WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? SACRED MEMORY IN A BLACK CHURCH CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

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Life is shaped by what we remember and what we forget. Identity is shaped by how we remember. This project examines a long-standing annual event at St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn, NY, to ascertain its value and sustainability as sacred memory in the community. As defined in this project, sacred memory encompasses the community's intentional, ritualized acts to recover, reinforce, and retain communal identity. St. Paul's expression of sacred memory called MAAFA addresses the trauma experienced by African-Americans from the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the residuals of slavery.

With over two decades in our rear view, we explore the power of sacred memory within the context of a congregation deeply connected to its community's needs and traumas. Beyond local import, MAAFA has been a template for congregations worldwide to address local needs through a decidedly incarnational ministry of sacred memory. We seek to discover, has a culture of sacred memory been thoroughly understood and established? Is the importance of sacred memory through MAAFA significant to the next generation? Do we see this ritual of remembering as an essential aspect of our identity? In short, "Where do we go from here?"

To investigate this query, we administered a pre-survey to establish a baseline of involvement and understanding concerning MAAFA. This information was used to inform the curriculum for a three day mini-conference to orient new members and reorient veteran

members. A post-survey was conducted to test the effectiveness of the conference and participant reactions. Responses were contrasted to the initial survey to measure the congregation's evolving disposition and understanding of MAAFA.

Results showed that the congregation is committed to continuing the commemoration. We also discovered that the community is interested in a yearly pedagogical effort to deepen our institutional understanding of MAAFA as a sacred memory ritual. On this basis, our church is investigating new and innovative ways to continue our work in sacred memory in a decidedly digital world.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1967 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*. Ironically and eerily, much of the subject matter of his last book before his untimely death is as relevant today as it was then. The subtitle suggests there are only two options for America: chaos or community. Dr. King's vision of the beloved community is rooted in the notion that America would need more than ratified legislation. King called for a radical redistribution of wealth and racial parity. Community, as King described, was full enfranchisement and economic inclusion in the wealthiest nation in the world. Put plainly, Dr. King was calling for an America beyond the rhetoric of change. As King has said, "the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice," suggesting that change is not an overnight occurrence but a journey. The power of sacred memory grounds us in our authentic communal identity and sustains us to continue the work for justice.

Sacred memory can assist us in forming prophetic communities that fight for freedom. How can the community be formed or re-membered for African Americans after the trauma of slavery? What makes it possible for traumatized people to claim their voice and space? How can we express and fight for that freedom despite the effects of an imposed colonized mindset? One answer: sacred memory. Sacred memory goes beyond "good ol' days" reflections. Instead, it is the community's act to remember a collective journey.

America remains at the crossroads of change. For the oppressed and marginalized, sacred memory provides the space to shed the constraints of Black inferiority and White

supremacy, making change possible. However, without the recovery of a painful history, there cannot be healing.

This project focuses on an expression of sacred memory embraced by the St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn, NY, called MAAFA. With global implications for healing, St. Paul seeks through MAAFA to reorient itself as well as to recommit to and introduce a new generation to the work of sacred memory. In the pages that follow, we strive to assert the collective identity of St. Paul as a congregation called to share the power of memory with the world.

In the spirit of sacred memory, I have framed each chapter of this writing with the lyrics of James Weldon Johnson's offering, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. More than a soundtrack, this song is an act of sacred remembering that codifies culture and resonates with the marginalized and oppressed in America and beyond. As Langston Hughes once asserted, “America was never America to me.” For America to authentically be America, the muted voices of the marginalized must be recovered.

CHAPTER ONE

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING: INTERSECTIONS OF PASTORAL IDENTITY AND PROPHETIC FIRE

The commemoration of the MAAFA is a communal ritual of remembrance of the millions of Africans captured in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and routed to the Americas. It is estimated that 9,000,000 -- 15,000,000 Africans were brought and sold as cargo, commodified as chattel in the dehumanizing system of American slavery.[1] Some scholarship suggests that for every African that survived the journey, at least five did not.[2] The shrieks and groans of the men, women, and children only begin to depict the horrors of the Middle Passage. This was a system of enslavement unlike any prior in history. Kidnapped Africans were forced to learn their oppressors' language and culture and could only retain their native culture covertly. Their voices were ignored and their cries for help disregarded. The commemoration of the MAAFA is the attempt of a local congregation to give voice to an unspoken pain primarily ignored by the dominant culture and the reclamation of cultural characteristics that give meaning to our journey.

It is estimated that over 50,000 people have experienced this life-changing presentation. Many participants report receiving insight to identify the origins of our history's inequities and injustices and connections to the present day. The influence of our

1. Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 3–13. Although no one can know for certain the number of Africans brought to the Americas, Curtin provides the most commonly held estimates to be approximately 9,000,000 - 15,000,000.

2. Erriel D. Roberson, *The Maafa & Beyond* (Columbia, MD: Kujichagulia Press, 1995), 28–33. Historian Joseph Miller estimates that between 40 and 50 percent of the captured Africans died before embarking on slave ships.

commemoration has led to St. Paul presenting MAAFA in major church venues such as Mt. Aery Baptist Church in Bridgeport, CT, Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, IL, Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas, TX. As a result, these and other congregations have since begun to institute their own versions of MAAFA.

This rich history and legacy of sacred memory at St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn began under the leadership of its sixth pastor, Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood, when seeking to address African-Americans' collective trauma. This journey started with a series of internal discussions with church leadership ruminating over an age-old question, "What's the problem with Black people?" The prophetic answer: "We have yet to mourn our losses." The MAAFA commemoration has been a twenty-six-year attempt to give voice to our trauma and spur recovery of our collective voice.

From Hymn to Anthem

The syncopated poem *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, also known as the Negro National Anthem, was written by James Weldon Johnson and composed as a hymn by his brother, John Rosamond Johnson. This composition gives voice to the hopes, aspirations, and even exasperations of African-Americans who have endured slavery, Jim Crow laws, lynching, the cradle-to-prison pipeline, and the legacy of systemic racism in America. Johnson originally composed the song as a hymn and not an anthem. Johnson's preference was that this song would remain a hymn, as he espoused the idea that America should have only one anthem.[3] However, the eventual designation of the song as an

3. Julian Bond and Sondra Kathryn Wilson, eds., *Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem* (New York: Random House, 2000), xx.

anthem was the natural progression of resonance for a people who yearned for justice, dignity, and equality. This anthem has served as a cultural soundtrack for millions.

Before being adopted as an anthem of liberation and affirmation by the NAACP, the first public hearing happened on February 12, 1900 at the Stanton School. It was performed by 500 school children on the occasion of James Weldon Johnson's invitation to speak.[4] While Johnson goes into great detail to describe his compositional process and to illuminate the lyrics of what has evolved into the *Negro National Anthem*, one wonders if the students and the first audience understood or could even conceive the significance of that moment.[5] Students' reverberating voices became the initial instruments to articulate a soundtrack that has lasted for over a century and is located well within a powerful, centuries-long tradition of music borne of the African-American experience.

Over time many musical genres have been birthed and popularized out of the crucible of African-American pain. Through the use of music, subjugated Africans psychologically and spiritually countered the dehumanizing effects of slavery.[6] Musical forms such as jazz, soul, rhythm and blues, and hip hop, all influenced by African-American culture, emerged as a resilient response to the societal desolation of oppression. Likewise, from Johnson's unfettered, liberated imagination came a song that has endured the past 120 years, giving evidence of its irrefutable legacy. The auspicious occasions of its hearing affirm the relevance and longevity of this hope-filled song: Nelson Mandela's

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4. Bond and Wilson, *Lift Every Voice*, 3.

5. James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973 [c1933], 154–56.

6. Megan Sullivan, "African-American Music as Rebellion: From Slave Song to Hip-Hop," arts.cornell.edu, January, 2001, Accessed December, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/1137169/African_American_music_as_rebellion_From_slavesong_to_hiphop.

release, President Barack Obama's inauguration, and even Beyoncé's historic performance at Coachella.

Most recently, on the heels of the NFL's massive fumble in its response to players' peaceful protests of police brutality led by Colin Kaepernick, the league's decision to include this anthem before games speaks to the song's enduring relevance at a time when America grapples with its unresolved history of systemic racism.[7] Most remarkable is that this song's genesis was during a time in American history when overt racism dictated and determined every aspect of Black life. In his autobiography, James Weldon Johnson reflected on his interactions with Black people in Georgia's backwoods as an educator during his college years. He recalled peering into their faces and seeing his own reflection. As he witnessed brutal, racist acts toward them, he noted unvanquished courage and their defiant hope as they sang fervently of a new day.[8] His words evoke images of collective resistance despite centuries of struggle. No doubt the images he saw of collective abuse toward Black people informed Johnson as he composed the lyrics of *Lift Every Voice and Sing.*

Renewed Relevance

Today, as our nation confronts police brutality and unresolved social inequities, the first stanza of this song is most relevant. As Johnson reflected on the writing of the poem turned hymn, he noted that the first line, "Lift every voice and sing," was not a very "startling line," but the ecstasy of the creative process enraptured him to complete the

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7. Jason Reid, "Source: NFL Plans to Play Black National Anthem before Week 1 Games," ESPN, July, 2020, Accessed December, 2020, https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/29401000/nfl-plans-play-black-national-anthem-week-1-games%3fplatform=amp.

8. Johnson, *Along This Way*, 119–20.

first stanza.[9] While Johnson referred to this lyric as "not startling," it is no less provocative. It continues to be a searing critique of the hypocrisy of a nation that has yet to reconcile the lived experiences of African-Americans contending with structural racism and oppression with the promises of freedom and justice for all. While there is no mention of Negro or Black people in the song, the words speak with profound resonance to American descendants of slavery. A soloist did not sing the inaugural rendition. Instead, a mass choir of students sang the song carrying traumatized people's legacy in their DNA. Each participant represented their personal story, a familial story, and the story of an entire people as they exhaled, releasing their breath, causing the collective vibration of their vocal cords together to produce a melodic composition. Their first lyric, "Lift every voice and sing," is an invitation to sons and daughters of enslaved Africans, disenfranchised and marginalized people aspiring to and hoping for a new reality. The first words suggest that every voice is significant. No voice is to be muted, but everyone is to be heard in a collective chorus as one.

It is interesting to note that James Weldon Johnson, a self-proclaimed agnostic, invoked the language of faith to speak to Black life in America.[10] *Lift Every Voice and Sing* would eventually evolve into a cultural staple in many Black churches. Johnson wrote this song when Black churches were preeminent in the Black community. As a result of the resonance of Johnson's hymn with Black religious institutions, churches became stewards of the song. While the message of *Lift Every Voice and Sing* is

9. Ibid, 154.

10. Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 20.

irrefutably powerful, filled with imagery of lament, prayer, and praise, the decision to convey the message through music follows a biblical pattern. Some say that the best interpretation of the creation story is that God sang cosmos out of chaos.[11] Music is a powerful vehicle to create and inculcate. Before we see the manifestation of creation we hear God singing the creation story.[12] Evidenced from the created order there is the primacy of voice before vision. Likewise, the story of sacred memory at St. Paul began with a song.

Voices at the Vanguard

Over the twenty-six years that I have served the St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn, our ministry has existed at the intersection of developing and finding voices. I began my full-time career in ministry as the principle assistant to the sixth pastor of St. Paul, Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood. During Rev. Youngblood's tenure, our entire congregation memorized all three stanzas of this community informing and forming song. Our effort was to teach and reinforce an appreciation for our history with a collective rally cry to remember. As we conceptualized the commemoration, we introduced and constantly revisited this song and ensured full vocal participation. Everyone was encouraged to find their voice. This song has proven to be a cultural distinctive of St. Paul, signaling to our entire congregation that every voice matters. Our Ancestors mattered. Black life in America matters.

As every choir has parts - soprano, alto, tenor, sometimes baritone and bass - and each contributes to the overall sound, similarly the St. Paul Community Baptist Church is

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11. Leonard I. Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 64–65.

12. Ibid, 64-65.

a congregation of many voices that have collectively helped shape a congregation committed to sacred memory. The commemoration has demonstrated a local congregation's witness and power in creatively telling a story trivialized by the dominant culture.

Historically, I have served in multiple capacities in the context of St. Paul. My tenure is comparable to the life cycle of the MAAFA. As a participant, I have grown with the annual commemoration. MAAFA has provided a venue for my development as a leader and informed my understanding of pastoral presence. Through the MAAFA, I have also learned that my voice and personal story matters. MAAFA inherently grants the freedom to own your own story unashamedly. As there have been voices that have historically provided the contours of my identity as a pastor, it is in the spirit of remembrance that I acknowledge a few voices herein. My paternal grandmother in my adolescence introduced me to her God. My first pastor and church experience welcomed me to speak and own my sense of calling. My predecessor in the church that I currently serve as pastor, the Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood, recognized my potential and believed that I should be heard.

My voice was first acknowledged when I was licensed to preach at the age of sixteen in Deer Park, Suffolk County, a predominately White hamlet in Babylon, Long Island. My parents had chosen to move out of Brooklyn to “greener pastures” years earlier. Although their intention was to relocate me to a safer community away from Brooklyn, as providence would have it I would pastor in the same community at St. Paul and find my voice while advocating for this same community. My father, a Vietnam veteran, joined the NYPD in his early twenties, affording him the economic opportunity

to purchase a high ranch home with a typical Long Island sprawling property. It was a matter of familial pride as young parents that they could provide their children with space, green grass, and fresh air.

While there were advantages to our suburban lifestyle, and the area was safe in many ways, there was no specific orientation about racial prejudice. My parents would inevitably give us a speech concerning any interaction with law enforcement, but there was nothing that could have prepared us for the overt and covert racism we would encounter. During my academic career in Deer Park, I never had an instructor of color and there were typically one or only a few Black students in a classroom setting. There was a pervasive practice of placing children of color into remedial classes. They thought of us as being different. Before I could spell racism, I knew how I was made to feel. The only institution in our entire community that was Black-led was our neighborhood church. My upbringing was not particularly religious, but the church only four blocks from our home provided a place for identity building. Our racially segregated community meant that we needed education and support more comprehensive than reading, writing, and arithmetic; we needed a voice to teach us how to survive within the context of a racial hierarchy.

With no ministers in our family, my paternal grandmother Rose, a faithful Christian and a dutiful member of her church, was a distinct voice that spoke to my religious imagination. I was profoundly affected by her witness as she came to live with us in hospice care at our home in Deer Park. For my grandmother, diagnosed with terminal cancer, each day was a struggle filled with movements and moments punctuated by noticeable pain. She did not waste her pain though, but utilized each opportunity,

unbeknownst to our household, to disciple the next generation. Due to limitations imposed by pain management, conversations and visits to her room were brief, but she would summon my brother and me separately to read Scripture aloud. As she cried out in pain, she would vehemently call on her Lord, seeking strength. With a grimaced face and shut eyes, she would listen to every word read by her grandsons. Coincidently, both my brother and I became pastors. I believe this was God's way of helping us find our voices.

Traditionally, young men during that time were encouraged to keep silent in the presence of adults, but the message of our grandmother was to find and use ours. After her passing, there was an unquenchable thirst to know this God that she called on in the crucible of her pain. Her cry was not a lament of desperation or resignation, but she was testifying in the manner of Job, finding strength and solace to articulate her pain and to affirm her faith. Surrounded by her children in the last moments of her life, she recited the 23rd Psalm as she breathed her last breath. During her eulogistic service, her pastor profoundly reflected on her journey. I do not remember the text he preached from, but in some ways her life was the text. During that service as an adolescent, I knew that I would serve the God that gave her strength.

Forging Pastoral Identity

My first introduction to the Pastor's position was made by jaded Sunday school teachers that struggled with classroom management, threatening to use the pastor as the ultimate disciplinarian. When I first observed him walking through the classroom, he was energetic with a look that would conjure images of Richard Roundtree, complete with a well-groomed afro, corresponding sideburns, and austere demeanor as if he was looking to solve a mystery. I thought of him as unapproachable and someone to avoid. It was not

until my teens that my impression of him began to change. His fiery preaching style, influenced by his southern roots, combined an impassioned driving cadence with a soulful delivery. He could preach! To this day, I can hear the influence of his voice in my attempt to proclaim God's word. Attending everything I could, from choir rehearsals, Bible classes, and annual revivals, it was a place where I felt accepted. Reverend John Mableton, the pastor, saw me. I could then see beyond the austere look and recognize a man who cared deeply for his people. He made me a Junior Deacon with meaningful responsibilities. We opened services, read Scripture, offered prayers, and participated in what was called devotion. Devotion was a testimony service, a time of reflection allotted to the laity to express what the Lord was doing in their lives.

What I did not fully recognize or understand then was the opportunity afforded me to exercise my voice in the community, giving shape to the trajectory of my life's vocation. After a year of testifying, the whisperings began within the congregation that I had the "calling," an idiomatic and cultural designation given by the people that indicates they see you. After my grandmother's passing, I approached Reverend Mableton to inform him that I was acknowledging my call to preach at fifteen. Determined to articulate my words with conviction, I rehearsed the phrase, "The Lord called me to preach" repeatedly as I walked to his home. Eerily, he opened the door almost as soon as I knocked, as if he expected me. I used my voice, made confident through hours of leading worship services, to articulate the best I could what I believed. A man of conviction, Mableton did not hesitate; he told me that God had already revealed the same to him, and I would be preaching my trial sermon in four months.

I do not recall a consultation with my parents, though I was still a minor. In reflection, my gifts and person belonged to that local community church that saw me almost as much as the parents that birthed me. Church mothers and deacons saw me; but most of all, Rev. Mableton, my pastor, accepted me. There was no exegetical or homiletical training provided, just a few conversations. The most memorable conversation in preparation for my first sermon featured a question that Pastor Mableton posed: "Who are you called to preach to?" My response was, "the youth." Upon my response he raised one eyebrow. He spoke with an intonation that left me feeling as though he was looking through me and said, "Did the Lord tell you that?" I indicated that I had said what I did because I thought it was what he wanted to hear. His chiding of me at that moment indicated that our relationship was changing. I wasn't being indulged as a child, but I was being prepared to be a preacher.

Due to my age, I was thought of as a prodigy, but I was still a teenager with the same proclivities of any other sixteen-year-old. Although he desired the best for me, upon his affirmation I would be introduced to a life filled with the conflict of being an older persona in a young man's body. I could no longer speak without giving thought to my answers. I was taking on responsibilities that would eclipse the natural maturation of a teenager. Still, the question of pastoral identity as articulated by Pastor Mableton has become an eternal chisel used by God to inform my pastoral formation. "Who are you called to preach to?" From that day forward, I would give thought to the craft of preaching and to my presence and obligation to the people I would be called to pastor.

With his second question he had imparted a corollary lesson not to entertain self-limiting thoughts about who God would allow me to preach to and pastor. "Did the Lord

tell you that (you are called to youth)?" I was being developed to imagine ministry without restraint. I was hungry for affirmation and Reverend Mableton met the need. Four months later, before a capacity crowd, I received that unique expression of pride on the evening of my initial sermon where he charged me to preach in season and out of season: a signed license to preach as God would provide opportunity. To this day it is one of my most treasured memories. One year later, John Mableton would be diagnosed with stomach cancer and would succumb to cardiac arrest. I was seventeen with my unresolved questions of God and my truncated training from the man who began mentoring me to understand what it means to be a pastor. After his passing, I was called upon to lead and assist our congregation through a contentious search for new pastoral leadership. Five years later, in a fog of discouragement, I would leave the church where I began my ministerial journey.

Broken and disillusioned by the loss of Pastor Mableton and recovering from a failed marriage, I was introduced to St. Paul Community Baptist Church by a longtime friend. I attended St. Paul for approximately a year before seeking a meeting with Rev. Youngblood. After successive losses, I felt it prudent to position myself in the rear of the sanctuary to listen each week and receive healing. The preaching style of Rev. Youngblood was conversational and created a safe space for introspection. I was being ministered to and healed through his messages. Although there was a significant spatial distance from the pulpit to where I sat weekly, an intimacy was still created that made me feel safe and sane. St. Paul's worship style was a dramatic paradigm shift from what I knew as the church. St. Paul self-identified as "church unusual," which meant an established culture of consistent, meaningful newness. Before St. Paul, my previous

church experience had exposed me to spirited but rigid and predictable worship services. The predictability did provide a sense of security, but I found in the St. Paul model a refreshing alternative. Weekly additions to the worship services or the church environment seemed strategically thought through. From dramatic full-stage productions to simple new bulletin designs, the idea was communicated that leadership took time to plan an engaging experience. I was so impacted that I was willing to leave the security of Corporate America, forsaking my five-year employment as a supervising manager with a nationally recognized company, to accept a full-time position as the Assistant Pastor of the St. Paul Church.

I saw in Youngblood a mentor. He would refer to me as a partner in ministry and his assistant. The next phase of my development and understanding of pastoring included the opportunities and exposure experienced through my relationship with both St. Paul and Rev. Youngblood. The first time I heard the title pastor associated with my name was while assisting Youngblood. After our first year together, our church added a daytime ministry component for senior citizens and others available during the day. My role expanded quickly. I expected an intensive training period, but I learned early that every day was a training opportunity. Pastoral training occurred during meals, casual conversations, impromptu meetings, counseling sessions, weddings, funerals, and board meetings. Each moment was a teachable moment punctuated with feedback and evaluative comments. When I inquired when my formal training would commence, Rev. Youngblood would refer me to the Scriptures. Jesus taught and trained His disciples by demonstrating the ways of the Kingdom and would then provide the opportunities for His followers to participate and relate to what he taught. In this phase of my development,

Rev. Youngblood said, “All you need is exposure.” The reference to exposure carried within it more than just the idea of opportunities to preach, but also the stretching of my understanding of pastoring after the truncated training process caused by the premature death of John Mableton.

One such area of exposure was my introduction to community organizing. St. Paul has a long history in community development and is renowned for social justice. The ministry has for decades required training for all ministers by the Industrial Areas Foundation, a nationally recognized network of community board-based power organizations. I had no previous orientation or education in community organizing and often experienced disorientation during the training process. Without a pastoral mandate, I would never have discovered this rich dimension of my pastoral identity. Through the intersectional exposures afforded me in my maturation and development, I understood my call to pastor more deeply. Community organizing assured me that I would not be shackled to a desk, but would have the opportunity to engage our people in house-meetings and mandatory one-on-one relational meetings. I began to realize that, through this relational and liberative pursuit, I was being groomed to be a pastor in a Black church.

MAAFA as Pastoral Ministry

The MAAFA is a reclamation of the unique contributions and experiences of American Descendants of Slavery. The recitation of African-American history would not be complete without the role of the Black preacher in community building. The exposure I encountered through the ministry of St. Paul is reminiscent of the historical part played by many Black preachers in the struggle for freedom, from the brush arbors of slavery to

the modern Civil Rights Movement. It was W.E.B. Dubious in his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk* who said, "The black preacher…is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil."[13] The preacher's role was developed often in consideration of the needs of the people they were called to lead.

Similarly, the context of many Black churches today, especially in impoverished areas, places a plethora of demands upon pastors to be proficient in more than one discipline. Ralph Wheeler states well the diversity of tasks of a pastor when he says, "Black preachers, especially in their role as pastor, perform many tasks: counselors, community organizer, preacher, spiritual guide and biblical interpreter, marriage and divorce counselor, teacher, community builder and spokesperson, educator and healer to name but a few…"[14] Rev. Samuel D. Proctor, Ph.D. adds texture to the conversation in the introduction of *We Have This Ministry, The Heart of the Pastor's Vocation* when he elucidates, "The pastor is called to give purpose and meaning, coherence, direction, and authenticity to the total human sojourn and then have the audacity to insist on a grand surmise about the journey's end."[15] Also, Rev. Taylor, co-author of the same text, references the need for formal training given the complexities and demands of pastoral ministry.[16] The pastor's role is far more than proclamation but a convergence of multiple functions that require character and ongoing discernment of call and context. During my

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13. W.E.B. DuBois, "Of the Faith of the Fathers," Teaching American History, Accessed December 7, 2020, https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/of-the-faith-of-the-fathers/.

14. Ralph Wheeler, "Pastor's Anniversary," African American Lectionary, June, 2009, http://www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org?PopupCulturalAidasp?LrId=92.

15. Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C. Taylor, *We Have This Ministry: The Heart of the Pastor's Vocation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996), x.

16. Ibid, 5-8.

tenure as Assistant Pastor, in the "second chariot," I encountered many roles that uniquely evoked newly discovered abilities and informed my pastoral identity.

After several years of developing my pastoral acumen and deepening a heart for the people, the necessity to grow and mature to meet the demands of ministry was evident. To assist another congregation after the loss of their pastor, Rev. Youngblood accepted the call to lead the Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church of Brooklyn. With two separate churches to lead and four Sunday services in two locations, I inherited the responsibility of being the primary weekly preacher of the 11:00 am service at St. Paul. The relationship with Youngblood was considered desirable by most and informed the dynamic with which we led. By all accounts, both churches were growing. Suddenly, without warning and fanfare, in December of 2007 at our annual church meeting Rev. Youngblood announced his retirement date and called for a vote to accept his resignation and my promotion as the seventh pastor of the St. Paul Church, ending his thirty-five-year tenure. We imagined with confidence a nationally celebrated transition based on our fifteen-year relationship deeply rooted in shared esteem and respect. Our transition began with powerful imagery and intention. I immediately assumed more of the day-to-day responsibilities and additional preaching opportunities. For a period of eighteen months, we would work to transition the ministry.

While the intentions were noble, in hindsight we learned through the process of transition that what was needed was a thorough plan and not merely a nationally well-regarded shared relationship between predecessor and successor. Problems occurred, and heightened anxiety became apparent due to issues that should have been explored, agreed upon, and resolved before the actual transition. Additionally, Rev. Youngblood's decision

to remain at Mt. Pisgah further complicated matters. As such, the context of my first pastorate was defined by a poorly executed and highly public transition. What could have been a national model for pastoral change became a painful introduction to my new role as Senior Pastor. It has been over ten years, and we are still recovering from what we called the "transition."

Fanning the Flames of Prophetic Fire

Friction over a protracted period will produce heat and eventually fire. In pursuit of a working definition and imagery for the intersectionality of pastoral identity and prophetic fire, our cohort examined the work of Eugene Peterson. I believe that authentic prophetic witness emerges out of context and in concert with other voices. Put another way, the flames of prophetic witness emerge in the context of relationships. Self-awareness and contextual intelligence support the ongoing development of pastoral identity. In his memoir *The Pastor,* Eugene Peterson, author of the highly popular *The Message* translation of the Holy Bible, articulates the ongoing discernment of his pastoral identity which exists at the intersection of relationships and context. His vivid and transparent disclosure of his pastoral journey provides a necessary rubric of understanding that pastoral identity is shaped over a lifetime of experiences and in relationship with others. The most memorable, profound, and affirming statement found in the first chapter of his memoir is the phrase, "I am a pastor, my work has to do with souls."[17] This statement frames the entire book and summarizes a journey filled with moments of illumination, intersections, and relationships that define Peterson's pastoral identity. He challenges us not to settle for popular business models of ministry with a sole

17. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 7.

focus on baptisms, budgets, and buildings, which are typically used to measure ministry success, but to embrace authentic relations and divine intersections that develop our unique pastoral identity. In his view, pastoral leadership is guided by relational encounters, not business transactions. The paradigmatic popular business models of leadership, often presented as universally successful at building institutional effectiveness, are too often viewed as the only rubric for successful ministry. This neglects institutional uniqueness. Peterson's ministry is an example of what Rev. Leonard Sweet, Ph.D. articulates when he advises churches to organically recover a missional understanding of ministry that is relational and incarnates Christ in their context. He says, "For the glory of the church to be nonlocal, it must first be authentically local." We must love the local and prepare the soil of our local context.[18]

A herd mentality to ministry, where there is an appropriation of popular ministry templates, skews the appreciation for what God has inherently sown in the organic soil. It is in the relationship of pastor and people that a prophetic witness can be clarified and contextualized. An ancillary consideration in the attempt to contextualize ministry is to identify the contextual location of that ministry. Living into a missional purpose begins with identifying the contextual location of the congregation. The congregation's location is more than a geographic context; it identifies where the institution is in its own story. Robert D. Dale calls this the organizational health cycle.[19] He argues that organizations move through cycles of birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death. To avert decline and

18. Leonard I. Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church: Missional, Relational, Incarnational* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 228.

