
LOST LEGACIES

African American Fathers and Brothers in Presbyterian History

THREE STARTING POINTS

- Personal and professional realization
 - My training: PhD in American Reformed Tradition at Westminster Seminary where I focused on Presbyterian history—and never heard anything about black Presbyterians.
 - *On Being Presbyterian*: I wrote a book that included over 100 pages on Presbyterian history and black Presbyterians are nowhere to be found.
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THREE STARTING POINTS

- Pastoral wrestling
 - Korie Edwards, *That Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*
 - Edwards observed that interracial churches tended to default to white forms of worship (36-37), doctrine (52), and government (126-127).
 - While I don't doubt those findings, I did wonder about what "white" worship, doctrine, and government look like?
 - Are there similarities between white and black Pentecostal worship, doctrine, government? White and black Presbyterian worship, doctrine, government? Is there any such thing as "transracial" worship, doctrine, government?
 - What does that mean as we try to plant churches that are genuinely multi-racial?
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THREE STARTING POINTS

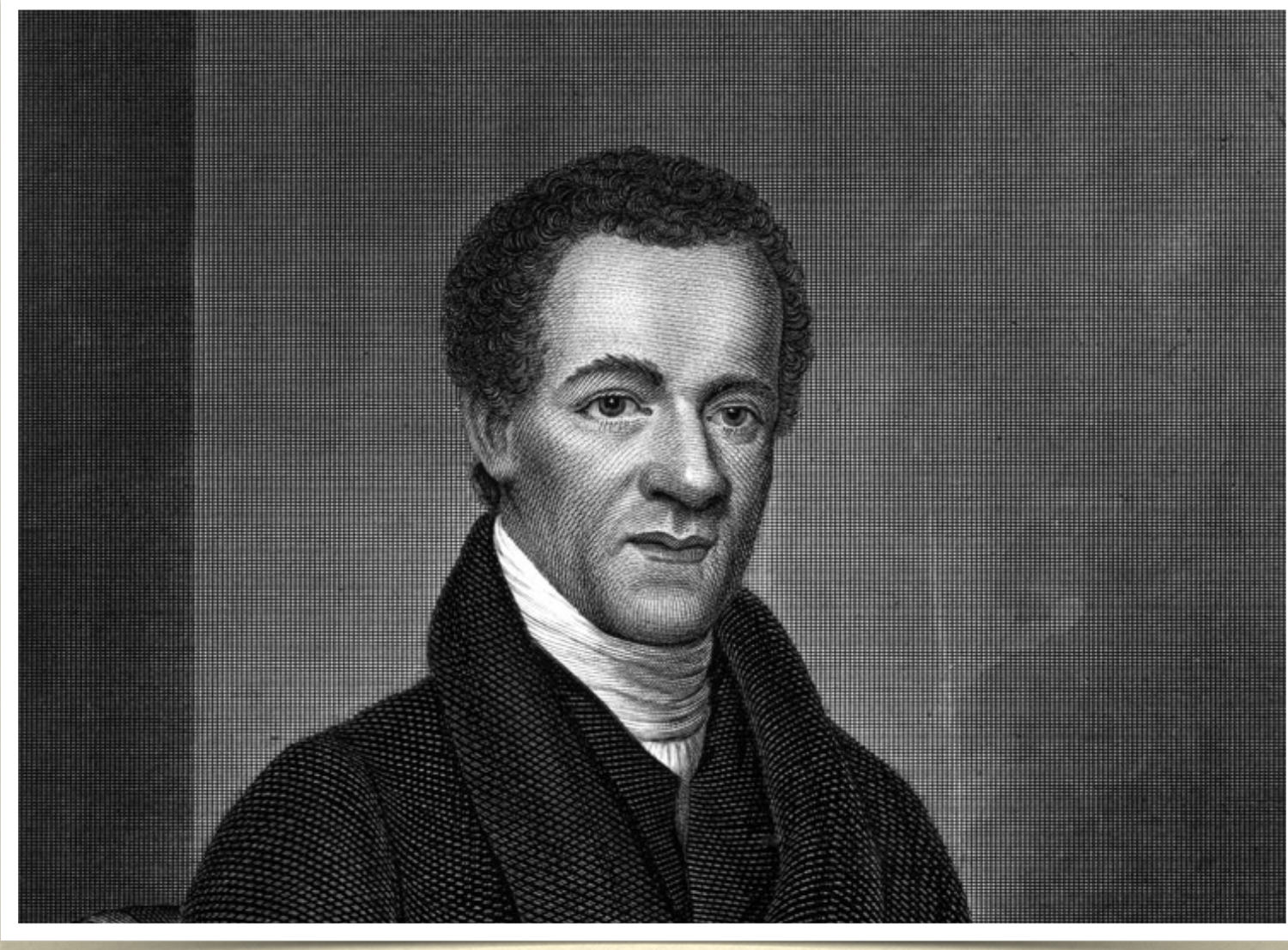
- Historical observation
 - The “historic black church” is made up largely of six key groups—African Methodist Episcopal Church; African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion; Colored Methodist Episcopal Church; National Baptist Convention; Progressive National Baptist Convention; Church of God in Christ.
 - There is no separate black Presbyterian denomination that is part of the historic black church
 - That’s because our black Presbyterian fathers remained in majority white denominations and sought interracial cooperation and integration.
 - They also fought to hold their white brothers accountable to biblical norms of justice and love in the context of shared mission.
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BLACK PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDERS



