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CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NEGRO
MIDDLE—CLASS RELIGION:
AN OVERVIEW

by

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CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

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The sociology of religion is often placed in a defensive position in which it must define its status as a legitimate area of scientific inquiry. Many doubt that religious phenomena, with a concern for the supernatural and with individual, subjective, non-empirical elements can be studied in any systematic, reliable fashion. But as the sociologist views religion, individual and subjective attributes are only one aspect of religious phenomena. Beyond this, religion is viewed as having significant collective and social elements. Religion is seen as a part of a cultural complex such that there is an interrelation of religion and society which involves mutual influences. The social system and social changes affect religious forms and expressions. At the same time, religion has significant effects on the socio-cultural system.

One of the major sociological interpretations of religion was made by Emile Durkheim. In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Durkheim attempts to discover the social sources of religion and the functions it serves in society. Illustrating that, in general, religion reflects society in all its various aspects and that religion plays a prime role in social solidarity, Durkheim concludes that "religion is something eminently social."[1] Durkheim's work is a classic one and has been the source of much discussion and debate. As Gerhard Lenski points out, however, this work "has led to little systematic empirical research" and there have been few major investigations "of the problems raised in the

theories of Durkheim...as they apply to the modern metropolitan community."[2]
Even less has been done in this area with regard to contemporary religious
phenomena among urban American Negroes. What, if any, are the social
determinants of religious rites and beliefs among American Negroes? How
does the Negro's religion reflect his society and affect the social
cohesion of his group? What are the peculiarities of Negro religious
phenomena which are related to his unique social situation——a uniqueness
due to a social heritage of slavery, social degradation and relegation to
an inferior status in American society? These and related questions are
important ones in an era when many groups hope for and work militantly
toward change in the social position of the Negro population. Many of
the desired changes are being realized and such changes both affect and
are affected by Negro religion.

Although the religion of the Negro American has been exhaustively
studied from an historical, descriptive perspective, less comprehensive
analysis has been directed toward contemporary Negro religion. Socio-
cultural changes, particularly within the last thirty years, have been so
pervasive as to make a purely historical treatment inadequate for an
understanding of Negro religion in its modern setting. Fundamental among
these changes have been the remarkably rapid urbanization of Negroes and
the beginning of their assimilation into metropolitan areas of both the
North and South.

Directly related to this urbanization have been significant advances
in the social and economic status of the Negro. Improved educational and
economic opportunities in the urban setting have facilitated the rise of
many Negroes to middle-class status. It is the middle-class which is the
particular focus of the present analysis. The middle-class is an emerging

and vital force in the Negro community. It is this strata of the Negro population which, in both its religious and non-religious behavior and values, most nearly approximates the white American middle-class mode. It is this class whose locus in our society is changing rapidly and whose patterns of religious expression reflect these changes.

Since the Negro middle-class is a "new" social stratum, consideration of its religious expressions apart from those of the Negro population as a whole has, consequently, made a relatively recent appearance. Significant as the issues are, investigation into the religious forces within the Negro middle-class has been limited and few studies have as their central focus the relationship of Negro middle-class religion and its modern social setting. Most writings on the subject remain at a level of undocumented speculation. And references to Negro middle-class religion are spotty and discontinuous, with little theoretical relevance.

A preliminary step in the direction of a more comprehensive treatment of Negro middle-class religion is needed in the pulling together or compilation of existing theories and data on the subject. This paper attempts such a preliminary step through a descriptive survey of the literature in this area which will organize and interpret information on Negro middle-class religion in terms of sociological formulations.

Several trends in Negro middle-class religion will be cited. It must be stressed, however, that these trends are not peculiar to the middle-class, but are found in varying degrees within other Negro social strata. These trends are most marked, however, within the middle-class.

Although many writers have concerned themselves with religious sects and cults among contemporary Negroes, the present analysis will

focus on the religious mainstream of Negro middle-class Americans. It
is within this mainstream that the social ideal of the Negro middle-
class is expressed.

II. TWO CONCEPTS DEFINED

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Lenski gives a similar, but more concise, definition which may be used along with that given above. Religion is a "system of beliefs about the nature of the force(s) ultimately shaping man's destiny, and the practices associated therewith, shared by the members of a group."[4]

It will be useful to further define religion in terms of its various functions in society. In functional analysis religion is "approached as action that has certain results in systems of social arrangements for human beings."[5] Considering the consequences of action and beliefs for both the individual and society as a whole, religion can be said to have four basic functions. These are (1) the reinforcement of values, (2) the interpretation of events, (3) the integration of the individual with others or social cohesion, and (4) the enhancement of self importance.[6] As the discussion develops it will be seen how these religious functions are met in the Negro middle-class.

In defining religion, we can not avoid recognition of the fact that religion often has institutionalized aspects. The term institution refers both to organizations and to practices or established ways of doing things.[7] The church is the institutional manifestation of religion. And as the

accepted behavior and practices of this organization can be objectively observed, an examination of the church becomes an effective means of studying religion. Thus, in our discussion of Negro middle-class religion, we will have frequent occasion to refer to the church.

The Negro Middle-Class Defined

Problems of definition become more complex as one attempts to relate what is meant by the Negro middle-class. Social class as an analytical construct refers to a prestige group or "a group of people who have about the same station in life in a hierarchal ranking."[8]

There is little consensus on the most reliable factors to be used in determining social class status. Such objective criteria as occupation, education, and income are most generally used. Among Negroes education appears as the most important variable in determining class status. This is supported by Glenn in an analysis of Negro prestige criteria in which he examines sixteen Negro stratification studies. The heavier weighting of education than of occupation and income is particularly significant since "in reports of white prestige-stratification studies strong emphasis upon education is conspicuously absent."[9]

Glenn notes that this skewed emphasis on education has been consistant over time. Education was emphasized in the two earliest(1899,1914) and the latest(1960) studies which he examined.[10] A 1953 study by King in which southern, urban Negroes stratified themselves similarly showed education as the chief item used for social ranking, followed by occupation and income.[11] Three possible explanations for this great significance of education are given by Glenn. Education may be more valued as a prestige criteria because (1) it is scarcer among Negroes, (2) because

it has greater utility for Negroes in the acquisition of other attributes, or (3) because education is more unequally distributed among Negroes. The third statement is the most likely explanation.[12]

Education ranks above wealth as a status determinant because, as Myrdal points out in The American Dilemma, there is too little money among Negroes for wealth to be very important in the determination of status.[13] Yet, Frazier posits that within recent years, income has emerged as a criteria more significant than education and occupation.[14] Glenn doubts the validity of this contention and calls this conclusion impressionistic, although Glenn does concede that income has recently increased in its importance as a determinant of social class status among Negroes.[15]

Regarding other possible status criteria among Negroes, it can be noted that family background is generally not a status-giving factor. Also, the significance of Caucasoid features as a status factor in the Negro population has diminished.