19. Robert D. Dale, *To Dream Again: How to Help Your Church Come Alive Again* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 15.

eventual death, leaders must dream again. He asserts that institutions begin with a dream of what is possible before actualization, en route to fulfillment of a dream. When an institution reaches its zenith, barring a proactive revitalization intervention, a plateau will occur, ending with an eventual decline. Given St. Paul's age and penchant for nostalgia, there is always a need to dream again. Early in my tenure it became evident that we would need to discern where we were but also who we are. After a thirty-five-year iconic tenure, what changes would be possible? How would we decide which core values, ministries, models, and identity should be retained in our process of dreaming again? How would I introduce the need to dream again without insulting a thriving church's recent and revered history? Serving St. Paul as the Assistant Pastor had positioned me to know the history and to enjoy the benefit of established relationships. Still, there was also an unspoken expectation that I would not change our culture.

It was evident that we were still an influential church in the community with a reputation for social justice, but it was also clear that there was the belief that our best days were behind us. In my first year and a half, I conducted fireside chats to encourage our people to dream again. I would engage each group with the same question, "If you had unlimited resources, what would you want for our church?" The goal was simply to engage our collective imagination. I expected this exercise to be simplistic, but I noted that it was not easy for our congregation to imagine a new day. To stimulate the process, I invoked what I learned during my tenure with my predecessor. Rev. Youngblood would often quip, "Use every opportunity to teach, make small changes consistently." With this advice in view, we used the term imagine to brand our church, but it was more than a business export. It was an invitation to dream again. To support the message¸ I would

solicit stories from older members sharing our arrival in the present. They remembered the moments when they dreamed of a new day in previous generations. This practice was my way of honoring what had been and invoking what was familiar. We solicited as many voices as possible in an attempt to dream again. It became clear that, as a church, we needed to discern “where to go from here” with regard to the most epic undertaking we engage in perennially, MAAFA.

For the past twenty-six years the MAAFA has been central to St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn's identity. As a perennial staple on our yearly calendar, and our costliest undertaking, MAAFA had developed an independent identity that threatened our church's cohesion. We needed to determine if the psycho-dramatic presentation should remain a ministry of our church or if we should jettison the nationally recognized presentation that has garnered a national reputation.

The original intent of the MAAFA commemoration was to call our community into a ritual of sacred memory. In conjunction with the production/psycho-drama, there have been lectures, workshops, and activities to reinforce the commemoration’s purpose. With over two decades in our rearview, we must consistently question whether MAAFA has devolved into an expensive theatrical event? Does our church value MAAFA enough to continue investing with diminishing resources, especially as our economic position changes? In recent years, due to fiscal concerns, we have sacrificed MAAFA's pedagogical dimension in order to continue the theatrical aspect of the commemoration. The consequence of this decision has been an apparent disconnect with the original intention of a community-based ritual.

While my predecessor founded the commemoration, some expect that it would be automatically retained indefinitely because MAAFA has historically been such a dynamic aspect of our ministry. However, beginning at the twenty-five year mark, an organic conversation about its relevance has ensued. As crucial as the commemoration is to the culture of St. Paul, it has been necessary to engage in a conversation that includes as many voices within our church community as possible around its future. Charles H. Vogl, in *Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging*, has defined community as a group of individuals who share a mutual concern for one another's welfare.[20] Without meaningful connections as experienced in authentic communities, humans do not possess a sense of belonging. To exclude or omit the perspective of any demographic present within the congregation could foster resentment and further deepen divisions. There are members of the church who participate in the MAAFA annually but are not present in our church community's other dimensions. Some newer members do not fully understand MAAFA and feel excluded from the commemoration. Vogl has well stated that communities need meaningful connections to foster a sense of belonging. Concurrently, our congregation also needs to examine what is healthy and meaningful. MAAFA can only be considered healthy if our entire church community has a voice.

According to Vogl, meaningfulness occurs when a community invokes rituals marking a special event or time. Malidoma Patrice Somé, in *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community,* supports this understanding and contributes the idea that the West can profoundly benefit from the

20. Charles H. Vogl, *The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016), 49. Vogl cites the work of psychologist Roy Baumeister who conducted a four-hundred-person survey to distinguish happiness and meaningfulness.

healing properties of ritual. According to Somé, human beings are "collectively oriented," therefore healing, ritual, and community are inextricably connected.[21] Somé, an author and scholar from the Dagara tribe of Burkino Faso, West Africa, rightly intersects ritual with the community's ability to imagine and act for its interests.

A major challenge is that MAAFA's original intention as a ritual is easily shrouded by the enviable production success experienced through the years. What is less evident to the casual observer is that the MAAFA is experiencing a plateau effect. While there is an internal demand for the presentation, it is noticeable that we are attracting a recurring but loyal audience. Insular approaches to ministry in a COVID-19 world could be interpreted as a disconnection from the culture or a version of exceptionalism. How do we "gift" MAAFA to the world? Since a missional approach to ministry is a dream based on a sense of mission, according to Rev. Leonard Sweet, how can we reach the people if our methods become myopic and our message parochial in scope? According to Sweet, we understand the essence of missions as a drama that reveals God's story. He suggests that the word drama means "to go" and is concerned with what God is doing.[22] How do we ensure that MAAFA is not restricted to our street but communicates the message God has uniquely called St. Paul to convey?

An additional complexity adding to our concerns while evaluating the commemoration is an unprecedented pandemic that has changed our world. If MAAFA is not relevant in a pandemic, then how should it be viewed post-pandemic? The restrictions imposed in an abundance of caution during COVID-19 has altered how our congregation

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21. Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998), 22.

22. Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 59.

connects. At the time of this writing, we are conducting virtual services, online nightly check-ins, Zoom group meetings, and bible studies. Almost every function of our church is now online. How do we conduct the commemoration of the MAAFA virtually? Would we be able to create a community-informing ritual through a virtual experience? COVID-19 has escalated the rapid pacing of an already fluid world. Almost overnight, our leadership team had to adjust to a "new normal," grappling with the uncertainty of our institution's future. I have spent approximately half of my life serving the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. I have never felt more anxiety about our church and our world than I did the day we announced that we were closing our campus and moving to a virtual model. Without a historical precedent to reference, we would need a pragmatic and pliable approach to ministry. Historian and futurist Yuval Noah Harari, in *21 Lessons for the 21st Century,* paints a sobering picture of the role of religion in the twenty-first century. While I disagree with many of his conclusions about the prospects for the viability of religion, Harari primes our thinking about the future of how communities will form. One searing critique levied against the efficacy of social media is its ability to engage what he identifies as an essential component of community formation. He states simply but poignantly, "humans have bodies." While there is a sense of connection, Harari rightly points out that humans need corporeal interactions with others that generate intimacy and provide a social fabric to address shared concerns.[23]

As alluded to above, prophetic fire is discovered in the self-awareness of identity and the intersections of relationships. The institutional fire of St. Paul will only continue

23. Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2018), 85–92.

to grow as we continue in community to deepen our collective identity and retain our ability to dream. Only by synchronizing all voices in the shared interest of prophetic witness will we glow and grow through the uncertainty of and opportunity of multiple pandemics. As sacred memory prompts the reclamation of our story, I heed the collective voices that inform this journey. Through their witness, as exemplars of faith, I am reminded to lean into my understanding of God, as my paternal grandmother demonstrated. As America has been brought to the crossroads of racial problems, struggling for her very soul, there is a need for churches to speak prophetically into the abyss of racial injustice. That flame of prophetic witness is fueled by invoking the exhortation of Pastor John Mableton to a young preacher, “Who are you called to?” Pastors and church leaders will need to recognize their ministry context's uniqueness within the world's context to harmonize and cultivate a unique and specific sound.

Similarly, the ministry should be thought of as a journey, not a destination. God has used the starts and stops of this journey fraught with friction to prepare pastors for this prophetic work. As Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood allowed me to be heard with exposure to be seen, I, too, am required to do the same. Uniting the voices of everyone is the essence of community.

CHAPTER TWO

STONY THE ROAD WE TROD: INTERSECTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SACRED MEMORY

The story of African-Americans has been one of resilience, resistance, and survival. It has been our enduring faith in God and our hope for our people that have sustained us through the Middle Passage, slavery, and institutional racism. While these milestones provide an opportunity for reflection, there is importance in remembering and identifying those intersections in our history of survival to help strengthen us today. To understand our present and secure our future, we must know our history. The St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn intentionally and unashamedly contextualizes our ministry in consideration of our Afrocentric roots. We further our commitment to remember our Ancestors and address collective trauma by introducing the MAAFA's healing possibilities to our community. Through the intersection of social justice informed by sacred memory, St. Paul seeks to be a prophetic community.

The African Holocaust, or MAAFA, is a Kiswahili term coined by anthropologist and African Studies scholar Marimba Ani, meaning "great disaster." It describes the horrors of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.[1] The twenty-six-year legacy of MAAFA at St. Paul has been our attempt to dramatize sacred memory. We chose to reflect on our Ancestors' sacrifices who, by faith, survived and bequeathed to us a legacy of endurance and strength through struggle. MAAFA is not merely a retelling of our story but an invoking of memory to energize us through our current struggle. Iva Carruthers, Ph.D.,

1. Marimba Ani, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora* (Baltimore: Nkonimfo Publications, 1997), 12.

General Secretary of the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference, in the introduction of a thoughtful resource guide for churches on sacred memory affirms:

> It is abundantly clear that for such a time as this, Black church leadership must carry the mantle of "Servants as Wounded Healers and Warrior Healers." And, as Healers, we must lead people in the acts of remembrance, lamentation, and celebration of our journey.[2]

In this statement, Carruthers unites the interconnected reality of sacred memory and social justice. The phrase "wounded healer" speaks to the priestly and pastoral ministry dimension that summons Black churches to bind up the brokenhearted, while the term "warrior healer" conveys the prophetic activity and witness of Black churches. Each phrase contains the word "healer," which speaks to intersectionality defining the purpose and goal of the work. There is a symbiotic relationship between both functions. As followers of Christ, this is not a binary but a holistic approach and way of being. It is the act of remembrance that grounds the work of justice. For Carruthers, acts of remembrance are redemptive aspects of a prophetic ministry. Soong-Chan Rah, the author of *Prophetic Lament*, joins Carruthers in advocating for lament as a prophetic call for justice. Rah connects the absence of lament in American churches with the loss of memory resulting in the acceptance of the conditions that maintain the status quo. Lament informs our need to struggle for justice.[3] As stated above, the celebration is not pain management but an authentic embrace and acknowledgment of God's redemptive acts.

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2. Iva Carruthers and Elaine C. Mosely, "Awakening Sacred Memories: A Resource Guide for Healing, Restoration and Justice," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference, Inc., 2017, Accessed April 1, 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/WGEAPD/RegionalMeetingEurope/Samuel_DeWitt_AwakeningSacredMemories.pdf

3. Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times*, Resonate series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 12.

To celebrate without remembrance and lament is to maintain a "haves theology," which fails to challenge the status quo.[4] It is sacred memory that summons us back into community, contextualizes the work of social justice, and renews the hope of prophetic imagination.

Communities consist of more than their geographic location or zip code, they are marked by the collective concerns of a people. Just because people live in close proximity does not necessarily indicate an authentic sense of community. The purpose of MAAFA is to invoke sacred memory to create a sacred space that informs community. Supporting connection is the role of ritual in community formation. In *The Art of Community,* Charles Vogl identifies ritual as one of the seven principles for community cohesion. He defines ritual as "any practice that marks a time or event as special or important."[5] Rituals are significant because they act to ritualize moments creating meaning for the community. Vogl further suggests that when the community enacts rituals, it is an opportunity for people to see themselves acting in the community context.[6] The efficacy of a community formed and informed ritual is the community's ability to involve every demographic. When individuals of the community see themselves represented in the ritual, the community messages that everyone belongs. Also, when each demographic is involved in the creation and evolution of the ritual, all perspectives

4. Walter Brueggemann, *Peace* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 26–28. Brueggemann uses the term "haves theology" to describe a celebrative emphasis in worship of the wealthy in contrast to the poor or "have nots" that develop a theology of worship based on survival.

5. Vogl, *The Art of Community*, 49.

6. Ibid, 54.

can be considered. When the context or needs of a community change, rituals can evolve based on the community's needs.[7]

MAAFA as a ritual constitutes a contemplative practice of remembrance that strengthens the community's resolve to act.[8] Barbara A. Holmes recounts the contemplative practices nurtured by Black churches in the 1960s as the reclamation of what she termed the "*imago Dei* in black bodies."[9] The ritualized acts of prayer, preaching, singing, and exhortation centered the civil rights marches and protests in the public square.[10] Through these contemplative acts, sacred space was created to energize. She states, "Like a spiritual earthquake, the resolve of the marchers affirmed the faith of foremothers and forefathers. Each step was a reclamation of the hope unborn."[11]

Stony the road we trod, Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast

In the second stanza of *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, James Weldon Johnson recounts that our people continue to traverse stony and challenging terrain. The tensions,

7. Ibid, 64.

8. Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 113–15.

9. Ibid, 116.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

exasperations, and hopes experienced by African-Americans articulated in this stanza depict the intersection of sacred memory and social justice. In Johnson's poetic genius, he piques our imagination to view our journey as a "stony" and difficult path filled with bitter moments. The successive scenes: The affectation due to bitter moments, causing feelings of the death of hope. Hope dead on arrival is the ultimate picture of despair. Despite a painful past, new hope is still possible.

The overtones of perseverance are articulated in the word "yet," despite feelings of divine abandonment. It is the persistent and steady movement of tired feet treading over stony paths and treacherous terrain that gives new hope. Johnson brilliantly uses the past, present, and future tense in each stanza of the song.[12] The use of the past tense "have come" reminds us that we are not the first to travel this difficult road. The resolve to continue marching in the present occurs when we come to those places in our history that cause us to recollect the sacrifices made on our behalf. Yes, silent tears, overlooked by years of oppression, have poured from the eyes of the oppressed, and blood has been shed needlessly; but we have come through it. Embedded in this verse is an interpretive lens of remembrance, calling us to view the places where our Ancestors were slaughtered. As descendants of those who sacrificed their lives, we remain and survive, declaring that we come from a gloomy past. We do so for the millions of Africans who suffered, bled, and died. The word of hope comes in our ability to measure the incremental progress experienced by our people. While there is much work to be done, we acknowledge that we still stand. The message of the last line of the second stanza, "Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast," indicates the hopeful future based on

12. Perry, *May We Forever Stand*, 19.

the courageous journey of those who have gone before us. This song, mainly this verse, has inspired generations to call the oppressed and marginalized to organize and act.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., addressing the eleventh annual Southern Christian Leadership Conference convention, invokes the second stanza of *Lift Every Voice and Sing* in a speech entitled, "Where Do We Go From Here?"[13] In the spirit of sacred memory, King refers to Johnson as a "great bard, who was also a great freedom fighter of yesterday."[14] Although Johnson had been deceased for several decades, his work was invoked to evoke courage amid present struggles. He states, "It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom."[15] Through sacred memory, Dr. King leads his audience to a metaphoric drinking gourd, to direct the listener to refresh their hope in the possibilities of a new day.

Through the work of MAAFA, we have attempted to unite our congregation around a collective narrative to inform the work of social justice. This collective narrative generates a powerful connection between memory and truth-telling, and an even more direct relationship between prophetic ministry and sacred memory. The pastor's prophetic role within the congregation is to provide the theological and homiletical grounding to create the space to remember and act. It is the ministry of the prophet to speak truth to a wayward world. This task demands courage on behalf of the prophet to cry aloud, exposing rapacious systems. Marvin McMickle, in his work *Where Have All the Prophets*

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13. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard, eds., *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: IPM (Intellectual Properties Management), in association with Warner Books, 2001), 197.

14. Carson and Shepard, *Call to Conscience*, 197.

15. Ibid, 198.

Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America, raises the issue of the inconspicuous absence of prophetic voices in today's pulpits.[16] While some have opted for a status quo message, ministry, and mindset, preachers must proclaim the prophets' prophetic message and Jesus as a mandate for justice. While the scope of his text is to raise the question of silent pulpits on the critical issues of social justice, I contend that we need even more than a prophetic pulpit. We need prophetic faith communities, shaped by prophetic preaching that produces a church guided by a sense of mission. J. Deotis Roberts referred to this reality as the "Prophethood of Black Believers." Roberts argues that a holistic understanding of the ministry of Jesus provides for a public and political witness. He exclaims:

> The saving proclamation of the gospel includes the life and ministry of Jesus on earth prior to the climactic summing up of his redemptive mission in the cross-resurrection event. A real incarnation includes the total enfleshment of God in the earthly Jesus. His death "under Pontius Pilate" makes a political statement. His birth, his witness among the dispossessed, his preaching to the poor, his visits to prisoners, his healing ministry are all part of the gospel.[17]

As Roberts aptly demonstrates, the underpinnings of a holistic gospel are priestly functions as well as a prophetic theology and praxis in the public square. This implication suggests the priestly dimension of ministry is the healing balm needed by the oppressed, while the prophetic ministry addresses the oppressed's systemic conditions and conditioning. As Roberts conjoins the priestly and prophetic dimensions of ministry, he appeals to the incarnate Christ. The latter healed the brokenness of oppressed peoples and

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16. Marvin A. McMickle, *Where Have All the Prophets Gone?: Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 2–5.

17. J. Deotis Roberts, *The Prophethood of Black Believers: An African American Political Theology for Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 36.

addressed the systems of oppression that created and maintained the status quo. Historically, this expression of the Black religious witness can be observed in the "hush harbors" of the invisible institution during slavery and through to the formation of institutionalized Black churches.

St. Paul Community Baptist Church self-identifies as a Black Church in the East New York section of Brooklyn. St. Paul collectively identifies as "Black" to distinguish our regard for African culture in our worship experience and our African worldview. In *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* Lincoln and Mamiya write:

> The black sacred cosmos or the religious worldview of African Americans is related both to their African heritage, which envisaged the whole universe as sacred, and to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and its aftermath. It has been only in the past twenty years that scholars of African American history, culture, and religion have begun to recognize that black people created their own unique and distinctive forms of culture and worldviews as parallels rather than replications of the culture in which they were involuntary guests.[18]

Given our local context and our church's collective lived experience, several distinctions constitute our witness. These include our willingness to respond, agitate and advocate for the community's existential needs where we reside. A cursory view of St. Paul Community Baptist Church's history will clearly show that, ontologically, we are a social justice church with a Black aesthetic, called to create a healthier community.

A Haven Up North

St. Paul is a ninety-three-year-old institution organized in 1927 by fifteen men and women in Brownsville, Brooklyn. The rationale for the creation of St. Paul was the

18. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 2.

felt-needs of southern migrants, primarily from the Carolinas, to re-create a vital community. Sam Freedman, author of *Upon This Rock: The Miracles of a Black Church,* captures this thought, indicating that this was the reason for the inclusion of "community" in the church name. Freedman says of the church forbears that there was "a re-creating in the strange, promising land of Brooklyn the same institution that had sustained them through slavery and sharecropping and Jim Crow."[19] Southern Blacks' migration to northern cities such as New York was based on safety from domestic terrorism. Still, many southern migrants were in search of economic opportunities. As African-Americans fled the South in the Great Migration, they established churches to foster a sense of community. Lincoln and Mamiya explain, "The majority of black migrants did not abandon their churches but continued to seek refuge, help, fellowship, and collective community efforts in the confines of the institution they had ever known."[20]

When Blacks from the South did not feel at home in churches that were already established, they would engage in the practice of launching a mission in a home or storefront building.[21] Under the leadership of S.V. Reeves, Pastor/Convener, the emerging group of fifteen rented a storefront at 265 Thatford Avenue, in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, New York. After the brief tenure of Reeves, Edward Leonard Heyward, a founding group member, led the congregation for two years. For the next forty-three years St. Paul would have three pastors, but the longest-tenured was The Reverend Adolphus Smith, serving St. Paul for twenty-seven years. During Smith's

19. Samuel G. Freedman, *Upon This Rock: The Miracles of a Black Church* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 159.

20. Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 117–19.

21. Ibid, 117–19.

tenure, St. Paul constructed a worship site at 45-47 Osbourne Street in Brownsville but eventually moved to 1926 Prospect Place, Brownsville, due to urban renewal. At the zenith of Smith's leadership, St. Paul soared to a membership of 500. Unfortunately, the Smith era would come to an end after an accusation of an indiscretion caused him to retire. Johnny Walker would succeed Smith. A commemorative book chronicling St. Paul's history would record that for Walker and St. Paul, it was the best of times and the worst of times.

In 1975, Johnny Ray Youngblood would assume the leadership of St. Paul, serving for thirty-five years. Eighty-four members would discern the leading of God and extend Youngblood the call to become their pastor. Under the leadership of Youngblood, St. Paul would increase exponentially in membership and influence. Thousands would be added to the membership roll. In 1980, St. Paul would move to Hendrix Street in the East New York Section of Brooklyn, New York. The new worship site, formerly a Jewish synagogue with an adjoining school, would become conducive to a Black church context, including allowing for the St. Paul Community Christian School to be established serving children from preschool to eighth grade.

The history of East New York, called Ostwout (or East Woods) initially by the Dutch, provides clues to understanding the current context of St. Paul.[22] In the late 1600's, the Dutch settled in what was then known as the New Lots of Flatbush.[23] Divided into ten farms, Dutch families pursued economic opportunities and moved to the

22. Leonard Benardo and Jennifer Weiss, *Brooklyn by Name: How the Neighborhoods, Streets, Parks, Bridges, and More Got Their Names* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 121.

23 Alter F. Landesman, *A History of New Lots, Brooklyn to 1887: Including the Villages of East New York, Cypress Hills, and Brownsville* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1977), 11.

uncultivated land east of the "old lots" of Flatbush. The primary commodities produced from the New Lots soil were potatoes, wheat, dairy cows, and swine. The land and venture were so profitable that it was known as "the Market Garden of the United States."[24] In the prologue of *Upon This Rock*, Samuel G. Freedman creatively frames the context of the enslavement of Africans in New Amsterdam:

> The First African Slaves arrived in the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam in 1626. Some thirty-four years later, it is recorded, slaves appeared in the adjoining town of Brooklyn. Well before the end of the century, historical accounts tell of their presence in the expanse of flatland and estuary called New Lots, which someday would be subsumed by Brooklyn, as Brooklyn would be subsumed by New York.
>
> Slaves tilled the soil for corn and potatoes and wheat. They built the mills along the salt creeks. They raised the horses their masters raced for amusement. On Sunday's the Dutch, believing themselves enlightened, allowed their African captives to worship in church. Christianity would keep their minds safely centered on the next world.
>
> Still, these Africans confounded their masters, the way they clung to such strange names as Kouba and Yaft, and commingled Christianity with belief in spirits, potions, and charms. There was even a rebellion in New Amsterdam in 1712, and nine whites fell beneath hatchets and knives. Not until 150 years after slaves were first sent to New Lots did one merit burial in the yard of the Dutch Reformed Church.[25]

Freedman, winner of the 1993 Helen B. Bernstein Award for Excellence in Journalism, begins his account of St. Paul by using several sources to create a historical mosaic. Freedman records the story of African religious expression, resilience, and reclamation of dignity in the context of chattel slavery. Although *Upon This Rock* is the account of the impact and witness of St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn

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24. Walter Thabit, *How East New York Became a Ghetto* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 9-10.

25. Freedman, *Upon This Rock*, 1.

specifically, it is also an expression of the wider Black church tradition. Freedman suggests that two conversations were happening in the context of the enslavement of Africans then, and two conversations are happening in America now. There have always been two Americas with two narratives: the narrative of the majority and a counter-narrative among the oppressed. Enslaved Africans demonstrated resilience and resistance despite nearly indomitable odds. In part, it was the confluence of religious expression and the remnants of their native culture that nurtured the will to survive and the hope to be free.

During enslavement there were varying degrees of oversight and cruelty, often determined by plantation size and the enslaver's philosophical approach. To quell a desire for freedom, the Dutch, thought to be more enlightened than other European enslavers, allowed enslaved Africans more religious freedom. The Dutch believed this strategy would cause enslaved Africans to accept their enslavement and keep their slaves directed toward an “other-worldly” perspective.

Freedman uses these historical statements to frame his depiction of St. Paul Community Baptist Church as a prominent institution in an impoverished area, having a different conversation and demonstrating what is possible. The subtitle of *Upon This Rock*: *The Miracles of a Black Church* does not visage a story of supernatural feats, but it points to a story of prophetic leadership and a community having a different conversation. As Albert J. Raboteau concluded in *Slave Religion*: *The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, that enslaved Africans' religion was not other-worldly, and was compensatory only in the sense that religion provided consolation. To depict slave religion as such would be a distortion and an oversimplification of the

complex and vital role of faith for enslaved Africans.[26] Raboteau points to the under-appreciated role of Black religion: providing consolation, liberation, and the reclamation of human dignity.

Recent discoveries of two African burial grounds, one in New York City and the other in East New York Brooklyn, have shed light on a grave disrespect of Africans who built the city of New York. It was in 1991 in Lower Manhattan, New York City, buried beneath twenty feet of asphalt, that the first of these African Burial Grounds was discovered. This discovery, just two blocks from City Hall, revealed a history long-forgotten. In the interest of city development, the graves of as many as 15,000 Africans were covered. This discovery sparked conversations about the contributions of Africans who labored to build the city.[27] A less celebrated but equally revealing African Burial Ground was discovered in 2010, walking distance from St. Paul.

The New Lots Reformed Church, established in the nineteenth century, contains the stories of a bygone era. On the property of this landmarked church is a cemetery with massive headstone markers of the original families who populated what was originally called New Lots, known today as East New York, Brooklyn. The history of this cemetery is the story of two different realities. Mary French, an anthropologist and founder of the New York City Cemetery Project, has collected information concerning 350 cemeteries through her organization. French says, “For those with passion for culture and history and curiosity about the unknown, cemeteries are tantalizing spots that provide a wellspring of

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26. Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 317–18.

