Carrie Steele Orphanage. In addition, Proctor and First Congregational were instrumental in establishing a Congregational mission in Angola and the National Convention of Congregational Workers among the Colored People. Moreover, in the wake of the Atlanta Riots of 1906, First Congregational became known as “The Church that Saved a City.”⁶

The matriculation of Thomas Nelson Baker, who graduated in 1896, marked another milestone in the black presence at YDS. Baker, a native of Northampton, received his baccalaureate degree from Boston University. After being ordained in New Haven, he served as pastor of the Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church for five years. Simultaneously, Baker pursued a Ph.D. from Yale, graduating in 1903. Among Baker’s literary accomplishments was his insightful review in 1903 of *The Souls of Black Folks* by W. E. B. DuBois.

Don’t Be Weary, Travelers . . . Into the Twentieth Century

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the continued presence of Yale black seminarians preparing to serve in a variety of ministerial vocations. Many of them served in full-time ministries while pursuing their theological education. For example, Edward Goins, already in possession of a B. D. degree from Oberlin Theological Seminary, pastored Dixwell Avenue Church beginning in 1901 while pursuing

graduate theological studies at the divinity school. He received his M.A. in 1904 and subsequently served for more than twenty years as minister of Dixwell.

Samuel Richard Morsell, a member of the class of 1910 and recipient of the second Mersick Prize (awarded by the YDS faculty to recognize and encourage effective public speaking and preaching), exemplified the new trend toward interfaith ministry. He was a pioneer in the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) among people of color. While at YDS, he served as the General Secretary of the Goffe Street YMCA. He was later terminated from a similar position when he refused to maintain a segregated YMCA operation in Westchester County, New York. His later career was spent as Executive Director of the Druid Hill Branch of the YMCA in Baltimore, Maryland.

Another significant milestone highlighting both the black presence at YDS and the broader engagement of the Divinity School with the black church was reached in 1931 when a conference of “Negro alumni and friends” was convened at YDS. During the conference, organized to discuss the current state of the black church and community, black students of the Divinity School met with influential alumni and black leaders, including Henry Proctor, Social Gospel activist; Dr. George Haynes, member of the Federal Council of Churches and former YDS student;⁷ A. Philip Randolph,

⁶ Proctor, *Between Black and White*, 109.

⁷ Dr. Haynes, a native of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, completed his undergraduate education at Fisk in 1903. Subsequently, he earned a Master of Arts Degree

General Organizer and President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; Benjamin E. Mays, member of the Institute of Social and Religious Research; and Frank T. Wilson, Executive Secretary of the Colored Student Work of the YMCA. The theme of the conference was “Whither the Negro Church?” Discussions focused on four topics: The Negro Church in a Changing Social Order, The Negro Church and Economic Relations, The Negro Church and Education, The Negro Church and Race. John Dillingham, writing for *Yale Divinity News*, proclaimed that “No future study of the Negro Church will be complete without due consideration of the work of this seminar.”

The 1930s gave rise to a new generation of emergent black scholars, one of the most significant being Josephus Coan. Having completed his undergraduate education at Howard University, Coan also earned a Bachelor of Divinity from YDS in 1933, followed by a Master of Arts degree from the Yale graduate school in 1934. His master’s thesis, which was later published, focused on the contributions of AME Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne to Christian education. Coan subsequently earned a doctorate from Hartford Seminary (1961) and served as the first Dean of R. R. Wright Seminary in South Africa from 1938 to 1947. Following his return to the United States, Dr. Coan served as a General Superintendent of the nineteenth District of the AME Church. Continuing his scholarly pursuits, he had a long and productive career at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta,

in sociology from Yale University. In 1905, he enrolled in Yale Divinity School, but he left before graduating.

Georgia. Dr. Coan, was Professor Emeritus of Christian Education and Mission at ITC and was awarded an honorary doctorate from ITC in acknowledgement and celebration of his long and stellar career. Dr. Coan who turned 100 in 2002 was believed to be YDS’s oldest living black graduate. Unfortunately, Dr. Coan died in the spring of 2004 as the final revision of this pamphlet was being completed.

Another notable scholar is Dr. William A. Banner, who graduated from YDS in 1938 and began his teaching career that year at Bennett College. Dr. Banner earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Harvard University in 1947 and continued his distinguished teaching career at Howard University, serving as Professor of Christian History and Thought in Howard’s School of Religion. He subsequently became Professor Emeritus in the Philosophy Department at Howard University. Returning to New Haven in 1954, Dr. Banner became the first known black visiting professor at YDS. He later served as a visiting professor of Philosophy for Yale University in 1964–65. His numerous publications include *Origin and the Tradition of Natural Law Concepts* (Harvard University Press, 1954); *Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (Scribner, 1968); *Moral Norms and Moral Order: The Philosophy of Human Affairs* (University of Florida Press, 1981); and *The Path of Saint Augustine* (Rowan and Littlefield, 1996). Howard University honored Dr. Banner in 1999 with the “Excellence at Howard” award. In honor of this occasion, Dr. Banner delivered an essay entitled “Philosophy and the Household of Reason.”

