

WHAT WAS THE BLACK CHURCH? (Opinion, *The Community Informer*, Greenville, SC, June 25, 2014, 2A.)

In our continued quest to understand what has happened to the role of the Black Church in our society, it is best that we begin our conversation with the question: what was the Black Church?

Historically, Lewis Baldwin argues in *A New Day Begun: African-American Churches and Civic Culture in Post-Civil Rights America* that the Black Church has been relevant and meaningful in its connection to the everyday lives of African-Americans. Hence, he shares below:

In any case, the Black Church was born into a culture that did not separate private devotion from public duty. Invariably, this means that the church had to move beyond the strictly spiritual and ecclesiastical to promote positive change in vital areas of life--social, political, economic, intellectual, and otherwise. This became all the more important for Africans in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, many of whom claimed the church as the only visible institution that they owned and controlled on a wide scale (Baldwin, 2003, p. 16).

Baldwin further supports his argument by stating Carter G. Woodson's vision of the Black Church.

It is important to note that the history of the Black Church has been, according to Carter G. Woodson, an 'all-comprehending institution', the general contention that there has always been a tradition in the Black Church that: (1) encourages faith-based social action; (2) social service; (3) involvement in public policy issues; (4) rooted in a social gospel that upholds Christianity's historic concern for the poor and oppressed; and (5) encourages the involvement of the church in virtually every aspect of African-American life (Baldwin, 2003, p. 15).

In other words, the Black Church was not only concerned with the issues inside the four walls, but also the outside. It embraced a dual private and public role for the Black community by birthing schools, seminaries, businesses, civil rights strategies, and more. From this, the Black Church met the needs of the whole person while working to combat racism. This activism provided holistic uplift, promoted a never-ending faith, challenged systems of oppression, and extended social responsibility to all of humankind besides Black people.

Thinking about the social ills around us, where is the Black Church today in comparison to its historical predecessor? Has it responded for us the same way it responded for our ancestors? These are insightful questions to keep in mind as we continue to examine and reflect on the status of the Black Church.