27 “African Burial Ground,” National Park Service, Accessed December, 2020, https://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/historyculture/index.htm.

information about individuals' lives, communities, religion, and historic events."[28] As French has aptly said, by studying cemeteries we can obtain a picture of the lived realities of those who have come before us. The story of the cemetery adjacent to the Dutch Reformed Church of New Lots stands in memory of the enslavers and progenitors of East New York. What is not seen is below the surface of the area on which the church and cemetery reside. Mary French points out, on a map of the site from 1866, a second cemetery called the "old cemetery." [29] The story of the old or slave cemetery as it eventually would be known is part of the founding narrative of East New York. As the old cemetery filled to capacity, Dutch settlers created the new cemetery adjacent to the New Lots Dutch Reformed Church. Many families exhumed and re-interred their loved ones in the new cemetery, rendering the African cemetery almost abandoned in the 1840's.[30] In the 1920s, residents of the community argued that the cemetery was an eyesore. Although the public record indicates that it was a known fact that this was an African Burial Ground, deserving of dignity and respect, a school playground and eventually a public library were still built on this site. French also records in her well-documented account that in 2017 during a redevelopment effort, human bone remains were discovered suggesting that, "disturbed and intact burials may exist beneath the park." In 2019, in the spirit of Sankofa, a term from the Twi language of Ghana meaning "go back and get it," community groups under the leadership of Assemblyman Charles

28. Mary French, "New York City Cemetery Project, 2010-2020," Accessed November 2, 2020, http//nycemetery.wordpress.com/about/.

29. French, "*New York City Cemetery*."

30. Landesman, *A History of New Lots*, 55–64.

Barron re-interred the discovered remains. They advocated for the park to be dubbed an African Burial Ground.[31]

Proudly, in the reclamation of the history of a story curiously forgotten, there is now a sign that says, "African Burial Ground Square" in honor of those Africans who were central to the narrative of East New York. Other signs continue to reveal a history that is still prevalent today. In the current New Lots Dutch Reformed Church cemetery, tombstones contain the names of the original families of New Lots, names like Schenck, Vanderveer, and Van Siclen - all Dutch family farming dynasties. Schenck Avenue, possibly named in honor of Teunis Schenck, is currently where the Imagine Me Leadership Charter School for boys is located. IMLCS, an award-winning K-8th grade school, serves Black and Brown boys from the east side of the St. Paul campus. Ironically, our educational partner resides on the street that commemorates the Schenck family. It is said that the Schenck family was known to be one of the largest owners of slaves in Flatbush.[32]

The city block where St. Paul Community Baptist Church currently resides sits on Hendrix Street. As Bernardo and Weiss chronicle, the Hendrix family was among the first families of East New York. Joseph Clifford Hendrix, a descendent of Ephraim Hendricks, is believed to be the namesake of Hendrix Street. Ephraim was engaged in many spheres of public life. He was a reporter for the *New York Sun*, president of two banks, and head of the Board of Education. He ran for Mayor of Brooklyn, was appointed Kings County postmaster, and was later elected to the fifty-third United States

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31. French, *New York City Cemetery*.

32. Benardo and Weiss, *Brooklyn by Name*, 131.

Congress.[33] While Hendrix's family name is a significant part of the history of East New York, to omit the stories of Africans that have contributed to the development of the area since the 1600's is a grave omission and would provide a truncated view. Similarly, the story of East New York cannot be fully understood without the reclamation of the African contributions to New Lots.

By the 1800s, Kings County, New York had the dubious distinction of having, proportionate to the population, more slaves than anywhere else north of the Mason-Dixon Line. According to Gertrude L. Lefferts Vanderbilt, in the *Social History of Flatbush,* the Dutch laborers were primarily associated with the fur trade. Due to the expense of hiring other Europeans to cultivate the land, it initially became "necessary" to utilize enslaved Africans. Generally speaking, the Dutch enslavers in Kings County were thought to be less oppressive in their practices than other European enslavers.[34] In 1827, slavery in New York was abolished. Although many formerly enslaved Africans in New Lots remained with their former enslavers, European immigrants competed with former slaves as domestics or laborers over time. Consequently, many European migrants displaced Blacks, keeping the Black population in New Lots relatively small.

The End of Civilization

When St. Paul moved to Hendrix Street in 1980, East New York was already dubbed the "end of civilization" by a visiting mayor of Boston.[35] Like other big cities

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33. Ibid, 126.

34. Gertrude Lefferts Vanderbilt, *The Social History of Flatbush: And Manners and Customs of the Dutch Settlers in Kings County* (New York: D. Appleton, 1881), 249–66.

35. Michael Gecan, *Going Public* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 10. To dramatize the extreme poverty and neglect of East Brooklyn, Gecan recounts the disinvestment and the abandonment that Boston Mayor White described as the end of civilization as he visited East Brooklyn.

during the era, urban blight from benign and intentional neglect had rendered East New York a ghetto community. East New York represents an example of a meta-narrative for African-Americans in one of the largest historical migrations in U.S. history. In pursuit of economic opportunities up North, Southern Blacks migrated only to discover the same racial caste system in play. Award-winning author Isabel Wilkerson describes this arrangement well when she says:

> They entered the North at the bottom, beneath southern and eastern Europeans who might not yet have learned English but who were permitted into unions and into better-served neighborhoods that barred black citizens whose labor had cleared the wilderness and built the county's wealth.[36]

There may be no greater evidence of what Wilkerson has identified as a hierarchical structure based on race than in government-sponsored housing segregation. A study conducted under the Lindsay Administration, spearheaded by Walter Thabit, reveals that the central section of East New York was 85% White in the early 1960s. Still, by 1966, the same area was reported as approximately 80% Black and Puerto Rican.[37] This drastic demographic shift in urban areas was intentionally construed by profit-driven realtors engaging in "blockbusting" speculation tactics creating "White flight." Realtors convinced Whites that the presence of Blacks was detrimental to their property values and their well-being. Richard Rothstein argues that the segregating of Black and Brown communities was not a de facto act determined by the market, but de jure government-sponsored American apartheid. Rothstein describes bank discrimination, redlining

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36. Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 134.

37. Thabit, *How East New York*, 7.

practices, and other unconstitutional actions that created this context for many cities.[38] According to Thabit, it was this dynamic that caused East New York to become one of the few places in the City of New York where Blacks and Puerto Ricans could live. He explains how the exponential increase of Blacks and Puerto Ricans in the area without services such as community-based organizations, faith institutions, a plan for school construction, pre-schools, daycares, parks, and pools contributed to the ghettoization of East New York.[39]

The courageous leadership of Reverend Adolphus Smith to move an overcrowded St. Paul Church in 1944, due to the wartime limitations, was a testament to the spirit of his leadership. Smith moved St. Paul into a new facility built from the ground up through the membership's contributions and chicken dinner sales, completing the project in two years.[40]

In the late 1970s, St. Paul Community Baptist Church, under the leadership of Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood, would once again demonstrate prophetic courage by leaving Brownsville and moving to East New York. In 1980, after six years of leading a congregation with an initial yearly budget of only $18,000, Youngblood challenged St. Paul to purchase a former synagogue and retire the mortgage in twelve months. Five years later St. Paul would expand its footprint, adding a $450,000 Renaissance Center housing music, discipleship, media, graphic and arts, and community outreach ministries.

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38. Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), VVII–XVII.

39. Thabit, *How East New York*, 19–20.

40. Freedman, *Upon This Rock*, 162–63.

To further the missional impact, in 1980 St. Paul joined an alliance of churches called East Brooklyn Churches, later to be renamed East Brooklyn Congregations. EBC, an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, was founded as a citizens' power organization with the ability to act on a range of issues facing our community. With fifty institutions to its credit, EBC would eventually garner national recognition. Governed by the philosophy of identifying winnable issues, EBC pressured the City of New York to restore 3,000 street signs, stop signs and one-way signs to place the blighted communities of East Brooklyn back on the map.[41] Ironically, EBC would also engage in building multiple affordable housing phases over time on land once owned by the Dutch but cultivated by Africans.

The Nehemiah plan was developed as a strategy to regenerate the blighted communities of East Brooklyn. The biblical story informed the Nehemiah project, in which the prophet rebuilt Jerusalem's walls and restored the burnt gates. St. Paul and Rev. Youngblood would emerge as leaders in this nationally recognized work responsible for over 5,000 homes as well as community renewal and wealth generation for thousands of families. News outlet NPR chronicled the outcomes of an online invention called the Opportunity Atlas, developed by Harvard economist Raj Chetty and others. The Opportunity Atlas is a tool that uses data to track wealth from one generation to the next. Chetty and his colleagues discovered, in viewing a street in Brownsville where Nehemiah Homes were constructed, that there was a stark difference in wealth for the children of

41. Gecan, *Going Public*, 12.

parents who owned Nehemiah homes.[42] The discovery confirmed the difference that homeownership makes. With four decades of unparalleled success in its rearview, EBC, a noted and influential organization in New York City with victories in public safety, education, and quality of life issues, continues to transform communities.

Community organizing is a relational work. The foundation of any organizing effort is rooted in people sharing their stories, building relationships, identifying issues, and building power. EBC conducts hundreds of issue-based conversations called 'one-on-ones" annually. These tools of organizing give opportunities to share stories. These relational meetings are then used to identify emerging talent and people with anger or "fire in their belly" with a willingness to act. The culture of St. Paul has been deeply informed by many of the strategies and tools of community organizing.

Jeffrey Stout, in his book *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America,* borrows the metaphor "sleepers" from Thoreau to speak to a false conscious power arrangement between the powerful and powerless. According to Stout, there is a reliance on deference on the part of the ordinary people that maintains the structure and makes change appear impossible.[43] The change will only occur when ordinary people awaken from their slumber and act. Stout rightly indicates that community organizing has been a historical factor in America's social movements, such as the Civil Rights and Women's movements. The legacy of St. Paul has been to work with other faith institutions that share our values to fill the void of inactivity and benign neglect. Without

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42. Jasmine Garsd, "The American Dream: One Block Can Make All The Difference," NPR, October 4, 2018, Accessed December, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2018/10/04/654085265/the-american-dream-one-block-can-make-all-the-difference.

43. Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 278.

agitation and advocacy, elected officials rarely act for the good of our community. The relational tools of broad-based organizing allow us to unite with others to build power and gain a seat at the table.

Practitioners of multi-issue or broad-based organizing seek to build power across ethnic and geographic lines, focusing on present issues. Within the IAF network, for example, a robust conversation is currently happening to move beyond the pragmatism of self-interest alone and to start addressing and naming the issue of race and inequality. Authors Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel, in *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World,* add that we need organizing rooted in the prophetic tradition of scripture and history.[44] The authors critique the Alinsky philosophy of issue-based organizing directed by self-interest. They suggest as Christians, we need more than a commitment to building power, but we need to draw from the imperatives and wisdom of our faith tradition in the pursuit of a just society. Community organizing is a powerful tool that cannot be overlooked. They have been effective in creating recognition and respect for many communities. Faith-rooted organizing, as described by Salvatierra and Heltzel, challenges us to aspire for more than power for powers' sake but for the beloved community. Rooting organizing work in the wisdom of scripture and sacred memory can aid us by invoking stories of transcendence, hope, and commitment as exhibited by those who have come before us. In reflection, St. Paul is challenged to renew our commitment to the cause of justice and our charge to be a prophetic community.

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44. Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 15.

As a prophetic community, our reflection on power dynamics in the world has caused us to reflect on our internal, unconscious institutional structures of inequality. As a Baptist church, St. Paul adheres to congregational polity, but we defer to our board of elders in matters of contention within the body. At St. Paul, the board of elders assumes a role similar to that of deacons in a traditional Baptist church. According to our church by-laws, elders are the church's governing body, sharing responsibility with the pastor to address all church spiritual matters. The elders and pastor advance the church's general welfare, including administering the ordinances of Baptism and Communion. The Board of Elders has traditionally been exclusively male.

Our church has been lauded for our intentional ministry to the African-American male. Male leadership has been a value for our church and has been accepted almost without question. We need to address structural gender bias within our context. As St. Paul seeks to participate in conversations about the significance of Black life in America, I am concerned that our witness will be weakened without the courage to face internal structures of patriarchy and male privilege within our church. If St. Paul is to dismantle systems that have historically formed and informed our institutional identity, we will need to invoke sacred memory to imagine what is possible. Although St. Paul is a voice for racial justice, without structural change our church, even as a social justice church, could be excluded as a moral voice in conversations about racial and gender parity.

To be a beloved community and a “So Beautiful” church, our congregation must do the internal work to ensure equality and fairness within our institution. Doing the work of justice has caused us to re-evaluate our rationale for excluding others from the table of equality. Sweet, in the epilogue of *So Beautiful*, reminds us that “Biblical community that

bears the image of the cruciform life is committed relationships of self-giving love with those whom you would normally not hang out with."[45] Our challenge at St. Paul has been to look critically at ourselves and address patriarchy and male privilege. We are now questioning the premise of an all-male led church as the only way to draw, disciple, and develop men. As an initial step toward gender parity and in the interest of inclusion, we addressed the absence of women in our pulpit. To that end, in April 2013, St. Paul licensed two women to the preaching ministry and is now open to ordination for women in ministry. Our church community's evolution will bring new perspectives; the challenge will be to think about what the future holds for our church and for people who are marginalized in our world.

In the context of my tenure, there are multiple stony roads ahead that St. Paul must face. The most immediate reality facing St. Paul is an aging building adding to budgetary constraints. After successive significant repairs to our HVAC system, roofing concerns, and increased operational costs, St. Paul is now in the process of redeveloping our property. Based on my work with East Brooklyn Congregations, I have been introduced to the world of development and project management. Still, our redevelopment effort will demand that our leadership display a greater degree of business acumen to ensure a fair and equitable deal for our church. Many churches have attempted to reconcile this tension by partnering with unsavory developers who offer shady deals in the service of their greed and the demise of unsuspecting congregations. Seminary training or post-graduate training needs to bring more awareness to the church's need for business acumen.

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45. Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 248.

As the last generalist in the culture, the pastor must have a breadth of knowledge across many disciplines. Greater access to information and vetting services are needed so congregations can do their due diligence in identifying trustworthy partners in development. Pastors also need some knowledge of city planning. Without advocacy from faith communities, gentrification is a likely scenario. As cities grow, the land will become scarcer; churches have a much-coveted asset that must be protected.

As St. Paul combatted urban blight in the 1980s, we will need to think and organize around the challenges of East New York's perception as one of the last areas in the City of New York ripe for gentrification. In recent years the City of New York selected the East New York section of Brooklyn as a priority for rezoning and development. The plan is to promote affordable housing preservation and development, economic growth, and community investment. The East New York neighborhood plan is a mayoral priority that proposes creating a more equitable and livable city.[46] Residents fear a Trojan-horse effect as a result of the mayor's plan. Although the mayor has committed $267,000,000 in infrastructure improvements, our neighborhood is already experiencing skyrocketing rents and predatory practices from predatory, unsavory landlords.

St. Paul is located in Assembly District 60 with a population of 126,000 people. The most startling statistic from a recent census report is the recorded area median income per household, which is just below $32,000, approximately half of the average median income of New York. Another disheartening statistic is that in East New York,

46. "NYC Planning, Neighborhood Focus Areas: East New York, Brooklyn," Accessed May 2019, https:/www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/community/East-New-york.page.

30% of residents live below the poverty line, double the average in New York and more than double the rate in the United States.[47] Deteriorating public housing developments surround our church. The conditions that residents are subject to are nothing short of environmental racism. As many of our members raise their families and their children in these neglected buildings, we continue to organize to address the systemic conditions that create respiratory diseases such as mold, mildew, and vermin. It is estimated that New York City Housing, which houses approximately 400,000 New Yorkers, has over a $40,000,000,000 capital budget deficit that grows by the year.[48] The fight for recognition and respect for NYCHA tenants will be more challenging than the historic battle for affordable housing.

With the challenges of economic scarcity and political neglect, the need for community has never been greater. As the nation works to recover from the economic impact of COVID-19, communities like East New York which are still recovering from the economic impact of redlining and community disinvestment, inevitably will be an afterthought in the economic recovery of America. As St. Paul has worked in collaboration for the regeneration of East Brooklyn, we will need to continue to deepen a sense of community. Given the reality of COVID-19, community organizing that relies solely on physical attendance as a way to act will be a challenge. We will need to re-imagine ways to organize virtually to compel elected officials to work in our

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47. U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates* (Retrieved from Census Reporter Profile page for Assembly District 60, NY), 2018, Accessed November 2020, http://censusreporter.org/profiles/62000US36060-assembly-district-60-ny/>.

48. Sindey Pereira, "City Warns NYCHA Could Need Double the Cash for Repairs in Coming Years," *Gothamist* (December 2019), Accessed November 23, 2020, http://gothamist.com/news/city-warns-nycha-could-need-double-cash-repairs-coming-years.

community's interest. The traditional tactic of meeting in homes is no longer feasible with COVID-19 restrictions. While many of the current COVID-19 restrictions may be temporary, the lingering PTSD associated with months of physical separation could hamper our efforts to organize for community renewal.

Doubtless, there are conversations presently occurring about the economic recovery of America and Black churches must be leading voices therein. To address the dehumanizing institution of slavery, our Ancestors convened critical discussions in the hush harbors to build community and nurture resilience. During a time of economic scarcity due to World War II limitations, St. Paul, under the leadership of Reverend Adolphus Smith, acted to build a new sanctuary, a symbol of Black economic power in the face of indomitable odds. Under the direction of Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood, St. Paul Community Baptist Church acted a generation ago to create an enduring model of community regeneration. St. Paul built wealth for multiple generations leading the way forward for communities of color in New York. Today, St. Paul will need to continue the conversation of economic parity within the context of the unchartered waters of a world inflicted with pandemic paralysis. Our credibility to convene such a discussion will depend on our ability to retain the community concept in a post-pandemic world.

St. Paul has been historically summoned to act during times of racial inequality, inequity, and economic disenfranchisement. St. Paul will need to respond once again as our forebears did; building a fair and just community from within our institution and addressing our church community's mammoth struggles. As wounded healers, we will need to invoke the Black Church tradition that has provided the consolation our people have needed. As warrior healers, we will need to fight for the soul of our congregation,

community, and our world. I believe that this is possible only in the context of community, as we identify our shared values and needs. As the forebears of our church who migrated from the American South in the Great Migration were determined to survive the new frontier of Brooklyn, they sought to build a church to foster a sense of community formerly experienced in the South. This sense of community preserved them during the dehumanizing institution of slavery, the disrespect of Jim and Jane Crow, and is the foundation and fodder necessary for the twenty-first century. Similarly, in the wake of gentrification, COVID-19, racial injustice, and economic scarcity, St. Paul will need the deepening of the community, through the healing power of ritual, to convene life-giving and life-sustaining conversations.

CHAPTER THREE

FULL OF THE FAITH THAT THE DARK PAST HAS TAUGHT US:

INTERSECTIONS OF CHRIST, CULTURE, AND FAITH

> "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters... And God saw the light, that it was good…
>
> Genesis 1:1-2, 4a (NKJV)

Our Ancestors' witness has come from intersections of African culture, a re-interpreted understanding of Christ, and faith that has been tested by the fiery trials of slavery and oppression. In this chapter, we will examine these intersections theologically. The Black church's witness is evidenced through rituals that have kept us existentially and affirmed us ontologically. The term MAAFA can be used to describe the activity of slavery, and the term can also speak to a commemorative moment of ritual and remembrance to honor our Ancestors who were victimized by the horrors of slavery. Our concern here is to establish the historic, prophetic witness and faith of our Ancestors who bequeathed to us the faith tradition of sacred memory. Next, we will offer biblical examples of rituals that support MAAFA's importance as a ritual of remembrance. As a matter of theological grounding for our guiding question about MAAFA's future and feasibility as sacred memory, we examine the creation story as a sign for an evaluation process to determine the direction of MAAFA.

Culture Birthed in the Crucible of Oppression

Sociologist Marimba Ani, Ph.D. defines MAAFA as a rapacious, historic world event traditionally called the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which describes the

commodification and exploitation of Black bodies by Europeans.[1] The lynchpin of this dehumanizing arrangement is a racial caste system that continues to this day, maintained with systems and acts of brutality in the service of whiteness. Due to a plethora of reasons, including sparse documentation, the loss of African lives during the MAAFA is challenging to quantify. The historical baseline of Africans "imported" to the Americas is approximately 10,000,000. While some scholars' estimates are higher, 10,000,000 has been a historical starting point. This estimate is derived from the work of Philip Curtin in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, which analyzes the period of 1451 to 1870. One must take into account that Curtin's work is an estimate based on importation.[2] This distinction is of importance as it does not take into consideration several factors. By offering a figure based on the importation, Curtin's figure does not fully account for the number of Africans that boarded ships as cargo headed to the Americas. This number does not factor in the mortality rate during a trek to the Americas, a trek that would sometimes last ninety days.

Additionally, this estimate excludes the number of Africans lost on the inland trek to slave forts on the coast of Africa. There would have been a significant loss of life due to famine and warfare as Africans were forcibly taken as captives. Recent scholarship has estimated the total number of Africans victimized to be at least 60 million.[3] No matter one's appraisal, it is clear that when we speak of the MAAFA as an event, we must conclude that millions of Africans were brutally victimized in the global enterprise called

1. Ani, *Let the Circle*, 12.

2. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 268.

3. Roberson, *The Maafa & Beyond*, 28–33.

chattel slavery. To simply quantify the number of lives is to overlook the enduring trauma caused by the MAAFA. As Erriel Roberson describes in his comprehensive book *The MAAFA and Beyond:*

> It is within bounds to say that if only a single individual today were made to endure kidnapping, rape, separation from family and friends, the hold of a ship under horrific conditions, the brutality of whippings and mutilations, and all that was endured during the MAAFA, the world would be outraged. Escalate the figure of one, to millions, and perhaps we then see the great necessity to pay homage to the memory of our African ancestors.

In describing the scope of his research, Roberson rightly includes the term "beyond" to describe the inconceivable conditions endured by Africans and the residual trauma experienced by the descendants of slavery. It is the goal of MAAFA as a ritual to contextualize this historical event and address the enduring legacy of slavery. As the institution of slavery reinforced the ideology of White supremacy, driven by the material objectification of black bodies, the systemic impact was the discounting of African humanity. Though slavery was not new in human history, chattel slavery was unique because it was based on the ideological presupposition that African culture and beings should be treated and thought of as inferior. According to Ani, Europeans created conditions to enforce this narrative to maintain a caste system based on color.[4] The disruption of the African spirit was designed to destroy the enslaved Africans' connection to their culture and kinship, and to weaken their will to resist this foreign arrangement. This chaotic and sudden intrusion and disruption of the African relational ethos was intentionally inflicted to devalue the African world-view and promote a materialistic

4. Ani, *Let the Circle Be*, 12.

value system to relegate Africans to property status. Slavery was a perversion of the orderly world that the African once knew. As Ani states, "To be European was to have value, to be African was to be without personal worth."[5] Despite European enslavers' attempts, as Ani describes, the African retentions that survived the dehumanizing enslavement process are noteworthy. Although trauma abounds, enough of the African spirit survived the dehumanizing institution of slavery to recreate community in what Ani calls "New Europe."[6] Unquestionably, the Africans who were forcibly compelled to embark on the journey to the Americas were not the same when they disembarked at the many ports of the New World. Varying degrees of the African spirit can be observed throughout the diaspora and contribute to survival and resistance. Ani's work challenges us to awaken our consciousness to see diasporic African cultural connections; to, in a word, "let the circle be unbroken."

One way to measure the depth of African retentions is to consider the cultural relations in religious expression. Ani uses a circle as a metaphor indicating African retentions and connections from the motherland. One example of African cultural retention in America is the ring shout found in the southeastern region of the United States. It is believed that the ring shout, as practiced by enslaved Africans, preserved African culture through story-telling, dance, and song. The cultural elements that constitute a ring shout have their origin in African communal expression. The ring shout "symbolizes community and solidarity, affirmation, and catharsis, common to many

5. Ibid, 13.

6. Ibid, 14.

African societies."[7] While not the scope of this study, it is noteworthy that there have been extensive debates concerning the degree to which African retentions are apparent in North America.[8] What is undeniable is the connection between African religious expression and the ring shout. There is no negation of the truths that enslaved Africans retained some of their African spirit and that the dehumanizing North American acculturation process changed them. It is clear that enslaved Africans used their pre-existing understanding of a supreme being with a sophisticated cosmology, which mixed with the experiences of suffering to create a new way of being. This new way of being was honed in the hush harbors of slavery. The genius of enslaved Africans is found in the creative communication of a religion of freedom while enduring conditions of servitude.

As in the tradition of the ring shouters of America's southeastern region, MAAFA as sacred memory is a testament to organic creativity. The ring shout tradition serves as an example of a community forming ritual through voice and vibration, echoing the hope of newness. According to Sterling Stuckey, the ring shout formed the foundation of Black creativity and cultural expression:

> But it was too late for African religion−and therefore for African culture to be contained or reversed, because its advocates were practically the whole black population in America: the essential features of the ring shout were present in one form or another, and hardly a state in the Union was without its practitioners during and following slavery. Moreover, the shout continued to form the principal context in which black creativity occurred.[9]

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7. Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 21.

8. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 48–55. The conversation surrounding the degree to which African retentions exist in Black religious expression has its origin in the debate between anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier. In his seminal work on African cultural retentions, or Africanisms, titled *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Herskovits boldly refutes the American Negro myth of inferiority.

9. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 95.

Stuckey concludes that African religion and culture were communicated in the ring shout. As the ring shout provides a therapeutic role in our people's survival, the MAAFA is intended to dramatize our Ancestors' suffering and oppression and is intended to give voice to African Americans' unspoken trauma today.

As a prophetic community, St. Paul, through our work in sacred memory, seeks to address the compounded impact of historical and current trauma. Acknowledging that there has been some healing from the trauma that has scarred us, Jacqueline T. Dyer points out that the work is not complete. As Dyer reports, we live in a "now and not yet soteriological understanding, both the resilience and the restoration exist and are yet unfolding."[10] Ministry that does not recognize historical trauma will have a limited lens to understand current trauma. Through the commemoration of the MAAFA, we seek to creatively shed light on current traumatic events of today by illuminating the generational wounds of a painful past.

Joy DeGruy, Ph.D., a renowned researcher in matters of race and trauma, in her work *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome,* connects the criteria utilized by mental health professionals in diagnosing post-traumatic stress disorders to examining the trauma induced by slavery and oppression. She argues that mental health professionals identify possible direct exposure, being a witness to, or indirect connection to trauma as enough to justify a diagnosis of PTSD. Stressors such as death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence can create a plethora of symptoms associated with a traumatic event. After listing the possible ways trauma is

10. Vince L. Bantu, *Gospel Haymanot: A Constructive Theology and Critical Reflection on African and Diasporic Christianity* (Chicago: Urban Ministries, 2020), 181. The phrase "historical and current trauma" is from Jacqueline T. Dyer's contribution to this volume.

experienced, DeGruy elucidates, “These are just some of the symptoms that an individual may exhibit having had direct or indirect exposure to a single traumatic event. What about those who experienced a lifetime of slavery?”[11] Contemporarily, if we consider the criteria mentioned by DeGruy, the impact of smartphone technology that is broadcasting the senseless torture of black bodies can only deepen racial wounds and compound collective trauma.