In terms of the above status criteria, how do we measure membership in the Negro middle-class? Educationally, the members of this emerging middle-class have at least a high school education and more frequently a college education. The scope of occupations which may be associated with middle-class status among Negroes is peculiarly wide. The range extends from business proprietors and well-trained, educated professionals at the top of the hierarchy to service workers and semi-skilled workers at the bottom. Included between these two extremes are those occupied as teachers, ministers, social service workers, and white collar workers.[16] As a measure of comparison we can note that among American whites, service and semi-skilled workers are not included among the ranks of the middle-class.

The income of the middle-class Negro population shows a similar

range. Annual incomes extending roughly from $3,000 and up can be included as correlating with Negro middle-class status. Yet, for this and for none of the other variables are there clear-cut boundaries which abruptly separate the middle-class from other Negro classes. In this sense the limits designated here are arbitrary and chosen to meet analytical rather than absolute standards.

Further understanding of this social stratum, which necessarily preceeds a discussion of its religious expressions, can be gained through the application of reference group theory to the analysis of the Negro middle-class. White middle-class Americans serve as the model or point of reference for the Negro middle-class. This latter group adopts the values and behavior of the white middle-class. Thus, the middle-class in the Negro population has greater similarity to the white middle-class in attitudes, values, and behavior than any other segment of the Negro community. In some aspects middle-class status can be defined by the degree to which a Negro perceives himself and is perceived by others to approximate the white middle-class in his behavior and his general "style of life."

Despite this element of emulation, the similarity between the Negro and white middle-class should not be overstressed. There is considerable disparity in the two status groups. In their analysis of social stratification in the Deep South, Davis, Gardner and Gardner give a graphic illustration of these differences as they diagram the relative position of the Negro middle-class to classes in the white population and to Negro classes of upper and lower status.[17] This diagram is designed to account for the dynamic aspects of stratification and to suggest that the Negro middle-class and Negro upper- and lower-classes are slowly

evolving toward similarity to classes in the white status structure.
It indicates that the Negro middle-class as a whole ranks well below
the white middle-class.

One further factor requires clarification at this point. That
segment of the Negro community which is often referred to as the Negro
"upper-class" and diagrammed in Deep South and other works as an upper-
class will be considered, for our purposes, to be of middle-class status.
This is primarily because the realities of Negro upper-class status in
terms of income, education, and values are middle-class in nature as they
are measured against the stratification standards of the dominant society.
As Myrdal points out, there is less social distance between the bottom
and top stratum among Negroes than there is among whites.[18] It would,
thus, seem that we can combine, at points, elements of the two upper strata
with no loss of verity. For example, some Negro "large business and
commercial owners-managers" are classified as upper-class.[19] In our
investigation holders of such positions will generally be considered of
middle-class rank.

Frazier calls the Negro middle-class a "new social stratum."[20] This
does not mean that status differentiation is entirely new among Negroes.
To the contrary, social status differentiation was characteristic of
even the early slavery period. This "newness" to which Frazier refers
is due to an era of faster upward evolution in non-white status initiated
since the Second World War. Important variables in this status change
have been migration of Negroes to urban areas of both the North and the
South and the greater occupational and educational gains in the urban
setting. There are regional differences in the Negro middle-class. The
Negro middle-class is larger and evolving more rapidly in the North than

in the South. "Consequently, according to the best estimates, in the

South middle-class Negroes constitute an eighth of the employed Negro

population, whereas in the North they constitute about a fourth."[21] Thus,

the Negro middle-class is an urban phenomenon with a greater concentration

in the northern United States. But as the South is increasingly urbanized,

the Negro middle-class similarly emerges in this region.

III. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to obtain a proper perspective, it is necessary to look at the background from which Negro religion has developed. When Negroes were uprooted from the African continent as slaves they were stripped of their social heritage. The social, political, and emotional turmoil inherent in their new slave status in America destroyed, for all intents and purposes, their native religious expressions. Just as African familial and political institutions were destroyed by slavery so, too, were African religious institutions fatally undermined.

The earliest systematic attempt to Christianize Negro slaves began at the beginning of the eighteenth century by the Church of England in a missionary effort carried out by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.[22] Prior to this the slaves had received various treatment with regard to their Christianization. Some of the earliest imported slaves were denied Christian instruction because "according to social, legal and ecclesiastical codes, the Negro was not considered a human being endowed with a will and conscience...."[23] Opposition to the Christian instruction of the slaves began to disappear when the laws made it clear that baptism and acceptance of the Christian faith did not mean freedom for the slave.[24] Conversion and baptism of the slaves proceeded in a haphazard manner. And the later mission of the Church of England, though organized in its efforts, is felt to have had only nominal success.[25]

It was not until the period of the Great Awakening (1734-1739) that a significant change occurred. In this period Baptist and Methodist

religious groups were especially zealous in their evangelism and proselyting mission and the success of their efforts is deeply imprinted in modern Negro religion. These missionary groups attacked the evils of slavery. This accounted for much of their early appeal to the slaves, although most Baptists and Methodists gradually receded from this position. Also, because of the simplicity and emotionalism involved in their doctrines and services, the Baptist and Methodist's creeds and worship appealed to the undeveloped intellect of the slaves. These two denominations made such inroads that by the Revolutionary War large masses of the Negro population in both the North and South were converted members of the Baptist and Methodist churches.[26]

Three trends are important in this early period of the Negro's Christianity. One is the early participation of American slaves in the religious life of their white owners. The slaves regularly attended the worship services of their masters, although they were generally segregated in "Negro sections" of the churches. This practice existed while there was developing what Frazier calls the formation of the "invisible institution."[27] The invisible institution was the separate and submerged expression of religion among plantation slaves. This was a situation in which Negroes were able to conduct services in their "own way" and which produced indigenous slave preachers who expressed the feelings and attitudes of the slaves. Thirdly, there was the concurrent development of independent Negro church organizations, especially among northern freedmen. These independent organizations represented "the efforts of free Negroes of the North to escape inferior positions in white churches and to assert their independence."[28]

These developments continued until the Civil War period. After

the war and with the failure of Reconstruction, the trend to Negro-white co-worship was ended. This resulted in the merger of the independent Negro religious organizations and the invisible institution of the plantation slaves. This merged organization became the "Negro church." The period from the Civil War to the First World War saw a rapid growth of this church which characterized the emancipation of the Negro from white guidance.[29] The Negro church, besides the family, is the earliest of Negro institutions.

Historically the Negro church and Negro religion served as a means of accommodating the Negro to his subservient status. Religion acted both as a mechanism of escape and of hope in that it helped make life's unbearable conditions tolerable. Negro religion was predominantly other-worldly in its orientation. That is, the central religious concern was with an after-life where the miserable conditions of this life would be rectified. The church, also, became a social center, in the broadest sense, because the Negro's participation in the larger society was restricted.