During this era, Yale's black seminarians not only served as outstanding leaders in the wider community and church, but also held prominent roles at the Divinity School. For instance, in 1941, Joseph H. Evans became the first black student-body president at YDS. He remembers this time as being particularly tumultuous because of heightened ethnic tensions related to World War II. Evans graduated and was ordained in the United Church of Christ in 1942. He later served as pastor of several Congregational churches and from 1967 until 1983 was the General Secretary of the United Church of Christ.

Been in the Storm So Long . . .
Old Faith, New Beginnings: The Post-World War II
Era

The post-World War II era marked the centennial of black theological education at Yale Divinity School. This era reflected both continuity with the past and substantial change. One of the milestones of prominent significance was the enrollment of Rena Weller Karefa-Smart. Upon her graduation in 1945, she became the first black woman to graduate from YDS. In 1948, she attended the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches as a consultant. Renowned as a proponent of global ecumenism, she is the former Ecumenical Officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Washington. An Episcopal Priest, she has also been a Professor of Ethics at Howard University and has been associated with the Center for Theology and Public Policy in Washington, D.C. Dr. Karefa-Smart's pioneering presence and subsequent success have paved the way for generations of black women at YDS.

The following timetable highlights additional events and achievements of note that have occurred during the second century of the black presence at YDS.

- *1947—Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor, YDS 1946, becomes president of Virginia Union University, Richmond, Virginia.
- *1950--Yale Divinity School begins wider city parish program that attempts to address the spiritual needs of low-income and minority residents.
- *1952—Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, President of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia., delivers the first convocation series of the Henry B. Wright Lectures.
- *1954-55--William Augustus Banner, YDS 1938, becomes the first black faculty member serving as Visiting Professor of Christian Ethics (YDS) and later as Visiting Professor of Philosophy (Yale University).
- *1955--James H. Robinson, YDS 1940, delivers the Beecher Lecture.
- *1955—Howard D. Gregg, YDS 1919, becomes president of Daniel Payne College, Birmingham, Alabama.
- *1955--Bernice Cosey Pulley, World YWCA Representative to United Nations (ECOSOC) and social justice activist, becomes second black woman graduate of YDS.
- 1956—Mary E. Fuget, third black woman to graduate from YDS. The Mary Eileen Fuget-Hayes Scholarship was later established in her memory+
- *1958—Congressman-to-be Walter Fauntroy graduates from YDS.
- *1960--Dr. Edwin Edmond, pastor of Dixwell Avenue Church, leads black and white YDS students in series of sit-ins.

*1961--Class of '61 votes to send class gift to help purchase books for Virginia Theological Seminary and College, Lynchburg, Virginia.

*1961--Yale Divinity School holds a series of lectures and seminars on the “Church and Race Relations” sponsored by the YDS Social Action Committee.

*1961--Muriel Phillips Chase becomes the first black woman to obtain an STM.

*1964--Lawrence Minear, YDS 1962, helps organize Mississippi Summer Project.

*1965--Edward Carroll, YDS 1933, becomes District Superintendent of the Methodist Church of Washington, D.C.

*1965—Rev. Samuel Slie, YDS 1952, 1963, becomes the Associate Pastor of the Church of Christ at Yale.

*1969--Bob Jones becomes chairperson of the Association of Black Seminarians.

*1969--77--Dr. William R. Jones serves as Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion.

*1970--Allen H. Smith becomes Administrative Assistant and serves as Lecturer in Pastoral Theology, 1969–71.

*1970--75--Robert Jones serves as Assistant Professor of Practical Theology and Lecturer.

*1971--87--Dr. Leon Watts serves as Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology.

*1972--77--Dr. William T. Kennedy, Jr., serves as Associate Professor of Preaching and Black Churchmanship.

*1972--The Black Church at Yale is established by Black Seminarians with the assistance of Rev. Sam Slie, YDS 1952, 1963.

*1973--Yale Black Seminarians convene first conference for black seminarians in New England.

*1973-77—Dr. Irene V. Jackson-Brown joins Yale University faculty and introduces the course “The Black Sacred Music Tradition” and helps to organize choir.

*1974–76—Dr. James M. Washington serves as Instructor of American and African American Church History.

*1976–79—Dr. John M. Burgess serves as Professor of Ministry and becomes Professor Emeritus of Ministry in 1979.

*1978–80—Dr. Cornell West serves as Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion.

*1979--Genesis, a musical group consisting of YDS black seminarians, performs at Baccalaureate.

*1979–83--Charles Sumner Brown serves as Associate Professor of Practical Theology.

*1982--The Black Church at Yale holds its tenth-anniversary celebration.

*1982–85—Dr. Burgess Carr serves as Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology.

*1983--Organization of the first Parks-King Institute by seminarians Bonita Grubbs, Bernard Richardson, and Jimmy Jones. The Institute would encourage integration of social theory and practice and inspire the annual Parks-King Lecture.