A further consideration in our understanding of trauma is found in the science of epigenetics. From the framework of the scientific field of epigenetics, DeGruy argues that environment may affect our genes, suggesting that trauma can be transmitted over generations. The premise of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* is that adaptive behaviors from traumas experienced in slavery were communicated to subsequent generations.[12] Epigenetics is the study of how our genes work. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “genetic changes, epigenetic changes are reversible and do not change your DNA sequence, but they can change how your body reads a DNA sequence.”[13] David M. Carr, in *Holy Resilience,* defines trauma. He states, “…trauma is an overwhelming haunting experience of disaster so explosive in its impact that it cannot be directly encountered and influences an individual/group’s behavior and memory in indirect ways.”[14] Recovery from the embedded trauma of the past, compounded by direct

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11. Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Uptone Press, 2005), 99–100.

12.DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 99–100.

13. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “What is Epigenetics?” August, 2020, Accessed December, 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/genomics/disease/epigenetics.htm

14. David M. Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 6–7.

or indirect trauma experienced by the threat of police brutality and acts of violence in the present, involves recognition of grief, memory, and truth-telling. As a ritual of sacred memory, MAAFA attempts to heal the trauma of slavery, and the maladaptive behaviors that no longer serve the descendants of slavery, through a healing journey of remembrance. A journey of healing from the trauma of slavery initially begins the act of remembrance. Judith Herman's work on trauma entitled *Trauma and Recovery* says:

> Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events is the prerequisite both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims…But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom.[15]

Biblical and Theological Foundations of Faith Forged Through Suffering

As MAAFA is the reclamation of remembrance as healing, it is essential that any Black Christian understanding of salvation must include healing. The term salvation is a comprehensive term from the Greek σῴζω (*sōzō*), meaning "save." According to Sweet, the three activities of Jesus in the gospels are preaching, teaching, and healing. The first recorded miracle of Jesus, muses Sweet, is turning the water into wine. This image presents us with a broader understanding of healing. Perhaps we should think of advocacy on behalf of the Black and Brown residents of Flint, Michigan as a ministry of healing. Likewise, sacred memory that connects us to our Ancestors' narratives can also serve to keep us connected to the suffering and needs of others. It is interesting that when William Tyndale in 1526 translated the Bible into English, he did not translate the word (*sōzō*) as save, but as heal. Sweet advises that as the ministry of healing accelerated the

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15. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: BasicBooks, 2015), 1.

ministry of the early Church, in the context of a COVID-19 world, churches should reclaim the ministry of healing.[16] Historically, Black Churches have engaged in a holistic understanding of ministry. Pragmatically speaking, Black Churches have been at the epicenter of providing educational opportunities, economic development, and social activism.

A broad definition of salvation should address every sphere of human existence. The legacy in the prophetic tradition of Black Churches has been the refutation of an "other-worldly" salvation that culminates in a heavenly abode. Salvation, as preached and incarnated in the life of Christ, addressed and changed the lives of others. The mission statement of Jesus as recorded in Luke's gospel was to "preach the good news to the poor, proclaim the release of the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed." In the ministry of Jesus, the liberating message and manifestation of salvation were seen in restorative justice and healing acts. This dynamic is seen in the cleansing of marginalized lepers, the healing of a blind man by a Jericho roadside, or raising a widow's son in Nain. As Sweet has indicated, churches that seek to incarnate Christ will preach, teach, and heal in their context. For the times in which we live, we would do well to prioritize a ministry of healing.[17]

Visual symbols and signs can serve as powerful reminders of God's work in the world. In a class discussion referring to the usefulness of the scriptures for defining oppression, Rev. Gary V. Simpson, D.Min. raised the query, "How did a book that came

16. Leonard I. Sweet and Michael Beck, "Reading the Signs of the Times," Fresh Expressions, Accessed October 2020, https://freshexpressionsus.org/reading-the-signs-of-the-times/

17. Ibid.

from oppressed communities become the book of the oppressor?" Trauma work in an ecclesiological context includes reclamation of a view of the scriptures from the bottom, and not from the top down. In *The Bible through the Lens of Trauma,* edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, biblical scholars and experts in trauma theory examine the Bible utilizing a hermeneutic of trauma. What is intriguing about this emerging discipline is the abundant possibilities of survival strategies, resilience, and trauma recovery. In the introduction the editors offer this rationale for their study:

> When biblical scholars employ trauma hermeneutics to explore texts that have emerged out of a context of trauma, they attend to the historical realities of traumatic violence and the disruptive and enduring impacts of those events on individuals and communities."[18]

The book of Exodus is a text that describes the collective trauma of the oppressed by Egyptian slavery. It is in this context that the institutionalization of Passover was given. As a part of the recovery from the spiritual and psychological trauma of slavery, a ritual of remembrance was incorporated to commemorate the Divine act of deliverance from Egyptian bondage. In North American slavery, enslaved Africans would be exposed to a consistent catechism of Biblical texts to reinforce the master/slave arrangement. However, enslaved Africans would engage in a hermeneutic of liberation by invoking stories like the Exodus narrative. Wilmore captures this when he says, "In the biblical stories, psalms, and accounts of miracles, they found the conviction and hope that a better life was possible for them in this world and, with even more certainty, in the world to

18. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds., *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 13.

come."[19] The institutionalization of the Passover event is a seminal ritual of remembrance. This act of remembrance was to continue perpetually as an ordinance to memorialize the deciding, liberating act of God on behalf of the children of Israel. The book of Exodus not only describes the first Passover but provides a prescribed liturgy of remembrance. The five liturgical requirements for this ritual of remembrance were: choose an unblemished lamb; sacrifice the lamb; spread the blood of the lamb on the home; eat the flesh of the lamb with unleavened bread; keep the Passover as a "day of remembrance."[20] This deliverance drama would be repeated as a sacred memory to remind the people of God's intervention, and would be passed down from generation to generation. Biblical scholar Brant Pitre, in *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, calls our attention to the Judaic roots of the Christian ritual of remembrance. Pitre suggests that there are intriguing connections between the Passover observance and the Eucharist. According to Pitre, the liturgy of the Passover that came to be known as the Last Supper was shaped by the preparation of the Pascal lamb and four cups of wine. It was not coincidental that Jesus would institute a "new Passover" from the context of His Passover with His disciples in the Upper Room. There is a sense in which Jesus (re)signs the Passover to point to His redemptive act. Pitre summarizes the connection between the Passover event and Christ when he says,

> Jesus also reconfigured the Passover around his own passion…Jesus acted as the host of the messianic Passover, because he saw himself as the Messiah. He offered himself as a sacrifice because he saw himself as the Passover lamb.

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19. Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 7.

20. Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 58.

It is in the act of remembering that we see Jesus. In the Christian ritual of remembrance, Communion, Jesus gives the directive, "This do in remembrance of Me." In the words of Rev. Sweet, "Jesus is the ultimate Sign (*semeion*) of God."[21] Jesus uses the context of Passover to direct His followers to focus on Him. The immediate context of the directive is the week of His passion. What is it that Jesus wants his disciples to remember? I believe Jesus is directing his followers to see the ultimate sign of his redemptive act. For followers of Jesus, Communion is a "pay attention" moment.

Additionally, this imperative to remember is given to the disciples as a part of the Upper Room discourse. It is on the occasion of a meal of remembrance that Jesus summarizes what He taught and modeled for the disciples. He uses this moment to prepare them to encounter a hostile world without His physical presence. He consoles them as He reminds them of His promise to be with them through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This moment is also about reminding His disciples of the sacrificial ways to relate to each other in community.[22] His emphatic commandment in the Upper Room discourse is to love one another. With the use of signs that can be perceived with multiple senses, Jesus leaves them lessons to remember that which would inform their relationships. Taking on the role of a servant, Jesus, teaching by example, uses the occasion of the Passover meal to model service and humility by washing their feet. According to John's

21. Leonard I. Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 58.

22. Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus* (Salem, Oregon: Charis Press, 2001), 75–83.

gospel, chapter thirteen, Jesus assumes the posture of a servant to demonstrate the necessary ethic of love and service as a subversive act.

In the words of Derickson and Radmacher, Jesus is showing what matters most to Him. We see the culmination of the earthly teaching ministry of Jesus during a meal of sacred remembering. It is noteworthy that the final instructions from Jesus to His disciples, about a new commandment to love one another in John thirteen, is in the context of sacred remembering of Passover and Communion. Jesus specifically tells them to love each other. The context of this command is a different community, called to have a different conversation and making a difference in the world. According to Derickson and Radmacher, the term "new" as used by Jesus in John thirteen is new in the sense of the depth of love. In other words, love in this context is not meant to be the absence of malice, but demonstrative acts.[23] Church Father and theologian Athanasius once said:

> In former times the blood of goats and the ashes of a calf were sprinkled on those who were unclean, but they were able to purify only the body. Now through the grace of God's Word, everyone is made abundantly clean. If we follow Christ closely we shall be allowed, even on this earth, to stand as it were on the threshold of the heavenly Jerusalem, and enjoy the contemplation of that everlasting feast, like the blessed apostles, who in following the Savior as their leader, showed, and still show, the way to obtain the same gift from God. They said: *"See, we have left all things and followed you."* We too follow the Lord, and we keep his feast by deeds rather than by words.[24]

Remembering Jesus is to reflect on His teachings and also His sacrificial death. In his missive to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul reports the first Communion instituted by Jesus, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you

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23. Derickson and Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker*, 81–83.

24. "Preparing for the Feast of Easter - Athanasius," Crossroads Initiative, Accessed December, 2020, https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/preparingforthefeastofeaster/Dr. Italy.

drink it, in remembrance of me. For as you eat this bread and eat this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." According to the text, Paul addressed division and the inappropriate ways the Corinthian believers were coming to the table. In his rebuke of the people, he acknowledges the diversity of gifts, but he also invokes a metaphor of being connected as one body. Paul says that obedience to Christ in this ritual of remembrance is an opportunity to examine self-centeredness and re-member the body. Sacred remembering is a call to re-member community. The examination to which Paul calls the church at Corinth is both individual and collective. He summons them to examine their toxic behavior and destructive communal ways. The Last Supper concludes with an imperative to remember. Implicit in the command to remember is also the need to re-member the body. Why does Jesus summon His disciples to sacred memory? Jesus knows that our tendency is to forget. It is in the institutionalization of Communion that Jesus affirms our need to remember and re-member. Ritual provides the space to examine our world.

What constitutes an act as a ritual is intent and commitment to the continuation of the act. One additional consideration that speaks to a part of our curiosity is how we are to pass down vital traditions to ensuing generations. Another moment of sacred memory in Israel's history is recorded with the intentional emphasis on communicating the history of God's miraculous intervention to their children. Inherent in the record of the crossing of the Jordan, the children of Israel are commanded to retrieve stones from the Jordan River to commemorate God's divine act on their behalf. The apparent rationale for the gathering of stones is for the children to have a visual sign stirring their sacred memory. Amid a milestone moment in the context of a divine imperative, Joshua establishes a

sacred memory for the children of Israel, "…that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'what do these stones mean to you?'" This text invites the community to establish a sacred moment with the intent of intergenerational re-telling of the story to discover an appropriate meaning for their context. Walter Brueggemann calls this act the process of *imaginative remembering.*[25] In the process of remembering, the concern is not the historical reportage but the space provided by the text to discover the acts of God in community. Since this is an imaginative process, successive generations are invited to creatively re-tell and interpret the story. The narrative assumes that children will have stones to see and a sign to interpret. It is the responsibility of the present generation to preserve the story for the benefit of their progeny. The question remains, how do we know we have effectively communicated sacred memory to our children? This narrative indicates that children raise the question of meaning. Joshua and the people were given the responsibility to place the stones so that their children would raise the question of importance. The rocks would lose meaning if there was no intentional space provided for intergenerational discussion.

While I seek to view sacred memory from a theological lens, this project's ultimate aim is to evaluate a twenty-six-year effort to honor our Ancestors and pass down a noble legacy. How do we make stones of remembrance accessible to our children while retaining the original intent for MAAFA? While truth is eternal, this query prompts the need to think creatively to be heard by new generations. The appeal to relevance is not a call to follow every fad, but to incarnate Christ in context. According to Sweet, to

25. Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 7–8.

organically incarnate Christ in a local context, three things are necessary: contextual intelligence, the intersection of location and timing, and organic and useful structures.[26] Sacred memory, in the context of communal remembrance, is concerned with the placement of the stones for the children. The question we seek to answer in this project is this: Is MAAFA, as a collective ritual of sacred memory, perpetual and inter-generational?

The explicit directions for stone placement from divinity are instructive. God commanded that each tribe be represented in the act of stone placement. Interestingly, no tribe is excluded but all are represented. Communal rituals of remembrance are designed to unite the community. For a ritual of remembrance to be effective, we must ask "who is missing from the community?" Sacred memory occurs when we are intentional about where we locate the stones. While this is not the Red Sea of Moses' era, this body of water is significant. The Jordan is a different body of water, but Israel follows the same God of the Exodus. The essence of sacred memory is to be reminded of God's acts in the past to ensure the people of divine presence in their present. The text says: "For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over (Joshua 4:23 NKJV). This ritual of remembrance serves to remind the people of a God who can repeat miracles. The drying up of the Jordan is to be interpreted through the lens of the drying up of the Red Sea. The rationale for this ritual of remembrance is found in the words God said to Joshua, "That this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?'" Stone placement is not the only

26. Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 202.

assignment for the people; there is the call to dialogue with an emerging generation. When the stone placement is intentional and epic, the children will raise questions. The divine directive was to shoulder the stones for placement. The stones were large enough that the men had to shoulder them. This story signifies to us that in sacred memory work we must be willing to do the heavy lifting of telling our story. As Sweet has suggested of missional, relational churches that seek to incarnate Christ in their culture, the presentation of our message must be "EPIC (experiential, participatory, image-rich, and connectional)."[27] This story of sacred remembering also speaks to a new generation shouldering the responsibility to communicate their story. Many of the pioneers who began MAAFA are no longer among us; it is up to a new generation to shoulder this worthy legacy.

The creation stories recorded in Genesis provide signs that inform us to steward the sacred responsibility of MAAFA creatively. Twenty-six years ago, the MAAFA commemoration was created *ex-nihilo* (out of nothing). It was the creative imagination of a previous generation who desired to address and contextualize our people's trauma. Today a new generation has the unique challenge of discerning a creation that has been handed down *ex materia* (out of existing material). As the earth was without form and void, and God transformed the world into something new, St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn is challenged to reflect on the direction of this ritual of remembrance. A.J. Swoboda, in *Subversive Sabbath,* offers the insight that the Sabbath was the culminating act of God in creation. Swoboda states, "The climax of creation is not humanity, as we have so arrogantly assumed. Rather, the day of rest is the climax,

27. Ibid, 35.

when creation all comes together and lives at peace and harmony with another."[28] What makes the Sabbath distinct in the seven days of creation is that it is called "holy." The culminating act of creation was the creation of a sacred space. Abraham Herschel, in his classic work *The Sabbath,* affirms this distinction: "It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *qadosh* is used for the first time: in the book of Genesis. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: 'And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.'"[29] Rituals of remembrance cause us to cease our routines, examine our patterns, and address our toxic tendencies. MAAFA is a Sabbath, a ritual of rest that exposes the gods that enslave us. The slavery I refer to here is not necessarily physical bondage but internalized racial oppression. As Swoboda points out, we need Sabbath to orient our lives toward the Creator. The term "orientation" in Latin, according to Swoboda, means to rise, as when the sun rises.[30] As we seek to emerge from the gloomy past of slavery, rituals of remembrance create the sacred spaces we need to arise from the shadows of shame and societal darkness cast upon us. I appreciate Swoboda's assertion that Sabbath is a subversive involvement. He says, "Sabbath is an orientation as well - an all-encompassing turning toward the creator God that changes everything in our lives. Sabbath is a kind of reorientation of our lives toward the hope and redemption of God's work."[31] In the creation story, the term Sabbath is not used; instead, we see the word "rest," which is not just a description but a prescription for humanity. When the

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28. A.J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018), 17.

29. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 9.

30. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 8-17.

31. Ibid, 9.

days of creation are in view, we see that humankind was created on the sixth day. Swoboda is correct when he says that mankind's first full day would have been a day of rest.[32] Sabbath observance is rooted in purpose and identity. If mankind's first full day was a day of rest, that suggests that humanity was given the space to reflect and appreciate the creative acts of God. Sabbath is a radical and subversive consideration when we remember that we live in a world driven by work and production. Sabbath observance aids our ability to see ourselves in light of God's creative acts. Remembering the Sabbath is of great import in the context of a culture that seeks to define worth by work and wealth. To define a person based on production is a perversion of the imago Dei. Our identity is reaffirmed in Sabbath observance. We were created for meaningful work, but we were not created for exploitative labor. In our rest, we remember who God is and who we are in the universe. We are more than what we do. MAAFA as sacred memory is a radical communal act whereby the community re-orients its collective existence back to the Creator. MAAFA as sacred memory is a Sabbath, as we are summoned in community to view God's creative, handiwork affirmed in a Black aesthetic. In a culture that discounts "blackness," it is the suspension of work, given a space of contemplation, and the intentional affirmation of our Black culture as good that deepens our appreciation for the creative acts of God.

My predecessor and MAAFA founder Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood has asserted that the Ten Commandments were given as a "Divine laxative for internalized oppression." Youngblood rightly understood God to have emancipated Israel's children from slavery and oppression, but the Exodus event continued in the giving of the

32. Ibid, 6–9.

Decalogue. Without the Exodus event and the Decalogue to reorient them to the God of their Ancestors, they would never indeed be free. It is noteworthy that the Ten Commandments begin with an introduction of God to the people, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exodus 20:1)." This divine re-introduction served to remind the children of Israel of God's identity and their collective uniqueness. In the Decalogue, the children of Israel are reminded that they are no longer under Egyptian oppression. Implicit in the statement that Israel's children are no longer under Egyptian oppression is that they are no longer slaves. When viewed as a ritual, the Sabbath assisted in shaping the unique identity of the children of Israel. In the Sabbath observance, two candles are often lit in the home, one candle for remembrance and the other for observance.[33] We note the need for both candles. Without our willingness to remember, we fail to observe what God has commanded. Swoboda reminds us that forgetting God's imperatives is not just when we ignore God's commands, but also when we alter or amend what God has commanded.[34] What is of interest here is how the Sabbath was given to the children of Israel to orient them to their new status as a redeemed people, and how the Sabbath was given to prevent their return to Egyptian ways.

As some have mused, there is a socio-economic implication for community formation within the imperative to keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath event for the children of Israel was a divine call out of Egypt and a call to live and establish a spiritual community that engaged in the practice of liberation. In the clear directives concerning

33. Ibid, 6.

34. Ibid, 8.

Jubilee, economic justice and social parity are lifted as values for the community. As communicated through the Sabbath, Israel was called to engage in a just and collective socio-economic system.[35] This socio-economic implication is a significant observation and has implications for MAAFA as a ritual that forms and informs community. As the Decalogue and specifically the Sabbath provided an alternative value system from what they experienced in Egyptian bondage, similarly MAAFA as a ritual of remembrance speaks to a collective consciousness that informs community.

One last consideration for Sabbath observance would be the healing possibilities inherent in following the divine imperative to remember the Sabbath. A recent Gallup poll published in an article in Axios titled, *Americans' Mental Health Takes a Huge Pandemic Hit,* indicates that Americans feel that their mental health has declined since the pandemic began. America has historically been poor at addressing mental health issues and is now inadequately addressing the fallout from this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. From the data presented in the article, lower household income groups report more mental health concerns.[36] Black churches will need to contextualize ministry to address historical trauma that is passed down generationally, compounded by the additional trauma inflicted by COVID-19. The plethora of losses and disorientation experienced during this pandemic is yet to be fully realized. The value of sacred remembrance rituals that foster space for lament will be vital to address our collective

35. Chris Spotts, "The Possibilities of the Hebrew Sabbath for Black Theology," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 33, no. 7 (Winter 2013), Accessed December, 2020, http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/5CE.2013.0050.

36. Catlin Owens, "Americans' Mental Health Takes a Huge Pandemic Hit," *Axios*, December, 2020, Accessed December 19, 2020, https://www.axios.com/americans-mental-health-pandemic-29c74866-6cc1-4f25-bba9-1c31713fe64f.html?utm_campaign=organic&utm_medium=socialshare&utm_source=email.

trauma. As MAAFA suggests, the millions of Africans lost in the so-called Transatlantic Slave Trade matter and must be memorialized. So too will we as a society need to memorialize those lost during this pandemic properly. For African-Americans, we are dealing with multiple pandemics. We are still giving voice to the historical pain of our past, coupled with COVID-19 that disproportionately affects Black and Brown communities. We need to ritualize healing modalities that will serve to address the collective trauma of our people. Perhaps this is why God gave the children of Israel the Passover as a ritual of remembrance to address their collective trauma. Jesus, as a Jew, observed the Passover and re-signed their ritual of remembrance, creating a ritual of remembrance. We would do well to remember the Sabbath, for in doing so, we affirm our identity and our purpose beyond a commodified existence.

It is curious that in the context of creation, God evaluates God's ongoing work throughout the process, stating continuously, "And God saw that it was good." "Divine perfection does not need an evaluative process, nor does God need a Sabbath, but perhaps this is a sign that we as finite creatures would do well to emulate."[37] Since God evaluates God's work in the creation of the world, we too must evaluate our ongoing work for God in the world. The next section of this work will seek to evaluate MAAFA as a ritual through the lens of the question, "Where do we go from here?" The witness of Scripture provides that we need rituals to ground and guide us. The question for our consideration as we consider the history and potency of MAAFA is, "In what form should MAAFA continue?" How will a new generation deepen a ritual that has served our congregation

37. Gary Simpson, class notes, August 2020, Drew Theological School.

well for twenty-six years? What are necessary pedagogical considerations needed to orient and re-orient our congregation in the ritual of remembrance called MAAFA?

CHAPTER FOUR

DRUNK WITH THE WINE OF THE WORLD, WE FORGET THEE: THE NECESSITY OF REMEMBRANCE IN AN AMNESIA PRONE WORLD

In the interest of collective healing, Rev. Youngblood taught St. Paul that "The Way Out is Back Through." According to Youngblood, the journey "back through" included a historic trek of memory back through our enslavement. Youngblood believed that to heal our collective trauma, we needed to remember a painful past. James Weldon Johnson's memorable image of an amnesia-induced intoxication is a way of speaking to the need to have a sobering process. Johnson speaks here of inebriation influenced by a world that promotes forgetfulness. The importance of sacred memory is to guard against what Walter Brueggemann identified as the "depreciation of memory and a ridicule of hope."[1] Memory is the sobering process that keeps us from staggering into the future. Brueggemann diagnoses the American church as being, "enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism." The American church's drink of choice is a co-opted alliance with the world that taints our witness and dulls our prophetic edge. Extreme drunkenness from alcohol can manifest in confusion, stupors, comas, and possible death. Given the mammoth concerns facing the African-American community, there is a need for Black churches to be sober-minded in order to rediscover, retain, and nurture a radical edge of prophetic sobriety. MAAFA is a healing journey meant to sober descendants of slavery in order to walk in prophetic posture in our world. As Brueggemann rightly points out, "The

1. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 1.

task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."[2]

We began our sobering journey in sacred memory in 1995 when St. Paul institutionalized an annual commemoration called MAAFA, revisiting the horrors of slavery. The commemoration has evolved to include an on-site museum featuring authentic slave artifacts and lectures from experts in slavery, trauma, and African and American history. A seaside ceremony, a culturally-rich baby dedication celebration, and an elders' permission service also serve to deepen the community's understanding of MAAFA. The centerpiece and capstone of the week of activities is *the MAAFA Suite… A Healing Journey*, a psychodrama appropriately described as transformational theatre. During my pastoral tenure, begun in 2009, some 50,000 people worldwide have witnessed MAAFA with over 2000 participants annually and an approximate annual operating budget of $100,000. We have noted over the past few years that a plateau of attendance and participation is occurring. Currently, ticket sales remain stagnant and the cast size is dwindling.

We no longer have much demand for our museum tours. Due to financial constraints, we have scaled back on lectures and workshops. We have a significant number of veteran participants, but new participants are becoming difficult to attract. One reason for the difficulties in recruitment is the four-month commitment to physical conditioning necessary for the intricate choreography and vocal work. Newer members do not exhibit the same dedication level because they do not fully understand the

2. Ibid, 3.

commemoration's purpose. Another consideration for lack of recruitment is that veteran leaders take strong ownership of the MAAFA and safeguard the psychodrama's legacy. There are members of our congregation who suggest that MAAFA is the legacy of my predecessor and that we should relinquish our stewardship. This Doctor of Ministry project has afforded the space and opportunity to assess MAAFA's viability for our future. I assembled a team to assist in the evaluative process. I selected the team members from leaders in our ministry's immediate context who have had various involvement levels with the commemoration.

This project has sought to create a process of orientation to introduce MAAFA to a new generation. A corollary to the orientation process is a re-orientation for our entire church community as our understanding of MAAFA has evolved. The scope of the project includes St. Paul Community Baptist Church of Brooklyn, including current and previous participants of the MAAFA commemoration. Our study was conducted in a 6-week period that began in February 2020. This chapter will provide our process, details of our plan, and the execution of our strategy for orientation/re-orientation of MAAFA as sacred memory.

To capture a holistic portrait of MAAFA's ministry and historical impact, qualitative and quantitative methodologies were utilized to ascertain an overall picture in order to answer the question, "Where do we go from here?" I assembled a diverse team to assist in the conceptualization of this project. Each member of the team was selected based on their unique historic contributions to the commemoration, knowledge of, and involvement with MAAFA in the past.

Advisory Team

REV. MIKAEL ELAM: Reverend Mikael Elam, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary where he received his M.Div. in Systematic Theology, has served as a principle teacher and minister to the MAAFA cast. Elam has an extensive background in remembrance rituals and advises the project on pedagogy and ritual creation.

REV. DEXTER HENDERSON: Reverend Dexter Henderson is an Associate Pastor at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. Reverend Henderson graduated and received his Master of Divinity degree from New York Theological Seminary in May 2016 and was ordained on October 15, 2017. Reverend Henderson's passion for social justice provides a unique perspective for the intersections of social justice and sacred memory.

REV. COREY LEWIS: Reverend Lewis served as a pastoral resident at St. Paul, where he was exposed to community organizing work through our affiliation with Metro IAF & EBC. Although Corey fulfilled his residency before completing the project, his insight as the newest member of our team provided a fresh lens in the conceptualization of the project.

ADELE ARMSTRONG: Adele Armstrong is a member of St. Paul Community Baptist Church. She has been part of the MAAFA Suite production team for several years as assistant stage manager, assistant to the director, and production stage manager and she has worked extensively with the MAAFA Commemoration executive director on related

projects. In 2016 she initiated a MAAFA think tank and implemented a new initiative involving the older congregants in a MAAFA ritual. Her dedication to the MAAFA is in synergy with her personal beliefs of knowing who we are as people of African descent, children of God, and moving towards healing.