The term emotionalism best characterizes the Negro's early religious behavior. Dancing, shouting, and other psycho-dramatic expressions met the religious needs of the Negro and were predominant, with little change, until World War I. At this point occurred the first of an important series of changes in the circumstances of the American Negro. The World War and post-war quotas barred many immigrants from the United States. This opened opportunities for Negroes in the North and the massive migration of Negroes to the North began. As American urbanization progressed, Negroes were absorbed into urban areas of the South as well as

the North. Occupational and status differentials among Negroes increased. These changes occurred and progressed slowly. It was not until the Second World War that the effects of these cumulative changes marked the succeeding years as significantly different from prior ones. It is the period since World War II that is of major concern in this analysis, for Negro religion and the Negro church reflected the Negro's changed socio-economic situation in the urban, industrial setting.

IV. THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE AND SECULARIZATION

The Negro is a part of the American cultural milieu and his religion
reflects the overall changes in religious orientation in America. One
important trend is that Negro religion, like American religion in general,
has become secularized. In The Religion of Negro Protestants Johnston
views the trend toward secularization as an attempt by the church to
meet a secular society "in order not to be incongruous with the culture
it serves." Frazier gives a similar picture of the Negro church's
secularization in the loss of a predominately other-worldly outlook and
in terms of a focus upon the Negro's condition in this world.[31] Thus,
secularization is viewed as a this-worldly orientation in religion, and,
as such, denotes changed religious values, standards, and practices
without attempt to assert whether these are more or less "truly" religious
or whether they are "good" or "bad."

In general, Negro religion has assumed secular tendencies at a
slower rate than religion among other ethnic groups in America.[32]
But Negro middle-class religion has more closely approximated dominant
secular patterns and has secularized at a faster rate than has the religion
of the Negro masses. Most important in this process has been the continuing
decline and today practical absence, of extreme emotionalism in the middle-
class Negro's religious service. Johnston expresses this absence in terms
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In general, Negro religion has assumed secular tendencies at a more moderate rate than religion among other ethnic groups in America.[32] However, Negro middle-class religion has more closely approximated dominant societal patterns and has secularized at a faster rate than has the religion of the Negro masses. Most important in this process has been the continuing decline, and today practical absence, of extreme emotionalism in the middle-class Negro's religious service. Johnston expresses this absence in terms of the normative principle, accepted by Negroes, that "there should be a moderate or subdued form of worship, with no exaggerated expression of emotion...."[33] Groups other than the Negro middle-class accept this

norm. For throughout the Negro sub-culture, in both rural and urban areas, emotionalism in religious worship is gradually being abandoned. It is within the Negro middle-class, however, that conformity to the norm of non-emotionalism is greatest. Johnston gives a tri-partite division of Negro religious worshipers based on the degree of conformance to this normative principle. She gives as a first category the serene worshiper or empiricist who emphasizes secular values and discourages all emotionalism. Second is the semi-demonstrative or moderate religionist who disparages extreme emotionalism. Third the demonstrative or traditionalist worshiper considers overt expression of religious emotion desirable.[34] Negro middle-class groups fall predominantly in the first category with some extension into the semi-demonstrative group.

Since Negro religion is subject to the influences which affect American religion in general, it is not surprising that the middle-class Negro's concept of God and the supernatural world are being altered. This is related to the attempt to adjust religion to a sensate society. As a result of secularization, attitudes toward the non-empirical elements of religious phenomena are changing. Among middle-class Negroes, for example, negative aspects of the supernatural world have decreased in significance. Some support for this conclusion is given by Johnston. Her questioning of forty Negro, southern college students (who, by definition, belong to the middle-class) revealed that all reported a belief in God and thirty-one reportedly believed in Heaven. However, clearly more than half of these students felt that there was no such thing as Hell. Johnston obtained similar results from her comparison of the religious beliefs of several educational and occupational groups. She observed the diminishing belief in negative aspects of retribution at higher educational and occupational levels.[35]

A third aspect of religious secularization involves a loss of an other-worldly orientation, with a new focus on conditions of life in this world. Religion, for the middle-class Negro, is now viewed as a means of meeting empirical ends in today's society. An examination of Negro religion as it relates to the central concerns of the middle-class will help in understanding this. These concerns are called "axes of life." They are social concerns and a look at these axes will indicate the intimate relationship between the religious and the social within Negro middle-class society.

V. RELIGION AND THE AXES OF LIFE
OF THE NEGRO MIDDLE-CLASS

The axes of life represent the dominating interests or centers of attention of a group. They are the basic interests which are pursued by men in an "attempt to make life profitable, enjoyable, and abundant, and in an effort to acquire honor and esteem."[36] The religious beliefs and behavior of the Negro middle-class reflect their interests.

The approach to religion by considering its relation to the axes of life of the group was suggested by the work of Drake and Cayton in Black Metropolis. In their analysis of the early 1940's, Drake and Cayton isolate five axes of the total Negro population in Bronzeville. These are given as (1) staying alive, (2) having a good time, (3) praising God, (4) getting ahead, and (5) advancing the race.[37] Other writings suggest that these interests can be considered as applicable to the total U.S. Negro population during that time, and, thus, were not peculiar to Bronzeville Negroes. Using these five emphases as a point of departure, this paper employs a similar listing of the life axes for today's Negro middle-class. Due to the changing socio-cultural setting and to emerging status differentials, noted above, these axes are not exactly like those outlined by Drake and Cayton in 1945.

An analysis of the literature dealing with the Negro middle-class has suggested to this writer that the contemporary Negro of middle-class status has three basic axes of life. These axes or focuses of attention are (1) getting ahead, (2) gaining social recognition, and (3) advancing the race. These axes consume the major amounts of time, interest, and money of middle-class Negroes.

At first glance, these focuses of life may appear to be the same
thing. For example, advancing the race and getting ahead could, in some
ways, be equated. Granting the similarity of these three factors, we
note their interrelatedness and recognize that only for analytical pur-
poses can they be separated. We hold, however, that each of these factors
bears a distinctive relationship to religious phenomena.

Getting Ahead

It is recognized that the American Negro is in a proscribed social
position. Even today his opportunities for economic and social advancement,
relative to opportunities among whites, are severely circumscribed.
Although one can point to numerous individual exceptions, for the Negro
population as a whole this statement holds true. The overall position
of the Negro in America falls markedly short of that of white Americans.
There is a clear rigidity in the social system as far as the Negro is
concerned. Throughout his history in the United States the Negro has
variously fought against and questioned the legitimacy of the social
arrangements in which his second-class status is defined. The Negro
middle-class is attempting to move out of this proscribed status. The
middle-class Negro is a status seeker and his decided goal is to "get
ahead."