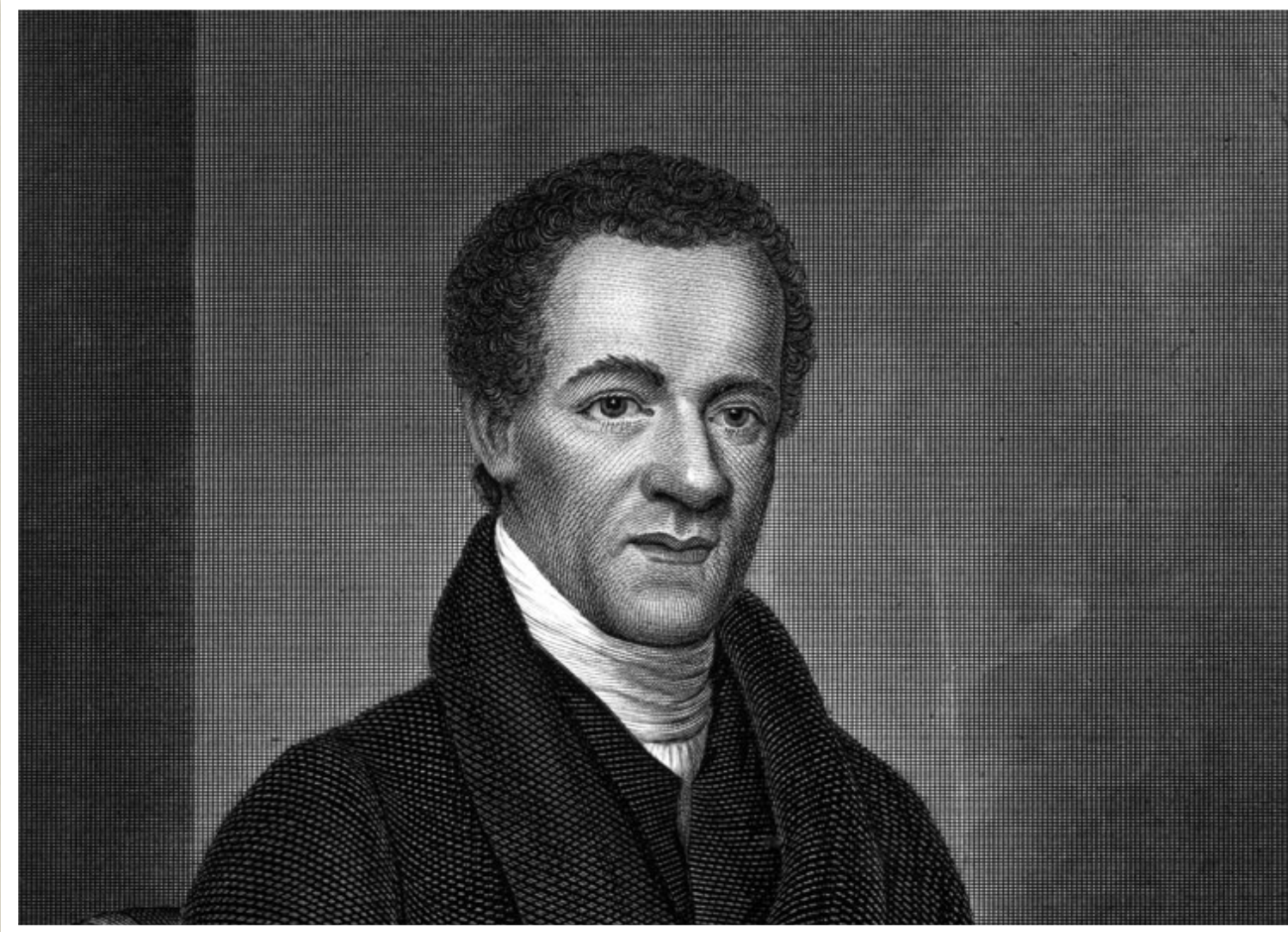
- The first black Presbyterian churches
 - Three African Presbyterian Churches in Philadelphia associated with the Gloucester family.
 - First African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia was organized in 1807 by John Gloucester under the sponsorship of the Philadelphia Evangelical Society.
 - Jeremiah Gloucester, John's oldest son, became pastor of Second African Presbyterian Church in 1824.
 - James, the middle son, organized Siloam Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, serving as pastor from 1847 to 1851.
 - Stephen, the youngest son, was licensed as an evangelist to serve Lombard Street Central Church.
 - William Still, father of the Underground Railroad, was a ruling elder at Lombard Street.