MONICA BRITTON: Monica served as the Director of Communications and Special Projects at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. Monica served as the coordinator of our Sankofa Conference and was a crucial data analysis leader for this project.

GLORIA MILLER: Gloria Miller serves as Chairperson of the Board of Trustees at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, accepting the fiduciary responsibility of the board to act in the best interests of the church and working to keep the church mission as the focus while supporting the congregation, ministerial team, and staff.

REV. NICOLE DUNCAN-SMITH: Reverend Duncan-Smith currently serves as an Associate Pastor at the St. Paul Community Baptist Church. She has taught Christian Theology and Ethics as a teaching fellow at New York Theological Seminary. She has the distinction of being the first ordained female in St. Paul's ninety-three-year history.

We convened several planning meetings in preparation for the February-March project period. During our first planning session, our team unanimously decided to

suspend announcing plans for our twenty-sixth commemoration. It was thought that we should enter this process open to every possibility. This decision was ratified by the Board of Elders, the governing body of our congregation.

Twenty-six years ago, when Johnny Ray Youngblood conceived this laudable legacy, he met with trusted leaders and raised questions about a healing modality for Black people. Our meetings were reminiscent of that history as we imagined ways to re-orient and introduce a new generation to MAAFA. We resolved that the only way to determine if new members were interested in the commemoration was to go back to MAAFA's origins.

To determine a fiscal baseline, we decided to request a cost analysis of previous MAAFA commemorations to assess financial feasibility. We examined budget trends, ticket sales, facility expenses, and professional and administrative costs. This empirical data was used to assist in determining the overall viability of the church's financial investment into maintaining the institution of MAAFA, particularly in consideration of the overall budget of St. Paul.

To capture the momentum of Black History Month, we decided to do a three-night conference to teach our MAAFA history in February. Since our focus was to orient and re-orient our congregation to our work in sacred memory, we called the conference "Sankofa." Sankofa, meaning "go back and get it," describes the goal of our ninety minute presentations. Our team compiled a forty-page workbook/journal for conference attendees (see Appendix D). We focused nightly on the themes of trauma, testimony, and triumph. Theatrical presentations were aligned with the theme of each evening. We highlighted MAAFA as trauma, testimony, and triumph to indicate that these three

elements are essential to MAAFA. To encourage attendance, we included some of the most requested preachers in the history of MAAFA. Our invited preachers were: Rev. Frederick D. Haynes, III of the Friendship-West Baptist Church, Dallas, TX; Rev. Otis Moss III, of the Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago IL; and Rev. Alvin C. Bernstine of the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, Richmond, CA. The cast of the MAAFA Suite provided signature vignettes nightly to accompany the theme of each night. The conference was held from February 24-26, 2020, beginning at 7 p.m. nightly. The attendance averaged 300 attendees nightly.

Given the twenty-five years of material to select from for our curriculum, our team conducted a pre-survey to inform our presentations' content (see Appendix A). There were 526 responses to the commemoration questionnaire. We crafted a program based on the responses received from the pre-surveys. The surveys were used to inform instruction and curriculum. Given time and space limitations, we opted for plenary-styled presentations. I will detail the programming offered nightly and the rationale for each nightly theme here:

Sankofa Nightly Programming

Orientation and Re-orientation of Sacred Memory

Trauma – Night One

The first night provided framing of the conference and its implications for the future of MAAFA. Our theme for the evening was "MAAFA and trauma." The first presentation was a multi-media presentation conducted by the Pastor to give the congregation an overview of MAAFA as a historical event. We created a PowerPoint titled *The MAAFA: Our History. Our Heritage. Our Hope*. In the overview we presented the necessity of remembrance as well as details of the slave trade, the African village, the capture and journey, enslavement, its economic impact, and an overview of post-traumatic slave syndrome as espoused by DeGruy. The MAAFA cast provided vignettes that spoke to the trauma of slavery. Reverend Henderson helped us to connect the MAAFA and its aftermath to the real concern of environmental racism.

Lakai Worrell directed the dramatic offering for the night. Worrell has served as the production director and principal producer for the last five years, but Lakai has been with MAAFA as a choreographer from the inception. Lakai selected several scenes from past presentations that gave a picture of our Ancestors' brutal and inhumane treatment in the dehumanizing institution of chattel slavery. Most of the scenes chosen were dance and choreography-driven moments that emphasized the commodification of Black bodies. Additionally, one scene dramatized the trauma of being separated from familial connections, tribal affiliations, and our native culture, only to be tightly packed into death ships. With each presentation, there was an exhortation to remember our Ancestors.

Rev. Frederick D. Haynes, III voiced our people's pain as he preached from Psalm 126. His title was “Trauma, Testimony, and Triumph.” Rev. Haynes acknowledged the exceptional contributions of now-Bishop Johnny Ray Youngblood, who was present. Haynes prophetically and powerfully recognized Youngblood and celebrated St. Paul for the ministry's continued witness in the present. Demonstrably and eloquently, with tremendous insight, Rev. Haynes preached the three moves of our reflection and encouraged our congregation to continue the work of MAAFA. We estimate that 300 people were in attendance. During the evening, space was made for a Q&A also.

Testimony- Night Two

The second night included a teaching segment in which Rev. Mikael Elam taught on the healing properties of ritual. I assisted Rev. Elam as he spoke to each ritual that constitutes MAAFA as a larger ritual of sacred memory. Elam explained that the pouring of libation is a ritual performed in many African villages, preceding public and private events. Elam taught that the pouring of libation is unto God and in honor of our Ancestors. There was detailed instruction about building altars for reflection and centering. During MAAFA, teams construct altars as a ritual of remembrance (see Appendix D). Rev. Elam explained the communal aspect of the baby dedication service, which is a ritual of hope. Also, we taught the connection between Communion and MAAFA as an imperative to remember our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is Christ who invokes the command to remember.

The MAAFA Suite team provided a montage from prior years’ productions to create a powerful storyline. With monologues and a smaller cast, the message seemed to

make space for voices from our history that lived in silence through the dehumanizing institution of chattel slavery.

Rev. Otis Moss, III was our scheduled preacher but was forced to cancel on the night before based on the threat of a significant snowstorm. Rev. Alvin C. Bernstine preached both Tuesday and Wednesday nights as a result. Rev. Bernstine preached from I Corinthians 2:9-10 both nights. The focus of Tuesday night's sermon was on imaginative possibilities with God and in ministry; he urged us to continue to nurture a sense of imagination as we discerned the future of MAAFA. We estimate that approximately 300 people were present.

Triumph - Night Three

Our team decided that we should contextualize slavery and its aftermath on the final night. We used Ava DuVernay's movie *13th* to show that MAAFA is an ongoing reality. Based on the book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* by Michelle Alexander, the movie explores the intersections of race, justice, and mass incarceration.[3] We used a fifteen-minute excerpt showing the historical connections between mass incarceration and slavery.

We solicited testimonies from present and former cast members to share their experience with the commemoration. In the interest of intergenerational participation, there was a diversity of ages represented. It was our goal that our members would see and hear themselves in the presenters. One woman in her eighties spoke of a sense of vitality resulting from her work with MAAFA. What is powerful about her witness is her

3. Manohla Dargis, "Review: '13th,' the Journey From Shackles to Prison Bars," *New York Times*, September, 2016, Accessed December, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/30/movies/13th-review-ava-duvernay.html.

commitment to learning scripts and choreography. The cast affectionately calls her "mama" because of her stature and gentle ways. She was quoted that night as saying, "Don't worry about your age; just live your life."

There were seven testimonies in all. Each participant was a representation of the diversity of the cast and our congregation. Perhaps the most rewarding testimony came from a young lady who is now twenty-one and has been with MAAFA since she was five years old. She told a compelling story of how her identity and drive to meet her goals were influenced by MAAFA. She announced that her exposure to her Ancestors' suffering inspired her to pursue higher education, graduating from college with a degree in economics and ethics. We had three men and four women share their stories. This segment was an attempt to allow all congregants to see that they too can participate in MAAFA.

The Director, Mr. Lakai Worrell, gave a guided meditation. We dimmed the lights and we engaged in deep breathing and visualization exercises. We were attempting to create an atmosphere similar to some of the components of MAAFA training. With sixty-five cast members and thirty-five crew members making up the MAAFA company, recently we have encountered some struggles in recruiting new people for the cast. At the end of the conference, we made an appeal to people interested in joining the MAAFA ministry.

Our Board of Elders served communion on this final night of the conference. The final theatrical presentation for the week ended in celebratory fashion with the MAAFA ministry dancing to the "Midnight Cry," a hallmark selection since the inception of MAAFA. Rev. Bernstine concluded with a powerful message entitled, "The Power of

Spiritual Nurturing." In this iteration and interpretation of the same text preached the previous night, Bernstine focused our attention on creating a world beyond trauma. His main point was that, from the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament, the story is a response to trauma. Bernstine asserted that we need mature ministries that nurture a creative response to trauma. We estimate that 300-350 people were in attendance. We polled the congregation the last night and found that most attended all three nights.

Post-Sankofa Reflections

Our team compiled a post-survey to evaluate the conference and glean data that could help us discern the future of MAAFA (see Appendix B). There was a total of 263 respondents for this survey. Attendance for the conference was, on average, 275-300 nightly. We had an approximately 90% response rate for post-surveys. The findings of the study are as follows:

1. **Did you learn something new about the MAAFA ministry at SPCBC by attending the conference?** Our goal to orient and re-orient our congregation in the work of sacred memory was a pedagogical pursuit. We want to know that people have a deeper knowledge of MAAFA. Our first indicator that the conference may have been useful is that 92.4% of those who attended reported that they learned something new from attending the conference.
2. **Did you gain a new understanding of the relationship between the MAAFA Commemoration and present-day social issues?** Our team asked this question as we believe that understanding the aftermath of

MAAFA contextualizes our ministry. We were concerned that MAAFA was beginning to disconnect from our understanding of our identity as a social justice church. Over 96% said they believed they gained a new understanding of social justice and MAAFA's relationship.

3. **Which teaching presentation was your favorite?** We offered three plenary discussions: MAAFA 101; Rituals; Mass Incarceration, social justice, cast member testimony panel. The segment on mass incarceration, social justice, cast member testimonials was chosen by 42.6% of respondents as their favorite, followed by rituals which was chosen by 36.5%, while MAAFA 101 was chosen by 20.9%. We believe that the testimonials from a cross-section of MAAFA participants may have resonated deeply with our congregation. For some of our congregants, the teaching about rituals was new information and was very well-received. The response to this question suggests that our people are at different points of understanding about MAAFA, and we may need to think about a breakout session in the future.
4. **Which theatrical presentation evening was your favorite?** The majority of respondents, at 46.4%, selected Night Three - Triumph as their favorite presentation. Respondents were equally divided between the other two nights, Trauma and Testimony.
5. **Please rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 being not good – 5 being excellent):** MAAFA 101: 92.4% rated the quality of this presentation at 4 or 5.

6. **Please rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 being not good – 5 being excellent):** Rituals presented by Rev. Mikael Elam: 93.9% rated this presentation's quality at 4 or 5.
7. **Please rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 being not good – 5 being excellent):** Mass Incarceration, Social Justice & Testimonials from cast members: 93.9% rated the quality of this presentation at 4 or 5.
8. **Would you participate in another forum?** 94.3% answered in the affirmative.
9. **How often should the conference be held?** 80.6% said annually.
10. **Would you be interested in seeing any of the following at the upcoming Sankofa Conference? Interactive activities; Breakout groups; Learning MAAFA (Midnight Cry) choreography; Behind the scenes tour of MAAFA Suite; Educational forums?** The most significant response was for educational meetings. The other categories are equal percentages.
11. **Would you like to volunteer during the MAAFA Commemoration?** 54.8% responded with "yes"

    45% responded with "no."

    Additionally, 105 people responded with their contact information seeking more details about how to become a MAAFA volunteer.

The data gathered from the post-survey indicate that those who attended the conference are interested in continuing MAAFA at St. Paul. The consistent attendance throughout the week was a strong indicator that there is interest in a conversation about

MAAFA. What is clear is that there is a need to increase and deepen educational opportunities for our congregation to comprehend MAAFA fully. We still have a healthy mix of veteran and new leaders who could help translate MAAFA's teachings and traditions to newer members. In the past, the MAAFA ministry has fallen into syncretism that has often created confusion. Without a sound structure for MAAFA, with consistent curriculum development or structured instruction, the MAAFA has the potential of losing focus. The conference provided a platform for the curriculum to be vetted by our team, ensuring continuity with our message.

In my conversations with cast members, I learned that my presence as a pastor is essential to their process. Just the idea of bringing focus to the MAAFA ministry seemed to have a positive impact. At the beginning of our sojourn in sacred memory, St. Paul invested in world-renowned speakers to educate our congregation in our history. Utilizing team members to present benefitted the congregation as these are leaders that evolved in our context. Our group attempted to model shared ministry by having different voices speak every night. Using our own leaders to present, we saved resources and re-directed funds, making the conference fiscally viable. From the data and information received during the conference, I believe that there is a strong mandate from the congregation to provide Sankofa conferences in the future to deepen our understanding of MAAFA.

Initially, the Sankofa Conference started as a means to an end. Upon its inception, we learned that there is a need for a mid-year educational opportunity to prepare our church for MAAFA's missional purpose. Our process gave us insight into the need for more education and training about the commemoration. I believe the conference partially answered the question of where we go from here. From the feedback we received from

the conference, the Board of Elders consented to move forward with the twenty-sixth commemoration.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRUE TO OUR GOD, TRUE TO OUR NATIVE LAND: SACRED MEMORY IN THE CONTEXT OF A COMMUNITY BASED CHURCH

As a ritual of sacred remembering, MAAFA provides the historic compass that helps us contextualize our present and walk with hope into our future. It is our glance back at the past that informs our walk forward. When James Weldon Johnson closes his historical composition, he speaks of having integrity and devotion to the God of our Ancestors. This interpretation is shared by the editor and writers of the African American New Testament commentary, *True to Our Native Land*. Brian K. Blount, General Editor for the volume, reports that the title's selection speaks of having continuity with the Black scholarship that came before them. The goal for this culturally relevant interpretation of the scriptures is recorded in the introduction. The writers of the text state, "...as a labor of love, may we continue our struggle of interpreting the biblical texts in a way that is sensitive to our heritage, that is, True to our Native Land."[1] We, too, as a congregation, seek to build upon the tradition of sacred memory that began twenty-five years ago. While we strive to honor the tradition of MAAFA, how do we present our story in ways that the children will ask, "What is the meaning of these stones?" In a word, how do we remain *True to our God, True to our Native Land?*

Our Sankofa Conference affirmed our need to continue the work of MAAFA. After our internal evaluation of the conference, we believe we achieved our goal of

1. Brian K. Blount, ed., *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 6.

introducing MAAFA to a new generation and re-introducing MAAFA to our church community. However, we still had the challenge of financial sustainability for the twenty-five-year-old commemoration. There were no ticket sales in the first ten years of our commemoration; all events were free to the public. This strategy had helped to create a loyal base of support from within the congregation and the community. How could we convince a new generation to finance a ministry they were just discovering? We thought about external partnerships; however, there is the concern of keeping the integrity of MAAFA's meaning. What form should MAAFA take in light of our findings? How do we present the legacy of MAAFA in a fresh new way without diluting the message?

Orientation

Our Sankofa Conference was conceived and conducted as an orientation of sacred memory. We also framed the conference during a moment of orientation.[2] There is a sense in which Orientation, as described by Brueggemann, is a status quo existence. It is in the state of orientation that the world is predictable and well-ordered.[3] Orientation is the term I employ here to describe the season our church and world were in during the preparation and execution of the conference. We concluded the Sankofa Conference during the last week of February 2020. There was talk of a pandemic taking and changing lives on the other side of the world. We had no concept of the change and devastation that was coming to our world. While we had heard the word pandemic, we had no context for the reality. We saw and heard reports of the devastation occurring in Asia and Europe; we

2. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 19–23. The language of orientation comes from the theological work of Walter Brueggemann. Brueggemann categorizes the Psalms in three ways: orientation, disorientation, a new orientation.

3. Ibid, 47.

planned and lived as if we had some intrinsic divine immunity. For St. Paul and all of America, we lived in a state of well-ordered orientation. Harari, in *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, argues that global challenges will reveal how interdependent humankind is. Although there has been a recent revival of nationalism, global concerns will demand of our world a global response. This pandemic has illuminated the fact that what happens to one nation can impact another.[4] From this experience, I learned how insular we could be about our self-interests, overlooking others' needs. Our moment of orientation would end on March 15th when St. Paul Community Baptist Church would shutter our doors for on-site public worship, uncertain of our return.

Disorientation

According to Brueggemann, disorientation is a category of Psalms that describes moments of "incoherence and a loss of balance and unrelieved asymmetry."[5] I invoke this term as it best describes the events of our world currently. I recall the sense of uncertainty when I announced to our congregation on March 15th our decision to close our doors, but not our ministry. I'll never forget the feeling of grief and uncertainty that overwhelmed me at that moment. Many of our leaders had a difficult time accepting the announcement of our new normal. In disbelief, many of our leaders promoted the idea that the pandemic would be over in a few weeks.

In March, issues of institutional survival consumed our time. Plans for the twenty-sixth commemoration were delayed. Our team began to entertain the idea that MAAFA may not survive the pandemic. One of the greatest challenges in the pandemic has been to

4. Harari, *21 Lessons*, 109.

5. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 51.

evaluate priorities. Our economic position was stable, but we were concerned about the sustainability of the ministry. In our thirteenth MAAFA commemoration year, our church took a sabbatical year and returned the following year. In a new generation without the same history, a sabbatical would be difficult. I was concerned that if MAAFA did not survive the pandemic, we would not return to sacred memory as we knew it. Initially, we decided to gather as much footage from previous years as possible to create a video presentation for our online viewership. The film footage we were able to recover was not ideal. Our church had only produced one full-length video three years ago. According to our leaders, the video was not meant for a broader audience but to chronicle the presentation. We would have to salvage what we could to create a short presentation. Given COVID-19 restrictions, our cast and crew's assembly to film a new version on-site was unlikely. I thought that MAAFA might not survive this moment.

Simultaneous to these concerns, the world erupted in protest. Black Lives Matter was the mantra of the moment all over the globe. There was murmuring within the congregation concerning St. Paul's response to the killing of George Floyd. There were young adults in our fellowship who expressed that we should join the spontaneous marches occurring around our city. As a church steeped in social justice work, it has been our culture to engage in strategic organizing, to identify and articulate problems, and address issues. As a leader, I was concerned about mass marches possibly exposing our congregation to the virus. For some, the perception of our response was that we were too passive. Emerging generations will not accept a neutral position or perceived hypocrisy concerning race in America from Black churches. During the Civil Rights Movement, Black churches were the strategic hub of the movement. Black churches are no longer the

only voice in the struggle for racial parity. The question is, in what ways can the church lead by following? Many of the members of our congregation wanted to do something to express their outrage. We offered prayer and public support of our members as they personally aligned with non-violent marches throughout the City. In this moment we needed to reconsider the role of MAAFA. We could stream old footage from previous presentations, but the need to contextualize our remembrance ritual felt unavoidable.

During a virtual intergenerational fellowship, one of our congregation's young women made the statement, “I am not my Ancestors.” By this comment, she stated that her generation was unwilling to accept what previous generations endured. It was a MAAFA moment, as older church members engaged her in a conversation. This powerful leader was celebrated for her spirit to fight, but informed that she did so without a historical lens. She blamed the generations that came before, suggesting that we were too passive and that racism should have been eradicated by now. As we thought through the exchange together, it became clearer that we as a congregation have a responsibility to share our Ancestors' stories for emerging generations. The passionate and powerful young leader had one last charge against our generation; she insisted that we need to tell the story. It was evident that we needed to invoke sacred memory within the context of a George Floyd and Breanna Taylor moment. How could we take the familiar format and form of MAAFA and present it in a compelling way that would help contextualize our struggle and provide generational connectivity? We would need a new way of commemorating MAAFA. This meeting would be the moment to discern the signs of the times.

In *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secret to Missions on the Front Lines,* Leonard Sweet and Michael Adam Beck define contextual intelligence as "the ability to accurately diagnose a context and make the correct decisions regarding what to do."[6] It was around a virtual table that we call "Breakfast and Bible" that we heard from our young adults. This virtual table talk was instituted during the pandemic as an informal means of processing the sermon together. While this is a virtual space, participants are encouraged to eat their breakfast while discussing the message. This innovation took the place of fellowships no longer afforded after worship in the local diner. A large contingent of our membership pre-COVID would frequent local eateries to talk, fellowship, and sometimes even critique the morning's sermon. The idea to create this space came through conversation and cross-pollination with my peer-mentor, Sela Finau. Sela's project entitled *Following Jesus into the Community: Creating a Third Space and Inviting Neighbors to Dinner,* stirred my imagination to think about filling a space of fellowship created by the pandemic. We call it "Breakfast and Bible" because it is where we meet around a virtual table to eat and engage the biblical message. In *From Tablet to Table,* Sweet offers this analysis, "The table is the place where identity is born−the place where the story of our lives is retold, re-minded, and relived."[7] Around this virtual table, our community was affirmed, and the context was being illuminated. It was in the darkness and chaos of multiple pandemics that newness became possible. To hold on to what we knew would have made us irrelevant to a generation. We needed to

6. Leonard I. Sweet and Michael Beck, *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secret to Mission on The Front Lines* (Oviedo, FL: HigherLife Development Services, 2020), 15–22.

7. Leonard I. Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 3.

contextualize the MAAFA for a COVID-19 world. This COVID-19 world has introduced us to new vocabulary and new experiences such as pandemic, social distancing, sheltering-in-place, and remote learning. How is MAAFA relevant in this new reality? How do we contextualize our witness for Christ?

A New Orientation

When there emerges in the present life a new possibility that is inexplicable, neither derived nor extrapolated but wrought by the inscrutable goodness of God.[8]

The original scope of my project was an orientation/reorientation of MAAFA. We wanted to discern the future of MAAFA at St. Paul. During our pre-COVID inquiry, our congregation messaged the necessity for MAAFA as sacred memory. Although our strategy to determine the direction of the MAAFA was not a comprehensive approach, we confidently ascertained the congregation's support to continue the legacy of MAAFA. Our moment of disorientation provided another lens to evaluate the necessity of the MAAFA in our context. Intergenerational conversations, coupled with the timing of the killing of George Floyd, created a discussion about a new model.

In March of 2020, life changed for our congregation and the world. What is certain is that life has changed in the short-term but also has changed forever in many ways. Many church leaders lead in a moment of disorientation, believing that the church will return to what they knew. All credible indications and predictions for the future of ministry are that churches will remain online. Churches' online presence will remain the "front door" for visitors and member engagement. Experts predict that there will be a

8. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 124.

hybrid of in-person and online ministry.[9] What newness can come from this moment of disorientation that shapes the future of MAAFA?

In conversation with our production team, we had several factors to process. MAAFA has always been an on-site, sanctuary-driven venue. Given the reality of COVID-19 restrictions, there were limits for on-site occupancy imposed by the CDC. As a result, our church was and currently is closed for in-person worship and in-person activities. We would need particular expertise to keep our cast, company, and crew safe. For twenty-five years, MAAFA has traditionally been observed during the third week in September. We began conversations about the next steps in Mid-July, which meant that we were severely behind in our preparation. Before the pandemic, we would have started our process in May. Historically, maintaining a strict schedule has been essential to ensuring cast members' optimal mental and physical conditioning; a four-month rigorous physical training regimen is ideal.

In the end, we decided to conduct the commemoration of MAAFA strictly online. Initially we were apprehensive of an online presence because we did not want our ministry misunderstood. One critique from some Christians that have Afrophobia (fear of all things African) is that MAAFA is not Christian. St. Paul has embraced our African roots and embraced a Black aesthetic. For some Black churches, St. Paul's identity is considered "too Black." Our cultural distinctions can be mischaracterized by the misinformed. St. Paul is passionate about our Christian witness. We choose to incarnate

9. Sweet and Beck, *Contextual Intelligence*, 24. Sweet and Beck point out, "One global lockdown did to the resistance to installing an internet front door in every church what two decades of books, lectures, and seminars failed to do."

Christ from the cultural lens of being "Unashamedly Black, Unapologetically Christian."[10]

Additionally, some of our membership opined that the St. Paul sanctuary was the "holy ground" that kept the MAAFA sacred. Rev. Youngblood has always been revered for his pioneering work with MAAFA. Youngblood taught that MAAFA should remain connected to the witness of Black churches. A change of venue, other than another church facility, could be viewed as a step toward losing the sacredness of the commemoration. COVID-19 restrictions ensured that there would not be an indoor, on-site presentation.

With an online approach to MAAFA, we decided not to monetize our events. Historically, to maintain financial sustainability, we have sold tickets. Returning to our origin, we decided not to charge. This decision was an act of faith. Our church income was stable, but with the uncertainty of the pandemic, finances were a concern. The Sankofa Conference revealed the congregation's desire to deepen our knowledge of slavery, institutional racism, and sacred memory. Historically, the cost incurred for MAAFA speakers could top $20,000. The MAAFA is a unique preaching venue. Commemoration speakers are some of the leading voices in our world on trauma, race, slavery, and healing work. St. Paul has hosted scholars such as Cornel West, Ph.D., Joy-DeGruy, Ph.D., Edwin Nichols, Ph.D., Naim-Akbar, Ph.D., and many other highly sought-after speakers. To defray costs, we attempted to identify grants that would supplement expenses. We only realized a modest grant, hardly enough to sustain the

10. Lee Hall-Perkins and Jana Hall-Perkins, *Unashamedly Black, Unapologetically Christian* (Nashville: FaithFirst Press, 2016), 1.

sizable budget necessary to compensate speakers. There are additional expenses when hosting speakers outside of the tristate area; airfare, lodging, meals, and ground transportation are expensive. A solution to the dilemma caused by speaker costs was the use of technology. This solution eliminated much of the costs that would make MAAFA speakers cost-prohibitive.

We have been curious for a while about possible strategic partnerships that could align with our values. In May 2020, Rev. Adolphus Lacey of the Bethany Baptist Church of Brooklyn convened a meeting of pastors and scholars to organize a response to Donald Trump's proposed disrespect for the Juneteenth commemoration planned in Tulsa, OK. The nine-member group composed "A Theological Statement from the Black Church on Juneteenth." The well-crafted multi-page document that was written served as a repudiation of White supremacy and anti-Black violence. The group's collective response would become the first of several organized actions as a prophetic witness from Black churches.[11] From the revolutionary work and witness of the group emerged a collective identity called *The Black Church Collective*. The goal of the collective is to "think, believe, and build Black." This diverse collective represents some of the finest scholars and pastors of the Church today. The Black Church Collective would become the first strategic partner for MAAFA since the inception of my tenure as Lead Pastor. The pastors and scholars of the collective provided preaching throughout the entire month of September. There was a substantial cost saving as each speaker participated virtually every Wednesday in September and during MAAFA week proper. Our team designated

11. The Black Church Collective, "A Theological Statement from the Black Church on Juneteenth," June, 2020, Accessed December, 2020, http://blackchurchcollective.org.

me as the MAAFA preacher for MAAFA Sunday. In the history of the commemoration, the twenty-sixth commemoration was my first opportunity to preach the MAAFA.