This group uses the white middle-class as a basis of comparison as
it works toward this goal. The white society serves as a reference
group. In an analysis of social mobility and reference group theory,
Merton and Kitt state that

> if the structure of a rigid system of stratification, for
> example, is generally defined as legitimate, if the rights
> and perquisites and obligations of each stratum are generally
> held to be morally right, then the individuals within each

stratum will be less likely to take the situation of the other
strata as a context for appraisal of their own lot. They will,
presumably, tend to confine their comparisons to other members
of their own or neighboring social stratum. If, however, the
system of stratification is under wide dispute, then members
of some strata are more likely to contrast their own situation
with that of others, and shape their self-appraisals accordingly.[38]

This theory of reference groups helps explain the orientation of the Negro
middle-class which evaluates its position relative to that of the white
middle-class. Relative to its historical position and to the position of
the contemporary Negro masses, the Negro middle-class is already ahead.
But relative to middle-class whites the Negro middle-class is still involved
in the active process of getting ahead. Accepting the white middle-class
as the primary reference group, the Negro middle-class has adopted the
values and standards of this group. Thus, the middle-class Negro stresses
stable family patterns, steady work habits, and overall success orien-
tation. Religion and the church function to reinforce these adopted values.

The significance of this is seen in the church affiliation of middle-
class Negroes. In a comprehensive study of The Negro's Church, published
in 1933, Mays and Nicholson assert that "the Negro church still furnishes
the best opportunity for Negroes of different social strata and various
cultural groups to associate together in a thoroughly democratic
way....Up to this time, the Negro church has been one of the most out-
standing channels through which the gulf between the 'high' and the 'low',
the 'trained' and the 'untrained' has been bridged."[39] This statement is
much less applicable today, for there is a significant development of
distinquishable Negro middle-class churches as this group becomes pro-
gressively differentiated from the Negro masses.

One effective way of characterizing this middle-class religious
institution is through the use of the church-sect polar typology originally

formulated by Max Weber. The church-like institution has a strong pro-
fessional leadership and is actively engaged in community affairs. Unlike
the sect, it accommodates to the secular order through adaptive compromise,
and the church-like parishioner strives to achieve secular goals. Church-
like religiosity is positively related to social status.[40] The Negro
middle-class religious life is church-like in its organization and orien-
tation. Thus, the churches serving the emerging Negro middle-class can
be said to have well-educated ministers who focus on contemporary, secular
issues in their sermons. The middle-class church member anticipates a
serene, non-emotional service which is in accord with his more developed
religious sentiments and with his newly acquired status. Ritualistic
services are adopted. Church affiliation becomes a symbol of his new
status and functions to enhance his self-importance and social esteem.

Booker T. Washington once said, "If you find a Negro who is not a
Methodist or Baptist, it is a sure sign that some white man has been
tampering with his religion."[41] This statement has currency even today.
For the great majority of Negro church goers are concentrated in the
five independent Methodist and Baptist denominations. These are the
National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated; the National Baptist
Convention of America; the African Methodist Episcopal Church; the African
Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; and the Christian Methodist Episcopal
Church. These five denominations have about ten million members.[42]
However, within the Negro middle-class there is a trend, though not yet
fully developed, to move away from these racially separate or independent
denominations and to join congregations affiliated with white denominations.
These latter are referred to as dependent denominations and, principally,
are the Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Congregationalist, Roman Catholic, and

Christian Scientist denominations. These are, likewise, middle and upper status churches among whites. The one possible exception to this generalization is the Roman Catholic Church which is often a low-status church among American whites.

The recent mounting interest of middle-class Negroes in the Roman Catholic Church is particularly important because the Protestant tradition among Negroes is deeply rooted. The strength of this Protestant tradition is largely due to the geographic concentration of Negroes in the South where Protestantism predominates, and because of the vigorous proselyting efforts of Protestants, as compared with Catholics, during the Christianization of the slaves. The consequences were such that even today about 90 per cent of Negroes are Protestants as compared with only two-thirds of whites.[43] However, an intensive drive within the Catholic Church to draw Negroes among their believers has had important effects. Currently there are nearly 700,000 Negro Roman Catholics. This number in 1953 was only 450,000. This represents an increase in membership of 55 per cent in one decade.[44]

As the Negro attempts to get ahead, "in a reversal of the pattern some immigrant groups have followed, to become a Roman Catholic is in part a move to a higher status because of the association between poverty and inferiority and their Protestant past."[45] Another significant status reason for joining or affiliating with the Catholic Church is related to Catholic educational institutions. Drake and Cayton state that both Catholic and non-Catholic Negro informants indicate that the major attractiveness of the Roman Catholic Church was in its parochial schools which these people felt offerred better educational opportunities to their children. The feeling was that these Catholic schools allowed for a

quieter atmosphere for learning and more personal attention for the students.[46] Frazier, similarly, notes that attraction to membership in the Catholic Church is related to the greater appeal of the disciplined parochial schools relative to Negro public schools.[47] The significance of this appeal of the Catholic Church as it relates to the fact that education is the dominant status determinant among Negroes is evident.

In general, membership in the Roman Catholic Church signifies the Negro's status achievement. Associated with this quest for status in the Catholic Church, however, are certain problems. It has been hypothesized that joining the Catholic Church is part of an attempt to escape one's identity as a Negro, which has all the connotations of second-class status.[48] But, according to Frazier, "very often after joining the Catholic Church with the expectation that they will escape from their status as Negroes, they find they are still defined as Negroes by whites."[49] This problem of identity and felt isolation is compounded by the fact that many Negro Roman Catholics worship in predominantly racially segregated churches. This point is emphasized by Liston Pope in a 1960 publication on "The Negro and Religion in America." Pope indicates that "the degree of actual segregation in institutions of the Roman Catholic Church is difficult to ascertain. It was reported a few years ago that about two-thirds of the Negro congregations had segregated services...."[50]

A similar situation of segregation in religious worship accrues in other dependent denominations, for only a small percentage of Negro church goers regularly attend churches with racially integrated congregations. Indicative of this situation are the findings reported in a 1946 study of minority group participation in 1,519 Congregational-Christian churches. Of these, only 198 had both Negro and white participants. The author

states that the attendance of Negroes at these churches was greater than the actual membership of Negroes in the churches. Such churches, which are called "inclusive," generally had a racial composition which included fewer than ten non-white members.[51] More recent writings do not suggest that the scale of interracial worship in all of the denominations has increased significantly beyond what is indicated here.

