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Configurational Patterns in the Function of the Church for Aging Persons: A Black Perspective

Functions of the black church for black aged may be considered an important issue in the study of black aging because of the manner in which these functions may impact transition and adjustment of blacks to old age. However, the importance of functions of the black church in the black aging process may be seen only insofar as it is possible to explore systematically the context in which these functions occur. One manner in which black church functions may be explicated is in terms of a socio-historical model adapted from Roth¹ which focuses on configurational patterns whose bases are in historical experience and which have a bearing on church functions.

In the main, the configurational model is conceived as a socio-historical model which seeks to determine the extent of continuity and change in black aged *role enactment* and black *group regard* for black elderly over periods of time. These periods of time include the pre-contact cultural background period in Africa; the period of slavery (1619-1865); the post-slavery period (1865-1945); and the contemporary era (1945-present). The assumption on which the configurational model is based derives from a realization that current literature on black aging does more to compare black aged with whites than to look at the black aging process from within black culture.² The present attempt is to establish a black cultural baseline on which successive behavior of blacks and current black church function may be assessed.

In the context of this study, *role enactment* is defined as those actions on the part of aged blacks which infer a process of experience and association with others and which revolve from an intricate network of socially defined expectations and judgments.³ By *group regard* is meant those attitudes that derive from group interaction through which black aged are identified and appraised.⁴

¹Guenther Roth, "Socio-Historical Model and Developmental Theory," *American Sociological Review*, 40 (April 1975), pp. 148-157.

²Jacqueline Jackson, "Negro Aged: Toward Needed Research in Social Gerontology," *The Gerontologist*, 11 (1971), Part II 51-52, and Christie, Kieffer, "Notes on Anthropology and the Minority," *The Gerontologist*, 11 (1971), Part II, 94-98.

³Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism* (Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969) p. 102.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 109.

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Configurational patterns in historical perspective

Because configurational patterns are concerned with cultural traditions as they inform the black aging process, it is important, initially, to focus on the pre-contact cultural background of American blacks. That is, the initial concern must be for those culturally conditioned beliefs, values and attitudes which derive from the African ancestry of American blacks. This provides a means of setting forth a baseline on which later change and continuity in role enactment and group regard may be assessed.

The studies of Herskovits,⁵ Mbiti,⁶ Massey and McKinney,⁷ and Wylie⁸ provide some evidence of the configurational patterns of blacks regarding religious concepts, roles of elderly and attitudes toward elderly blacks at the pre-contact level. In brief the African religious life incorporated a view of the universe as ruled by Great Gods who were associated with forces of nature. In this context, Africans held a world view which implied beings who had powers of assistance, decision-making and foresight. Ancestors were viewed as possessing power and, thus, were regarded as "alive" in surviving family memories.⁹ In this regard elderly persons were also perceived to be endowed with certain peculiar powers and were accorded care and respect because of the good or ill their powers could bring. Moreover, elderly were considered the stabilizing force in societal organization and were unfailingly consulted prior to reaching decisions.¹⁰

The reign of law was assured by the "king" and the council of his elders.¹¹ In Massey and McKinney's terms, old people in African society were considered repositories of community wisdom—wisdom which grew out of experience.¹² In addition, African elderhood carried with it a responsibility for conducting oneself in a manner which was conducive to earning respect as indicated by Akan proverbs such as "An elder does not roast a hot stone and place it in the hand of a child;" "A greedy elder washes his own dishes."¹³

Both the McKinney and Massey Study¹⁴ and the Wylie Study¹⁵ contend that in African societies, elderhood through grandparenthood represented an estate which signaled not only a status which summed up the meaning of the life cycle but also was an estate which had the responsibility of instruction to the young. This honorable and obligatory

⁵Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1970).

⁶Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1969).

⁷Floyd Massey Jr. and Samuel Berry McKinney, *Church Administration in the Black Perspective* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1976).

⁸F.M. Wylie, "Attitudes Toward Aging and the Aged Among Black Americans: Some Historical Perspectives." *Aging and Human Development*, 2 (1971): 66-70.

⁹Mbiti, *African Religions*, p. 139.

¹⁰Herskovits, *The Myth*, pp. 83-84.

¹¹Ibid. p. 83.

¹²Massey and McKinney, *Church Administration*, p. 45.

