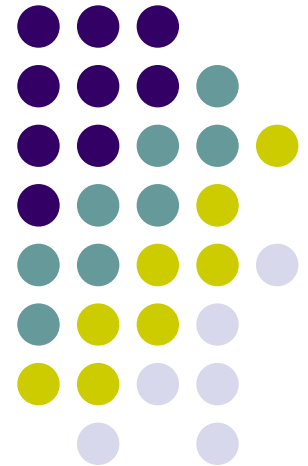


‘Whither the Negro Church’: Yale Seminar on the Negro Church - 1931

**Prologue to the
Civil Rights
Movement**



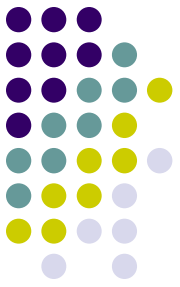
April 13-15, 1931: An historic three-day gathering was held at Yale Divinity School



- “A representative group of Negro alumni and friends met at the Henry Wright Cottage to consider some of the present problems of the Negro church. The theme of the meeting was “Whither the Negro Church?... In attendance [were] 24 delegates and leaders from Negro churches and educational institutions in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Kentucky, Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, the District of Columbia, and West Africa.”

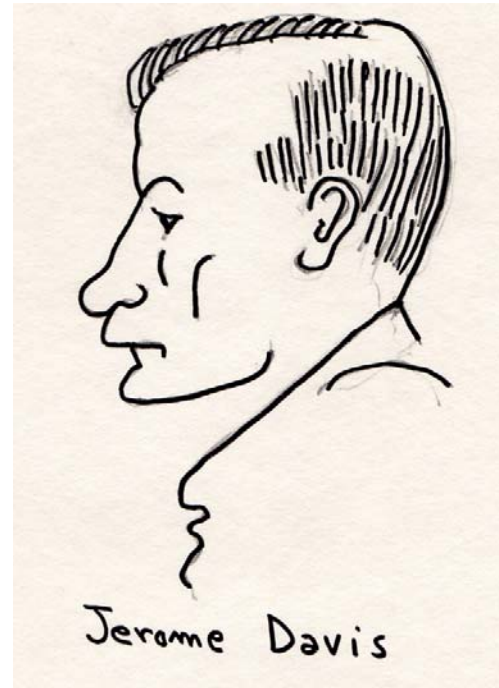
Yale Divinity News (May, 1931)

Upsilon Theta Chi society

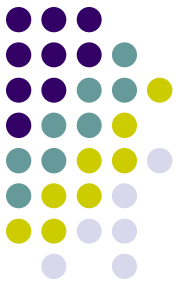


- The seminar was called and sponsored by black students “preparing for religious work at Yale.” However its genesis was their formation the previous spring (1930) of a “Negro society called Upsilon Theta Chi, whose motto was ‘Service and Sacrifice for Christ.’” Among its members were Harry W. Roberts (Pres.), Edward Carroll (Sec., YDS 1933), John Dillingham (Business Manager), Everett Davies, Samuel M. Carter (YDS 1939), Josephus Coan (YDS 1933), and Charles H. Moss (YDS 1931).

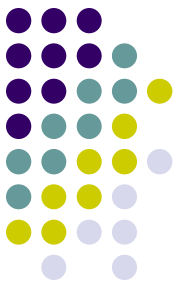
Jerome Davis



Caricature of Davis
by Roland Bainton



Both the Upsilon Theta Chi society and subsequent seminar enjoyed the enthusiastic support of Dr. Jerome Davis – labor organizer, sociologist, and social gospel advocate and since 1924 the Gilbert L. Stark Professor of Practical Theology at Yale Divinity School.



Jerome Davis, the Divinity School's most socially active and "radical" professor, enjoyed a very special relationship with black students at YDS. The extent and intensity of this relationship was attested to in a number of interviews conducted with elderly black alumni who had been students during this era, including Drs. Josephus Coan, William Banner, and Richard J. McKinney.