Between 1950 and 1954 Kramer made a national study of three Protestant denominations. These were the United Lutheran Church in America, the Congregational Christian Churches, and the Presbyterian Church in the USA. His data indicates that under one per cent of the 13,597 churches to which questionnaires were sent reported non-white persons in groups of ten or more in a single church. Detailed reports from 405 ministers suggest that non-white persons represent about 2.7 per cent of the members in their congregations.[52] Similar data from Kramer's report led one author to conclude that the church is the most segregated of our major institutions.[53]

It is Clark's contention that the Negro members of the interracial churches probably rank above the white worshiper in his congregation in social, economic, and educational status. Clark also feels that "the interracial church outside the ghetto is a social instrument for the upwardly mobile and upper middle-class Negro who uses it as evidence of his success. He therefore tends to demand of the church that it protect this image of himself above all else. Any issue which would tend to remind the Negro of his racial identity would necessarily conflict with basic needs satisfied by this membership."[54]

Negro members in segregated congregations of dependent denominations, likewise, seek status verification through worship in white affiliated denominations in which demonstrativeness is abandoned and ritualistic, liturgical services are adopted. The services and beliefs of communicants

in these churches do not differ, significantly, from those of white Protestants of similar education and economic standing.[55] Concerning the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist denominations, Glenn points out that few Negro church services are as formal as their modernistic higher-status white counterparts. "Most Negro middle-class congregations are more nearly comparable to white Baptist and Methodist congregations...."[56]

In the independent denominations the middle-class Negro establishes churches composed of those of like status. Or, if he stays in a church in which there are mixed status groups, it is generally a very large Baptist or Methodist church in which he provides the lay leadership. The size of church plus the comportment of the services determines its status. Here getting ahead is similarly associated with a loss of racial identity. In some churches there has been an attempt to remove church names identified as racial. For example, under pressure from the middle-class communicants, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church became the "Christian" Methodist Episcopal Church. However, when the middle-class leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church tried to substitute in its name the word American for African, there was significant resistance on the part of the masses who demanded that the change not be made.[57]

In an attempt to get ahead the Negro of middle-class rank clings desparately to status symbols because he is concerned about his new, and often tenuous, status. Church affiliation is such a symbol and becomes part of the social paraphernalia of the class. Suggestive of this is the fact that many Negro professionals hold membership in two churches.[58] One of these memberships is in a church of the lower-class, the strata from which the professional draws most of his clientele. The other

membership is in a middle-class church along with those of like social and economic standing. This latter membership helps define his social standing.

To the Negro getting ahead is defined, largely, in economic terms. Within the last thirty years the Negro's economic position has been progressively enhanced. Forces responsible for this have been the existance of a high demand for labor; the expansion of the economy; a growing favorable attitude toward equal opportunity; urbanization; and better educational opportunities.[59] However, despite these advancements, the position of Negroes, when compared with whites, has not changed significantly in the last two decades.[60] A similar conclusion has been advanced by Glenn in his examination of changes in the Negro's relative status from 1940 through 1960. According to Glenn the ratio in 1949 of urban Negro to urban white median individual income was .561. In 1959 this ratio had risen to only .576. Similarly the proportional distribution of occupations among Negroes has been retarded, such that their representation in the higher occupational groups has not increased as rapidly as at the intermediate and lower levels.[61]

The middle-class Negro feels, greatly, the brunt of these income and occupational deficiences because they are inconsistent with his motivation to get ahead. Although the goal of economic advancement is often frustrated, the Negro middle-class attempts to maintain a style of life which "gives the impression that it has an economic base different from what it has in reality."[62] Frazier proposes that the middle-class Negro attempts to confirm his new status by conspicuous consumption.[63]

The struggle for material advancement is sanctioned by the religious values of the class. This contention is supported by a statement made

by the prominent Negro leader, Dr. Martin Luther King and quoted by Brink and Harris in The Negro Revolution in America. Dr. King observed that "the social gospel is as important as the gospel of personal salvation. Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and ignores social and economic conditions that cripple the soul is a spiritually moribund and dead religion and it is only waiting for the day to be buried."[64] The same point was made by another Negro, Dr. George E. Harper of the Federal Council of Churches who claimed that the "Negro church today faces a most unusual opportunity to overcome an uneconomic and unsocial past. The building up of a moral reserve, the securing of Negro workmen's living standards and the saving of body along with the soul, is the job of Christianity...."[65]

When his efforts to get ahead fall short of his idealized goals, the Negro relies on his religious institutions as a refuge. Traditionally, the role of the Negro church and Negro religion has been important in helping the Negro accommodate to his servile, impoverished, and psychologically demeaning position in the social structure. Today an analogous situation exists for the middle-class Negro. Although the Negro middle-class is more integrated into American society than other segments of the Negro population, it is far from being well assimilated. Its leadership role in the dominant society is restricted and its social contacts are chiefly confined to non-whites. The middle-class Negro is rebuffed by white Americans in his efforts to advance. The religious institutions of the middle-class Negro still serve as a mechanism for accommodating to this situation. The church serves as a social gathering place where the Negro's leadership and organizational abilities can be utilized. It remains an organ of self-expression for the middle-class, but not to the same

degree as it does among the Negro masses. One must be careful not to overstate this role of the church as an institution of social adjustment, control, and accommodation among the middle-class. Until the past twenty years or so, says Frazier, the church has remained the most important agency of social control among all Negroes.[66] But as the Negro is slowly drawn into organized forms of social life in the American mainstream, the church's influence as an agency of social control diminishes. The church is one, but no longer the center of social life for the middle-class Negro. His professional, business, political, and college associations outside of the church have increased in importance and help meet the goals of status achievement and social control.

Gaining Social Recognition

Closely related to the focus of getting ahead is the middle-class Negro's search for social recognition. This search can be explained in terms of the desire of this class for acceptance of its status as legitimate. Whereas, the goal to get ahead is, in many respects, individualized, the goal of social recognition is a collective emphasis on gaining recognition from both white Americans and other Negroes.

First in this process of gaining social recognition, there is the necessity for the Negro middle-class to distinguish itself from the Negro masses. In recent years the middle-class has become alienated from the Negro masses. As the middle-class Negro rises from the ranks of the masses, he is most critical of them as backwards, immoral, and lazy. In their depressed social, economic, and educational situation, the masses, to the middle-class, are representative of the Negro's history of servitude and degradation, a stigma which the Negro must escape if he is to get ahead

and achieve acknowledgement of his claim to middle-class status. We have used reference group theory to explain the acceptance of the upwardly mobile Negro of white middle-class values and modes of behavior. There is another aspect of this theory which helps in understanding the alienation of the Negro middle-class and the Negro masses. Considering the white population, for the middle-class Negro, as an out-group or non-membership group and the Negro population as an in-group, we can see the Negro middle-class attitude as a positive orientation to a non-membership group. This orientation, according to reference group theory, is seen as non-conformity by the in-group. The middle-class is criticized by the masses for this non-conformity. Thus, the middle-class Negro, to some degree, both rejects and is rejected by the masses. At the same time he is not accepted into the folds of the white society as he would like to be. His status, then, is marginal. This yields an intensity to his efforts to differentiate himself from lower status Negroes in order to gain acceptance.