BLACK PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDERS



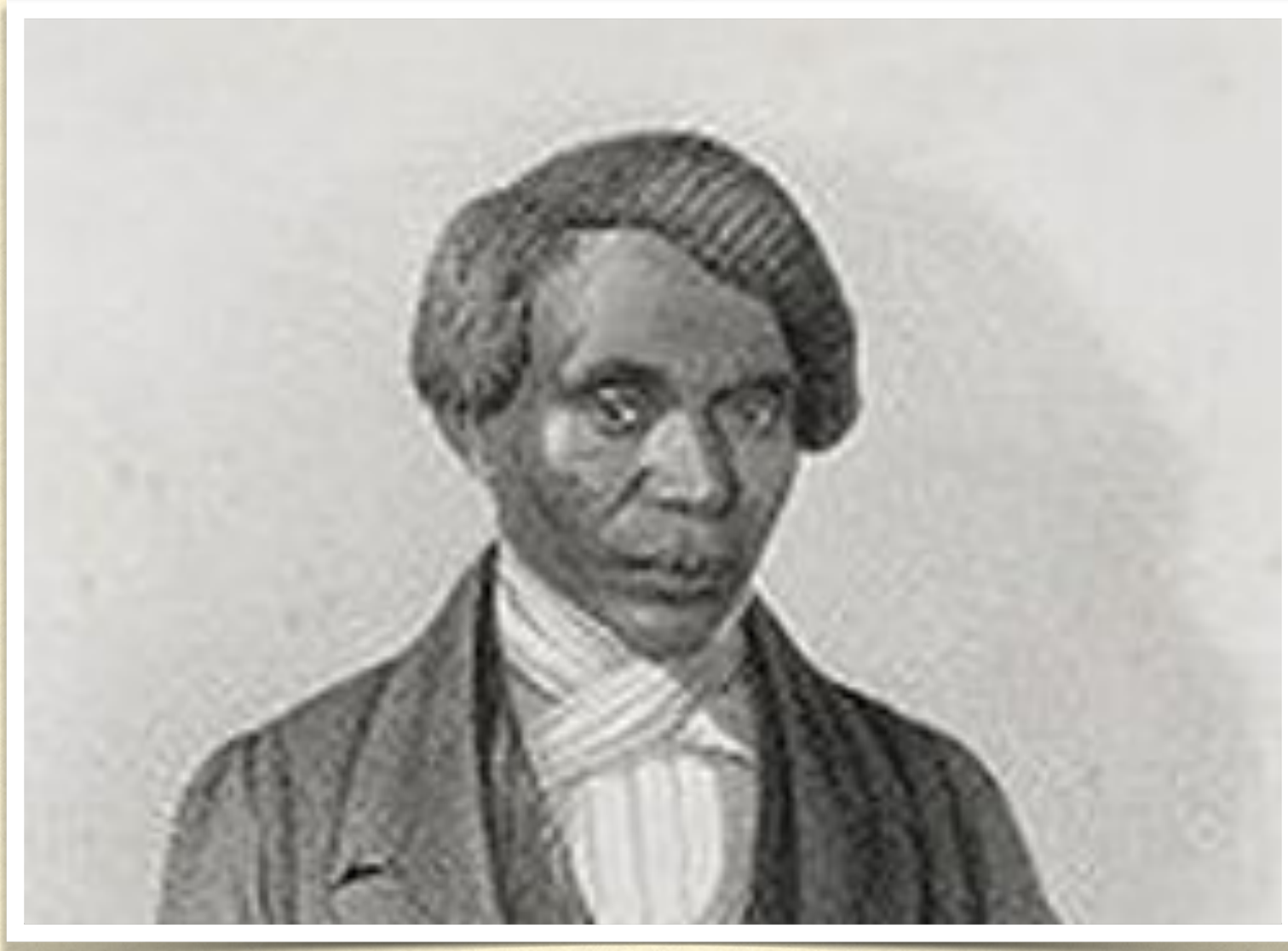
- The first black Presbyterian churches
 - Samuel Cornish started the first black Presbyterian church in NYC; he also was the first black American journalist.
 - Came under the care of Philadelphia Presbytery in 1817; after a program of study, was licensed to preach in 1819.
 - In 1821, he was recruited to NYC and by 1824, the First Colored Presbyterian Church was organized.
 - He would later be instrumental in starting Second Colored Presbyterian Church.
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BLACK PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDERS



