

What Black History Month Means to Me

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Pastor Bruce E. Smith

Black History Month is a 28-day celebration of the achievements of this country's Americans of African descent. Americans learn of the accomplishments of those who have been marginalized because of the color of their skin and the status of their humanity as slaves and former slaves. Students, whether home schooled or in public-, private- or charter schools, study those who boldly accomplished unexpected feats.



Bishop Isaac Lane of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

One of those achievers is Bishop Isaac Lane, a prominent bishop in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and founder of Lane College. He was born a slave in Jackson, Tennessee on March 3, 1834. He is my grandmother's grandfather. More about his life can be found in his book, *Autobiography of Bishop Isaac Lane, LL.D.: with a Short History of the C.M.E. Church in America and of Methodism (1916)*, the complete text of which can be found here: (docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/lane/menu.html)

Lane's mother, Rachel, was a slave on the plantation belonging to Lane's white father, Cullen Lane. Lane enjoyed privileges as the master's illegitimate son and was able to attend religious services held by white Methodists. Though he never received a formal education, he learned to read and write on his own.

In 1853, Lane married Frances Anne Boyce, a slave on a nearby plantation, and brought her to live with him on Cullen Lane's property. Shortly thereafter, he experienced a religious conversion and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church South, on September 11, 1854. Although white-Methodist officials denied his petition to preach because of his race, he was granted an exhorter's license in 1856.

A decade later, Lane was ordained a deacon and an elder at a regional conference where African-American members of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, gathered to debate a formal break from the white congregation. A special session of the newly formed Colored Methodist Episcopal Church elected him as bishop in 1873.

In this new role Lane formed conferences and built churches throughout Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana, focusing on higher education for both clergy and lay people. To further his cause, he purchased four acres of land in Jackson, Tennessee in 1882 for the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church High School, which was later renamed Lane College.

Lane retired from the bishopric in 1914 but continued to organize churches throughout the Midwest. He died in Jackson, Tennessee on December 5, 1937 at the age of 103.

I feel that Bishop Lane's spirit has been with me since I joined the Unification Church (UC) back in 1977. His work and our work in the church, from the formation stages of mobile fundraising teams, to witnessing about True Parents mirror each other. In another section of his book, he discusses the important events in his life while educating his readers on the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church's significance in Methodist history.

In Chapter 17 he says, "I began the work of a bishop under great disadvantages. Not having had the opportunity of early training in the science of letters, I was very embarrassed to preach to congregations composed of so many persons who had enjoyed those advantages. Nevertheless, by consecrating myself to my Heavenly Father and applying myself to such books as I had, I got possession of a vocabulary of words and a line of thought that served me well on all occasions. Wherever I went, my services were acceptable, and the people heard me gladly. I continued to study, and by using all I had, I grew in knowledge and power of speech.

"Above all, I wanted to be a good man, and as a young man, I resolved that I would live a pure, upright life before God and my fellow men. I knew that even if I could not be learned or rich, I could be upright in my life."

I resonate with Bishop Lane's suffering all the time. I have felt misunderstood and ridiculed from when I worked with the Free Teens program, which is an abstinence program started by members of the Unification Church. I remember people saying, "Abstinence will never work." Just as my great-great grandfather kept going from town to town despite the difficulty in traveling over "unpaved roads" and finding himself in "foreign" and often hostile land, I keep going, for the sake of God and my congregation. From working on stopping the spread of pornography in and around our church to working with the Interfaith Coalition Against Sex Trafficking (ICAST), I have to keep going to build the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and liberate God and True Parents.

Because the sex-trafficking industry is a form of modern slavery, I see myself as a modern-day abolitionist. With this spirit, I joined the Outreach Subcommittee of Indiana Protection for Abused and Trafficked Humans (IPATH), which was created with the assistance of Indiana's Deputy Attorney General, Abigail Kuzma. During the most recent meeting, which took place before the Super Bowl, we met and discussed ways to collaborate more effectively. Other local groups and national organizations that work to promote anti-trafficking awareness and education attended as well.

Efforts discussed included faxes to hotels concerning human trafficking, the Soap Project, International, Hope 61, Outreach Materials, Sex Trafficking Reduction Project, Other Super Bowl-focused projects and upcoming events. All of these are featured on my blog: nomoresextrafficking.blogspot.com/

This is my African-American heritage on this Black History month in 2012.

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The full book can be read online at docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/lane/menu.html