

## ADDENDUM TO PROCTOR 2019 REPORT (*REFLECTIONS*)

### **Proctor Conference Paper Michael Sneed**

The Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference is a Black conference that holds a microscope to Social Justice and Christianity, analyzing how the two complement and contradict each other. The conference was started in 2003 by Dr. Iva E. Carruthers, Dr. Frederick D. Haynes III and Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr, and introduced to me back in 2017 by Reverend Theo. He invited me to go along with him and a few other members of Allen Temple but my schedule was busy. Both times my peers and family members returned from the Proctor conference gloating about their experience so I knew I had to make a trip. My experience at the 2019 Proctor Conference was an eventful one to say the least. The biggest thing I took from the experience was that my love for education was rekindled.

The Conference lasted three days. The first day I spent my time in the Seminary class where we learned the importance of using the Bible to stand up against homophobia. We also learned how to use our blackness to combat homophobia. A lot of the tools in this session were tools that I had already knew but it was comforting knowing that there were Black Christians out there who felt the need to stand up for that marginalized group of people.

The second day was one of the more important days to me. There were about 15 rooms filled with workshops and we were allotted enough time to attend two of them. The only complaint I had was that I did not have more time to experience more of the workshops but the two that I did attend were great. The first one I attended was called "Fund Your Vision." It was centered on retrieving grants to fund your missionary work. In this workshop, we learned how to write grant proposals. The main take away from the seminar was that it is important to know your story and how you will use the grant to change your status. I made sure to take a voice recording of this seminar so that I could take it home and show it to all of my friends. I am making them listen to it, digest it, then report back what they learned from the seminar in about two weeks.

*I think the Proctor Conference is a necessary experience because it reminds you of the purpose of the Black Church. To say the Black Church is a household for religious community, is more than an understatement. The Black Church is a disguise we can use to house revolutionary thought and action. It is a space where the entire black community can congregate and plan. It should not be a space that is divisive or exclusive.*

### **Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference 2019 Reflection Paper Rev. Alexandria Spearman**

*Sitting in the balcony of the 16th St. Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, on the side of the building that had been maliciously bombed over fifty-five years ago which wounded the souls, splattered black blood and enraged to action the surrounding community of people, I heard the preacher man say repeatedly, "Remember Who You Are!" Attending the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference (SDPC) in Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama, this year granted me the space to name, claim and remember who I am as an image of God in the earth. The theme for this year's conference read, "The Cry of Black Blood: The Call to Sacred Memory" with biblical scriptures from Deuteronomy 4:9 and Jeremiah 9:17. During my first pilgrimage to the South for the purpose of Christian social justice, I discovered both the value and difference between secondary sources and eyewitness, became aware of my responsibility to simply show up, and found containers within which to establish to my ministry.*

As a young person visiting the birthplace of the official Civil Rights Movement and especially the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and Memorial for Peace and Justice the impact on my understanding of the genocide within which African-Americans live lies between the spacial divide of secondary sources and eyewitness. As an African American Cultural Studies scholar, I have had the opportunity to read numerous accounts of racial injustice including excerpts from, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases" and "A Red Record", both written by Ida B. Wells-Barnett. These texts along with others taught me what the tension of life was like in the 19th and 20th centuries for my skinfolk. Taking the trip down to Dixieland put into tangible reality all that the texts were teaching me. It is truly a different experience from reading facts and stories to standing on the soil where memorial plaques are hung in memory of people, young and adult, who had their lives brutally stolen. While I am one, who envisions vividly the stories that I hear the visceral horror was so overwhelming that my tears were not enough. The tears that I had prepared to cry, the ones which I had held silently in a compartment in the back of mind, the ones that held memory of not only historical lynchings but of those in contemporary times. These tears of mine, the ones I prepared to cry, held stories of children who were shot and left to lie in the street bleeding to death, stories of police murdered friends whose innocence is filmed on camera yet whose justice has yet to come, stories of loved ones gone without a mention in the community. The tears I had come with as a young, Black woman from Oakland, California were not enough nor were they all that were necessary in that place of memorial. I had come face to face and held hands with family members of those who had been lynched, and even made aware that someone I knew personally found their own family listed on the plaques. Tears were not enough.

