

“Let the Church Say Amen!”

Objectives:

- 1) To appreciate the importance of religion in the lives of the slaves.
- 2) To compare and contrast the extent of the allowances of religious worship by the slave owners.
- 3) To examine the importance of religion today in the African American community.
- 4) To evaluate the importance of the African American churches during the Antebellum and Reconstruction eras.
- 5) To develop computer and presentation skills by using Power Point.

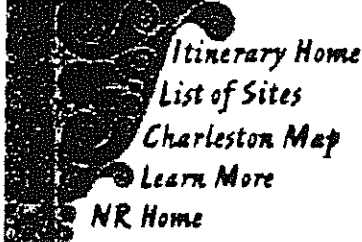
Procedures:

Day 1:

1. The teacher will lecture on the various traditional West African religions such as Islam and animism during the time of the slave trade. He/She will emphasize the importance of religion (the center of the community).
2. The teacher will then explain the necessity for the slave owners to forbid the practice of the Africans' religion in the process of adapting them to American culture and their life as a slave.
3. The class will discuss various ways in which the slaves might incorporate practices from their original religion into their newfound religion (mostly Christianity).

Day 2:

1. The teacher will introduce the lesson by reading 3 quotes of former slaves about the importance of religion in their lives.
2. Each student will then randomly pick a quote or narrative (printed on various colors of paper) to read. They will be given approximately five minutes to read the primary source twice.
3. Each student will be asked to summarize their narrative and to conclude the feelings of the witness to the class when called upon. After all the given primary sources are covered, the class will discuss the differences of the experiences.



Emanuel A.M.E. Church

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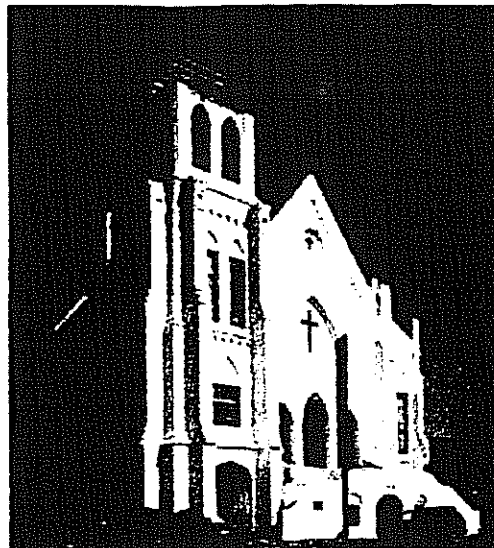
Emanuel AME Church
 Photograph by Lissa D'Aquisto, courtesy of City of Charleston

The Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church is a Gothic Revival style church built in 1891. Retaining its original alter, communion rail, pews, and light fixtures the church is one of only a few unaltered religious interiors in Charleston, especially from the Victorian period. The brick Gothic church with its tall steeple replaced an earlier 1872 church badly damaged by the 1886 earthquake. Today Emanuel is the oldest AME church in the South, and houses the oldest black congregation south of Baltimore, Maryland.

The history of this congregation reflects the development of religious institutions for African Americans in Charleston. Its roots stem from a religious group of free blacks and slaves organized in 1791. In 1816, black members of Charleston's Methodist Episcopal church withdrew over disputed burial ground, and under

the leadership of Morris Brown, formed a separate congregation. The church's 1400 members soon thereafter established themselves an African Methodist Episcopal church, a denomination formally established in 1816 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Two years later, Brown and other ministers of the church were jailed for violating state and local laws which prohibited religious gatherings of slaves and free blacks independent of white supervision.

In 1822 the church was investigated for its involvement with a planned slave revolt. Denmark Vesey, one of the church's founders, organized a major slave uprising in Charleston. Vesey was raised in slavery in the Virgin Islands among newly imported Africans. He was the personal servant of slavetrader Captain Joseph Vesey, who settled in Charleston in 1783. Denmark remained with him until in 1799, when he was able to purchase his freedom with a winning lottery ticket worth \$1500. He became a successful carpenter, especially among Charleston's majority black population. Beginning in December 1821, Vesey began to organize a slave rebellion, but authorities were informed of the plot before it could take place. Three hundred thirteen alleged participants were arrested, and 35 including Vesey were executed. The plot created mass hysteria throughout the Carolinas and the South. Brown, suspected but never convicted of knowledge of the plot, went north to Philadelphia where he eventually became the second bishop of the AME denomination.