The team thought that my voice needed to be heard in the commemoration context, believing that pastoral influence would be necessary to renew sacred memory in our context. The theme for MAAFA 2020, "I Am My Ancestors," was extrapolated from our virtual intergenerational breakfast table. The scriptural base for the month was the Epistle to the Hebrews. We chose this based on the context of the epistle. James Earl Massey, in his commentary, points out that the epistle has a strong Christological emphasis. The writer of Hebrews encourages their audience to remain faithful to their profession of faith and Christ, who is our Great High Priest and the author and finisher of our faith.[12] Our ministers assisted our team by creating the weekly preaching themes from the prescribed text. We wanted a Christocentric grounding for MAAFA to establish a biblical base for the commemoration.

In preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist online, The Board of Elders of the St. Paul Community Baptist Church prepared "communion kits." Each package contained communion supplies, devotionals, and anointing oil with biblical instructions. The Board distributed over 1,500 kits to our congregation's families. The Elders wanted to ensure that members were able to participate from home with the larger Church.

Our team needed to decide within days what form MAAFA was going to take. By early summer, state regulations for in-person worship were modified, allowing many more attendees; however, we elected to remain closed to in-person services. Our team investigated the possibilities of online rituals. The data we collected suggested that we

12. Blount, *True to Our Native Land*, 444–60.

were successful in emphasizing the importance of ritual. We believed that our members would participate in their homes. Traditionally, there are four collective rituals within the context of MAAFA: the Permission service, the Baby Dedication service, the MAAFA Suite… A Healing Journey, and the Seaside send-off. Each of these rituals changed as a result of COVID-19 (See Appendix C for treatment of each ritual). The most notable change is that we conducted all four rituals online. All of our rituals were originally created by our fellowship and for an intended purpose. Over the years, there have been minor enhancements to some rituals, but no significant changes occurred until COVID-19. Although our rituals have not significantly changed, it does not suggest that we cannot change rituals in the community's healing interest.[13]

Analysis indicates that the virtual MAAFA successfully addressed the needs of our congregation. The cost of the virtual MAAFA commemoration was significantly less than the conventional pre-COVID presentation. The viewership of the virtual commemoration was approximately 25,000 viewers. We estimate that MAAFA, when experienced in our sanctuary, accommodates 2,000 people. The implication is that a virtual commemoration provides a more significant opportunity to expose the MAAFA to the world.

The primary drawback to a virtual presentation is the loss of human touch. I would argue that we were still able to create a sense of community in spite of the virtual format. Members of our leadership team have been reviewing all MAAFA comments and the vast majority are significantly positive. Although we did not directly monetize the

13. Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom*, 36. Somé posits that communities can exercise agency to create, modify or change rituals to the benefit of the community.

MAAFA this year, we did realize a stable giving stream that was helpful. Lastly, we now have a presentation that lives in perpetuity on our social media platforms. There are watch parties still happening and individuals still viewing our events. The conventional method of sharing MAAFA only allowed for a one-week shelf life. By every measure, MAAFA 2020 was successful.

Implications for the Future

Through this process, we learned that MAAFA is not limited to a single format. Sacred memory does not have to be conducted in our sanctuary to be holy. When our team traveled to Ghana in 2019 for the "year of return," we met with the PANAFEST foundation. PANAFEST is a bi-annual diasporic festival that celebrates the African culture globally.[14] Our team presented for their "reverential night." James Smalls Jr. challenged our contingent to ensure that MAAFA becomes a part of all Africans' lexicon throughout the Diaspora.

This year is the new beginning of MAAFA. There is a sense that MAAFA is becoming missional. We are strategizing to create a possible movie production team that will allow us to make high-quality presentations. There are requests for St. Paul to produce a new curriculum for MAAFA for churches interested in sacred memory. There is the thought that MAAFA could have a similar impact as Kwanza. As we discovered a new way to commemorate MAAFA in our homes, there is a sense that we are bringing sacred memory to where it is most needed. We see MAAFA entering spaces, through technology, that we never imagined.

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14. "Pan African Historical Festival," PANAFEST, PANAFEST Foundation, 2020, Accessed December, 2020, https://panafestghana.org/index.php.

Our Sankofa Conference will become the "academy" for learning and teaching our sacred story. We envision a writer's guild, director's workshop, and trainings for pastors in sacred memory. Our partnership with The Black Church Collective has the potential to deepen our reach through different networks allowing for the mission of MAAFA to expand. We want to continue to connect sacred memory to the work of social justice. We envision study tours, post-COVID, to historic locations to expose our children, and all people, to what is possible today. Lastly, we want to develop our YouTube channel for on-demand MAAFA lectures and programming.

The Moment of Truth

St. Paul is a local congregation with a global calling to teach sacred memory throughout the Diaspora. COVID-19 was a moment of disorientation that cast us into the abyss of chaos. From the challenges imposed by a pandemic, our church adapted and adopted a new way to convey our story. Our congregation discovered that our lack of imagination only hindered us. When we began this study, our only consideration was the fate of our commemoration. We wondered if it was realistic to continue such an expensive involvement. Ultimately, an additional question arose: How do we tell our story when the State has shuttered our venue?

In the midst of this disorientation we learned how to be the Church without the building. We learned that we could change methods while keeping the integrity and intended purpose of MAAFA. The last words of the poem-turned-hymn and anthem have taken on new meaning for our fellowship, "True to our God, True to our Native Land." This unprecedented time in global history has provided a context for testing our collective truth as a congregation. If MAAFA did not survive the pandemic, the

commemoration would likely have ceased. I believe that our congregation has grown to realize a deeper connection with our Ancestors. This moment has taught us as a church community that we are resilient and resourceful. Without this moment of disorientation and our willingness to imagine something new, we would possibly have overlooked that we were more committed to the commemoration's format than to the purpose of MAAFA.

My Personal Truth

Rev. Gary Simpson, D.Min., my mentor in this process, challenged that if my project was to be an authentic pursuit, I would need to suspend my judgment about the future of MAAFA. Contemplating the fate of a "sacred cow" such as MAAFA would take courage. There was the inherent risk of being perceived as critiquing the Youngblood era. Transitioning from the "second seat" to a Lead Pastor's position was difficult in my pastoral context. There are members of our congregation who believe I should retain every initiative from my predecessor's tenure. What adds to the idea that I should continue the Youngblood era is my participation in that era as his Assistant. When I served as an assistant, I served with loyalty and fidelity. I believed that I was to carry out every initiative he began. Now at the helm, at times I struggle with claiming my leadership space, remembering that I am no longer the Assistant but the Pastor. During my tenure I have initiated some changes, most being enhancements to the building. I also began my leadership with a difficult decision to close the St. Paul Christian School and sponsor a charter school for boys. I did not realize how some of the wounds from previous internal struggles impacted me. To authentically reflect on the role of MAAFA was no easy task.

As I have attempted to grow into my pastoral identity, I have experienced congregational opposition attempting to thwart progress. Perhaps the most significant challenge within my context has come from within myself. One of the loudest dissenting voices has been my own. The self-talk of self-doubt and the need to prove my leadership has created inertia and ministry drag. Additionally, it has been a challenge to define ministry success because there are many competing views within the congregation. While I shared ministry for fifteen years with my predecessor and have learned much through his work, I am not an extension of him. My calling, personality, and gifting are unique. Not only have I had to accept my uniqueness, but I have also needed to accept that others may not.

Just a few months before the pandemic became our new reality, Rev. James Forbes Jr. preached at our church on the occasion of my pastoral anniversary. At the end of his sermon, he asked me to stand and to publicly and demonstratively declare the words, "I am the Pastor." After a decade of having the title, it was challenging to say with conviction what was requested. Upon reflection, the belief that I was in some way competing with the legacy of an icon had been an imposing and self-limiting thought. I would never attempt or want to tarnish the work of a man that I served with and respect so deeply. This preoccupying thought kept me from claiming my own leadership space. Ultimately, I was leading from a place of fear and not freedom.

I began this project with the question, "where do we go from here?" The question was framed around the future of MAAFA, a ritual of sacred memory. I now know the question of discernment was equally about my own growth. I needed to grow to accept my uniqueness without apology. To learn and lean into the tension of honoring a man I

respect without sacrificing my identity. The fear of public critique and disapproval only proved to diminish my prophetic fire. To grow from a flicker to a flame would mean to embrace my journey and honor my call.

MAAFA serves our institution because the power of memory can ground and guide you along the journey. Likewise, as a leader, and more importantly, a person, I have memories that guide me in the fulfillment of my vocation. The memory of a grandmother who introduced me to her God speaks to me as poignantly as the witness of the Hebrews 11 hall of faith. She taught me what faith looks like in the crucible of pain and suffering. From her lived witness, my measurement of success in ministry is raised beyond the usual predictors of institutional growth (e.g., finances, attendance, and notoriety). Grandma's pedagogical approach for passing down her faith to the next generation was to call her family to be with her while facing the certainty of death. Success in ministry is to be with others, to remain faithful to the call, and to express that call with integrity. By God's grace and the power of sacred memory, I embrace the lessons taught from the bedside of a godly grandmother. I am enough.

I have intentionally organized my dissertation in the form of a hymn. Hymns are works of praise to God. The purpose of a hymn speaks to the highest endeavor for our lives. Jesus, in the rabbinical tradition, taught his disciples by raising questions more than supplying answers.[15] In sacred memory of John Mableton, my first pastor, I acknowledge that his question concerning ministry context and call served to assist me while conducting this project. As we surveyed the congregation concerning MAAFA, we learned that newer members were not aware of our ministry of sacred memory. Some

15. Martin B. Copenhaver, *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), 15.

veteran leaders had varying degrees of understanding about MAAFA. The Sankofa Conference served to bring our church into dialogue about our congregational identity. Over the last decade, our membership has grown numerically and there is a significant mix of new and veteran leaders that make up our membership. I had been leading the congregation without recognizing that a substantial number of members accept my leadership. What is clear is that attempting to quantify congregational approval is a de-energizing pursuit. What fed my prophetic fire was the deepening of my connection to the congregation during the pandemic. I experienced connectivity with our congregation that strengthened me in the uncertainties of a pandemic. Rev. Simpson once said, "prophetic ministry is more than proclamation; it is an act." The disruption and disorientation of our world through a pandemic was the moment that summoned me to act.

We were able to complete the Sankofa Conference two weeks before COVID-19 restrictions were imposed. As of this writing, it has been approximately one year since we have gathered in-person for worship. The Sankofa Conference revealed the desire of the congregation to continue in the work of sacred memory into our future. This project's scope was to raise the question of where we go from here, but there was no conversation about direction. We resolved to retain MAAFA, but we did not discuss the form in which MAAFA would continue.

As I learned new ways of creating spaces for our congregation to be together virtually, our connection deepened. Members commented that they felt more connected during this moment than before the pandemic. A leader within our community quoted Michelle Obama when she said, "Being president doesn't change who you are; it reveals

who you are."[16] She explained that my title did not make me who I am, but this crisis has revealed to the congregation who I am. She furthered explained that the impact of the pandemic created a space that demanded a leader to act.

In pursuit of the central query, "where do we go from here?" I have attempted to articulate the MAAFA as a historical event in human history. Based on the St. Paul Community Baptist Church's prophetic courage, MAAFA is also a commemoration of sacred memory. As the term MAAFA conveys calamity and chaos, there is a sense in which COVID-19 has devastated our world. By invoking sacred memory, our church community has been able to glean from our Ancestors' witness to ground us in the most uncertain time of our own lives. I, too, invoke the memory of those who have spoken words that have never left me. If the reflections of an observant member are accurate, the pandemic revealed who we are. My predecessor's words spoken to me twenty-six years ago are equally valid, "Brawley, you just needed exposure." In other words, he saw abilities in me that I did not see in myself. I now know that I can embrace what this moment has revealed about who I am.

The outcomes of this project have exceeded my expectations. I believe the St. Paul Community Baptist Church has a renewed commitment to sacred memory. I have been able to reconcile and reconnect with memories that have empowered me to move forward. When 2020 began, the vogue saying was, "the year of clarity." I discovered clarity at the intersection of my pastoral identity and prophetic fire. Without clarity of institutional and personal context, there is the danger of emulating others' work and not

16. Liz Halloran, "Michelle Obama: 'Being President ... Reveals Who You Are,'" NPR, September 5, 2012, https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2012/09/04/160581747/michelle-obama-being-president-reveals-who-you-are.

living in one's call. I desired to expand our church's work; I now have a healthier metric. While we walk by faith and do not possess the certainty of all things, I have learned to live in the tension of clarifying questions. If we do not raise contextual questions ("Who and where am I?") we may not rightly discern our direction.

I can say with conviction; I am a pastor.

APPENDIX A

PRE-SURVEY INSTRUMENT

What is MAAFA? We posed this because we were curious about whether our membership, from Sunday morning worship services, is informed about MAAFA.

What is your age? We were seeking to understand the demographics of MAAFA

Are you a member of St. Paul Community Baptist Church? As MAAFA has been a vehicle for visitors and guests, we sought to identify members and non-members.

Have you ever volunteered during the MAAFA commemoration? The goal of this inquiry was to introduce the idea of volunteerism through the MAAFA ministry.

Gender? We sought to understand if there was equal understanding of and representation within MAAFA among men and women, proportional to our congregational makeup.

Have you ever experienced the following MAAFA commemoration activities?

- MAAFA museum tours
- Baby Dedication Ceremony
- MAAFA speakers
- The MAAFA Suite… A Healing Journey presentation
- Seaside send-off

(We posed this question to determine the appeal of activities typically offered during the commemoration.)

APPENDIX B

POST-SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Did you learn something new about the MAAFA ministry at SPCBC by attending the Sankofa Conference?

Did you gain a new understanding of the relationship between the MAAFA Commemoration and present day social issues?

Please rate on a scale of 1-5: Rituals Presentation by Rev. Mikael Elam

Please rate on a scale of 1-5: Mass incarceration, social justice and testimonials from cast members

Which theatrical presentation evening was your favorite?

Please rate on a scale of 1-5: MAAFA 101 PowerPoint Presentation

Which was the most impactful experience for you?

Would you participate in another Sankofa Conference?

If yes, how often should the conference be held?

Would you be interested in seeing any of the following at an upcoming Sankofa Conference?

Would you like to volunteer during the MAAFA Commemoration?

Gender?

Are you a member of St. Paul Community Baptist Church?

APPENDIX C

MAAFA Rituals

The Permission Service (The Ritual of Order and Respect)

The permission service was a later addition to the rituals of MAAFA. The MAAFA commemoration team created this sacred space to reorder and re-member the community. Creating and maintaining an ethos of order begins with respecting our seniors. As Somé suggests, Elders are essential to the stability of the community. Elders are the repositories of the history and traditions of the people. In the context of MAAFA, we seek the permission of our Elders before beginning our week-long commemoration.

Rev. Elam serves as the minister of MAAFA. Elam and the team relate with our seniors to collect their stories. Many of our seniors report that there has been shame from the abuse they have experienced. A result of their silence is our community being left bereft of sacred memory. We invite our seniors to share in dignity. There is a ritual for members who are to be recognized for the first time as Elders of the village. As a community, we affirm the value of graceful aging. This is a counter-cultural ritual that directs us to embrace the aging process. Through this ritual, we reject the powerful and seductive capitalistic mechanisms of popular culture that disdain the beauty of graceful aging. Psalm 92 says, “Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age. They shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the LORD is upright…” The Elders of the village bear fruit when planted in the house of the Lord, bearing fruit and sharing their stories.

We streamed this essential opening ritual - our fellowship purchased tablets for seniors and provided instructions for use. We did not leave any seniors out. Everyone

participated. The gesture of buying the tablet encouraged our seniors to learn technology. Representation of our seniors was physically present to grant our church permission to begin the MAAFA formally. This symbolic act is the way our community says to seniors, "we see you."

Baby Dedication (The Ritual of Hope)

The baby dedication service has been a staple of our commemoration from the beginning of MAAFA. Traditionally, this ritual occurs in our African motif-strewn sanctuary. This year we decorated the building per usual, but only admitted the families of the babies who were to be dedicated. We strictly followed the COVID-19 requirements for the dedication service. We attempted a virtual, international baby dedication service, but had limited responses. Usually, only participants in the ceremony attend the baby dedication service. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we streamed the ceremony so extended family and friends could participate.

The Dogon tribe of Burkina Faso, Africa, welcomes children into the community as a special event. Somé describes, "In order for the community to function in a way that encourages the blossoming of its individuals, indigenous people make every birth a village event, where the newborn is welcomed by all." Somé points out here that a community's health is partly dependent on how children are received into the community.

The MAAFA Suite… A Healing Journey (Ritual of Remembrance)

The MAAFA Suite was the most significant challenge during COVID-19. We decided to produce the MAAFA Suite in a movie format[1]. Before COVID-19, no one on

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8ukI1zoPwQ

our team knew how to create full-length movies. With six weeks to write, cast, and produce, we would need additional support. We retained the services of a professional movie producer to support our team. The initial challenge was to write a working script to submit to film directors for bids. Lakai Worrell wrote a full script in a matter of weeks. This iteration was possible because we had twenty-five years of material to inform our process. Our process mirrored the first chapter of Genesis, wherein God takes the existing material of creation, and from the darkness, gives shape and form to a new world. Biblical scholarship calls this creation *ex materia* or from existing material.

There were elements of previous work that informed the new script, but there were also significant differences. What made this script unique and different was the length. We learned that there is a considerable difference between a stage play script and a movie script. Theatre and film are different media, but with the same objective of storytelling. Lakai's experience was in theatre, so the choice of a seasoned director of film was paramount. After interviewing several companies, we chose Shu Hirayama, a Japanese film director. Shu is a master story-teller with an eye for angles and creative views. The other difference in this script is the context. We decided to contextualize the movie in the George Floyd narrative.

The main characters of the film are a boy called Isaiah and his grandmother. The story begins as the camera scans the grandmother's kitchen, pausing at a clock, reflecting the time as 8:46. The clock was a metaphor to direct our attention to the senseless killing of George Floyd. The opening scene features Isaiah and his grandmother, who is keeping him while Isaiah's mother, an essential worker, is detained at her employ. In the intergenerational conversation between Isaiah and his grandmother, Isaiah is free to

inquire about the killing of George Floyd. The genius of Worrell is in uniting the two most vulnerable populations in the African American community. Lakai gives voice to their confusion and pain. From the framework of intergenerational dialogue, grandma, who represents the elders of the village, conveys MAAFA to Isaiah, who represents a new generation.

We still had the issue of securing an appropriate venue to film the MAAFA. COVID-19 restrictions placed significant limitations as to where we could film. As a result of the imposed limits, we decided to identify local outdoor venues to maximize our cast's safety. We utilized local historical sites, parking lots, and parks for rehearsals and filming. The choice of outdoor venues added texture and authenticity to the presentation. We found a local commercial warehouse that eerily resembled slave dungeons located on West Africa's coastline. We received permission from local elected officials to use the Black Lives Matter street mural to film a tribute scene to police brutality victims. The mural scene was also an opportunity to connect our Ancestors' story, who were victims of the great suffering. The limits of COVID-19 created the space for our team to imagine something new.

We maintained a one-week filming schedule. The rationale for filming in one week was that it would limit the cast and company’s exposure to COVID-19 as well as creating cost-savings and helping with deadline delivery. Our production team completed the project on time and within budget. On average, the cost of the MAAFA Suite pre-COVID was approximately $100,000 for a four-night presentation. The production cost for the movie version of MAAFA was 40% less because we filmed within a five-day window.

The MAAFA museum is another perennial offering for people who visit our campus during the MAAFA season. COVID-19 restrictions curtailed the possibility of an on-site museum. We created what we called a “walking museum” to supplement. With our in-house video team's technical support, we interviewed Assemblyman Charles Barron, who told the East New York African Burial site story (see chapter 2). As a pre-movie presentation, we interviewed Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, who told the Lower Manhattan African Burial site story. The on-site museum usually has less than 500 visitors; the “walking museum” had over 5,000 viewers. There was no expense incurred in producing the “walking museum.”

Seaside Closing Ceremony (The Ritual of Release)

The final ritual is the seaside service. The function of this ritual is to bring to completion our week of remembrance. This ritual is similar to an internment or burial service. The Elders call the names of those who died during the year. Participants in the ceremony are requested to wear all-white. The Eucharist is served at the seaside to emphasize that we are a community faith called to remember and be re-membered. We distribute rose petals to attendees to release in the sea as they remember deceased loved ones. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we were unable to secure a permit for a large crowd. However, we believed the seaside experience was particularly necessary in the midst of the death toll of COVID-19. The MAAFA experience opens wounds and reveals unresolved trauma. In addition to the large numbers of deaths in New York, many of our members who lost loved ones in the year leading to MAAFA 2020 were not able to have complete eulogistic services due to health and safety restrictions. In order to make sacred

space, we used a small team of Elders, leaders, and liturgical dancers to pre-record a seaside ceremony due to COVID-19 regulations. We received feedback from members that hearing the names of deceased loved ones brought healing and comfort.

MAAFA, the Movie has been viewed over 10,000 times on our YouTube channel. The data indicate a substantial increase in viewership across all social media platforms. In comparison, the on-site MAAFA commemoration only accommodates a maximum of 800 attendees. Utilizing our social media platforms, we can serve an unlimited amount of users. The cost differential of on-site MAAFA commemoration vs. online MAAFA is substantial. We estimate that *MAAFA, the Movie* cost approximately 60% of our traditional MAAFA on-site model. There was no facility expense for the film or charge for the use of the sanctuary for the conventional model of MAAFA. When we have used the church sanctuary for the four-month MAAFA preparation period traditionally, utilities have increase by approximately 50% over that period. The traditional method of commemorating MAAFA has a loyal ticket base that defrays costs, but we were not able to monetize our movie.

Analysis indicates that the virtual MAAFA successfully addressed the needs of our congregation. The cost of the virtual MAAFA commemoration was significantly less than the conventional pre-COVID presentation. The viewership of the virtual commemoration was approximately 25,000 viewers. We estimate that MAAFA, when experienced in our sanctuary, accommodates 2,000 people. The implication is that a virtual commemoration provides a more significant opportunity to expose the MAAFA to the world.

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APPENDIX D

Social and New Media Engagement Overview

Table D1 - MAAFA Sunday (09/27/2020) Social Media Engagement

Real-Time Streams	
YouTube:	**Facebook:**
151	**568**

Table D2 - MAAFA Season Webpage (SPCBC.COM) Traffic

Total Number of Visits (Incl. Visits By Same Visitor):
4,799 (+51%)
Total Number of Unique Visitors to Site:
2,606 (+34%)

MAAFA Suite Week (9/14/2020 - 09/20/2020) Instagram Engagement

Total IG followers: 1,786 (73% from NY)

-No. of unique accounts that have seen any page posts reaches 679 (+26% over previous week)

-Total content interaction for week: 282 (+68% over previous week)

-No. of users who have visited IG profile increases 98% over previous week

-No. of users who have clicked website link in IG bio (website taps) increases 459% over previous week

-No. of times all posts have been seen (impressions) increases 63% over previous week

(Instagram) Posts Snapshots

Table D3

MAAFA: The Movie (Premiered 09/25)	
82 likes	**7 comments**
47 shares	**6 saves**

Table D4

MAAFA Baby Dedication	
33 likes	**1 comment**
4 shares	**1 save**

MAAFA Season (08/31/2020 – 09/27/2020) YouTube Engagement

Total Current Subscribers: 1,340

- From 08/31 - 09/27, the channel grew by 416 subscribers.

-Out of the 416 new subscribers, 329 were added during the week of 9/21 - 9/27

Week of 09/21/2020 - 09/27/2020 Total Video Engagement (Across all platforms)

- Total impressions: 70,200 (+425%) (How many times page video thumbnails were shown to viewers)

- Total views: 14,700 (+280%) (No. of users who intentionally initiated watching for at least 30 seconds)

● Unique viewers: 5,000 (+313%) (No. of people who watched, 1 person = 1 viewer)

● Total engagement: 3,200 (+425%) (No. of comments, likes/dislikes, shares, subscribers lost/gained) (*Comments are not on when streaming through Wire Cast)

● Average view duration: 13:15 (+45%)

MAAFA: The Movie (Encore)

Views: 1,670

Average view duration 14:40

Shares: 52

MAAFA: The Movie (Real-time)

Total Viewers: 998

Week of 09/21/2020 – 09/27/2020 Facebook Engagement

- People who *like* the page = 5,237 (someone who has chosen to attach to the page as a fan)

- People who *follow* the page = 6,922 (people who want to receive page updates in their newsfeed

- No. of Actions (Click link for contact info): 56 (+114%)

- Page Views: 3,292 (+19%)

- Page Likes: 46 (no percentage change)

- Page Followers: 135 (+13%)

- Post Reach (No. of people who have seen any post): 21,472 (+10%)

- Post Engagement (reactions, comments, shares, clicks): 23,149 (no percentage change)

- Videos (3 second views): 25,899 (+12%)

Critical metrics for social media

1. Engagement – How the audience interacts with our content (likes, shares, comments)
2. Impressions – No. of people exposed to our content
3. Reach – How many people have seen the post (what does our audience find valuable)
4. Conversation – Visitors taking action (clicking a link, subscribing to a newsletter, downloading content, registering to attend an event)

Note: Views are quantified by 0:03-0:30 seconds. The best qualifier of views is 14% of view: subscribers in one day

APPENDIX E

2020 SANKOFA CONFERENCE JOURNAL

Reverend David K. Brawley

Lead Pastor

St. Paul Community Baptist Church

Brooklyn, NY

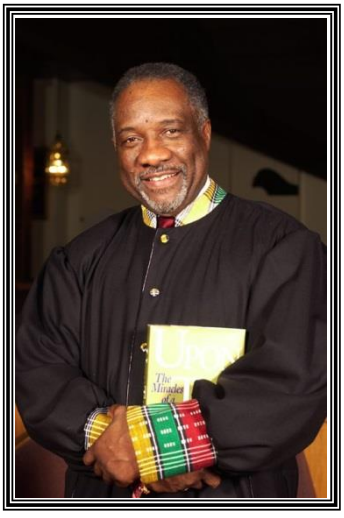
"We do this because our ancestors deserve it, our children are worth it, and our future requires it."

Reverend Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood

Executive Pastor and Spiritual Engineer

Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church

Brooklyn, NY & Queens, NY



"The Way Out

Is Back Through."

MAAFA FOUNDER

THE MAAFA

WHAT: **MAAFA (pronounced MAH-AH-FAH) "The Great Suffering" is a Kiswahili word that means great calamity, catastrophe, tragedy or disaster. It was introduced into contemporary African American scholarship by Dr. Marimba Ani to redefine the period in world history formerly identified as the Middle Passage or Transatlantic Slave Trade.**

WHY: The MAAFA Commemoration is a spiritual experience aimed at healing our collective memories and building community reconciliation. The residuals of enslavement and racism are a part of our historical landscape. **The MAAFA SUITE… A Healing Journey®,** a powerful psychodrama, is the beginning of a healing and educational process regarding an overlooked chapter of history that has affected people of all races and cultures, and a means of furthering our awareness of and efforts to undo institutionalized racism.