To come into a space and not seek to pour your will onto your perception of its needs is manifested for me as the art of presence. This lesson was not so easily learned on this journey. As I walked around the Memorial for Peace and Justice, known by some as the Lynching Memorial, I had come with my bucket of tears. See, I thought that they were a required offering for entering the space; I thought that this place would relieve me of the hurt I felt, because this was a place of mourning and remembrance. This was not the case. I liken this transformative process as the one emerging in the Christian Mission space; the shift in this paradigm is to remove the baggage of superiority and belief that we are able to save and provide and it be a testament to our own good works and to instead enter with permission, listen and hear the needs and do what is asked of us by the means and modes that we have available. In relation to my journey through the Memorial, I was called to release the baggage of crying for myself and to lament for those whose blood is continuously shed. When Jeremiah 9:17 proclaims that the Lord calls for the mourning women, the skilled ones, I discovered in that place that my use of means was displaced. Instead of wailing with tears, the Spirit of the Lord and those whose blood cried from the earth called for lament through dance. The suffering in this land goes beyond psychological to emotional and the memory of a thing in my mind could not compare to the memory of a thing in my body. What the Spirit in the space called for was expressed suffering and lament through the entire body. Through my method of becoming present in the space I recognized who I was and what I was being asked to do. The Lord had called me and named me, a skilled mourning woman, to lament through the mean and mode I had available. Surely, this experience offered a chance to truly and fully confess that my dancing is not just for myself but for the ministry of others.

Throughout the entirety of the SDPC, the focus of mission and my ministry were made clear and set in particular containers that will be of value to me as I continue my journey. In taking the conference course, "Effective Proposal & Grant Writing Strategies to Fund the Vision", I was refreshed with the value of identifying your lane for ministry, navigating and staying in it. While there are many ways an individual can get involved in Christian social justice, there is a path setup exclusively for me that should I walk in it, there shall be provision. Everyone has a role to play in the manifestation of the *Kindom* on earth as it is in heaven. When we act out our role in authenticity and collaboration with others we will find success in all we do, while at the same time knowing that total success may not come in our lifetime but that we

work for the step closer to the goal. My call is to care for souls in the midst of trauma both leaving expectations and bringing expertise.

One of the joyous moments for me in *Kindom* building came with the reunion of Global Missions delegates, also known as home church family. It was truly a pleasure to catch up with and hear the progression of minds and theology from both my peers and ministry chair whom I have traveled to our sister churches in South Africa with over the years. Collaboration means evaluating the assets among all the stakeholders and pulling them together to create. Through our continual meeting of the minds, in spaces, both work and play oriented, we are better able to continue to show up, listen and act on behalf of God, our neighbors and importantly, ourselves. Thank you Allen Temple for every moment and every prayer of belief in the things God has in store through us all.

### **Reflections on Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference 2019**

**Daniel Mastin**

Food for thought, feeds the mind. Food for the heart, feeds the soul. While fruitful feet feed the nation. The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference year in and year out proves itself be a catalyst and proverbial gadfly in our consciousness to call us to the action of exploring and creating food for thought, accepting and protecting food for the soul, and maintaining fruitful feet. *Through this conference and overarching experience and fellowship, we are beckoned to be the change we want to see and to study, learn and think in a way that will bring such to fruition, both inside and outside the four walls. Through this organization and experience, we are challenged to decolonize our minds and actions.* We are then encouraged to bring that same energy we used to break our own chains and focus it in on our communities and our people as a whole. We are given tools and inspiration to establish the peace, love and clear mind that is prerequisite for an active and ever advancing struggle. In times like these all, we gain and give is ever so valuable and has been an immense blessing to take part in.

Every year I come to Proctor, I come different than I came the last time. I've gone young and eager, I've gone older and more patient, I've gone active and hungry and I've gone isolated and jaded, I've gone as a starving student and I've gone as a tired employee, I've gone with one theology and mindset and returned with new and expounded understandings and experiences. Through all these changes, this conference has been a steady and consistent challenge to my thinking and activity. I go in thinking and leave thinking more. Somehow, this conference seems to grow with us who attend as much as we grow through it.