¹³Ibid. p. 45.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Wylie, "Attitudes Toward Aging."

state is summarized in the Akan proverbs: "When the buttocks of an elder grow thin, it goes into those of the younger generation:" and "He deserves pity who does not have an elder in his house"¹⁶

The religious concepts of the 'invisible' black church of the slaves¹⁷ and of organized institutional church were those that embodied a doctrine of relevance and dignity for all black persons. The black church was further conceived as a means through which black people have been enabled to see themselves in the image of God.¹⁸ Because the black church is considered to be the major social institution around which black life has historically been structured,¹⁹ the religious concepts of the church are seen as undergirding configurational patterns of black elderly role enactment and group regard in the four time periods of black experience already outlined.

The presence of aged persons during slavery is documented at least in part by diary entries of missionaries compiled by Crum,²⁰ who confirmed visitations had been made to aged slaves in their cabins. In addition, data indicate that in at least one mission, three-hundred catechized black children were kept under the care of an elderly female.²¹ Nonetheless, extant data regarding the role enactment of black aged and black group regard toward them during slavery are sparse, perhaps owing to the fact that the black population was a young one at that time.

Much of Herskovits' data regarding retention of Africanisms in the behavior of blacks in America spans both the slavery and post-slavery periods even though his data was compiled beginning in 1938. For this reason, it is difficult to assign specific time periods to his data on black aged. Nonetheless, his data is instructive of the non-institutionalized form of behavior which was exhibited by blacks after confronting the American scene. In short, Herskovits refers to the concern shown by blacks for the best treatment of elderly because of a belief that ancestors could help or harm their descendants.²² Moreover, blacks studied by Herskovits tended toward referring to old people as "Uncle" and "Aunty" whether they were relatives or not.²³

Reinforcement of the importance of elders though remembering minutest details of family history is also considered by Wylie²⁴ to be a consequence of the African oral-historical tradition carried to America by slaves.

¹⁶Massey and McKinney, *Church Administration*, p. 45.

¹⁷E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1964), p. 17.

¹⁸The United Methodist Church, *Ethnic Minorities in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1976), p. 58.

¹⁹Frazier, *The Negro Church*, p. 31.

²⁰Mason Crum, *The Negro in the Methodist Church* (New York: Editorial Department, Division of Education and Cultivation, Board of Missions and Church Extension, The Methodist Church, 1951).

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 36.

²²Herskovits, *The Myth*, p. 151.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Wylie, "Attitudes Toward Aging"

Several studies including one by Atlanta University,²⁵ the Murray Report,²⁶ and a study by Weiss²⁷ provide illustrative material concerning role enactment of aged black persons and black group regard for elderly during the post-slavery period (1865-1945). In the Atlanta University Study,²⁸ the "home for the aged" appeared as the most characteristic charity of black people and tended to be sponsored by church groups, other charitable organizations and individuals. Weiss²⁹ also included old-age homes among the earliest efforts to aid city black persons in the period from 1910-1918. Moreover, these efforts, which were seen as offshoots of church, charity, benevolent and settlement movements, were staffed and supported by blacks.³⁰

The presence of the earliest homes for black aged were considered as a reaffirmation of respect and concern of blacks for elders in the light of previous neglect of old people within the slave system.³¹ Moreover, in at least one instance, the presence of a home for children and destitute men and women provided opportunity for caregiving on the part of elderly women. Thus, a report about the Tent Sister's Old Folks Home, Raleigh, North Carolina, indicated that of 250 persons assisting in the work of the home, 100 were over sixty years of age.³²

Murray's Report³³ refers to care-receiving on the part of black aged by their respective families and benefits derived from government assistance programs, a fact that as reinforced by the small proportion of this group (5.5%) in homes for the aged, infirm or needy.³⁴ In addition, the report which represented 1940 government statistics revealed a tendency of aged minority persons to remain active in the labor force.³⁵

As is the case with previous time periods, there is a dearth of information on current configurational patterns representing the period from 1945 to the present. However, extant data indicate the importance of religion in the lives of aged black people.³⁶ To this degree, church activities tended during this period to be oriented around interests, support and participation of older people. Moreover, old people have exhibited significant control of religious instruments and ritual in the

²⁵W.E. Burghardt Dubois, Ed., *Atlanta University Publications Number 14: Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans*, (Atlanta, Ga.: The Atlanta University Press, 1909. Also in the Atlanta University Publications (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968.