WHO: **The commemoration of the MAAFA involves people of all backgrounds, Black, White, Latino, and West Indian, engaged in memorializing and honoring the millions of Africans lost in the horror of The Great Suffering.**

SANKOFA CONFERENCE

February 24 - 26, 2020

7:00 PM

Opening Ceremony (Monday only)

Seeking Permission from the Village Elders

Libation

Scripture - Hebrews 11

Musical Selection

Dramatic Presentation - MAAFA Suite Cast

Monday - Trauma Tuesday - Testimony Wednesday - Triumph

Teaching Segment

Monday	"What Are These Stones?" (Joshua 4:21) - **Rev. David K. Brawley**
Tuesday	The Significance of Rituals - **Dr. Mikael Elam**
	Selected Testimonies - MAAFA's Impact
Wednesday	**Rev. David K. Brawley**

Preaching Segment

Monday	**Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Haynes**
	Friendship West Baptist Church, Dallas, TX
Tuesday	**Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III**
	Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, IL
Wednesday	**Rev. Dr. Alvin C. Bernstine**
	Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, Richmond, CA

Closing Ceremony - Lift Every Voice

Reverend Dr. Alvin C. Bernstine

Senior Pastor

Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church
Richmond, CA

The Reverend Dr. Alvin C. Bernstine is a fourth generation Baptist preacher. He was born in Oakland, California, receiving his primary education in the Oakland Public School system. It was seen quite early that Alvin had promise, and was accelerated by skip- ping the second grade. He went from the kindergarten to the second grade. However his academic promise was frustrated by family struggles and the drama of the Sixties. As a result, he barely completed the requirements for a high school diploma

After several years as an entrepreneur, he decided to return to school in Sales and Marketing at Laney College, Oakland, CA. In 1977, he responded to God's call to ministry and radically changed his interests. He transferred to Bishop College, Dallas, Texas, graduating in 1981 at the top of his class, Magna Cum Laude. He continued studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School, of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. In 1984, he received the Masters of Divinity Degree, with a concentration on Preaching and Biblical Studies, receiving the distinction of the Florence Conwell Preaching Honor. He furthered his studies as a Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor Fellow at the United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio. In 1995 he received the Doctor of Ministry Degree, with his dissertation project focusing on "Preaching that Enhances the African American Family: Homilies on the Jacob Narratives." In 2011, Dr. Bernstine completed studies and received a graduate degree in Psychology and Counseling. This degree puts him on track to becoming a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist.

Dr. Bernstine has been privileged to serve as pastor of three wonderful congregations. He served the Olivet Missionary Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, from 1984 to 1993. From 1993 to 2006, he served the Mount Lebanon Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York. He led the Mount Lebanon Baptist Church in the establishment of relevant ministries, a major building restoration project, and in the year-long celebration of a century of Christian service, in 2005.

Dr. Bernstine has been given the tremendous honor to currently serve the Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, which represents the primary Christian community in which his migrating family was nurtured.

Dr. Bernstine is an avid swimmer, and still finds time to enjoy life through travel, family, chess playing, automobile restoration (owning two classics: '89 Corvette, and '91 Toyota MR2). His favorite pastime is reading.

Reverend Dr. Frederick D. Haynes, III

Senior Pastor

Friendship West Baptist Church

Dallas, TX

Frederick Douglass Haynes, III, is a prophetic pastor, passionate leader, social activist, and eloquent orator and educator engaged in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, fighting against racial injustice; committed to economic justice and empowerment in under-served communities and touching and transforming the lives of the disenfranchised.

For 37 years, Dr. Haynes has served as a visionary and innovative senior pastor of Friendship- West Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. Under his servant leadership, the ministry and membership have grown from less than 100 members in 1983 to over 12,000.

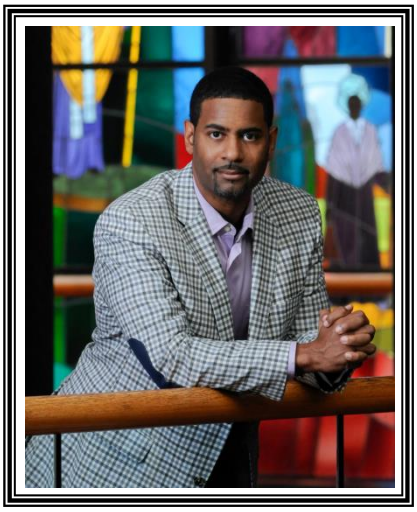
Dr. Haynes graduated with honors from Bishop College in Dallas, TX in 1982 with a B.A. degree in Religion and English. While a student at Bishop College, he also be- came a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. In 1996, he earned a Masters of Divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 2005, Dr. Haynes received his Doctorate in Ministry from the Graduate Theological Foundation where he was afforded the opportunity to study at Christ Church, Oxford University in Oxford, England. His dissertation, "To Turn the World Upside Down: Church Growth in a Church Committed to Social Justice" reflects his commitment to faith based social activism.

Dr. Haynes is married to Debra Peek-Haynes, Founder and President of Quorum Commercial, a commercial real estate firm. They are the proud parents of Abeni Jewel Haynes.

Reverend Dr. Otis Moss III

Senior Pastor

Trinity United Church of Christ
Chicago, IL



With civil rights advocacy in his DNA, Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III built his ministry on community advancement and social justice activism. As Senior Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois, Dr. Moss spent the last two decades practicing and preaching a Black theology that unapologetically calls attention to the problems of mass incarceration, environmental justice, and economic inequality.

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Dr. Moss is an honors graduate of Morehouse College. He earned a Master of Divinity form Yale Divinity School and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Chicago Theological Seminary. He returned to Yale in 2014 to present the famed Lyman Beecher lectures. The three-day event included an in-depth discourse on the subject of "The Blue Note Gospel: Preaching the Prophetic Blues in a Post Soul World." The lectures, which demonstrated a homiletic blueprint for prophetic preaching in the 21st century, were the foundation of his book, *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World: Finding Hope in an Age of Despair*, published in 2015.

Dr. Moss is married to his college sweetheart, the former Monica Brown of Orlando, Florida, a Spelman College and Columbia University graduate. They are the proud parents of two creative and humorous children, Elijah Wynton and Makayla Elon.

Looking Back

St. Paul Community Baptist Church - MAAFA History

Rev. Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood coined the phrase, "The Way Out Is Back Through." He understood the need to embrace our past in order to begin to see our future. He states, "The Commemoration of the MAAFA is a desperate and determined effort to heal a wounded nation. Its primary vehicle is that of remembrance, because denial just does not get it."

From The Beginning

- Prior to 1995 the congregation received information on several topics focusing on racism and slavery from renowned scholars. During the period of study Monica Walker, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood, envisioned bringing life to the concept of MAAFA through drama.
- Monica Walker sought the counsel and expertise of Dr. Marimba Ani, who introduced the term MAAFA into scholarship in her book "Let the Circle Be Unbroken".
- Monica Walker partnered with Jesse Wooden Jr., Director of St. Paul's Drama Ministry to provide editorial assistance and discourse for what was to eventually become The MAAFA Suite…A Healing Journey®.
- In **September of 1995** members of St. Paul Community Baptist Church's newly formed MAAFA Council coordinated and presented the first annual commemoration of "The Great MAAFA" during the week of September 14 – 19, 1995. The activities over the six days consisted of workshops and lectures as well as presentations of songs, slave narratives, and dance (precursor to The MAAFA Suite).
- **1997**
  - Monica F. Walker was named Executive Coordinator to lead the vision of Rev. Dr. Youngblood.
  - The year marked the official Institutionalization of the MAAFA.
  - Evelyn Edmund was charged with designing the scenery and she enlisted the help of Elder Desmond Bailey. They created a unique but simple visualization of a boat posted on the baptism pool, 8ft long with blue moray taffeta and cotton.
- **2000 -** …A healing Journey was added to the name of the production.
- **2003** - Process to trademark the production was initiated.
- **2004**
  - Tickets were sold for the first time.

- Trademark was granted.

- **2005** - Production was no longer presented during Sunday morning worship services.
- **2008** - Registration of the name The MAAFA SUITE…A Healing Journey® became official.
- Production Directors: Jesse Wooden, Jr. 1995 – 2008; Michele Hawkins-Jones 2009 – 2011; Curtis D. Jones 2012 – 2015; Lakai Worrell 2016 – present. .
- The MAAFA SUITE…A Healing Journey® has been presented in Dallas Texas, Seattle Washington, Bridgeport Connecticut, Chicago Illinois, Atlanta Georgia, Waveland Mississippi, St. Croix U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Over fifty locations commemorate the MAAFA.
- Present - The Commemoration of the MAAFA continues under the leadership of Rev. David K. Brawley and consists of two weeks of activities including Museum Tours, Baby Dedication, guest lecturers and preachers, quilting and Meditative Moments. The MAAFA Suite…A Healing Journey® has become centerpiece of the St. Paul MAAFA Commemoration.

"The MAAFA SUITE breathed life into the story by making it more than simple historical data".

Monica Walker

Reference: 10th Anniversary Commemoration of The MAAFA newspaper; MAAFA programs and other documents.

MAAFA SCRIPTURES AND THEMES

YEAR	SCRIPTURE	THEME
1995		In Commemoration of the Great MAAFA
1996		
1997		The Way Out Is Back Through (The Institutionalization of The MAAFA)
1998		The Way Out Is Back Through
1999		The Way Out Is Back Through
2000		A healing Journey (Phrase introduced)
2001		A healing Journey
2002	Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)	May we never forget to remember!!!
2003	Hosea 4:6	My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
2004	Hebrews 11	(No theme – 10th Anniversary)
2005	Hebrews 11	Remember…Remember…Remember
2006	Joshua 4:5-10; Deut. 4:9; Deut. 6:20-21	What will you tell the children?
2007	Psalm 139:23-24 (KJV)	In the year of Jubilee…Reflection, Reconciliation, Renewal and Re-Creation
2008	Genesis 50:20	We were never meant to survive…Look what God has done!
2009	Hebrews 11-12:1	Honoring the Legacy...Renewing the Tradition
2010	2 Kings 7:3b (KJV)	"Why sit we here until we die?...Resistance!"
2011	Nehemiah 5:1-13	"Breaking Barriers…"
2012	Lamentations 5:1-5	"Remembering to Weep…"
2013	Psalm 137	Dreams of Freedom
2014	Genesis 50:20	Unbroken
2015	Deuteronomy 4:9 (NIV)	MAAFA...Preparing The Next Generation

2016	Ephesians 4:25 (NKJV)	Speaking The Truth
2017	Micah 6:6-8	MAAFA…"A Sojourn To Justice..."
2018	Galatians 5:1	"Eradicating Slavery's Legacy"
2019	Isaiah 58:12 (The Message)	"Repairers Of The Breach"

MAAFA Speakers Through The Years

MAAFA 1997 SPEAKERS

Riua Akinshegun

Rev. David Billings

Jane Elliott

Tom Feelings

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Jeffrey Noble

Dr. Ivan Van Sertima

Marta Vega

Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker

Undoing Racism Workshop

MAAFA 1998 SPEAKERS

Dr. Charles G. Adams

Jane Elliot

Noel Ignatiev

Rev. Clarence James

Joy Leary, MA, M.S.W.

Alton Maddox, J.D.L.

Dr. Marta Moreno Vega

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Dr. Cornell West

Undoing Racism Workshop

MAAFA 1999 SPEAKERS

Dr. Na'im Akbar

Rev. Daniel Buford

Lisa Densmore

Haile Gerima

Rev. Dave Haberer

Jacquelyn Huges-Mooney

Noel Ignatiev

Dr. Leonard Jeffries

Alton Maddox

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Jeffrey Noble

Rev. Dr. Nelson Smith, Jr.

Dr. Gardner C. Taylor

Dr. Marta Moreno Vega

Undoing Racism Workshops

MAAFA 2000 SPEAKERS

Dr. Na'im Akbar

Russell Banks

Dr. Nicholas Cooper-Lewter

Haile Gerima

Rev. Frederick D. Haynes, III

Rev Hong Sun "Sunny" Kang

Dr. Joy A. D. Leary

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Dr. Gardner C. Taylor

Dr. Marta Moreno Vega

Dr. Jeremiah Wright

Undoing Racism Workshop

MAAFA 2001 SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Douglas Bailey

Rev. Joseph Barndt

Rev. David Billings Diana Dunn

Cornelia Jones

Dr. Kobi Kambon

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Jeffrey Noble

Dr. James Perkins

Dr. Victor Rodriguez

Aimee Sands

Dr. Gardner C. Taylor

Lee Mun Wah

Amistad American Project

Circle of Learning Orators

Undoing Racism Workshop

MAAFA 2002 SPEAKERS

Anthony Browder

Ron Daniels

Edna Wells Handy

Dr. Asa Hilliard

Dr. William Augustus Jones

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Dr. James Perkins

Randall Robinson

Dr. Gardner C. Taylor

Tim Wise

Amistad Vessel

Undoing Racism Workshop

MAAFA 2003 SPEAKERS

Rev. David D. Daniels, III

Dr. James Forbes

Edna Wells Handy

Paul Kivel

Dr. Werner Lemke

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Carrie Secret

Rev. Dr. Nelson Smith, Jr.

Tim Wise

MAAFA 2004 SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III

Dr. Joy DeGruy-Leary

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Jeffrey Vincent Noble

Rev. Frank Ray

Randall Robinson

Rev. Al Sharpton

Rev. Dr. C. T. Vivian

Tim Wise

Undoing Racism Workshop

MAAFA 2005 SPEAKERS

Rev. Joseph Barndt

Rev. Dr. Alvin C. Bernstine

Rev. Calvin O. Butts, III

Martin Friedman

Rev. Dr. James S. Hall, Jr.

William Loren Katz

Barbara Major

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Albert Vivian

MAAFA 2006 SPEAKERS

Rev. David Billings

Tony Burroughs

H. Mondrea Harmon

Rev. Dr. Clifford E. McLain

Rev. Dr. Daran H. Mitchell

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Rev. Dr. James C. Perkins

Monica F. Walker

Tim Wise

MAAFA 2007 SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Herbert Daughtry

Bishop James W.E. Dixon, II

Rev. Jack Gaines

Sherrilyn Ifill

Dr. Bernard LaFayette, Jr.

Chaplain Julius Thomas

MAAFA 2008 SPEAKERS

Rev. Tim Ahrens

Douglas Blackmon

Dr. James H. Cone

Sherrilyn Ifill

Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr.

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Kevin Powell

Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon

Traces of The Trade

MAAFA 2009 SPEAKERS

Rev. Lawrence Aker III

Rev. Dr. Anthony Bennett

Rev. Dr. Alvin Bernstine

Rev. Dr. Brad Braxton

Jeremiah Camara

Rev. Dr. Herbert Daughtry

Rev. Dr. James Forbes

Rev. Dr. H. Beecher Hicks

Jesse Holland

Rev. Dr. Millicent Hunter

Dr. Carole McKindley-Alvarez

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Sonia Sanchez

Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker

Dr. Jonathan Walton

Doris Withers, Ed.D

Rev. Dr. Jonny R. Youngblood

MAAFA 2010 SPEAKERS

Dr. Edward M. Bostic

Tom Burrell

Dr. Scott Christianson

Dr. Ron Daniels

Karen Hunter

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Rev. Dr. Lewis T. Tait, Jr.

Dr. Jonathan L. Walton

Tim Wise

MAAFA 2011 SPEAKERS

Dr. George C. Fraser

Dr. Cleophus J. LaRue

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Dr. Edna Olive, PhD, EdD

Dr. Divine Pryor

Rev. Matthew L. Watley

MAAFA 2012 SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Leslie D. Braxton

Rev. Dr. Elliott Cuff

Dr. Arthur C. Jones

Glenn McMillan & Imani Singers

Rev. Dr. Daran H. Mitchell

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Kathy Taylor

Monica F. Walker

MAAFA 2013 SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III

Dr. Edwin Nichols

Rev. Dr. Keith A. Russell

HB Samuels

Monica F. Walker

MAAFA 2014 SPEAKERS

Rev. Anthony L. Bennett, D. Min.

Rev. Raphael Warnock, Ph.D.

MAAFA 2015 SPEAKERS

Dr. Obery Hendricks, Jr.

Rev. Eboni Marshall-Turman, Ph.D

Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr.

Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, III

MAAFA 2016 SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Jawanza Karriem Colvin

Rev. Neichelle R. Guidry

MAAFA 2017 SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Haynes, III

U.S. Congressman John Lewis

Glenn E. Martin

MAAFA 2018 SPEAKERS

Rev. Racquel Gill

Derrick Johnson

Rev. Dr. Kevin W. Cosby

MAAFA 2019 SPEAKERS

Rev. Dr. Anthony L. Bennett

Rev. Dr. Johnny R. Youngblood

Rev. Starsky D. Wilson

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon

HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

1600's Africans begin being shipped to North America as slaves.

1787 The writers of the United States Constitution decide that slaves will count as three-fifths of a person when deciding how many representatives each state will have in Congress.

1820 The Missouri Compromise allows the people in each state to vote on whether slavery should be legal in that state or not.

1826 Sojourner Truth escapes from slavery and begins fighting for the desegregation of buses in Washington D.C. and for women's rights.

1828 Nat Turner sees a vision and hears voices telling him to fight against slavery by killing slave owners.

1847 Frederick Douglass gives speeches and publishes a newspaper to encourage others to help fight against slavery.

1849 Harriet Tubman begins helping over 300 slaves escape to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

1850 The Compromise of 1850 ends the slave trade to the United States, but allows slavery to continue.

1854 The Kansas-Nebraska Act causes fighting in Kansas and Nebraska over whether those new states should allow slavery or not.

1857 Dred Scott takes his case to win his freedom to the Supreme Court, and the court rules that slaves who escape to free states must be returned to their masters.

1859 John Brown attacks the military arsenal at Harper's Ferry to start a slave revolt and end slavery.

1860 Abraham Lincoln is elected the sixteenth President of the United States, and begins to work to keep the country together.

1860-1861 Southern states break away from the United States, angering northerners and causing the Civil War.

1861–1865 The North (Union) battles the South (Confederacy) in the Civil War.

1863 The Emancipation Proclamation frees slaves in southern states to punish the South for trying to break away from the country.

1865

- The Thirteenth Amendment ends slavery in the United States.
- President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated.

1865-1877 During Reconstruction, the Union Army keeps southerners from treating their freed slaves badly.

1866

- The “Black Codes” are passed by all white legislators of the former Confederate States. Congress passes the Civil Rights Act, conferring citizenship on African Americans and granting them equal rights to whites.
- The Ku Klux Klan is formed in Tennessee

1868

- The Fourteenth Amendment makes all people born in the United States citizens.
- The Ku Klux Klan begins terrorizing blacks.

1870 The Fifteenth Amendment gives black men the right to vote

1877 A deal was made with southern democratic leaders which made Rutherford B. Hayes president in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, and put an end to federal efforts to protect the civil rights of African Americans.

1879 Thousands of African Americans migrate from the South to the West to escape oppression.

1881 Tennessee passes the first of the “Jim Crow” segregation laws, segregating state railroads. Similar laws are passes over the next 15 years throughout the Southern states.

1896 In the case of Plessy v. Ferguson, the Supreme Court rules that it is constitutional to require black and white people to be treated "separate but equally."

1910’s Marcus Garvey starts the Back to Africa Movement to encourage Blacks to leave the United States and move to Africa. 1935 Mary McLeod Bethune works with President Franklin Roosevelt to get more money for black schools.

1954 In the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KS, the Supreme Court rules that separate schools for black and white students is unconstitutional.

1955 Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat in the front of a bus, helping begin the Montgomery Bus Boycotts.

1957

- Martin Luther King, Jr. leads the Montgomery Bus Boycott to help end segregation on buses.
- The Little Rock Nine help integrate the all-white Little Rock Central High School.

1960 Ruby Bridges is one of the first black students to attend an all-whiteschool.

1961

- President John F. Kennedy promises to end racial discrimination in his inaugural address.
- Black and white freedom riders travel into the south to see if they will be treated equally, and they are attacked by racists.

1962 Jesse Jackson leads Operation Breadbasket to get more job opportunities forBlacks. 1963

- President Kennedy is assassinated.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. gives his "I Have a Dream" Speech in Washington, D.C.
- Medgar Evers is assassinated for working with the NAACP to end segregation in colleges.

1964 The Civil Rights Act of 1964 guarantees that all people will have equal access to hotels, restaurants, and other public places.

1965 Malcolm X is assassinated after giving speeches to encourage others to fight for their equal rights "by any means necessary."

1968 Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated.

1984 Jesse Jackson runs for President of the United States

1988 Jesse Jackson runs for President again

2008 Barack Hussein Obama is elected the first black President of the United States of America

2009 - Present The cycle of racism and marginalization continues.

Religion and Slavery

- Slaves were considered by their owners to be heathens and pagan worshipers based in the practice of witchcraft from Africa.
- The Methodists, Evangelist and Baptist were interested in influencing the religious practice of the slaves .The religious practices of the African were mostly erased by the second generation.
- There were many African-American Baptists and Methodists by 1850.
- The outbreak of slave revolts throughout the south encouraged the whites to pass laws prohibiting the slaves from assembling to worship or learning to read or write.
- Religion was many times used to control the slaves by preaching that slavery was part of God's divine plan.
- Slaves worshiped in gathering places called "hush arbors" and "praying grounds" at a scheduled time, sometimes very late. These services were not known to the owner. The slaves could worship in their own way.
- Slaves could not be ordained and could not preach without the presence of the white man.
- The white preacher would preach at the slave's services and then the black preacher would preach.
- The slave preacher did not have papers but developed a unique style that focused on positive measures to cope with slavery and how to be free.

SPIRITUALS DURING SLAVERY

(From the Spirituals Project by Dr. Arthur C. Jones)

In the period of captivity that began with the arrival of the first cargo of Africans in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 and continued until 1865 when legalized slavery ended with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, spirituals gradually evolved to serve a variety of purposes in the fight for freedom.

These purposes included:

1) Singing as an expression of democratic values and community solidarity
2) Singing as a source of inspiration and motivation
3) Singing as an expression of protest
4) Singing as coded communication

Spirituals as Coded Communication

Perhaps the best known use of spirituals in the service of freedom during the slave period was the imbedding of "hidden" or coded messages in song lyrics for the purpose of clandestine (secret) communication on the Underground Railroad. One of the first public revelations by a former slave of this practice of secret communication through spirituals is found in the autobiographical writings of the noted Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, in which Douglass revealed to his readers that some songs interpreted by outsiders as referring to life after death in Heaven, were actually understood within the enslaved African community as signifying a determination to reach freedom in the North, outside the reach and power of Southern plantation owners.

Two common types of coded spirituals were signal songs and map songs. In a signal song, a singer or group of singers communicated in code that a certain event – such as a planned escape from a plantation – was imminent. In a map song, the lyrics actually contained elements of a map that directed people to significant points of escape along the routes of the Underground Railroad. The most famous map song was "Follow the Drinking Gourd," which used the metaphor of a drinking gourd to symbolize the constellation of stars known as the Big Dipper, containing the North Star, an important compass guide for

individuals and families who needed to be certain that they were continuing to travel in the direction of north as they made their way to freedom.

Our Rituals
And Traditions

MAAFA Village Elders

“With the utmost respect we come to you our Village Elders seeking your blessing and permission to begin this Commemoration of the MAAFA. Will you grant our collective request?”

During MAAFA season the opposite ends of our life cycle are celebrated; the ancestors are honored and our babies are blessed by those of us who reside somewhere in the middle. We came to the realization that an important component of our village was missing and we were out of balance. In 2016 we instituted a new Ritual entitled “Honoring Our Village Elders”.

The MAAFA Ministry seeks to restore the balance by purposefully recognizing and honoring our elders. Their importance to us and our survival cannot be disregarded. Once a year, elders who have attained the age of 70 years are invited to become a part of the MAAFA Village Elders. This group of “wise” persons study together, and impart their “wisdom” to all of us.

Libation

The libation ritual is performed in many African villages preceding traditional, public and private events. Usually these events include a meeting of chiefs, a birth of a child, a wedding, social gatherings, and welcoming visitors into the home.

- Libation prayer is to the gods and ancestors.
- Libation wine is a symbol of intimacy with the ancestors and harmony with the living.
- The invocation with the wine symbolizes calling upon a spiritual grace of God.
- The elders pouring of the wine on the floor or ground symbolizes safe passage of the ancestors from the spirit to the physical world.
- The final blessing asks for wealth, good health, and peace.

References: bridgingdevelopment.org

www.umunna.org

ALTAR BUILDING

The role of building altars is significant throughout the early Hebrew Scriptures. Bible References:

1. **Genesis 8:20** Then Noah built an **altar** to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. Genesis 8:19-21 (in Context) Genesis 8 (Whole Chapter)
2. **Genesis 12:7** The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an **altar** there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. Genesis 12:6-8 (in Context) Genesis 12 (Whole Chapter)
3. **Genesis 12:8** From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an **altar** to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. Genesis 12:7-9 (in Context) Genesis 12 (Whole Chapter)
4. **Genesis 13:4** and where he had first built an **altar**. There Abram called on the name of the LORD. Genesis 13:3-5 (in Context) Genesis 13 (Whole Chapter)
5. **Genesis 13:18** So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an **altar** to the LORD.

Building altars was not just a practice for Hebrew Bible characters, but most cultures, if not all, built altars as part of their spiritual development and out of honor to the Creator of their understanding.

In the continuing tradition of the MAAFA, we use the system of altar building from the Dagara people of Burkina Faso, West Africa. The Dagara cosmology uses five elements: Fire, Water, Mineral, Nature, and Earth. What each element represents and how each elemental altar should be constructed is explored. Each Altar (meditation space) reflects the state of the imagination of the people who build it.

MAAFA BABY DEDICATION CEREMONY

In years past, the Baby Dedication Ceremony was usually rescheduled in order to accommodate the events of the Commemoration of the MAAFA. Our intent was to place a high priority on this cultural/ spiritual event of paying tribute and honor to our ancestors by remembering the horror of their suffering and the triumph of their survival. Our intentions were earnest, but somewhat shortsighted in retrospect. Thanks to the leading of the Holy Spirit, we have come to recognize that this dedication ceremony should rightfully be a prime event of our commemoration.

In the context of everything we do in our season of "remembering", the children are our focus. Through the events of the commemoration, we prepare a generation for the future by reconnecting them to the past, even in infancy.

These, your babies and the village's children, embark on a journey of preparation. Lest we forget… they are our hope. Lest we forget… they must understand…they must know… they must keep the legacy alive.

According to many African traditions and teachings, each of these children possesses the memory and the spirit of our ancestors. This ceremony is the beginning of their commemoration.

We paraphrase from Joshua 4:21-23 in this way: Then he spoke to the children of Africa saying…"When your children ask their fathers in time to come saying, "What is our history? How did we get here? What do we celebrate?" Then you shall let your children know that Africans crossed over on oceans of blood, horror and terror in bond- age, at all times protected by the divine hand of God…"

Nommo

St. Paul Community Baptist Church approaches the MAAFA Commemoration, MAAFA Suite, and the Sankofa Conference through a symbolic lens that reimagines our Trinitarian Christian doctrine to represent our Liberation Theological leanings and our African connection to spirituality. The greatest symbol of this religious pluralism, an approach that concedes that the God that created all things can be communicated through cultural perspectives, are the Nommo.

