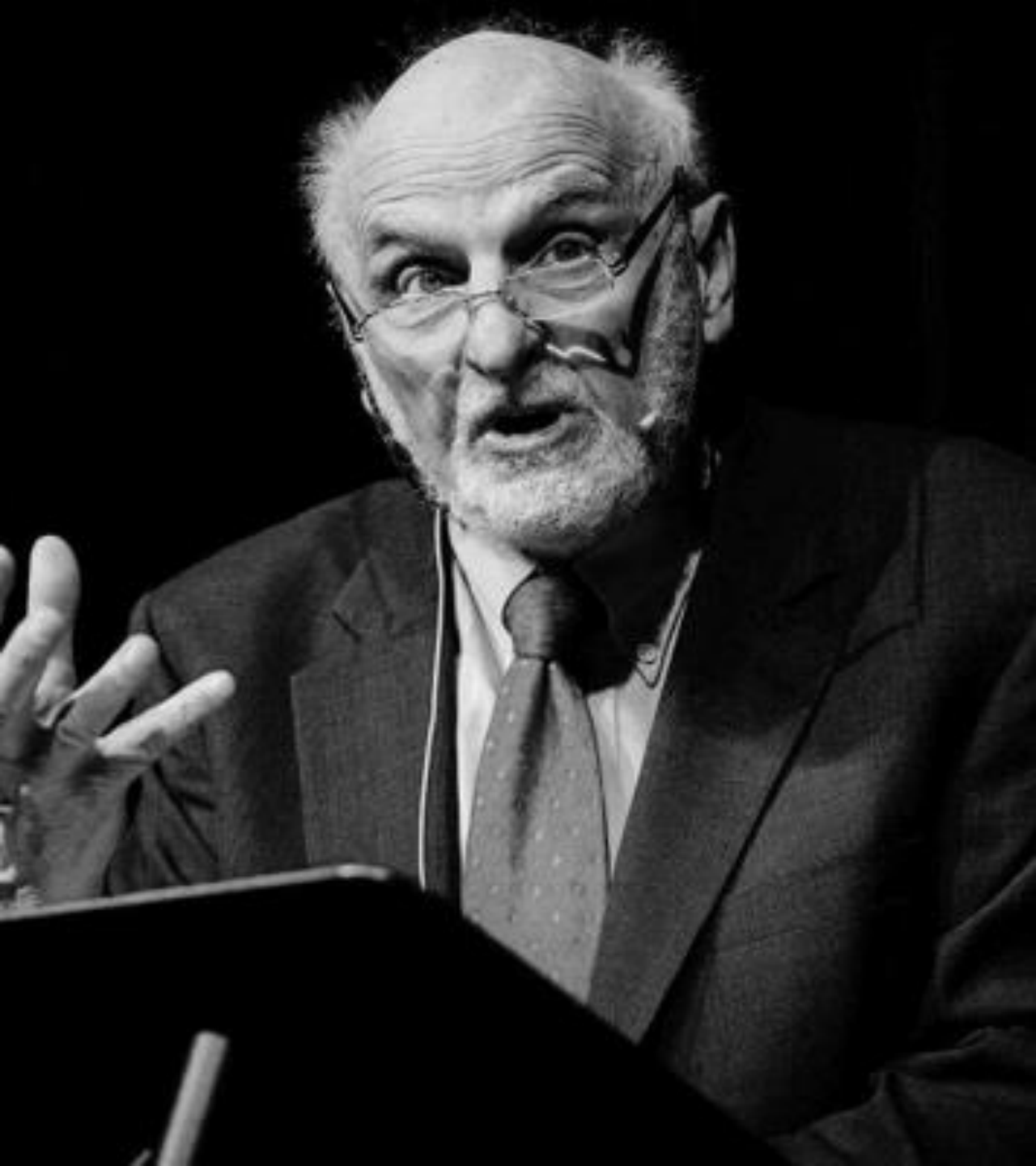




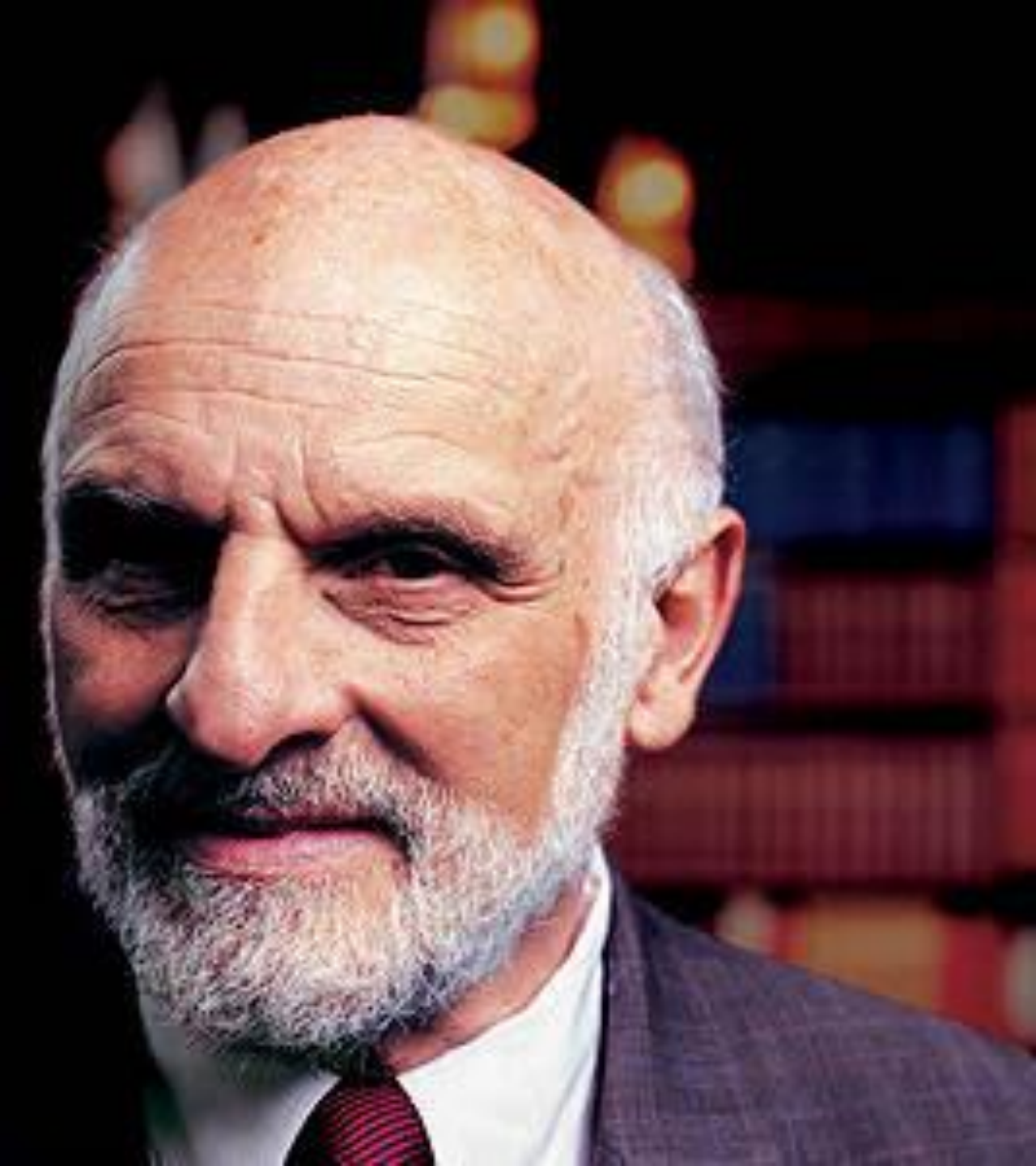
The Prophetic Imagination of the African Methodist Episcopal Church: Praxis and Social Transformation