²⁶Florence Murray, Ed. *The Negro Handbook* (New York: Current Books, Inc., and A.A. Wyn, Publishers, 1947.

²⁷Nancy J. Weiss, *The National Urban League* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

²⁸Dubois, *Atlanta University*.

²⁹Weiss, *The National Urban League*.

³⁰Ibid., p. 11.

³¹Dubois, *Atlanta University*, pp. 65-77.

³²Ibid., pp. 71-72.

³³Murray, *The Negro Handbook*.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 12-13.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Jackson, "Negro Aged." and Hylan Lewis, "Blackways of Kent," in *The Black Church in America*, ed. Hart M. Nelsen, et. al. (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

black church. Data from three black churches in the Lewis Study³⁷ reveals that four of six deacons in a Baptist church were over sixty-five and the average age of a trustee board of eight men in an African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was over sixty-five. In a Methodist Episcopal Church, the pattern deviated because the older men died; however, all of the active older men were officers. Older blacks were also more likely to provide vocal support and encouragement for the pastor through responses such as "Amen," "Preach," "Ain't it so," or "Yes Lord." In addition, older persons tended to be the experts on public prayer.

Mays' and Nicholson's Study³⁸ further shows that in Sunday School and young people's work, a significant number of older persons have been teachers or managers. However, in all cases of church endeavors including overall participation, financial contributions and moral support black women rather than black men dominated.³⁹ Nevertheless, the kinds of group regard generated by the black church have, according to Dancy,⁴⁰ made it possible for black aged to feel like and be somebody.

Data from autobiographies of black applicants to seminary from 1958 to the present⁴¹ contain information about grandparent role enactment and applicant regard for this person. Although with less frequency now, approximately half of the applicants had previously listed the grandmother as having considerable influence in their lives and on their choice of career. In nearly every case the grandmother had major responsibility for child-rearing, was designated the primary source of emotional stability and was considered the wisest within the household with particular adeptness for giving sound advice.

Summary of continuity and change in black aged role enactment and group regard for black aged

In tracing continuity and change in patterns of black elderly role enactment and group regard for black elderly, limited data preclude any comprehensive assessment during the representative time periods outlined at the outset. However, existing data do provide a fairly generalized picture of replication of patterns regarding black aged as well as distinctive features occurring from one period to another.

In African culture the roles enacted by aged persons were closely tied to religious beliefs and tribal structure. These roles largely included leader or stabilizer in societal organization; consultant or advisor in decision-making; oral historian or collector and disseminator of socio-cultural history; reposer of wisdom; and grandparent and caregiver in whom the life cycle culminated and from whom direction for life tasks came. Societal regard for the African elder included respect

³⁷Lewis, "Blackways."

³⁸Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969).

³⁹Mays and Nicholson, *The Negro's Church*; Jackson, "Negro Aged;" and Lewis "Blackways."

⁴⁰Joseph Dancy, Jr., *The Black Elderly: A Guide for Practitioners* (The University of Michigan and Wayne State University: The Institute of Gerontology, 1977).

⁴¹Personal Conversation With Thomas Pugh, Academic Dean, The Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

which bordered on worship and awe. Moreover, there was a general acceptance of the skills, rights and authorities of old people.

A number of black aged roles and types of group regard toward aged which appeared in the pre-contact cultural background were replicated in subsequent historical periods as indicated in Chart 1. Specifically, continuity of aged role enactment over the entire span of the time periods appeared in the roles of leader and caregiver, particularly as they related to the church. The role of oral historian, as well, was present throughout the time spans. While the grandparent role occurred throughout the historical periods, its function became modified during the slave era to include extended family; thus grandparents also became relative designates.

CHART 1

AGED BLACK ROLE ENACTMENT AND BLACK GROUP REGARD

PRE-CONTACT (Africa)	SLAVERY 1619 to 1865	POST-SLAVERY 1865 to 1945	CONTEMPORARY 1945-Present	STUDY FINDINGS
<i>AGED ROLE ENACTMENTS:</i>				
Leader.....				
Stabilizer			Stabilizer.....	
Consultant (Advisor)			Consultant..... (Advisor)	
Oral Historian.....				
Grandparent	Grandparent..... (Relative Designate)			
Care-giver.....	Care-receiver.....			
Repository of Wisdom			Repository..... of Wisdom	
		Worker		
<i>GROUP REGARD</i>				
Awe.....				
Respect.....				
Worship				Honor
Acceptance of skills.....				