In this struggle, religion forms one basis of social cohesion or unity within the middle-class. The group justifies its rejection of the Negro folkways in religious terms. It defines many of the folk values as immoral or rejects the emotional and demonstrative religion of the masses as insincere. Middle-class Negroes are critical of what they see as "religious infidelity" among the masses.[67] To the extent that the middle-class church is an active physical symbol of class differences, it serves to intensify class divisions and alienation. The more sophisticated middle-class church does not and can not minister to the needs of the less educated and more emotionally demonstrative lower-classes. Its existence is a significant indication of the communication barriers between these two groups and the different goal orientations which set them apart.

Whereas common religious expressions and the church play a role in the social cohesion of the Negro middle-class, they act as a divisive influence in the Negro population as a whole.

The attempt to differentiate themselves from the masses is suggested by the fact that many middle-class Negro congregations have rejected the singing of Negro spirituals which are popular among the lower-classes. According to Frazier, upper-status churches resented gospel singers and refused to permit them to sing in their churches. He notes, however, that the Negro middle-class became more favorable of the spirituals and gospel singers as these acquired status within the white world.[68] Another possible reason for this rejection is that the mood of resignation predominent in the Negro spirituals is no longer prevelent among the middle-class Negro groups which are active in combating second-class status and actively seeking social recognition.

The desire for acceptance is further illuminated by Washington in a discussion of the Negro membership in the Catholic Church. This author postulates that, essentially, the Negro Catholic is tired of Protestant segregation, and his decision to join Catholicism does not reflect a commitment to the Christian church but is motivated by the possibility of authentic acceptance.[69]

In his quest for social recognition, the middle-class Negro becomes preoccupied with respectability. The proper church affiliation confirms this respectability. If he does not actually have a church membership the middle-class Negro will often claim one.[70] Because church attendance is respectable the Negro middle-class is more faithful in its church attendance than other Negro classes. This fact is substantiated by Daniel in a study of ritual and stratification in Negro churches. Daniel states

that this more frequent attendance is often for social reasons as well as for spiritual uplift.[71]

Along with the desire for social acceptance it can be noted that a goal of this class is to enjoy life in this world. This is related to the growing this-worldly orientation in Negro religion. The middle-class Negro is no longer content to accept the prohibitions that his traditional fundamentalist religion placed on such activities as dancing, card-playing, and drinking. This is not unlike the situation among white religious groups as they acquire higher social status.

Also, the modern urban church attempts to compete with the many entertainment and recreational opportunities that city life makes available for the Negro's enjoyment of life in this world. It thus, becomes an activities center which attempts to reach into and become involved in community affairs. The middle-class Negro church best exemplifies this where the majority of the churches promote such programs as Girl and Boy Scouts, plays, concerts, educational programs, movies, church bands, nurseries and kindergartens, supervised recreational programs, and civic programs.

For comparison, and to indicate how these activities differ from church programs of other class groups, one can examine the findings of Felton's 1950 study of Negro churches. Felton listed the frequency of forty activities of 570 rural, southern churches. The most frequent were such activities as financial rallies, anniversary services, and special "choir sings." Few of the activities listed were of the less traditional type which today appeal to the middle-class. For example, only 28 of the 570 churches had study groups or forums on community problems, 21 provided supervised playgrounds and only 11 had craft or community classes or clubs.[72] The degree of overlap is not pointed out and it can be assumed

that the total number of churches providing non-traditional programs is less than the summation of frequencies would indicate.

The middle-class congregation can often provide these extra-religious programs because it has the financial ability to pay staff to organize and supervise them. However, the economic base of the Negro middle-class is weak and many churches have only skeleton programs or programs in name only. Yet the idealized goal, patterned after white church practices, is to provide a wide range of social and recreational activities and to extend into the community of the church members. The middle-class Negro church desires recognition as a community oriented church with social involvement in a wide range of activities.

Advancing the Race

The Negro middle-class is, in general, committed to advancing the race. This means promoting the social welfare of the race and fighting for the attainment of civil rights, equality, and justice for the Negro. In fact, the goals or axes of getting ahead and social recognition can be subsumed under this axis of racial advancement. They can be viewed as particulars under this general and pervasive orientation toward advancing the race.

The civil rights protest movement, in all its phases, is the paramount mechanism through which racial advancement is hopefully fostered. The Negro minister and the church have played a dominant role in this protest movement. However, the minister and the church did not play an initiating role nor did they set the mood of protest, but rather, followed and adjusted to the developing militancy of middle-class Negroes. From early times the Negro minister has been the leader of his race and the prime liason with the white community. For a short interim it appeared that

labor and civic leaders would take the forefront in today's militant drive for racial aggrandizement. It was not until the 1950's that religious institutions and ministerial influence added a spark to the existing mood. The church, the strongest organization among Negroes, became the center for stimulating and communicating the goals of the movement.

In The Transormation of the Negro American, Broom and Glenn further illuminate this point. They feel that the traditional role of the Negro minister as a race leader has been "redefined as being militantly engaged in seeking full integration of Negroes into American society." But,

> the new role of the Negro church has not been internally generated and spontaneous. Rather, it has resulted from a changed mood of the Negro populace and competition from other sources of race leadership....For some time, the prestige and influence of the Negro clergy have declined, partly because many Negroes have felt that clergymen have not provided positive leadership on the behalf of the racial cause. A large number of professional "race men," the functionaries of the NAACP and the National Urban League, have overshadowed the traditional leadership of ministers.[73]

Similarly, Myrdal, in his classic study of Negro society, comments that "the Negro church has been lagging ideologically....While for a long time the protest has been rising in the Negro community, the church has, on the whole, remained conservative and accommodating.[74] Correctly indicating the changed position of the Negro church and ministers, Fichter proposes that "it can be argued that the felix culpa of the Negro Protestant denominations is that they have been a training ground for the most successful integrationist leaders." Whereas organized religion generally plays a conservative and preservative role in society, Fichter considers that which has come to light in the civil rights movement as the "prophetic, creative, and positive role of religion."[75]

The events of this drive for racial uplift have been interpreted in religious terms and the principles of Christian love and brotherhood

were early infused into the primarily non-violent protest movement. The middle-class struggle to advance the race, the search for freedom and equality, is felt to be in accord with Christian principles and, therefore, virtuous. A tone of morality pervaded the entire early struggle in which Christ was idealized as a norm for action. In this way the Negro related the supernatural to the known world.