*1987—Dr. Fredrick “Jerry” Streets, YDS 1975, is appointed Assistant Professor (Adjunct) of Pastoral Theology.

*1989—Dr. Lamin Sanneh is appointed D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity.

*1989–94—Dr. M. Shawn Copeland serves as Associate Professor of Theology and Black Studies.

*1990–91—Dr. Irene V. Jackson-Brown serves as selected research fellow at the Institute of Sacred Music (ISM) and designed and edited ISM Prism series “The African American Experience in Worship and the Arts.”

*1993—Dr. Frederick “Jerry” Streets, YDS 1975, becomes the first black Chaplain of Yale University.

*1996—Dr. Gilbert Bond, Associate Professor of Theology and African American Studies, joins YDS faculty.

*1999--YDS hosts conference on the role race plays in American society.

*2000--Michael Bruce Curry, YDS 1978, becomes the first black to lead an Episcopal Diocese in the South as the eleventh Bishop of North Carolina.

*2000—Dr. Yolanda Y. Smith, Assistant Professor of Christian Education joins, YDS faculty.

*2002--The Yale Black Seminarians hold the first Gospel Music Conference.

*2003--Yale Divinity School hosts the first Students of Color Conference.

*2003—The Ronald B. Packnett Scholarship Fund established+

*2003—Portrait of Professor Leon Watts hung in YDS Common Room+

*2004—Prof. Yolanda Smith leads a YDS Travel Seminar to Ghana+

*2005—Dr. Emilie M. Townes appointed Andrew W. Mellon Prof. of African American Religion & Theology+

*2005—Jason Richardson Memorial and Live CD Recording was held at YDS+

*2006—Yale Black Seminarians host “An Evening of Thanksgiving and Praise in Honor of the Rev. Dr. Edwin Richardson Edmonds, Preacher, Activist, Mentor, Friend”+

*2006—Dr. Andre Willis appointed Assistant Professor in Philosophical Theology+

Black Participation in YDS Lectures 1954–Present

The Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching

1954-55	James H. Robinson
1956-57	D. T. Niles (Of India)
1973-74	Henry H. Mitchell
1975-76	Gardner C. Taylor
1982-83	Kelly Miller Smith
1985-86	James A. Forbes, Jr.
1989-90	Samuel D. Proctor
1992-93	Thomas L. Hoyt, Jr.
1998-99	Peter Gomes
2004-05	Otis Moss, Jr.+

The Halford E. Luccock Visitorship

1985-86	Gardner C. Taylor
1986-87	Joan M. Martin
1988-89	Joseph L. Roberts, Jr.
1992-93	Jeremiah Wright, Jr.
2005-06	Cynthia Hale+

The Hoskins Visitorship

1991-92	J. Alfred Smith+
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The Roland Bainton Lectureship

1989-90	James M. Washington
1996-97	Albert Raboteau
2001-02	Lamin Sanneh

The Loring Sabin Ensign Lectureship

1996-97 Mercy Amba Oduyoye

The Henry B. Wright Lectureship

1953-54 Benjamin E. Mays

The Margaret Lindquist Sorensen Lectureship

1994-95 Marion Wright Edelman

1999-00 Delores Williams

The Bartlett Lectureship

2000-01 Emilie M. Townes

Parks-King Lectureship and Practicum

1983-84 Alfred G. Dunston, Jr.

1984-85 James Washington

Herbert D. Daughtry

1985-86 Gardner C. Taylor

James A. Forbes, Jr.

1987-88 Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Prathia Hall Wynn

1989-90 Marcia Y. Riggs

1990-91 Calvin O. Butts, Jr.

1991-92 James H. Cone

Rena Weller Karefa-Smart

1993-94 Peter Paris

1994-95 Barbara Rose Collins

1996-97 Allan Boesak

1997-98 Kelly Brown Douglas

1999-00 Renita J. Weems

2000-01 Peter Paris

2001-02 Barbara Holmes

2002-03 Joseph E. Lowery

2003-04 Robert Franklin +

2004-05 John W. Kinney+

2005-06 Bishop Vashti McKenzie+

Miscellaneous

2003-04 Mercy Amba Oduyoye+

Black Church at Yale**Pastors**

Allen Smith

George Kates

Joseph Stephens

Nicholas Hood, III

Dwight Andrews

Larry Smith

Kevin Turman

Winston Gooden

Jewelnel Davis

Leroy Gilbert

Verna Cole

Delois Brown-Daniels

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Cynthia Johnson

F. E. Baye Landy, Jr.

Joan Burnett+

Jacqueline Gilchrist+

As we continue to document and celebrate the African American presence and legacy at YDS, again, we invite you to

join us in recovering and reclaiming our past. Please complete and return the questionnaire on this website to Dr. Yolanda Y. Smith.

To request a hardcopy of the questionnaire, please contact Dr. Smith and return completed forms to:

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