Roles during the pre-contact period were ostensibly giving ones on the part of aged Africans; thus, there was a dominant concern for extending the self rather than receiving from others. Black elderly were increasingly seen throughout the subsequent periods as care-receivers, especially in the context of old folks homes and more recently in terms of church programs for aged blacks. This trend has represented a movement away from age-integrative functioning in the pre-contact period to age-segregation though the extent may be described as minimal. In the periods of slavery and post-slavery, the stabilizing influence of black aged was not evidenced, probably owing to a younging black population during these periods. The stabilizing influence reappeared within the black church and within the family context during the contemporary era with an element of control which constituted a variation of the consultant or advisor role. Wisdom as a category of group regard appeared first in literature on the pre-contact period but not again until the contemporary era.

In summarizing group regard for aged blacks, it may be said that respect for black aged and acceptance of their skills were dominant categories throughout the time periods. Awe as a kind of group regard was demonstrated during the period of slavery, while ancestor worship as it occurred during the pre-contact period did not appear thereafter in the literature. Concern and recognition appeared as distinct characteristics during slavery, post-slavery and during the contemporary era.

By way of conclusion, there has emerged from the historically-based configurational patterns certain kinds of functioning by aged blacks which has included active participation in life's events. Within the context of community, black aged have tended toward age-integration rather than age-segregation. Finally, the overall manner of functioning by black aged throughout the historical periods has tended to be related to kinds of black group regard which may be described as being positive.

The study

The black church has been cited as probably the most important social institution affecting the cultural and social values of black people and it is reasonable to assume that it continues to exert this influence on persons through old age. Hence, an exploratory study was undertaken to gain insights into the extent to which the previously outlined configurational model applied to current black churches. The configurational model was conceived as a socio-historical model through which continuity and change in black aged role enactment and black group regard would be assessed. The assessment involved the use of periods of time including a pre-contact period in Africa; the period of slavery (1619-1865); the post-slavery period (1865-1945); and the contemporary era (1945-present). In this context, the purpose of the study was to explore the existence within black churches today of those enacted roles and group regard which appeared during the historical periods as a means of determining possible black church functions in the black aging process.

The assessment of enacted roles included the following: (1) leader; (2) stabilizer; (3) consultant or advisor; (4) controller; (5) oral-historian; (6) grandparent or relative designate; (7) care-giver; (8) care-receiver; (9)

CHART 2: COMPILATION OF BLACK CHURCH DATA

	ROLE ENACTMENT	GROUP REGARD	ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT	AGE SEGREGATION
U.M.C.	<i>Leader:</i> Finance, Family Ecumenics, Administrative Brd., Health & Welfare, Pastor/Parish Relations. <i>Repositors of Wisdom</i> <i>Consultant to Young Adult</i> <i>Grandparent</i> <i>Care-Receiver</i>	Awe Acceptance of Skills Some resentment (1)	Significant Involvement in Total Church Life	Senior Citizen Program Retiree Organization
Presb.	<i>Leader:</i> Property Manager, President of Senior Citizens' Club	Awe Respect Acceptance of Skills	Largely involved as members	
Baptist	<i>Leader:</i> Deacons Brd., Trustees, Finance Com., Treasurer, Mothers' Brd., Spiritual Leader <i>Consultant</i> to Pastor and the young. <i>Caregiver/Teacher</i> <i>Grandparent/Relative</i> <i>Designate</i> <i>Repository of Wisdom</i>	Awe Respect Acceptance of Skills Honor Antagonism and Resentment (3)	Significant Involvement in Total Church Life Some Tendency toward Control (3)	Golden Age Resource Center
C.M.E.	<i>Leader:</i> Trustee Board, Treasurer, Class <i>Leaders/Consultants</i>	Acceptance of Skills Antagonism and Resentment	Tendency to Control Worship & Program geared to Elderly	
A.M.E.	<i>Leader:</i> Sunday School Supt., Finance and Stewardship, Trustees, Secretary <i>Consultant</i> <i>Repository of Wisdom</i>	Respect Acceptance of Skills	Significant Involvement in Total Church Life	

repository of wisdom; and (10) worker. The assessment of group regard included the following: (1) awe; (2) respect; (3) worship; (4) acceptance of skills; and (5) concern.