One significant aspect of religion is its power as a source of social control and group morale. In the early periods of public protest, religion acted to regulate, order, and give cohesion to the national uplift efforts of the Negro. During racial demonstrations, the singing of spirituals and the repetition of prayers became a means of fortifying the position of non-violence.[76] The function of religion as it helped to integrate the middle-class Negro with others of his group is evident in the drive for civil rights.

The Negro church has become an organ for racial betterment. Clark postulates that the Negro church can only be understood as it is a weapon of protest, a protective fortress within which the Negro plans his strategy of attack against racial barriers.[77] Similarly, Wilmore claims that what is different about Negro churches today "is a new sense of power in the war against racial discrimination." He counts the middle-class Negro as strong among the group of "New Negroes" which has divested itself of moralistic complacency about the status quo and become a force in revealing the religious significance of human life in today's society.[78]

Although other status groups participate in the fight for racial advancement, the Negro middle-class is the decided leader of this racial struggle. For, "middle-class persons increasingly predominate among those Negroes who most strongly evince a desire to move toward and gain acceptance

in the total society. The Negro middle-class usually furnishes the leaders for the major desegregation organizations and the trail blazers, the 'first of the race' in newly desegregated institutions."[79]

In line with this orientation, religious sermons in Negro middle-class churches are expected to reflect the current situation in race relations and to refer to the importance of religion as a solution to social problems. Missionary efforts become racially oriented so that the fundamental basis of "good works" is a hope for secular racial improvement.[80]

The emphasis upon freedom and equality has led Washington to characterize Negro religion as having a dominant ethical orientation. That is, the Negro orients himself to one phase of Christianity. That phase is the ethic of love-justice-equality.[81] Washington interprets contemporary Negro religion as a revival of Negro "folk religion." He sees folk religion as the racially militant religion which was curbed and repressed by patterns of oppression, segregation, and discrimination following the Reconstruction period. Folk religion was then superceeded by more accommodative, conservative, institutional religious expressions. These latter forms of religious expression are themselves being overturned within middle-class religion which again asserts a determined militancy to advance the race and attain freedom now.[82]

> The root of the folk religion is racial unity for freedom and equality. Every ecclesiastical expression of Negro congregations and institutions is but a variation or frustration of this theme. Regardless of the congregational expression in which he may be involved...the Negro knows the dimensions of separation from the white world which leads him to seek fulfillment in fellowships primarily concerned with folk religion: freedom and equality.[83]

Negro religion is a religion initiated and perpetuated in racial fellowship which persists in response to the dominant social, economic or political needs.[84]

Making a point similar to Washington's, Johnston states that "the present trend in Negro religion is similar to that phase before the Emanicpation Proclamation when white and Negro abolitionists sought liberation of the Negro. But today the general emphasis is stronger...."[85]

Middle-class Negro religion is the prototype of these trends and, thus, manifest to the greatest degree the processes attributed by these authors to contemporary Negro religion in general. As we have seen the middle-class Negro attempts to sever his identity with his slave past and he, likewise, rejects elements of his fundamentalist religious heritage. Yet, he readily accepts and expands on elements of an earlier folk religious legacy which directs him to unrelenting commitment to racial betterment.

The desire for advancement illustrates that the Negro middle-class is enamored with racial pride and concerned with racial integrity. It may seem inconsistent to state, as we have done, that the middle-class attempts to lose his racial identity and, then, to state that his religious practices reflect a strong racial pride. In attempting to define its position as different from the lower-classes, the middle-class Negro does try to escape his racial identity and, thus, alienates himself from the masses. But, in being rejected by the larger American society, the fact of his race is constantly forced upon his consciousness. His color visibility precludes the possibility of his passing quickly and unnoticed into the American mainstream. Thus, the middle-class Negro sets himself up as a symbol of racial potentialities and a pride in his race develops partially as a response to being rebuffed by white Americans. The developed, sophis-ticated church and religious practices, too, become symbols of racial potentialities.

To date the independent church has provided a "safe" platform from which to promote the drive for social and economic betterment. This can

be explained in large measure by the economic foundations of the Negro middle-class church. This church is financially supported by Negroes. It is not primarily dependent on the philanthropic support of whites and accordingly does not jeopardize this support by involvement in efforts to advance the race. The economic autonomy and the independent professional leadership of Negro churches facilitated social protest. Yet, the weakness of drawing leadership from the middle-class church "lies in the possibility that even the relative independence of the Negro church does not provide a genuine source of power. It does not in itself provide the financial or organizational stability for a long range conflict."[86] By implication, what the church can do alone in a sustained struggle for human rights and social betterment for the Negro is limited. Ministerial leaders must seek support outside the church in civic, professional, and labor organizations, and in the Negro masses.

Another problem exists regarding the advancement of the race and its solution bears significant consequences for the future of the Negro church. Although Negro religion and the church, particularly of the middle-class, have fostered integration in non-church settings, Negro religion itself is, overwhelmingly, segregated religion. Some feel that the church is working toward its own demise by fostering racial integration.[87] Yet, many see this demise as only a very distant prospect. One minister says, "I think the church will be the last thing to go.... This is because it is so much a social gathering ground—a cultural and social group."[88] Just as the Negro middle-class has a vested interest in a segregated society because much of its economic base is lodged in racially segregated institutions, so too, does it have a vested interest in the segregated church. Many members of this class find a basis of

personal worth and self-esteem in the church. Because of this, this institution will, for some time to come, easily resist the tide of racial integration.

In the case of rapid and total integration of religious institutions, the Negro would again be relegated to the fringes in these organizations. But in the segregated churches the middle-class is rather secure in its leadership and social prestige. This points to the element of ambivalence the Negro has toward total integration. Thus, the church does seem to act, in some respects, as a contemporary refuge for the middle-class Negro. Yet, integration, as it is a component of complete civil rights and as it is in accord with the integrity of the race, has been defined by the middle-class as morally correct. Such beliefs dispose the middle-class Negro to commitment to social amelioration and advancement for the race.

VI. SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION

Ralph Bunch once wrote that the American Negro thinks and acts entirely in a "black groove." That is, there is a psychological fixation among Negroes such that their problems are interpreted in exceedingly narrow terms. "Thinking, feeling, life itself, revolve about the narrow axis of 'minority status'."[89] The Negro's position in American society is defined in racial terms. His entire social existence is dominated by race. Second-class citizenship, accented by pervasive patterns of discrimination, is a social reality which circumscribes his behavior and thoughts and orients him to continued racial awareness. This view is not to be interpreted as an assertion of some vague form of racial determinism, but, rather as an affirmation of race as a major social force within the Negro community.

This observation holds true for the middle-class Negro community in America today. As the middle-class Negro is slowly drawn into the mainstream of American culture, as he is brought into competition with whites and as he encounters rejection and frustration of his goals for achievement, the middle-class Negro is forced into continued racial consciousness. Then, it is not surprising that as Negro religion progressively loses its other-worldly orientation, it should come to focus around a preeminent this-worldly social element, race.