Being in Birmingham this year and Memphis last year, for me was most empowering and meaningful to me. To be part of living history and meet living heroes. To walk where our martyrs and legends walked and revisit their words conceptualize their visions in current time and place was surreal. Being in the Deep South with a sense of power, presence, and potential that our ancestors could only internalize but not externalize was fuel for challenge to the status quo. Amidst tumultuous times as such, with a people becoming more conscious of the continuous evolution of the struggle of we, the oppressed, rendered a deeper understanding for our mission as lovers and advocates of social justice and liberation. It felt as if we returned to our roots to grow into more fertile trees standing tall for generations to come. To realize the sacrifices, to acknowledge the work, to ritualize the memory and to reactivate and instill the cause for which we live and fight is truly the future and the birthright our ancestors secured for us.

Proctor stands as a conference and assembly of people doing the work that grew feet and became more of a movement for movers, shakers and thinkers, feeding the nation. We have the conversations, do the networking and share the space that is critical to our forming and sustaining healthy and free people and systems throughout the diaspora and the world. In my time and tenure coming to Proctor with and through Allen Temple, no matter what impasse of life we who attend happen to be at in life and through

many of these varying ways of life and life's transitions and we are fed and fueled to sharpen iron and continue to learn and fight the good fight.

### **Refocused, Refreshed, and Renewed**

Rev. Warren Long

February 28, 2019

*“And on that day of Pentecost, they were all gathered in one place on one accord. Devout people, out of every nation under heaven. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost...”* [Acts 2:1-4 paraphrased]

“That moment at Pentecost” was my thought as I sat in the Grand Ball Room at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center at this year’s Proctor Conference surrounded by 700-800 other believers. What a glorious moment that must have been! Each year that I attend the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, I am filled with hope and energy as we gather as clergy and lay leaders to strengthen our capacity through education, and social justice activism/advocacy. And what strikes me and strengthens my resolves is seeing so many people gathered on one accord – no dissensions, no factions. Just Christ and mission-centered focus.

Of the three Proctor conferences that I have attended, this year’s conference was a different in that there was one night less of preached word (each year Proctor presents some of the preeminent preaching voices of our day). However, that which we heard was none-the-less powerful.

Proctor 2019 offered a plethora of workshop sessions and Proctor Talks, which met every interest from church economic empowerment to pastoral care to end of life care. The varied offerings and the limited time however made it difficult to decide which workshops to attend. Stretching the conference out one more day would have made it easier.

I am always inspired by seeing the number of seminarians in attendance. I say “hundreds”; Rev. Reagans more conservatively says “100+”. It fills me with pride and hope when I see so many (mostly) younger adults on the battlefield and committed to Christ. The Seminarian Track focus this year was on Black liberation and womanist theologies.

Proctor 2019’s theme was “The Call to Sacred Memory” and Birmingham, Alabama as the home to the historic Birmingham Campaign was an appropriate location for this year’s gathering. *We had opening night worship service at the historic 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church where in 1963 four members of the Ku Klux Klan planted bombs killing four girls (and injuring a fifth) attending Sunday School. The sense of history is that church and feeling purpose was almost tangible and was evidenced with people shouting at the singing “Lift Every Voice and Sing”. And, that was just the **start** of the service!*

Later that week we drove to Montgomery, AL and visited the Legacy Museum and the National Monument for Peace & Justice. The Legacy Museum displays the history of slavery and racism in America. The exhibit that most captured my attention was collection of jars of soil from lynching sites across the country. The Peace & Justice Monument is located near the site where enslaved African were auctioned at market, and has 805 hanging steel rectangles, which I *just* realized are the size and shape of

coffins, representing each of the counties in the United States where documented lynchings took place. It was disquieting to me to see that California was represented.

We finished the conference with the “Beautiful Are the Feet” program, in memory this year of Doctors Katie Cannon and Hal Cone. I must say that each moment of this conference was more powerful than the last, and I look forward each year to having my focus re-centered and my hope renewed.