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An Analysis of Negro Ritualistic ceremonies as Exemplified by Negro Organizations in Omaha

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An Analysis of Negro Ritualistic
Ceremonies as Exemplified by
Negro Organizations in Omaha

by
Ida Madonna Rowland, B.A.

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the
Department of Sociology
of the
Municipal University of Omaha
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INTRODUCTION
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION...

This study is an attempt to analyze the ritualistic ceremonies of the Negroes of Omaha. Various interpretations are given to the terms "ritual" and "ceremony." They are often confused and used synonymously. According to the World's Popular Encyclopedia, a ritual is an outward act of worship, the performance of certain outward acts, and the use of symbols which become identified with the thing symbolized. Dr. Whitehead says a "ritual may be defined as the habitual performance of definite actions which have no direct relevance to the preservation of the physical organisms of the actors."\(^2\)

A ceremony\(^3\) is an act or series of acts often symbolical proscribed by law, custom or authority in matters of religion, state or other organizations. A ritual is only a part of the ceremony. A ceremony is a complete series of rituals. Ritualistic ceremonies, therefore, are ceremonies composed of a complete series of revelant and closely related rituals.

My problem in this research is to study the ritualistic ceremonies as exemplified by negro organizations in Omaha, and to determine as far as possible the origin and development of the ceremonies that are particularly characteristic of the negro population.

\(^1\)World's Popular Encyclopedia, Vol. II, 1937
\(^2\)Alfred Whitehead, Religion in the Making, 1926, p. 20
\(^3\)Webster's Standard Dictionary
Ritualistic ceremonies are peculiar to all races. Man, in his effort to control his food supply and environment resorted to certain magical practices which led to ritualism. The ceremonies of each race are colored by the traditions, background and culture patterns of that particular race. With the domestication of animals, the cultivation of plants, and the discovery of metals, man abandoned some of his rituals, especially those pertaining to the obtaining of food, but some of these basic rituals have come down to us from the distant past and fragments of these can be found today.

The aim of this paper is to set forth facts in scientific form and there is nothing in it to engender racial feeling. To gain an adequate background I have made an extensive study of the origin of ceremonials, the origin of religion, and the rise of fraternal organizations, also, racial differences. And, I have tried to organize my chapters so as to give a brief but adequate background for the main phases of my paper.

In this research I have used the case method in studying the ceremonies of various organizations of Omaha. In the use of this method I have interviewed contemporary officials and past officials of Omaha organizations, as well as other individuals who have no connection with the organizations. I also used the historical method. It was impossible to reduce all the data discovered to statistical analysis, due to the nature of the material.
This study represents the coordinate relationship of Sociology to Psychology, in that it shows the motivation of man's behavior and his participation and the use of ceremonies which are distinctly sociological.

The findings in this study should be of distinct value to the student of contemporary society for several reasons:

1. An understanding of the origin and development of various ritualistic ceremonies should enable leaders of organizations to modify and adjust ceremonies to better meet the needs of the present day.

2. Knowledge of these practices and their significance should develop a greater racial pride.

3. It opens new avenues for further research.

4. A knowledge of the origin of ceremonies and rituals of a racial group, and the sources of its beliefs and customs, will enable us to better cope with the racial problems that arise.
THE RISE OF CEREMONIALS
Chapter II

THE RISE OF CEREMONIALS

Primitive man engaged in ceremonies of various kinds in order to conserve socially recognized values or customs of the tribe. These ceremonies played an important part in the life of the savage. They promoted social solidarity and unity of the group and brought about a feeling of neighborliness and good fellowship between the various tribes.

The people from different tribes came together and participated in certain solemn rites. Dances were held and discussions of their history and traditions. This made for mutual good will and understanding of the tribes. The culture patterns of the past were preserved in this manner and handed down from generation to generation.

Ceremonies had a real moral significance in the life of the savage. By then they were made better men and women. The white man's influence has broken down much of the significance attached to these ceremonies. Naturally they had no significance for the white man and he has made the native feel that they are worthless and foolish, when in fact they had a real and vital significance for the native. Wright says, "It is sad to note that the influence of white men is breaking down this reverence for tribal morality and substituting nothing in its place."¹

¹W. K. Wright, Student's Philosophy of
These ceremonies had a real social significance for the savage. Ceremonies were performed for the benefit of the tribe as a whole. They taught them the values of organization and collective effort. Mr. Wright seems to think that ceremonies of primitive man were important forerunners of the rise of industry and economic division of labor. They are definitely evolutionary forerunners of our religious and lodge ceremonies of the present day.