- The first black Presbyterian churches
 - Samuel Cornish started the first black Presbyterian church in NYC; he also was the first black American journalist.
 - Cornish also started the first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, to rebut racist attacks in NYC papers and to refute the arguments of the American Colonization Society.
 - His attacks on the ACS would alienate Princeton Seminary leaders Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller.
 - Cornish would later start a two other papers, *Rights of All* and *The Colored American*.
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BLACK PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDERS



- Other key antebellum black Presbyterian leaders
 - Theodore Wright (1797-1847)
 - The first black graduate from an American theological school (Princeton), he served as pastor of First Colored Presbyterian Church, NYC, from 1828-1847.
 - Under his leadership, the church grew from 75 to 413.
 - Wright also helped to start the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 and the Phoenix Society in the same year, an organization dedicated to black education.

BLACK PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDERS



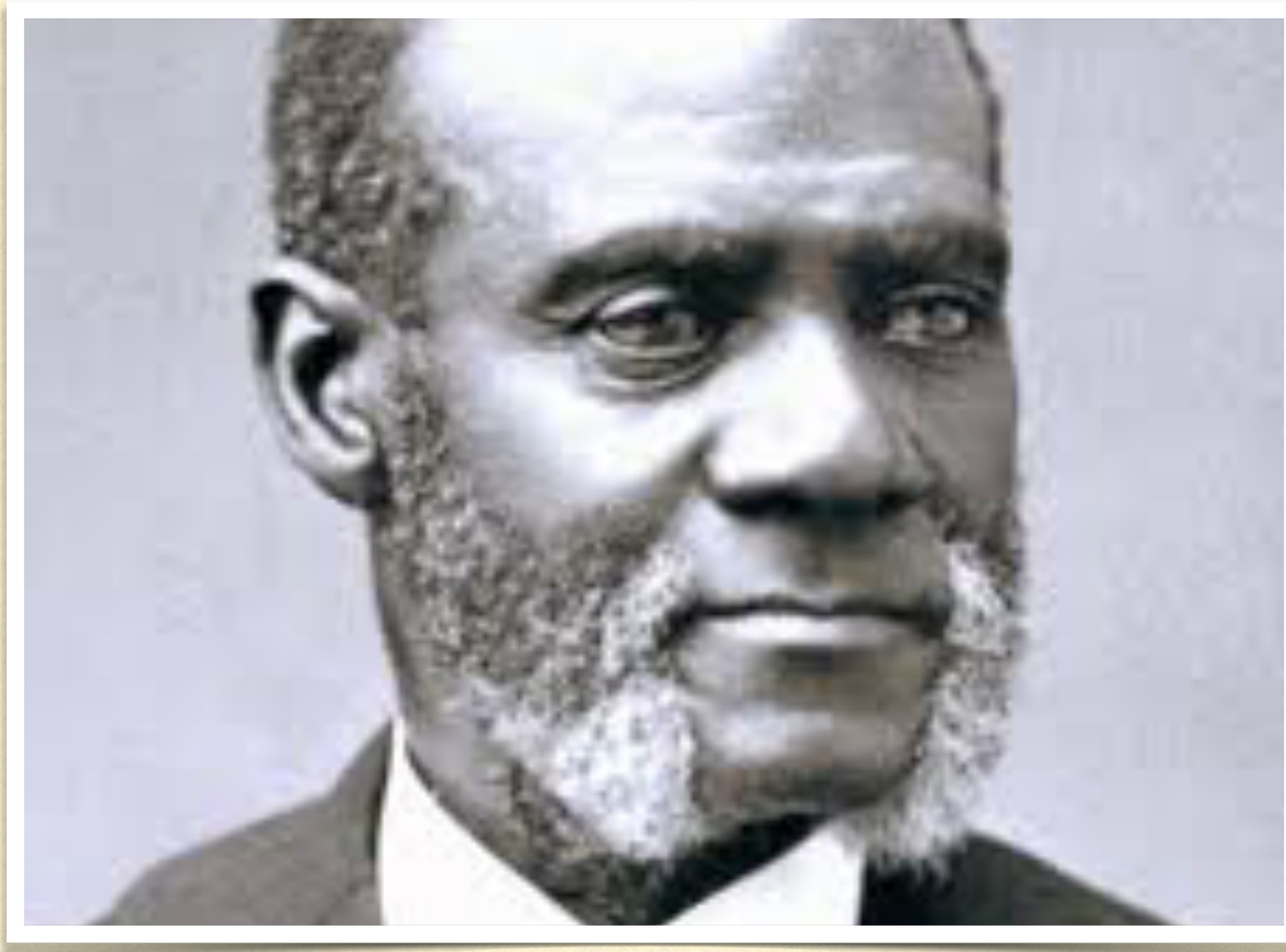
- Other key antebellum black Presbyterian leaders
 - James W. C. Pennington (1807-1870)—escaped from slavery, made his way to Pennsylvania, and eventually Brooklyn. He had a deep thirst for education, paying for tutors out of his earnings.
 - He would be involved in various black leadership conventions in Philadelphia, which spurred on his desire for leadership as well. He would become involved in Shiloh Presbyterian Church under Theodore Wright's influence.
 - He pastored a Congregational church in New Haven and sought (and was denied) admission to Yale Divinity School. He attended classes as an auditor for two years to further his education.
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BLACK PRESBYTERIAN FOUNDERS