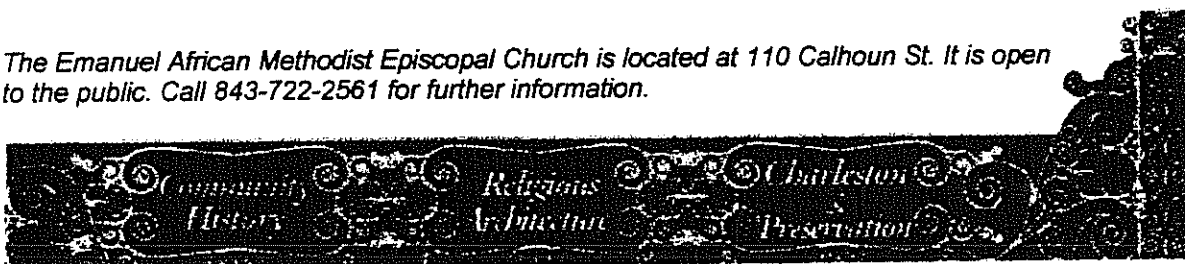


Emanuel AME Church, after Hurricane Hugo in 1989

Photograph by Jack Boucher, courtesy of HABS

During the Vesey controversy, the AME church was burned. Worship services continued after the church was rebuilt until 1834 when all-black churches were outlawed. The congregation subsequently met in secret until 1865 when it was formally reorganized, and the name Emanuel was adopted. Today, Emanuel AME Church is one of more than 1400 historically significant buildings within the Charleston Old and Historic District.

The Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church is located at 110 Calhoun St. It is open to the public. Call 843-722-2561 for further information.



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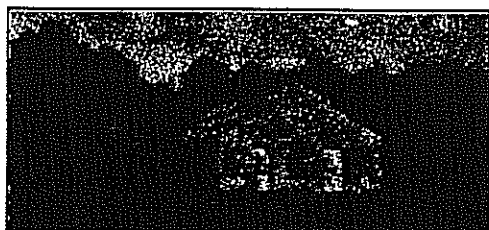
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Brotherly Love

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Church on John's Island

1797

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This 1797 watercolor painting by artist Charles Fraser shows St. John's Church, located on John's Island in Charleston, South Carolina. Fraser, a native of Charleston, painted the scene when he was fifteen years old. It is one of forty of his early drawings "of the city and surrounding country, including plantations and parish churches" included in a collection entitled *A Charleston Sketchbook, 1796-1806*, published in 1854.

Since house slaves and those who lived near cities often attended church with their white masters, blacks attended or became members of many of the white churches surrounding Charleston. Near the end of the 18th century, a few independent black congregations were allowed to form.

Fraser described the impact on Charleston when in 1793 "the awful tragedy of St. Domingo, as is well known, threw upon our shores a crowd of miserable and destitute French," to whom the city responded "readily and cheerfully to the extent of their means." Fraser recalls being employed "upon errands of charity to those unfortunate beings. Although white refugees were greeted with compassion and material aid, state and local ordinances were passed to restrict the entry and movement of French-speaking blacks.

Three years after Fraser painted St. John's Church, Gabriel's Rebellion was discovered in nearby Virginia, and South Carolina passed a law forbidding Negroes to assemble "for the purpose of mental

instruction or religious worship" between sunset and sunrise, even with a majority of whites present. The law was amended in 1803, and again in 1819 so that the presence of one white person made the gathering lawful.

Black Methodist congregations were numerous in the Charleston area, operating semi-autonomously with a white "Preacher in Charge," even holding their own quarterly conference and maintaining charge of their own financial and disciplinary affairs until 1815. In 1817, when the white trustees of the Charleston Bethel Church attempted to erect a hearse house on the black burial lot, the 4,367 black members withdrew. They formed the African Church of Charleston. Morris Brown, who had been ordained by Bishop Richard Allen earlier that year, became the African Church's first pastor.

Image Credit: The Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association



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