Dr. Michael W. Waters



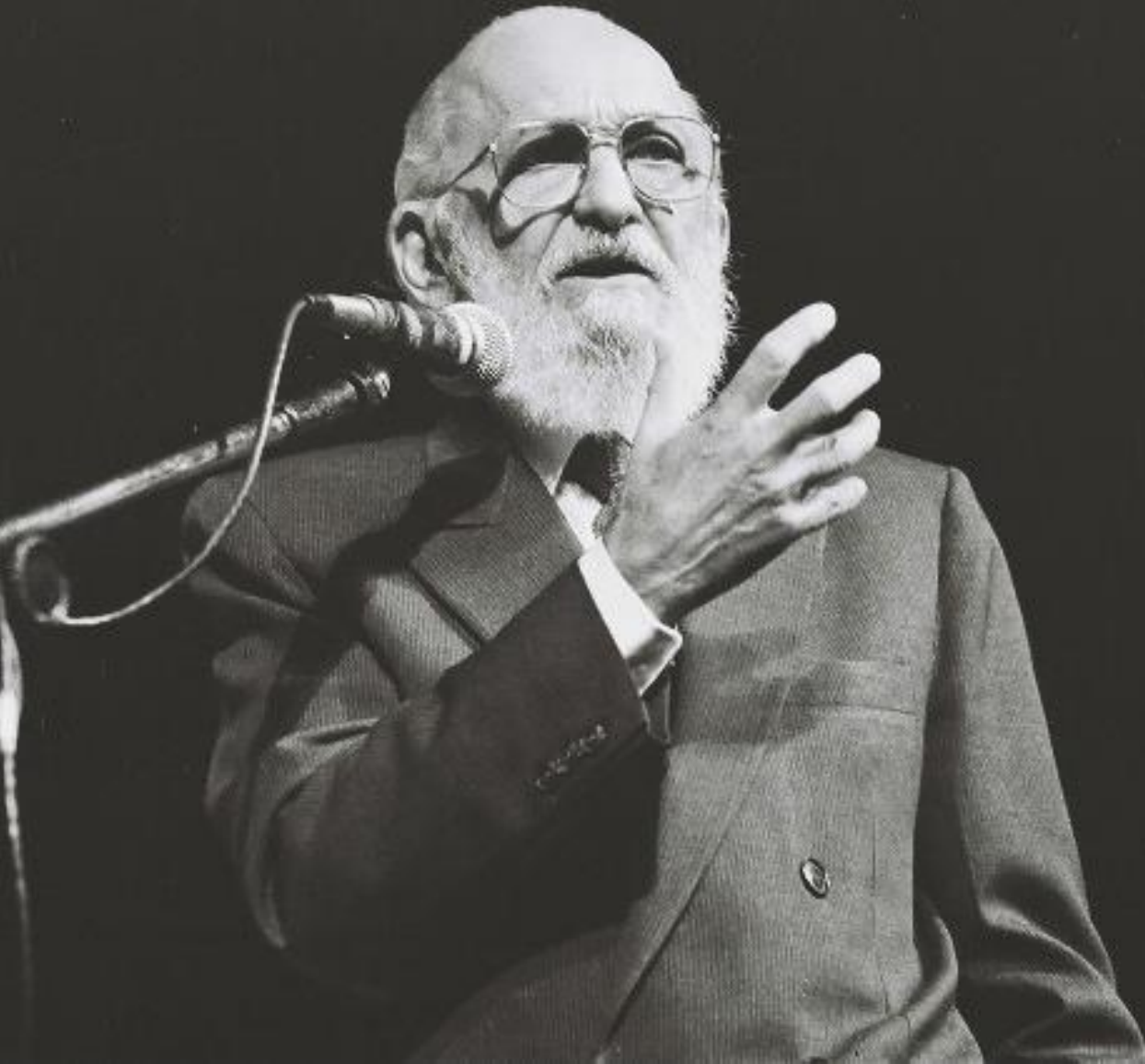
The Prophetic Imagination

In his seminal text *The Prophetic Imagination* (1978), Walter Brueggemann writes, “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”



Two Tasks of the Alternative Consciousness

For Brueggemann, there are two tasks of the alternative consciousness (imagination). They are to 1) “**criticize** in dismantling the dominant consciousness” and 2) **energize** persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move.”