A population of ten black churches in the metropolitan Atlanta area was chosen on the basis of denomination; membership size and pastor's age since it was postulated that these variables might inform enacted roles by black aged and group regard for aged by church members. As indicated in Chart 2 data are based on three black United Methodist churches with memberships of 225, 1500 and 1800; one black Presbyterian church with a membership of 200; four black Baptist churches with memberships of 275, 300, 350 and 1800; one Christian Methodist Episcopal church with membership of 148; and one African Methodist Episcopal church with a membership of 100. The pastors ages ranged from 22 to 64.

Collection of data was accomplished through focused interviews with pastors of the ten churches. Thus, the survey was limited to the clergy's knowledge and observations about the aged constituency and parishioner attitudes.

Results and analysis

Overall data obtained from the sample of ten black churches as contained in Chart 2 indicate that current enacted roles of black elderly 65 years of age or older include, in various forms and degrees, all enacted roles appearing in the historical periods. Thus, the overall results regardless of denomination include the following:

1. *Leader.* Specific leadership roles by aged blacks were to be found in all churches and included official capacities such as treasurer, class leaders, secretary, property manager, president of senior citizens group, Sunday school superintendent, and chairman of finance and stewardship; member of leadership committees such as administrative board, ecumenical affairs, health and welfare, mother's board, deacon's board and trustee board, family life, pastor/parish relations.
2. *Stabilizer.* In one church, aged persons serve as the essential life force undergirding the church in the view of the pastor.
3. *Consultant or advisor.* In three churches aged persons serve either as advisors to the pastor, to Sunday school classes or to young adult groups.
4. *Controller.* In five of the ten churches, there was recognition of black aged as controllers who dominated church responsibilities to varying degrees, sometimes at the expense of younger members.
5. *Oral historian.* In one church, an aged man serves as historian.
6. *Grandparent or relative designate.* In three churches, intergenerational family units comprise the church membership with grandparents either overseeing younger members or assuming a role of passive member.
7. *Caregiver.* In three churches, aged persons were identified as giving service to other aged or younger members through missionary societies, the mother board, senior programs or visitation programs.
8. *Care-receiver.* In all churches, a significant number of aged persons may be termed care-receivers either because they have assumed a more inactive receptive role; because a senior citizen's program is offered which provides services to them; or because the church provides a visitation program to homebound persons.
9. *Repository of wisdom.* In two churches, aged members were singled out as those from whom general wisdom as well as spiritual wisdom is expected.
10. *Worker.* In all churches, the majority of aged blacks had been in the labor force with some currently working. Occupations represented a wide range from manual labor in industry, carpenter, domestic workers, cooks and bakers, postal workers, bank employees, insurance manager, school teachers and college faculty and a president emeritus of a college. In the majority of churches the wide range of occupational statuses were to be found in a single congregation.

The overall data suggests a strong trend in church functions toward age-integration rather than age-segregation, although in the largest United Methodist and Baptist churches and in the C.M.E. church there is programming for senior citizens or retired persons which is self-contained or which is coordinated with larger community programs. An acceptable balance between aged and young involvement has been achieved in half the church sample. Elderly involvement was problematic in the remaining half. Difficulties tended to be more pronounced in the three largest Baptist churches, in the largest United Methodist church and in the C.M.E. church where elderly were perceived as controllers in varying degrees. Aged involvement in the youth program at the C.M.E. church confirmed the findings of Mays and Nicholson.⁴² Moreover, their findings of church programming geared toward the needs of elderly was also confirmed in the case of the C.M.E. church.