Josephus Coan



William Banner



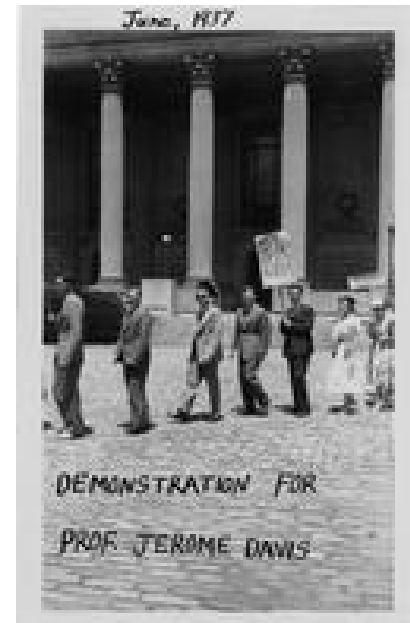
Richard McKinney

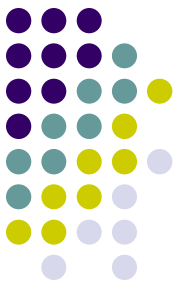


The controversial Davis (who would later author *Capitalism and its Culture*, be denied tenure, and depart Yale in 1937) provided the most visible faculty linkage to the seminar. In the Foreword to the published proceedings, he noted that “Yale Divinity School has long been friendly to the aspirations, the hopes, and the achievement of the Negro people.”



A protest march at the time of Davis's denial of tenure.

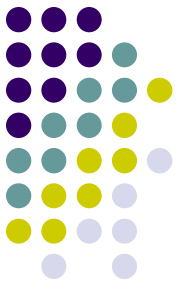




From Jerome Davis's Foreword:

- **“The proceedings here printed offer a ringing challenge to contented indifference. The Negro church must move forward to greater and nobler heights. That it has potential leadership of a high order will be at once clear to anyone who reads this report. It is to be hoped that many ministers throughout the U.S. may thoughtfully read these messages. Perhaps Negro ministers are peculiarly called of God to serve our country – to redeem all of our American nations, both white and black...”**

Amid the resurgent racism and economic deprivation of the Depression, the three-day seminar focused on five topics:

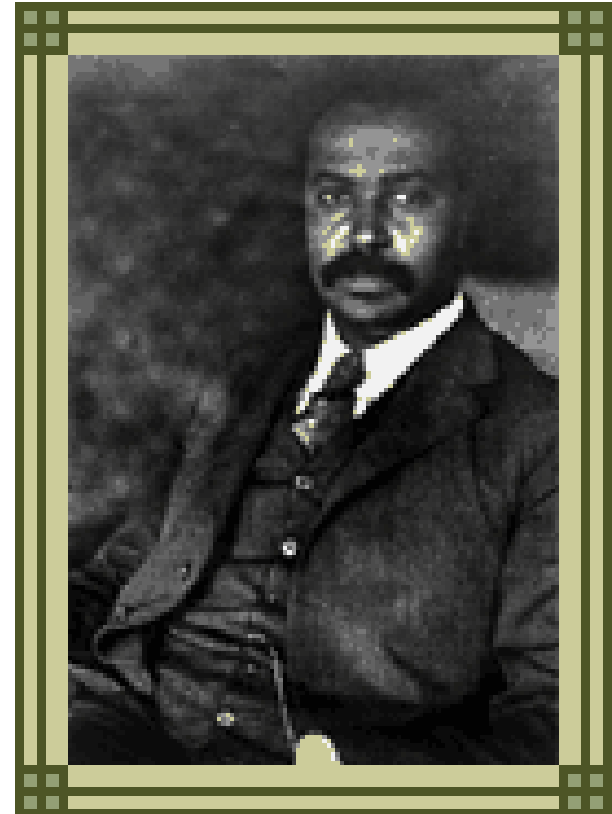


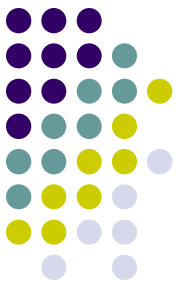
- **The Negro Church in a Changing Social Order**
- **The Negro Church and Economic Relations**
- **The Negro Church and Education**
- **The Negro Church and Race**
- **Future Leadership of the Negro Church**



Among the presenters:

Henry H. Proctor (YDS, 1895)
pastor emeritus of Atlanta
First Congregational Church,
co-founder of the Atlanta
Interracial Fellowship, and
pastor of Brooklyn's
Nazarene Congregational
Church.

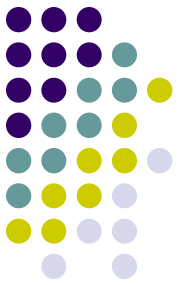




Among the presenters:

Dr. George Edmund Hayes (MA, Yale, 1904) Enrolled in YDS in 1905 but left before graduating; co-founder and executive director of the National Urban League (1911-1918) and first executive secretary of the Department of Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches.