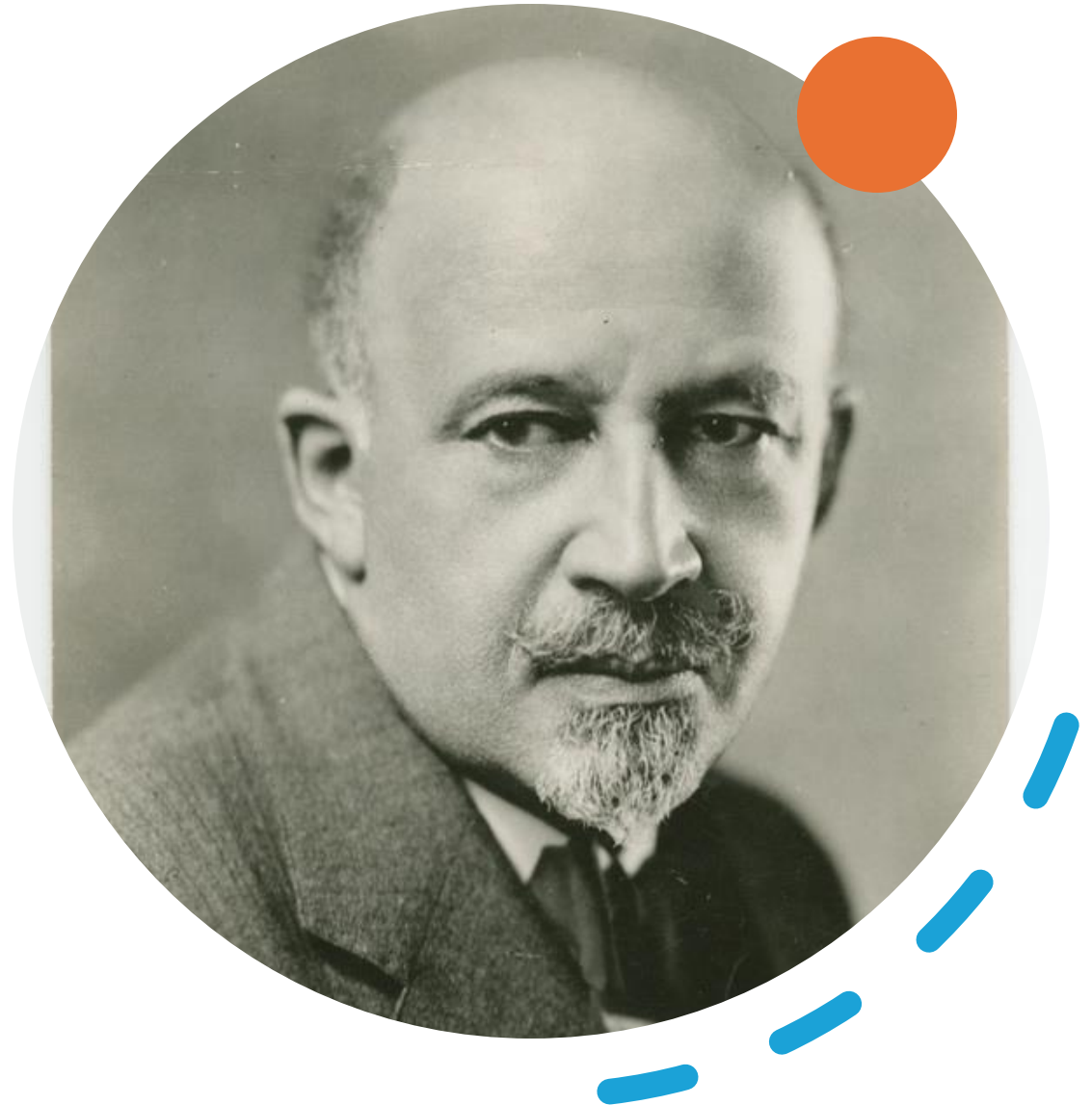


Pedagogy of the Oppressed

In his classic text ***Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970)***, Paulo Freire offers instruction towards co-creating in solidarity with oppressed people an educational mode whose goal is the cultivation of a ***critical consciousness*** in oppressed people as they ruminate on the source(s) of their oppression and take action in the liberation struggle. This notion of reflection with action is called *praxis*, and *praxis* transforms the world.

The Souls of Black Folk

In his classic text, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. DuBois wrote, “The A.M.E. Church is the greatest Negro organization in the world.” DuBois made this audacious claim about the A.M.E. Church because he believed that it was the “...center of social, intellectual, and economic life for Black people.”