In the largest Baptist church the problem of control by elderly and antagonism toward the elderly by the young has been ameliorated in part by the use of a dual system of control in which old people function as honorary leaders with younger members making the decisions. In this case, however, the primary financial support comes from the older members. The fact that age-segregated programs exist in this particular church as well as in the largest United Methodist church might tend to indicate the use of these programs as a means of solving the dilemma of control. Of the five churches with an acceptable balance of control, the A.M.E. church utilized an educational program aimed at sensitization and understanding of elderly persons and responsibility of the church to all persons as a means of developing shared responsibility between young and old. It is not clear to what extent pastors' ages were factors in churches with problems of control and antagonism. However, in the case of the pastor-instituted educational program in the A.M.E. church, the pastor's age was 58, whereas in four of the five churches with admitted problems, the pastors ages were among the youngest of the sample, ranging from 22 to 48 years.

The presence of antagonism or resentment by young persons in the category of group regard is distinctive to the current study sample and, thus, represents a discontinuity in the configurational pattern set forth earlier. Of the categories of group regard appearing throughout the historical periods, "awe," "respect," and "acceptance of skills" appeared with varying degrees of frequency in discussions of member and pastor attitudes toward aged blacks in the church. There was also the addition of the word "honor" to describe lay and clergy regard as well as aged expectations. However, of all the categories of group regard, "acceptance of skills" appeared consistently throughout the entire church sample.

Summary and discussion

Data from the study of ten black churches indicate that the black church may remain a dominant influence in the continuity of black aged

⁴²Mays and Nicholson, *The Negro's Church*.

roles which have had a foundation in history. Moreover, the kinds of black group regard exhibited over the historical time span are apparently still related to and necessary to this continuity. Because of the re-enactment of roles over periods of time, it is plausible that black aged are socialized to these roles in subsequent generations. In this regard, an important function of the black church may be one of facilitating the socialization process so that there is ease of transition and adjustment to old age. Three methods of facilitation emerge in the data:

1. Acceptance of skills came forth as an important aspect of group regard throughout the historical periods and in all of the ten churches in the study sample. This would tend to indicate that a dominant function of the black church in the black aging process is one of acceptance of old black people not only by young black persons but also by themselves.

2. The presence of various degrees of antagonism or resentment on the part of young persons in half of the black church sample constitutes a discontinuity in historically-based configurational patterns which, if exacerbated, would tend to militate against ease of transition and adjustment to old age. However, the use of an ameliorative program by one church suggests that a function of the black church may be one of confrontation. In Nouwen's terms (1974), such a function is aimed at confronting all ages with their participation in the aging process and, further, confronts aged black with their own finitude. This would necessarily include the pastor's coming to terms with his or her own aging process.

3. A dominant theme throughout the historical periods and in the study sample is that of active participation of black aged persons and age-integration rather than age segregation in the context of community. The recurrence of this aspect of functioning suggests that a function of the black church may be one of bringing generations of black people together in a creative and recreative way, to use Nouwen's terms (Nouwen, 1974, p. 179). Only in so doing is it possible for the black church to, indeed, become the embodiment of a doctrine of relevance and dignity for all black people.

Insights gleaned from the present study suggest further research. First, further research may be directed in the area of developmental issues that inform the configurational patterns explored herein. This would do much to answer the questions: What social variables inform the development of antagonism or resentment toward black elderly by the young? How did minority status and discrimination impact the development of black aged roles and group regard toward black aged? How did social action on behalf of blacks impact the development of black aged roles and group regard for black aged? How has socio-economic status within the black community impacted the development of black aged roles and group regard for blacks? How has the black church response to black aged been affected by these issues?

Second, research may be directed in the area of situational patterns which explicate fluctuation and change in social condition and interaction in larger society. This would do much to answer the questions: What social events or "accidents" brought about black aged role enactment and group regard from one time period to another or within periods of time? To what particular degree have particular black church activities effected adjustment of blacks to old age? What, if any, differences exist between black women and black men in adjustment to old age as a result of church involvement? What dynamics are set forth by pastors' attitudes and ages which inform aged role enactment and group regard for aged persons?

How may black church functions be further operationalized to take into account particular church settings?

Third, there needs to be, as well, a replication of the present study to include a more comprehensive sample of black churches in the various geographical regions of the country. The purpose of the replication would be twofold: first, to reassess the function of the black church in the black aging process on the basis of the wider sample; and second, to explore regional difference occurring in enacted roles and group regard of black aged.

Finally, more forthright effort is needed in the area of comparative gerontological studies which involves African blacks and Afro-American blacks. This is particularly important in the light of almost total exclusion by social scientists of the African heritage of new world blacks.