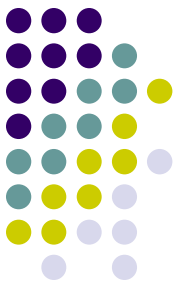


Among the presenters:

A. Philip Randolph

General Organizer and President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and son of a Methodist minister.

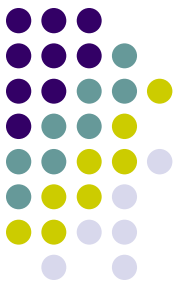




Among the presenters:

Benjamin Elijah Mays (MA, Ph.D Univ. of Chicago 1925, 1935) Minister, educator, Dean of School of Religion of Howard University, President of Morehouse College, civil rights activist, mentor and eulogist of Martin Luther King, Jr.

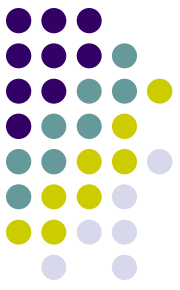




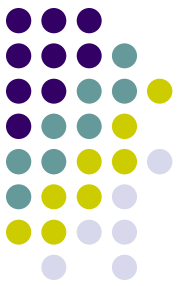
In response to the urgent inquiry ‘Whither the Negro Church?’ concluding resolutions adopted by seminar participants were farsighted in their call for the black church to:

- 1) “set itself to the task of developing a more prophetic and fearless technique in making applicable the implications of the religious of Jesus in relation to the social order.”
- 2) “discover and develop a type of leadership that would do for America and the Negro race what Gandhi has done for India and what Jesus has done for the world.”

Another concluding resolution:

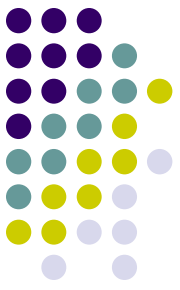


- “ After three days of communion, conference, and discussion in what is properly designated ‘The Yale Seminar on the Negro Church,’ we ... wish to go on record as pronouncing this a movement fraught with unlimited possibilities for the Negroes of the U.S....”
- “We are keenly conscious that this significant movement is made possible because of the secure place and the fine qualities of the Negro students in the Yale Divinity School. It is very evident that these students have so recommended themselves to the authorities that, through them, the needs of their people are recognized and the Divinity School seeks thus to help in solving the vexing Negro problem.”



Resolution in tribute to Jerome Davis:

- **“We are appreciably aware that any such movement must have the guidance of some interested and understanding personality, and we have sensed such a personality in Prof. Jerome Davis. His closeness to his students, his interest in them and their people’s needs and his constructive activity, as shown by his sponsorship of this Seminar, are keenly noted and appreciated by the members present.”**

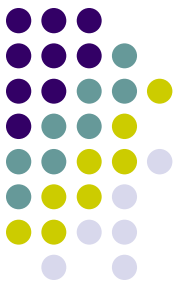


Plans to hold subsequent conferences on the “Negro Church” at YDS apparently failed to come to immediate fruition. Nevertheless, this historic seminar anticipated and encouraged revival of a prophetic black religious tradition that would subsequently provide critical leadership, inspiration for the emergent civil rights movement.

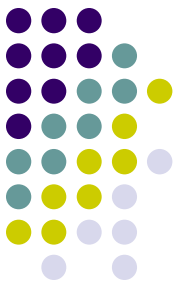
A number of seminar participants, most notably A. Philip Randolph and Benjamin E. Mays would play prominent roles within its ranks – mentoring its leaders, devising strategies, and providing intellectual and theological legitimating.



The seminar has been cited for its contribution to the intellectual and theological foundations of the modern civil rights movement.

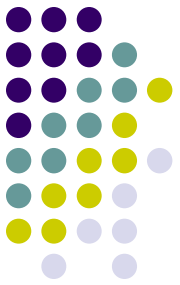


See: Dennis C. Dickerson, “African American religious intellectuals and the theological foundations of the civil rights movement, 1930-55,” *Church History* Vol. 74, June 2005: 217-235



In summary:

The 1931 ‘Yale Seminar on the Negro Church,’ served as prologue to the modern civil rights movement and thus linked YDS – its faculty, black students and alumni – directly to one of the century’s most important religious and social reform movements. It constitutes an important but heretofore all but forgotten episode in the prophetic tradition of black theological and ministerial education at Yale Divinity School.



- Special thanks to Martha Smalley for her contributions toward development of this Power Point