The Black Church

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From the Editor's Desk

When I first moved to Maine in 1997, I took an apartment on Portland’s Munjoy Hill. I soon fell in love with the Eastern Promenade and the redemptive power of its views of blue wash. There were many evenings that I came home, fatigued from teaching and research, and felt my spirit bolstered by a quick detour along the water. Many also were the mornings that the glassy, indigo image of Casco Bay reflected in my rear view mirror and washed over me in a simple prayer: “Surely God is here.”

Equally as powerful as the sensation of nature, however, was the feeling that I was living in the presence of history. Coming to realize and appreciate the presence of historic places like the Eastern Cemetery, the Abyssinian Church, and Green Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, I always felt linked to the past—a past of which I was no longer a teacher, but a student. In the rituals of life and death, of worship, sacrament, and burial, surely God was there.

In keeping with the Convocation theme of “Religion and the Human Experience,” this edition of the Griot examines the sustaining power of the African American church in Maine in its progression “from anchor to beacon.”

Maureen Elgersman Lee is an assistant professor of history and the faculty scholar for the African American Archives of Maine, housed in the University of Southern Maine Library.
A Place in Time
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The Abyssinian Church today.


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February 14 to 18: Dr. Traci C. West, assistant professor of ethics and African American studies at Drew University Theological School in Madison, New Jersey, will be at USM. West is the author of Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics, and as a Women’s Studies visiting scholar, she will be giving various lectures and symposiums on subjects related to her research. For more information contact Women’s Studies at (207) 780-4289.

March 9: One of the highlights of the 1999-2000 Convocation year will be an address by feminist, cultural critic, and renowned professor bell hooks. “Is God Love?” is the title of her talk; 7:30 p.m. in Sullivan Gym, Portland. Free and open to the public. For more information contact the History Department at (207) 780-5320 or 780-5239.

April 29 and 30: The annual conference of the New England American Studies Association (NEASA) will be held on USM’s Portland campus. The theme of this year’s conference will be “Unmasking Ethnic New Englands,” and will deal with “the many ways that ethnic identities have been invented, constructed, hidden, and preserved.”

Calendar – Spring 2000

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