

Review

The Cost of Unity: African-American Agency and Education in the Christian Church, 1865-1914. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008. Pp. 307. Cloth \$45.00. by Lawrence A. Q. Burnley

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Lawrence A. Q. Burnley, *The Cost of Unity: African-American Agency and Education in the Christian Church, 1865–1914*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008. Pp. 307. Cloth \$45.00.

The Cost of Unity is a positive contribution to the historical literature on African American education in the United States. By focusing on the Christian Church, also known as the Disciples of Christ, Burnley's account adds a new chapter to what we know about the education of African Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and serves as a useful complement to previous studies of the Freedmen's Bureau, the American Missionary Association, and philanthropic foundations such as the Rosenwald Fund. The author, both a professional historian and an ordained minister in the Christian Church, brings a unique perspective to his material.

By the late 19th century the Christian Church had about 250,000 members, over 48,000 were African Americans. Established in 1832 in Lexington, Kentucky, the Christian Church was influenced by John Locke, and other Christian Enlightenment thinkers, Scottish philosophy, and both Presbyterian and Baptist religious doctrines. The Christian Church's founders disdained formal creeds and held a fervent belief in the absolute authority of the Bible. African Americans, Burnley tells us, were attracted to the Christian Church not merely because it was opposed to hierarchal ecclesial authority, but also because the Church hierarchy offered African Americans the opportunity to organize their own congregations.

From the end of the Civil War to 1914, the Christian Church founded over a dozen schools for African Americans in seven states and the District of Columbia. While the initial educational efforts stressed evangelization, the Christian Church ultimately supported three types of schooling: theological, teacher training, and the Hampton-Tuskegee form of industrial education. Burnley contends that the Christian Church's white-controlled schools for African Americans were designed to keep them in their place, economically, socially, and politically. This program of "education for subordination," Burnley says, was largely a result of the Christian Church's northern members capitulating to southern whites' demands in order to maintain unity within the national church. In other words, a Booker T. Washington approach to industrial education for black southerners was the price exacted for achieving unity among the Christian Church's white membership.

Subordination may be a part of Burnley's narrative, but the crux of the monograph is a story about African American agency. Above all else, *The Cost of Unity* is an attempt to correct the Christian Church historiography that depicts African Americans as "passive recipients of white benevolence." In contrast to most recent histories of the Christian Church, Burnley asserts that African American disciples were active participants in the Christian Church's educational initiatives and that they demonstrated "great courage, sacrifice and ingenuity in their struggle

to provide schooling for their communities.” Burnley’s overarching arguments about African American agency are heavily indebted to James Anderson’s *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (1988). Although he acknowledges Anderson, Burnley might have been more forthcoming about the extent of Anderson’s influence. In any case, if forceful assertions of African American initiative invigorated readers twenty years ago, they have a much more familiar ring today. Indeed, highlighting African American agency has provided the basic template for recent scholarship on African American education by scholars such as Joe M. Richardson, Vanessa Siddle Walker, V. P. Franklin and Carter Julian Savage, Heather Williams, and others.

The examination of “Black Literacy Development and Schooling within the Christian Church” and “African-American Agency” are at the core of Burnley’s original contribution. Drawing from evangelical publications such as *Missionary Tidings* and *Gospel Plea*, Burnley effectively traces the African American contributions to several Christian Church educational initiatives from the opening of the Piedmont School of Industry in Martinsville, Virginia, in 1900 to the establishment of Jarvis Christian Institute (later College) in Hawkins, Texas, in 1913. Regarding Jarvis Christian Institute, Burnley demonstrates that Mary Alphin, an African American woman, played a crucial role in raising the needed funds. He also introduces us to James Nelson Ervin, who served twenty-four years as Jarvis Christian Institute’s first president. Alphin, Ervin, and many other African Americans embraced an educational program that would honor the heart (religious instruction), the hand (manual training), and the head (classical education).

Overall, Burnley presents a compelling case that the participation of African Americans on a grassroots level was vital to many Christian Church educational enterprises. Why is it, though, that agency must always be righteous? Surely there was as much agency in play when the Texas preacher who, as Burnley informs us, absconded with funds for a Christian Church school as there was when Alphin went out and successfully raised funds in the same region twenty years later. Burnley devotes the last two chapters to a discussion of the current status of African Americans within the Christian Church, and the chapters offer a provocative consideration of the meaning of integration as well as the nature of present-day intragroup and interracial relations. Burnley maintains that the Christian Church is a microcosm of the larger society in that it has never achieved real racial integration in the sense of “unrestricted and equal association.” He also laments the elimination in 2007 of the Black Ministries Department of the Christian Church, asserting that African American church members need to “create space *exclusively* for Blacks in national settings for the purpose of fostering and sustaining empowerment.” Along these lines, he calls upon the African American clergy to rally around Jarvis Christian College, the only remaining historically black Christian Church institution of higher education.

The flow of Burnley's text is frequently interrupted by lengthy quotations from primary and secondary sources, and this reviewer wishes that the author had spent more time summarizing the contents of these sources rather than simply reproducing them. And Burnley could have dedicated more space to discussing specific Christian Church educational initiatives and less to rehearsing the well-known historical details of the Reconstruction and Progressive eras. Nonetheless, *The Cost of Unity* is a valuable work and one that should appeal especially to those scholars interested in American and African American religious and educational history.

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Ramla M. Bandele, *Black Star: African American Activism in the International Political Economy*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008. Pp. 230. Cloth \$40.00.

Ramla M. Bandele offers a promising perspective in her book *Black Star: African American Activism in the International Political Economy*. In the preface she describes her purpose as using her book to test her "empirical methodology to objectively study" how the racially oppressed and resource-poor Western hemispheric segment of the global African Diaspora participated in and greatly influenced international politics and economics during the 1920s while seriously attempting to reconnect physically, at least, with their ancestral homeland—Africa. In Bandele's words, this monograph would serve "to test the robustness of [her] model in the study of African American transnational politics."

Bandele respectfully acknowledges her intellectual indebtedness to the diaspora-related scholarship of Ronald Walters and Gabriel Scheffer. Walters emphasized that "the immigrant model does not apply for diasporans," and offered a more useful and descriptive definition of "ethnic diasporas" defined as "a functioning trans-state network" whose foundation consists of a trio of "political actors" each typically engaged in self-centered political activity. Those actors or elements are the home country/region or "ancestral home" of the ethnic diaspora, the migrant population itself, and the "host country" or the geographical location where the ethnic diaspora settled outside the home country. Sometimes disagreeing and sometimes agreeing with other scholars regarding diaspora-related scholarship, Bandele makes it clear that her study does not address "ethnopolitics" as does the work of Joseph Rothchild. Instead of connecting Walters and Scheffer's approaches with her own, she states that her model seeks to focus on "how ethnic workers