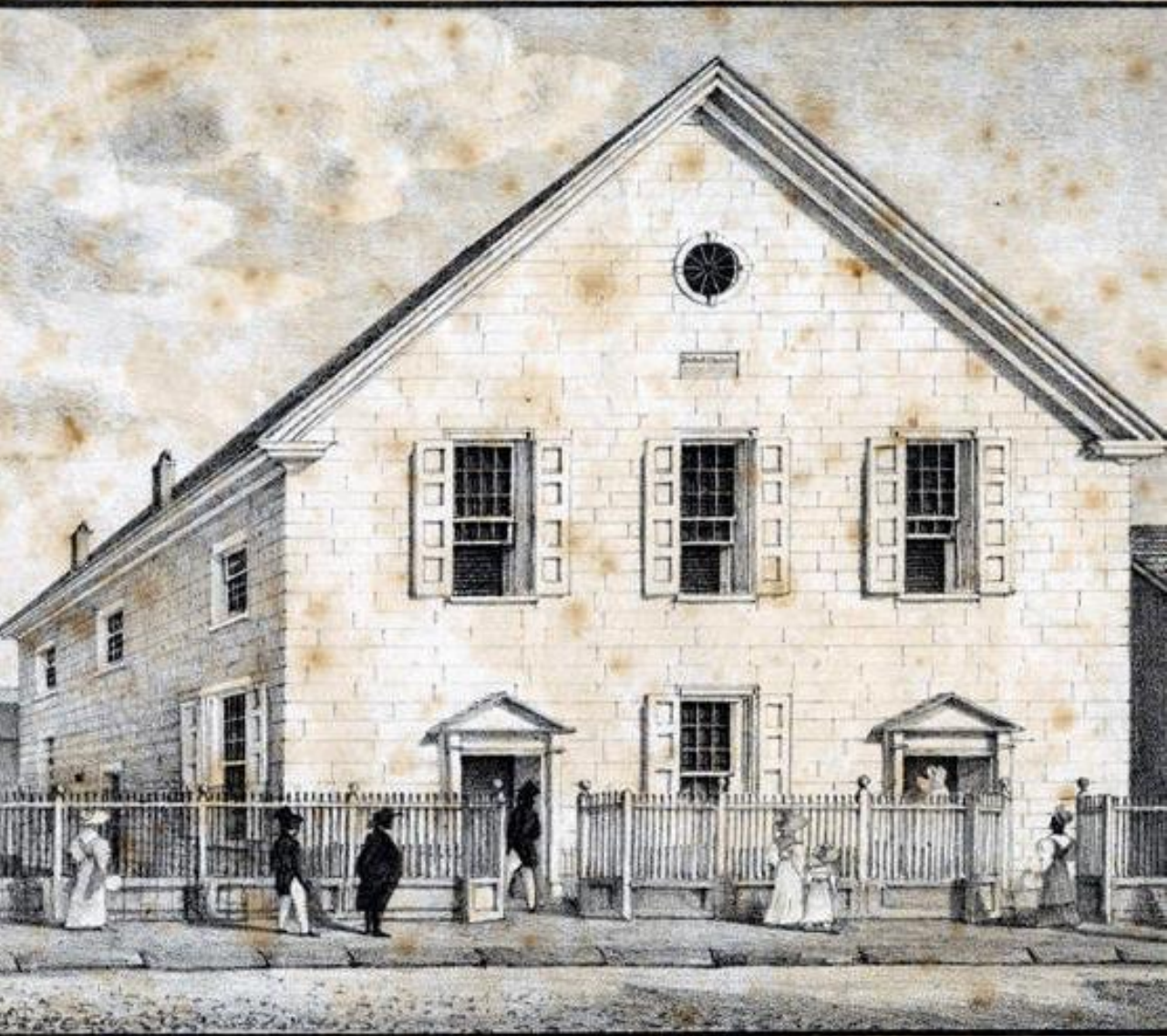
The Inflection Point

In a courageous act of ***embodied resistance***, as Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and the Black worshipers at St. George's Methodist Church resisted forced removal from the altar while in prayer, then staged a walkout of the church, it ignited a fire of ***prophetic imagination*** in America that has yet to be extinguished.



The Inflection Point

In a singular act, Allen and the others reclaimed not only the agency of Black Americans, but affirmed their *imago Dei*, created in the image of God. Their act **criticized** the demonic oppression of white supremacy and **energized** resistance that led to social transformation through the founding and expansion of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It was **praxis** - reflection and action- leading to transformation. It was **prophetic imagination**.



BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, PHILAD^a

Founded in 1786 by the Rev^d Richard Allen, Bishop of the first - African - Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. — Rebuilt in 1818

London. Printed July 1818

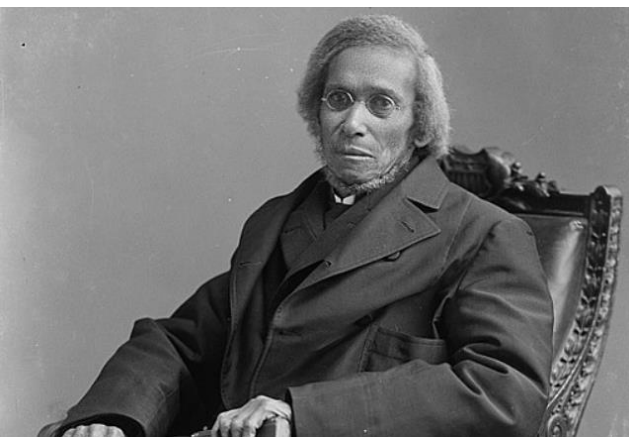


The power of *prophetic imagination* is to create new worlds that fuel greater imagination!




Freedom's Prophet **(2008)**

According to Richard S. Newman, “For Allen, **black abolitionism** [prophetic imagination]...was **the heart and soul of America’s future**. He and other black founders still do not get enough credit for developing this idea, or for creating a tradition of **public protest** [embodied resistance] that undermined [critiqued] notions of racial superiority every bit as much as Atlantic-world slave rebellions.”



At every turn in the Black Liberation struggle, the African Methodist Episcopal Church has continued to embody the *prophetic imagination* of Richard Allen to *criticize* and to *energize*, to *reflect* and to *act*, to engage in an *embodied resistance* that has wrought *social transformation*.

A crowd of people gathered for a rally or protest. In the center, a man in a white suit and tie is speaking into a microphone. The crowd is dense, with many people holding up their phones to record. Several American flags are visible, including one being held high on the right side. The scene is set in front of a stone building with large columns. The overall atmosphere appears to be one of a significant public gathering.

**What is God calling the
A.M.E. Church to imagine
today?**



Culturally Induced Despair



the clock is ticking

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF LABOR
THE SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY
THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT AGENCY

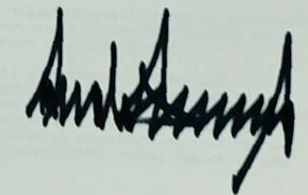
SUBJECT: Authorizing the Other Needs Assistance Program
for Major Disaster Declarations Related to
Coronavirus Disease 2019

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution
and the laws of the United States of America, including the
Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act,
42 U.S.C. 5121-5207 (the "Stafford Act"), and in light of
Proclamation 9994 of March 13, 2020 (Declaring a National
Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
Outbreak), which declared a national emergency by reason of the
threat posed by the outbreak of the novel (new) coronavirus
known as SARS-CoV-2, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Policy. Protective measures enacted by States
and localities across the country to prevent loss of life
from COVID-19 have resulted in millions of Americans becoming
unemployed and in need of assistance. My Administration,
recognizing the acute financial distress affecting families
across the country, has worked to quickly provide billions of
dollars in relief to supplement unemployment benefits and help
businesses keep their workers employed, in addition to zeroing
out Federal student loan interest and delaying Tax Day. In total,
nearly \$1 trillion has been appropriated for emergency funding
related to COVID-19.

Because many of the relief programs created by the Congress
expired or will shortly expire, my Administration and the
Republican leadership in the United States Senate have proposed
options to continue to provide needed relief to
Americans, but Democratic Members of Congress have twice
rejected temporary extensions of supplemental unemployment
benefits. Political games that harm American lives are

**"A deliberate strategy
[where] political actors
exploit the chaos of natural
disasters, wars, and other
crisis to push through
unpopular policies [which]
favors corporate interests
while disadvantaging and
disenfranchising citizens
when they are too
distracted and
overwhelmed to respond or
resist effectively."**





Embodied Hope: A Homiletical Theology Reflection (2021)

For Veronice Miles, ***embodied hope*** serves as a counter to ***culturally induced despair*** which seeks to inhibit our acknowledgement of our identity as ***imago Dei*** (image of God) and our co-laboring/partnership with God. Miles offers that the “***African American journey toward justice and equality***, viewed through the lens of the beloved community” is “a case study in the ***courageous audacious practice of living with Hope.***”

Embodied Hope

The enemies of democracy have employed the **shock doctrine** to **overwhelm** and to create a sense of **hopelessness** in order to **quell** resistance and force compliance.

Our greatest gift is **prophetic imagination** as embodied hope. For such a time as this!









A Moral Problem

In our nation, what “remains constant is the will and power of the dominant culture to diminish and/or disregard the rights of children.”

- Mitzi J. Smith



An Invitation