According to Roy Cummings, the Nommo are the ancestral spirits of the Dogon from Mali and are the explicit implication of the highest vibration of "The Word." The Nommo uses the power of words to create harmony and balance in the face of great disharmony.[129]

African-American professor and philosopher Molefi Asante is one of the scholars that have used the Nommo to "as the process undertaken in community to foster transformation in that community by naming the current reality and re-imagining a future." [130]

This fits perfectly as a spirit guide for our church to do the powerful work of MAAFA and represent the ideals of Sankofa— through sacred memory in efforts to not only heal from our collective trauma and envision a healthy future, but create a world of jubilee. Part of this transformation is to have the Nommo call on the individuals trusted with The Word and the listeners of The Word to be united in affirmation, prophetic agency, and movement to change the dynamics of their respective realities.

The Nommo helps the people to heal from tragic memories, while simultaneously reminding them that they have agency. Just as the Nommo is the transformational power of The Word, through our reimagined contemplation of Divine Energy, it is also the animated instinct of speaking The Truth.

While the Nommo is referred to singularly, the Dogon believe in its plural nature, representing four sets of twins. According to Ancient Origins, the Nommo is also part of a complexed cosmogony, centered on faith of one Creative God, Amma that created all things and is represented "as the eight pro-genitors of the Dogon, brought to Earth in a basket containing the clay … [which] hides, in reality, a very profound knowledge of the universe and of the celestial bodies."[131]

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[129] Cummings, M., & Roy, A. (2002). Manifestations of Afrocentricity in rap music. *Howard Journal of Communication, 13,* 59-76.

[130] Asante, M. K. (1987). *The Afrocentric idea.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[131] Dr. Massimo Bonasorte, "The Dogon's Extraordinary Knowledge of the Cosmos and the Cult of Nommo," Ancient Origins, May 17, 2018, https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends-africa/dogon-s-extraordinary-knowledge-cosmos-and-cult-nommo-0010059.

For the purposes of the St. Paul Community Baptist Church's MAAFA Commemoration, MAAFA Suite, and the Sankofa Conference, we interpret the African Nommo as a present representation of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. Directly connecting the Dogon cosmology of the Nommo as the word, with The Gospel of John that reveals Jesus of Nazareth as "The Word" and its prophetic urging for justice as Will of God. Lastly, we look at its power to bring harmony, restoration to the brokenness of people as the Power of the Holy Spirit.

FOR THE MILLIONS

By: *Abiodun Oyewole*

For the millions of Africans chained to the slave ships

For the millions of scars on the Backs and Faces by the bullwhip

For the millions who jumped overboard for the blood that poured

on the shores of North America South America Central America Europe

and each ripple in the Ocean is a grave for an African who refused to be a slave

For the millions who cut the cane picked the cotton

whose names have been forgotten

whose flesh has rotted with the trees they hung us from

cut out our tongues cut off our hands if we played the drums

For the millions who were shot hung beat to death

tar and feathered boiled in oil

whiplashed backlashed crocasacked and thrown in the river

castrated mis-educated segregated integrated legislated by the constipated

For the millions who've been lied to denied to

vampire eyed to misguided to and not abided to

So we decided to get together and change the weather
not just for now but forever we decided to love each other
Stop the madness and be real sisters and brothers

We decided to stop and take a look at the Beauty of ourselves
at this colored skin and this thick hair and these full lips
and this Africa all inside our Souls still breathing the breath of Gods in our lungs
Greatness is where we're coming from

For the millions who marched sang prayed
sat in laid in lived in jailed in boycotted picketed spit at
cursed at yelled at like Blacks not where its at
like we should be satisfied to ride in the back

For the Fanny Lou Hamers and the Rosa Parks and the Eula Mae Johnsons
and Harriet and Sojourner and Eleanor Bumpers and Assata Shakur and Gwendolyn Brooks
and the Martins and the Arthurs and the Deacons the Panthers and James and Langston
and Richard Paul Malik Marcus and Nat and Cinque and Kunta Kinte too

For the millions who know and those who have always known
that no matter what "Truth crushed to Earth shall rise again"
No matter how many bullets and prisons diseases and deaths
no one can take our breath away we are here to stay
no matter how much liquor and crack nothing can kill the fact
that we are a divine creation started civilizations
built the pyramids and the Sphinx
taught the world how to pray and think
not to mention inventions we never got credit for
and all the babies we raised even when our own were ignored

For the millions with fire in their souls that burns so bright
and the strength of our will as dominant as the night
and the rhythm when we walk and the rhythm when we talk
even when we have nothing to say
we utter sounds that put color and spice in the day

For the millions who are ready to turn this thing around
who are tired of being tired and crawling on the ground
it's time to return to our Spiritual Home
reclaim our Throne
and leave this American Nightmare alone.

For the Millions – Identities

Fanny Lou Hammer	Civil rights activist born 1917 in Mississippi most noted for her work on voter's rights.
Rosa Parks	Born 1914, her actions as a private citizen sparked the Montgomery bus boycott.
Eula Mae Johnson	Community activists Dr. Von D. Mizell and **Eula Mae Johnson**, leader of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People organized a series of "wade-ins" at beaches in Fort Lauderdale in 1961. One year later, a judge refused a request by the city to stop the wade-ins and that decision led to the desegregated beaches.
Harriet Tubman	Born 1822 an abolitionist, humanitarian and Union spy. Best known for her work in the Underground Railroad.
Sojourner Truth	Born 1917 in New York this former slave and abolitionist was best known for her speech later called "Ain't I a woman too?"
Eleanor Bumpers	Born 1918 in the Bronx NY was an elderly Black woman shot to death with a twelve gauge shotgun by a NYC police officer on a routine eviction. She was behind 4 months on her rent of less than$100.00.
Assata Shakur	Born 1947 Jamaica NY she was a member of the Black Panther Party and Black liberation Army. She was accused of several crimes from bank robbery to murder. She escaped prison and sought asylum in Cuba. She is the step aunt to deceased rapper Tupak Shakur.
Gwendolyn Brooks	Born 1917 A poet who published her first work at age 13. She was the first African American winner of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry.
Martin	MLK leader of the civil rights movement and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. A clergyman born 1929, the youngest person to receive the Noble Peace Prize.
Arthurs	Arthur Ashe: Born July 5th 1943 a tennis great and social activist. After retiring from tennis he took on many social ills from apartheid to HIV awareness.
Deacons	The Deacons of Defense and Justice were an armed defense organization of civil rights in the 1960's.
Panthers	The Black Panther Party Founded in Oakland, CA. by Bobby Seal and Huey P. Newton was an organization to promote Black power and self defense.
James	James Baldwin: Author born 1924 in Harlem NY. Most of his works dealt with racial and sexual is- sues at a time when it was not the norm.
Langston Hughes	Born 1902 was an Arthur, poet, columnist, short story writer and playwright. One of his best known works is Black Nativity.
Richard Wright	Born 1908 in Mississippi, he was an Author most noted for "Uncle Tom's children" and "Black Boy".

Paul	Paul Robeson was an internationally acclaimed actor, singer, scholar and activist. He was under watch by the FBI and the CIA until his death in 1976 because of his beliefs in socialism and his cause for racial equality around the world.
Malik	Malcolm X (May 19, 1925 – February 21, 1965), born Malcolm Little and also known as El-Hajj **Malik** El-Shabazz was an African-American Muslim minister and human rights activist. To his admir- ers, he was a courageous advocate for the rights of African Americans, a man who indicted white America in the harshest terms for its crimes against black Americans. Detractors accused him of preaching racism, black supremacy, anti-Semitism, and violence. He has been called one of the great- est and most influential African Americans in history.
Marcus	Marcus Garvey Born 1887 in Jamaica best known for his Pan-African views *(one African political nation of native Africans and those of the diaspora.)* Also believed to be the founder of the Rastafari movement.
Nat	Nat Turner: Dubbed "The Prophet" was born 10/2/1800. On 2/12/31 he believed a solar eclipse to be a sign from God to lead an uprising where 55 whites were slaughtered.
Cinque	Led the revolt on The Amistad, the boat illegally carrying slaves from Africa.
Kunta Kente	A rebellious slave from the movie "Roots" and ancestor of Alex Haley the author.
The Sphinx	Egyptian statue of a human head and lion body with bird wings. It is the largest statue known to man. It also houses a temple.

Midnight Cry

Music & lyrics by Charles Day and Greg Day

I hear the sound of a mighty rushing wind,
and it's closer now than it's ever been.
I can almost hear the trumpet as Gabriel sounds the call;
at the midnight cry, we'll be going home!

I look around me; I see prophecies fulfilled everywhere;
the signs of the times, they're appearing everywhere.
Oh, I can almost see the Father as He says,
"Son, go get my children"
At the midnight cry, the Bride of Christ will rise.

When Jesus steps out on a cloud to call His children,
the dead in Christ shall rise to meet Him in the air.
And then those that remain shall be quickly changed;
at the midnight cry we'll be going home.

I look around me; I see prophecies fulfilled everywhere;
The signs of the times, they're appearing everywhere.
I can almost see the Father as He says,
"Son, go get my children"
Oh, at the midnight cry, the Bride of Christ will rise!

When Jesus steps out on a cloud to call His children,
The dead in Christ shall rise to meet Him in the air.
And then those that remain shall be quickly changed;

At the midnight cry, oh, at the midnight cry,

At the midnight cry, oh, when Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,

Steps out on a cloud to call His children,

The dead in Christ shall rise to meet Him in the air;

And then those that remain shall be quickly changed,

At the midnight, oh, at the midnight cry,

Yes, at the midnight cry, at the midnight cry, (many times)

We'll be going home.

Midnight Cry / Scriptures

1 Thessalonians, Chapter 4, Verses 13 – 18

13: But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14: For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15: For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and re- main unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16: For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18: Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Revelation, Chapter 7, Verses 13 – 17

13: And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they?

14: And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15: Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16: They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

17: For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

Negro National Anthem

Music & lyrics by James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson

Lift ev'ry voice and sing till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;

Let our rejoicing rise, high as the list'ning skies,

Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,

Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,

Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,

Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chast'ning rod,

Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;

Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet,

Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come, over a way that with tears has been watered,

We have come, treading our path thro' the blood of the slaughtered, Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,

Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;

Thou who hast by thy might, led us into the light,

Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places, our God where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath thy hand, may we forever stand,

True to our God, true to our native land.

The History of Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing

Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing is often called "The Black National Anthem"- written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) and then set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson (1873- 1954) in 1899. It was first performed in public in the Johnson's hometown of Jacksonville, Florida as part of a celebration of Lincoln's Birthday on February 12, 1900 by a choir of 500 students at the segregated Stanton School, where James Weldon Johnson was principal.

James W. Johnson's father was born free and of mixed ancestry. His mother was born in the West Indies of French and Haitian ancestry.

James Johnson and his brother John, a talented composer, wrote over 200 songs for Broadway musicals, including "The Sleeping Beauty" and "Humpty Dumpty".

References: naacp.org

Timeline – James Weldon Johnson

1871 – Born in Jacksonville, Florida, June 17 1894 – Graduated from Atlanta University
1895 – Started the first Black Newspaper in The United States "The Daily American".
1897 – First Black admitted to Florida Bar
1899 – Wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing" with his brother 1906 – US Consul, Puerto Cabello, Venezuela
1909 – US Consul, Corinto, Nicaragua
1920 – Appointed Executive Secretary of NAACP
1921 – Wrote first novel: "The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man"
1922 – Collected poems of black poets in "The Book of American Negro Poetry". 1927 – With brother Rosamond, published "God's Trombones"
1930 – Became professor at Fisk University 1933 – Wrote autobiography, "Along This Way"
1938 – Died in an automobile accident in Maine, buried in Brooklyn, New York, with a copy of the book, "God's Trombones".

References: afn.org

THE MAAFA MUSEUM

GUIDED TOURS - EXHIBITS - DISCUSSIONS

History

Corridor of Kings and Queens

After Captivity - Tunnel / Pathway / Holding Cells

Exit to the Ships

The Middle Passage

Slavery Revolt

Civil Rights Movement

Accomplishments


RULES
For the Society of
NEGROES. 1693.

St. Paul Community Baptist Church's Sunrise Ceremony at Oceanside

Riis Beach

The Oceanside Ceremony culminates The Commemoration of The MAAFA at St. Paul Community Baptist Church. It is the time we set aside to remember and pay homage to our individual ancestors while simultaneously honoring our forebears who lost their lives during the trek across the Atlantic Ocean and the lives lost therein. The significance of our seaside ceremony is to bring "closure & healing" to the memories of personal and collective trauma that we have experienced as a result of our MAAFA. We continue to draw critically on elements of African traditions that survived the MAAFA as they are taught to us by scholars and practitioners, forging a new syncretism of African-American Baptist and traditional African spirituality.

Our Oceanside Ritual consists of:

- Burning of written prayers releases them to heaven. Letting go and letting God do the work in this sacred experience.
- Continuous recitation of the poem "For The Millions" by Abiodun Oyewole of The Last Poets.
- Popcorn Baptism - an adaptation of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions which signify healing, cleansing and closure. This ritual is symbolic of closing the conduits and emotions that were opened during the MAAFA season.
- Pouring of Libation - The African ritual of remembering those who have transitioned.
- Singing
- Eucharist - The opportunity to keep alive our Lord and Savior's sacrificial work for our redemption.
- Dance
- Releasing flower petals to the ocean waves. This signifies our final act of closure.



ST. PAUL COMMUNITY BC
Imagine...

REV. DAVID K. BRAWLEY, LEAD PASTOR
WWW.SPCBC.COM

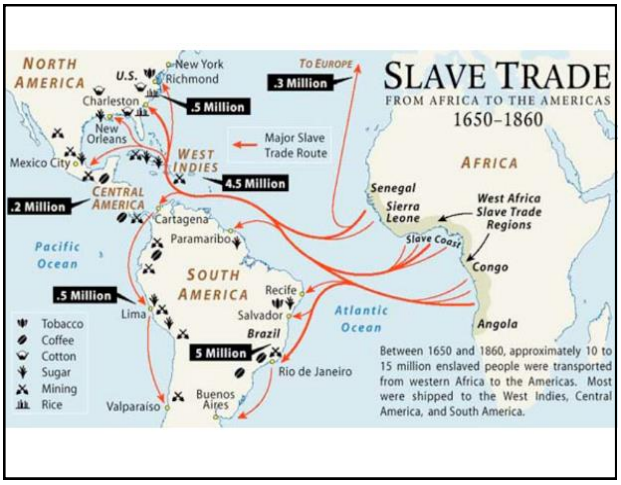
THE MAAFA

Our History. Our Heritage. Our Hope.

WHY WE REMEMBER

- The Village
- The Capture & The Journey
- The Enslavement

- Economic Impact
- Environmental Oppression
- Post-Traumatic Syndrome



THE AFRICAN VILLAGE

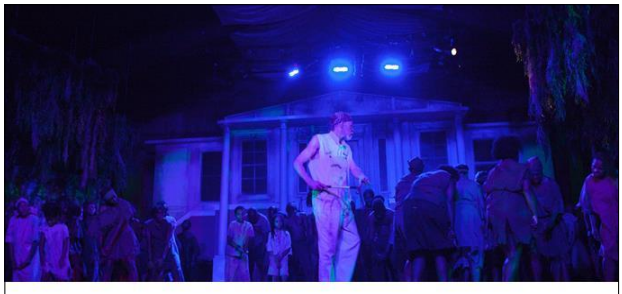
THE AFRICAN VILLAGE

- Ranged in size *(several dozen to several hundred)*
- Different customs and ways of living
- Every village had the Arts! (dance, music, mask-making, body art, etc..)
- The village was a COMMUNITY!

THE CAPTURE & THE JOURNEY

THE CAPTURE & THE JOURNEY

- Between mid-1400's and the mid-1800's roughly 60 million-and possibly 100 million Africans were enslaved.
- **Resistance occurred!** Revolts, Refusing to eat, Jumping Overboard
- Every slave imported represents 5 corpses in Africa or the high seas who were eliminated
- The slave trade was astronomical, not just a footnote in history.



THE ENSLAVEMENT

THE ENSLAVEMENT

- Slavery became legal in the U.S. in the mid-17th century, beginning in Massachusetts.
- **By 1750, slavery was legal in all 13 Colonies.**
- Instilling self-hatred in the African slaves was top priority of the Europeans
- Capitalism and Slavery

ECONOMIC IMPACT

REDLINING

Banking **Housing**

Law

ENVIRONMENTAL OPPRESSION

Flint, MI water crisis | Food Deserts | Lead Based Paint

POST TRAUMATIC SLAVE SYNDROME

(PTSS information based on the published work of Dr. Joy DeGruy)

> P.T.S.S. is a theory that explains the etiology of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in African American communities throughout the United States and the Diaspora. It is a condition that exists as a consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of chattel slavery
>
> *-Dr. Joy DeGruy*

M.A.P.

M: *Multigenerational trauma together with continued oppression*

M.A.P.

A: *Absence of opportunity to heal or access the benefits available in the society; leads to*

M.A.P.

P: *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.*

KEY PATTERNS OF P.T.S.S. BEHAVIOR

- **Vacant Esteem** - Insufficient development of what Dr. DeGruy refers to as primary esteem, along with feelings of hopelessness, depression and a general self destructive outlook.
- **Marked Propensity for Anger and Violence** - Extreme feelings of suspicion perceived negative motivations of others. Violence against self, property and others, including the members of one's own group, i.e. friends, relatives, or acquaintances.
- **Racist Socialization and (internalized racism)** - Learned helplessness, literacy deprivation, distorted self-concept

OPPRESSION classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism	**PRIVILEGE** benefits attached to your group
INTERNALIZED INFERIORITY self-hate	**INTERNALIZED SUPERIORITY** entitlement

Internalized Racial Inferiority - a multi-generational process of disempowerment which occurs when people of color believe, accept and ultimately act out the definition of themselves as dictated by their oppressor.

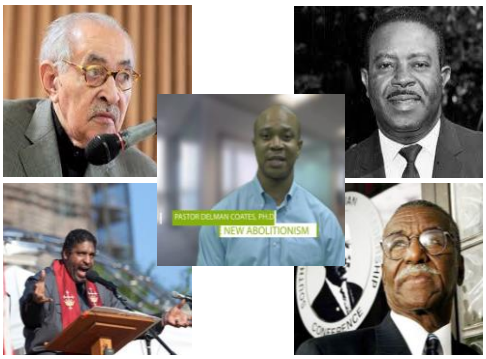
MANIFESTATIONS & FORMS OF IRI

MANIFESTATIONS
- ANGER
- DENIAL
- FEAT
- GUILT
- SHAME
- EXAGGERATED VISIBILITY
- SELF DESTRUCTION
- BLACK ON BLACK ATTACKS

FORMS
- Assimilation
- Acculturation
- Tolerance
- Protectionism
- Colorism

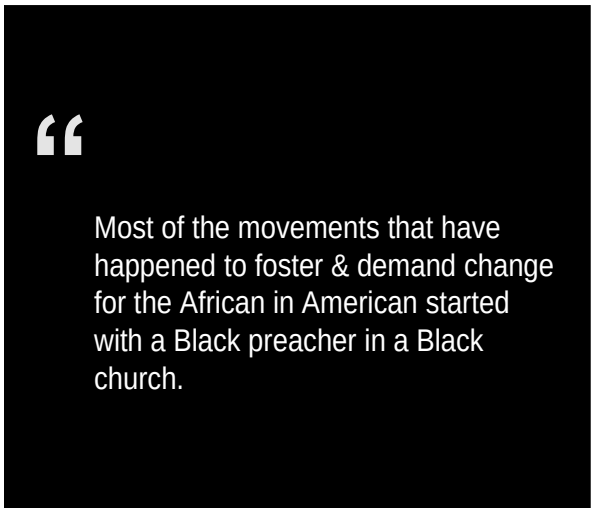
OUR HOPE

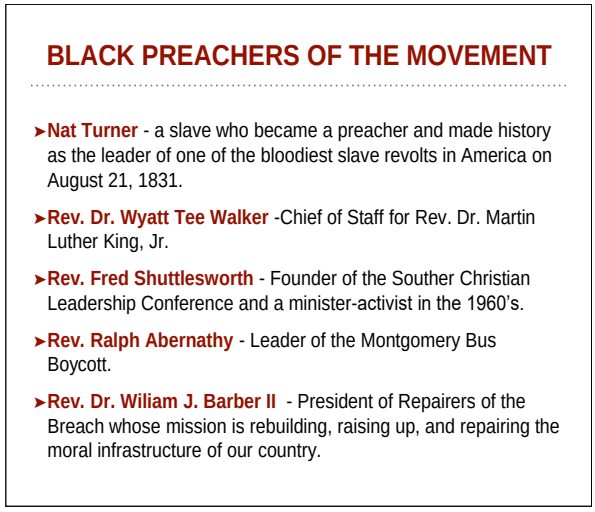
The Impact of the Black Church: Past/Present/Future



A FEW Leaders of the Movement!

(l - r) Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rev. William J. Barber, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth

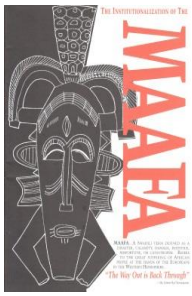


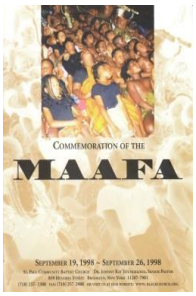


(Slideshow sourced heavily from the work of Rev. Monica F. Walker of the Racial Equity Institute)

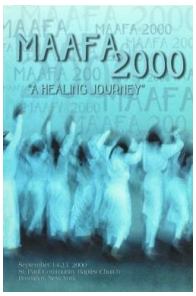
NOTES

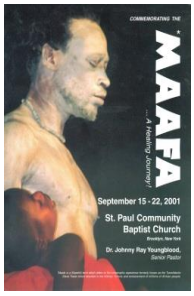

In Commemoration of the
Great Maafa
The Great Suffering of African People in the Middle Passage & Slavery
Tuesday, September 19, 1995
St. Paul Community Baptist Church

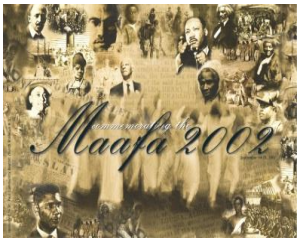

MAAFA

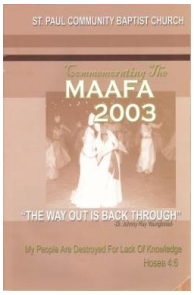

Commemoration of the
MAAFA
September 19, 1998 ~ September 26, 1998

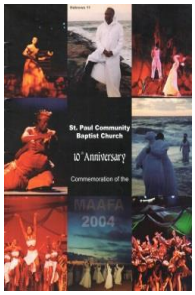

Commemorating The
MAAFA

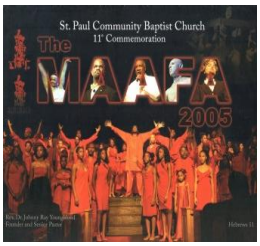

MAAFA 2000
"A HEALING JOURNEY"

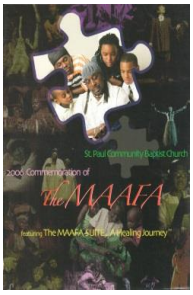

MAAFA
September 15 - 22, 2001
St. Paul Community Baptist Church
Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood

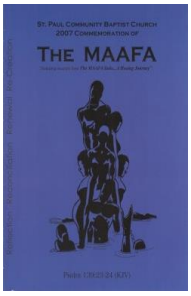

Maafa 2002

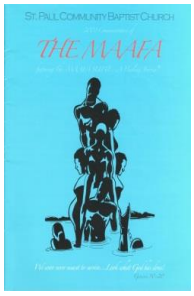

ST. PAUL COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
MAAFA
2003
"THE WAY OUT IS BACK THROUGH"

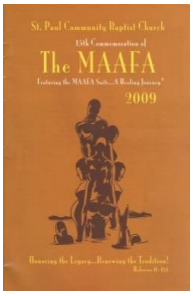

St. Paul Community Baptist Church
10 "Anniversary
Commemoration of the
MAAFA
2004

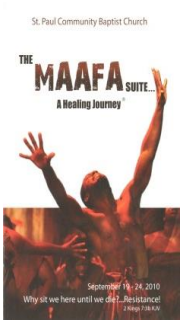

St. Paul Community Baptist Church
11' Commemoration
The
MAAFA
2005

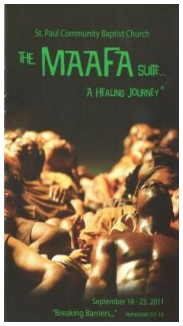

St. Paul Community Baptist Church
2006 Commemoration of
the MAAFA


St. Paul Community Baptist Church
2007 Commemoration of
THE MAAFA


St. Paul Community Baptist Church
THE MAAFA


St. Paul Community Baptist Church
The MAAFA
2009


St. Paul Community Baptist Church
THE MAAFA SUITE...
A Healing Journey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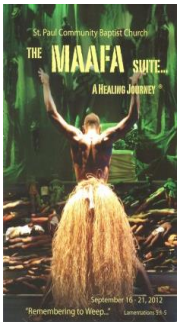
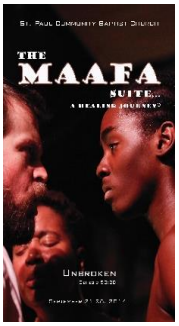
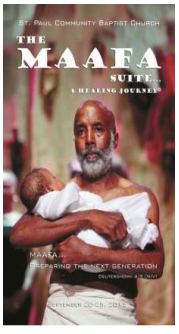
THE MAAFA SUITE...
A HEALING JOURNEY


St. Paul Community Baptist Church
THE MAAFA SUITE...
A HEALING JOURNEY


ST. PAUL COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
THE MAAFA SUITE
...A HEALING JOURNEY
DREAMS OF FREEDOM


THE
MAAFA
SUITE...
A HEALING JOURNEY
UNBROKEN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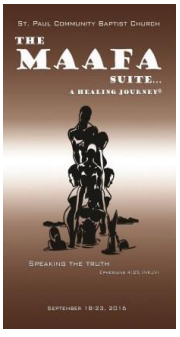
A HEALING JOURNEY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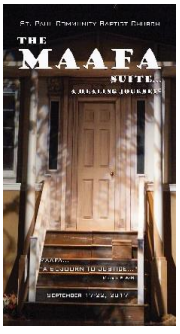
A HEALING JOURNEY
SPEAKING THE TRUTH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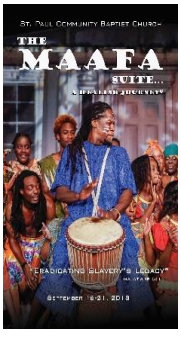
A HEALING JOURNEY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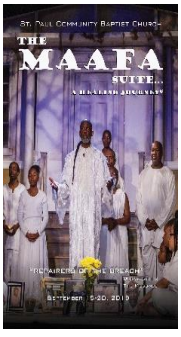
A HEALING JOURNEY
"ERADICATING SLAVERY'S LEGACY"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THE MAAFA SUITE...
A HEALING JOURNEY

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