The dominant interests or axes of life of this middle-class racial group are reflected in its religion. Interest in getting ahead or achieving social and economic prosperity and status is reflected in the recent

development of the "status church" among Negroes. This is a symbol of

arrival into the ranks of the middle-class. This status church is also

a manifestation of a desire for social recognition and acceptance. It is

a symbol of racial potential as the middle-class attempts to throw off the

stigma of its slave heritage. Lastly, the church is an organ of minority

group advancement in the civil rights movement for racial equality.

The three axes of life——getting ahead, gaining social recognition,

advancing the race——represent the collective ideal of the Negro middle-

class American. And the central preoccupation is no longer with salvation

beyond the grave but "with what religion does to contribute to the attainment

of the ideal in society."[90] This thought is in accord with Durkheim's

interpretation of religion as expressing the collective ideal in society.[91]

Society, Durkheim states, is the "soul of religion."[92] This view

stresses the social factor as the animating principle of religion. Such

an interpretation can be applied to an analysis of the Negro's middle-

class religion, the idea being that the web of social forces revolving

around his racial identity lend a peculiar character to his religious

expressions. Race is the animating principle of Negro middle-class religion.

Conveying a similar idea, Mays and Nicholson speak of the "genius"

or "soul" of the Negro's church. They describe the uniqueness of the

institution, its life and vitality, as its ownership by a "race." The

Negro's church is his very own, which provides him with opportunities

and freedoms not available in other organizations. His church is a

social center.[93] Following this lead, Washington elaborates the point

with the idea of a genius or soul of American Negro folk religion. He

states:

> The findings reveal that the Negro has created, out of the
> scraps provided by white missionaries, an ingenius technique

for survival and a creative means of calling forth pride
in achievement to disprove the white assumption of Negro
inferiority.[94]

The genius of the Negro folk religion is the use of the church as an
instrument for the fulfillment of its participation as a race in every
area of life.[95] These conclusions are not unlike those of Clark expressed
in Dark Ghetto. Here Clark notes that the Negro church allows for the
personal and racial freedom necessary in the campaign against racial
injustices. "The Negro church, therefore, can not be understood primarily
in traditional theological terms, but rather in terms of the religion of
race."[96]

The religion and church of the Negro middle-class exhibit these
characteristics in bold relief. Negro middle-class religious behavior
and institutions have become differentiated as symbols of new racial
status. The church progressively attempts to penetrate the secular
community and foster the social well-being of the race. The ethic of
love-justice-equality and related religious beliefs are supportive of
personal and racial prosperity, racial dignity, and freedom and suggest
means of action for attaining these ideals. It is apparent, then, that
the social reality of race has become a focal point of Negro middle-class
religion.

This analysis has shown that the development and growth of the
middle-class is relatively recent among American Negroes. The Negro
middle-class is a product of changed social and cultural conditions.
Through a process of cultural integration the Negro church and Negro
religion have adaptively changed to meet the needs of this emerging social
stratum. A primary need which the church meets is that of status veri-
fication as noted above. For the middle-class Negro faces a discrepancy
between his nominal and aspired middle-class status and his actual
status relative to the white middle-class.

In general, variable correlates of middle-class status in America are (1) privilege, (2) prestige, and (3) power. When compared with white Americans the Negro middle-class is relatively deprived of these components of middle-class status. The church, consequently, has become a major source of privilege, prestige, and power for the Negro middle-class.

In speaking of status privileges, Max Weber notes that the counterpart of stratification by status is the special acquisition of ideal and material goods or opportunities.[97] Within the total social structure, such privileges for the Negro are limited. But within the Negro sub-culture the middle-class becomes the privileged class, and Negro middle-class religion both reflect and create these privileges. Particularly illustrative of this is the privilege of leadership which the middle-class Negro has within both dependent and independent congregations. Similarly, the privilege of autonomy is acquired, for the "Negro's church is his very own" and he is not under the dictates of whites in his religious institutions. It was shown above that the benefit of self-expression, often denied the Negro in the larger society, is accorded through the middle-class church. Further, the economic "advantages" of the Negro middle-class are reflected in the church and the privileged leisure time of this class is spent in involvement in the extra-religious social activities of the church.

Generally, middle-class status and group prestige are attendant variables. Yet, the middle-class Negro, by virtue of his race, has little or no prestige in our society where he, at best, holds second-class citizenship. In this situation the middle-class church is a source of prestige to the Negro since it is evident "proof" of his similarity to, or even equality with, the white middle-class. The non-demonstrative church is supportive of self-esteem and racial dignity. The emphasis upon

gaining social recognition and acceptance in the church is a search for
the prestigious valuation of whites and of other Negroes.

Beyond this the Negro middle-class church is a source of power.
Parsons explains that power is

> the realistic capacity of a system-unit to actualize its
> "interests" (attain goals, prevent undesired interference,
> command respect, control possessions, etc.) within the
> context of system-interaction and in this sense to exert
> influence on processes in the system.[98]

The church is one means through which the middle-class actualizes its
interest in getting ahead, gaining social recognition, and advancing the
race. The middle-class religionist has the power and control over the
material and human resources which are invested in the church. In exerting
its influence on the processes in the larger social system the Negro
middle-class church uses this power to become a bastion of protest and
a significant force in the moral struggle for human rights.

The axes of life converge on the need of this racial group for
prestige, privilege, and power. Summarily, the Negro middle-class wishes
to "participate fully in American society with the dollars [privileges]
and dignity [prestige] of other Americans."[99] But the middle-class Negro
is a marginal man who is not accepted within our cultural mainstream.
In defining himself as middle-class in terms of education, occupation, and
income the Negro faces an inconsistency in status because our society does
not award him the attendant power, prestige, and privileges. However, in
allying educational and economic status with the power, prestige, and
privileges accorded in the church, the Negro middle-class church serves
as a mechanism for achieving a measure of status consistency.

In several ways the changes in status of the Negro American have
been rapid and revolutionary. In many more ways, however, these changes
have been slow and arduous, as is much permanent social and cultural

change. Whatever its precise nature the Negro middle-class has been at the forefront of this social reformation in which the Negro middle-class church has, also, played a vital role.

The future developments of Negro middle-class religion, expressed through the church, are, of course, indefinite. During the process of status change the Negro's attempts to get ahead will, at times, be stifled; he will often be denied social recognition of his alleged middle-class status; the efficacy of his protests for justice and equality will wax and wane. It is evident that there will be continued importance of religion and the church as mechanisms of adjustment to this situation, and as wellsprings of social esteem, power, and privileges for the Negro middle-class——a class which will, for some time to come, face a discrepancy between its ideal status and its real status in American society.

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