

A Series: THE BLACK FAMILY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 80's

PART IV: THE BLACK CHURCH

"Believe me . . ."

Acknowledging the importance of the resurgence of the family to American and particularly Black American society, and in keeping with the recent Proclamation by the Clark County Board of Commissioners designating the 1980's to be the "Decade of the Family," the Las Vegas SENTINEL-VOICE continues this series of articles by MAUDRA JONES on "THE BLACK FAMILY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 80's." In offering this special series, we salute the Black Family during this "DECADE OF THE FAMILY." We dedicate the series, with love and appreciation, to the families of America and hope that our readers will be inspired to promote and develop opportunities for strengthening the institution of the family in all areas of community life.



Maudra Jones strategies for survival and escape from bondage. After slavery and until today, and church has remained the unofficial headquarters in the Black community for the righting of social and political wrongs, and salvation and deli-

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verance of our people. From Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman and Denmark Vesey to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Shirley Chisholm and Andrew Young, the Black church has produced fearless, courageous, outspoken leaders, dedicated to God, committed to the principles of progress and freedom and imbued with a deep, abiding and unwavering love for their people.

Like the Black family, the Black church is a bastion of love, strength and unity. Like the Black family, the Black church is essential to the survival of Afro-Americans as a people. The church is the family, and the family is the church; without one the other would not continue to exist."

The church has been and continues to be the Black community's caretaker — yet, so much more than a caretaker. Those of us who witnessed the documentary film "This Far By Faith," shared more than the reaffirmation and reassurance that the Black church has "driven us on," and serves as a bedrock of the Black community. We also witnessed the

vivid illustrations of the significant impact which the Black church has had on the lives of many Americans and on American culture. Fragments of the "old landmark" are still found in our churches today. My recollections of the "old landmark" with my grandmother in Louisiana bring to focus the church as the "school house," the "crisis center," the "shelter," the "home of the benevolent association," the "community center," and more. Signs of the "genuine essence" of our religious traditions are continuing to emerge as we face the challenges of the 80s. The Black church is indeed rethinking and re-

Believe me, I loved you all
Believe me, I knew you, though faintly,
And I loved, I loved you all



By Maudra Jones

In remembrance of Christ's resurrection and in reaffirmation of the belief and faith that represents the genuine essence of the Black church, we continue our examination of the family with this expanded discussion of the church in the Black experience.

The traditional Black church, like the Black family, is an institution — something all our own, rooted in the "deep spirituality of the Black religious tradition and combined with the quest for earthly freedom. Described by one writer as the "most influential single force behind the vitality of Black culture," the Black church brought dignity and strength to the Black experience. Bowden writes:

"The Black church, since its establishment, as well as the Black family, nurtured, nourished and gave succor to the spirit of Black Americans from the time of captivity, enslavement and emancipation to the present time of fragmented freedom; it still provides the greatest source of energy and inspiration for the continuous struggle to raise the human existence of millions from the atrocities of evil to the lofty heights of man's greatest potential."

The church is the strongest, most durable and lasting influence in the Black community. If one is to accept the fact that there is a separate and distinct Black American culture, then one has no choice but to acknowledge the

fact that the nucleus — the backbone — of that culture is the church. It was the church that brought Afro-Americans together while they were slaves in the early American south and it has been the church that has moved us and moved with us into freedom and citizenship. Studies of the relationship of the church and family in the Black experience have resulted in major contributions by noted theologians and scholars. Among writers on the subject are: W.E.B. DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier, Carter G. Woodson, Howard Thurman, C. Eric Lincoln, Benjamin Mays and J. Deotis Roberts. Most of these writings explore the deeper meanings and importance of the church and family in the Black experience. Reflections of them are found in this statement delivered to the Family and Religious Community in Partnership Conference, Washington, D.C., September 1980:

"... The Black church has always been more than merely a house of worship. The Black church is a meeting and a greeting place, a social, emotional and spiritual outlet for kindred spirits, thrown together by the oppressive, disruptive and divisive forces from without, and bound together by the unifying, comforting and reassuring Holy Spirit from within.

During slavery the church was where the Africans went to praise God, pray for deliverance and map out their own plans and

evaluating its commitment to the great commission and the higher calling. In the final statement of his book titled "Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church," J. Deotis Roberts makes the challenge clear:

"When the Black church is viewed as a family, all persons, whether married, single or divorced, will come to a sense of kinship in the church as the family of God. The church is the family under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to whom all families in heaven and earth owe their substance and health. Let us hasten the day when the church will be a family and the family a domestic church. Then will God's kingdom be nearer than we had believed."

ACTION PLAN FOR THE WEEK

Begin to develop ways for your family and church to become more active as a resource center for education and training in family life. Find and implement ways to eliminate those negative factors that exist in family and church units and relationships.

NEVADA'S LARGEST AND MOST COMPLETE BLACK COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

IMPORTANT NOTICE PUBLIC HEARING

The Citizens' Advisory Committee and the City Council of the City of North Las Vegas will conduct a public hearing.

When: Citizens' Advisory Committee Tuesday, April 5, 1983

City Council Wednesday, April 6, 1983

Where: North Las Vegas City Hall Council Chambers 2200 Civic Center Drive North Las Vegas, Nevada

Time: 7:00 P.M.

Purpose: Program 1982-83 Community Development Block Grant contingency funds and potential additional Community Development Block Grant Funds

All residents and property owners in North Las Vegas are cordially invited to attend the public hearing.

Citizens' Advisory Committee

Mike Joyner, Chairman
John Losky, Vice Chairman
Patricia Boyett
Irene Childress
Olevia Fleming
Larry Grubb
Lloyd Retke
Sixto Vela
I. W. Wilson

City Council

James K. Seastrand, Mayor
Theron H. Goynes
Lillian Strom
Jacob David Bingham
Dale J. Huntsman