- Other key antebellum black Presbyterian leaders
 - When Pennington pastored in Hartford, he wrote the first history of African Americans published in America (1841). He also helped raise money and sought justice for the fugitives on the *Amistad*.
 - In 1848, he became pastor of Shiloh Church in NYC, but took a leave of absence to do a two-year speaking tour of Europe with Henry Highland Garnet. He would serve Shiloh until 1855.
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POSTBELLUM BLACK PRESBYTERIAN LEADERS



- In the north, black Presbyterians continued as a small but significant presence in the PCUSA.
 - Key leaders included:
 - Henry Highland Garnet (1815-1882)—escaped from slavery as a child; trained in one of the Phoenix schools sponsored by Theodore Wright; went to college at Oneida Institute.
 - Became pastor of Liberty Street Presbyterian Church in Troy, NY, for six years where he supported the work of the American Anti-Slavery Society and delivered powerful speeches opposing slavery.
 - Would eventually pastor Shiloh Presbyterian Church in NYC (1856), Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC (1864), serve as President of Avery College (1868), before returning to Shiloh.
 - Appointed ambassador to Liberia in 1881, where he died shortly afterward and where he was buried.
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POSTBELLUM BLACK PRESBYTERIAN LEADERS



- In the north, black Presbyterians continued as a small but significant presence in the PCUSA.
 - Key leaders included:
 - Matthew Anderson (1847-1928): born in Pennsylvania as a fifth generation Presbyterian. Trained at Oberlin College (1871) and then Princeton Seminary (1874) and Yale University (1877).
 - Came to Philadelphia in 1879 and stayed for his entire ministry —started Berean Presbyterian Church and a range of other ministries: a penny savings bank (1888), a Building and Loan Association (1888), a manual training school (1899), a dispensary (1890), and a kindergarten (1892).
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POSTBELLUM BLACK PRESBYTERIAN LEADERS



- In the north, black Presbyterians continued as a small but significant presence in the PCUSA.
 - Key leaders included:
 - Francis Grimke (1850-1937): born into slavery, set free at the end of the Civil War, would graduate from Lincoln University and Princeton Seminary.
 - Would pastor Fifteen Street Presbyterian Church in Washington DC from 1878 until 1928; there would a four year hiatus in Florida (1885-1889), seeking to recover his wife's health.
 - He was instrumental in creating both the Niagara Movement and the NAACP; served as a trustee for a settlement house in DC; and helped to found the American Negro Academy.
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LESSONS TO LEARN

- Black Presbyterian leaders taught Presbyterian doctrine because they believed it to be biblical.
 - But they also preached and taught, advocated and organized, on racial issues, seeking justice in American society.
 - They didn't see these things as contradictory nor as violating the church's spiritual mission.
 - These leaders relied on white allies for fund-raising and advocacy.
 - But they also recognized that these white allies were limited and sometimes betrayed their best desires.
 - Black Presbyterian leaders show us both the benefits and frustrations that minority leaders experience as they work within a white majority culture.
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