Even before religion took a definite form, primitive man was aware of a vague feeling of some sort of impersonal power. The beginning of a religious conception was present in the confused mind of the savage.

They performed ceremonies to increase their food supply or bring about rain or to transform their adolescents into men and women or to promote the welfare of the group as a whole.

James Frazer has made a study of the ceremonies of various primitive groups among which the savages of Australia are the most primitive. Their economic development is the very lowest. They have neither domestic animals nor cultivated soil. The men hunt animals while the women gather wild game such as honey ants and lizards. It is said that these people belong to the pre-religious stage. But it would be truer to say their religious ideas are different. Although they have no conception of prayer or other communication with the spirits or gods,

2 James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, 1925. p. 17
they possess the germ of religion that exists among higher races today. They have developed a complicated system of totems.

Every person belongs to a totem, that is, he is mystically united with some plant or animal. The Arunta tribe believes that each individual is the direct reincarnation of an ancestor of his totem or else of the spirit part of an animal of the totem. Except in rare ceremonies an individual must not eat this totem for food, on account of his mystic union with the totem. This union with the totem gives him power to increase the food supply or bring about rain or other activities of great significance to the tribe.

The intichiuma ceremonies, in which the forbidden totemic food is partaken of by the participants seems to be the beginning of the conception of a sacrifice we read so much about in the Bible.

If we study the ceremonies of the savages we shall perceive in them some of the characteristics of higher religions. Ceremonials serve the same purpose for the black peoples of Australia as does the confirmation of the Jewish or Christian youth or the confirmation and baptism of Negro youth in America. Socially, the ceremonies conserve what has been held sacred in the past and passes it down to the coming generation. Individually they bring about humility and intense emotional states which are necessary for the initiation.
The effect of the initiation and the ceremonies is to cultivate a tremendous awe and reverence for tribal traditions much the same as our lodge ceremonies today.

The resemblance of the intichuima ceremonies of the Australian Black people with that of a fraternal organization that exists in the United States today is obvious. In both cases some sort of totem is used, usually an animal, and the initiate is made to feel that some sort of mysterious impersonal force operates in the initiation ceremonies and transforms him both physiologically and mentally into a stronger man. It is something felt rather than thought, and becomes more vivid and potent because of its uncanny and mysterious aspects. Resemblance of the ceremonies can also be seen in certain religious rites of our modern churches.

The practice of sorcery by the Toda tribes in the Nilgiri hills in Southern India seems to be the evolutionary forerunner of our good luck charms and voodooism. In the Toda rites there is a utilization of an impersonal psychical power, although they have little or nothing to do with the worship of gods. The sorcerer can bring evil upon an enemy by holding in his hands a bundle composed of stones and hair and addressing the mysterious power to bring bad luck upon his enemy. "By the power of the gods if there be power; by the god's country if there be a country; may his calves perish; as birds fly away may his buffaloes go when the calves come to suck; as I drink water, may he also have nothing but water to drink; as I

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3Ibid
am thirsty may he also be thirsty; as I am hungry, may
he also be hungry; as my children cry, so may his children
cry; as my wife wears only a ragged cloth so may his wife
wear only a ragged cloth. He then hides the bundle in
the hut of his enemy.

This sort of thing still exists among some groups
today. Ceremonies for evoking the evil spirit to bring
harm to an enemy are still practiced, and charms are
often buried under the doorstep of an enemy.

If a man of the Toda tribe has misfortune, he will
consult a diviner. Diviners are spiritual mediums who
work in secret agreement with the sorcerers. The Diviner
goes through a violent mental agitation, and a god speaks
through him and gives the man in trouble information and
advice. He learns what sorcerer has put a curse on him
and for what reasons. He then gives the sorcerer what
he asks and becomes reconciled with him. The sorcerer
then revokes the curse.

Such practices still exist among the Negroes of the
United States, and traces are found in Omaha. These rites
held vital significance for the Todas and other primitive
groups and have lost their meaning for more civilized
groups but nevertheless are still being practiced. Such
are the powers of tradition.

In Melanesia, the home of a negroid race of people
the idea of an impersonal power or force has been developed

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4 K. Wright, op. cit., p. 22
5 J. G. Frazer, op. cit., p. 147
much farther than among the Todas and the Australian Black race. They have a name for that mysterious force, mana. It is not possible to give a logical definition of mana because it is not a logical conception. They arrived at it through feeling rather than reason. Races who believe in mana have not learned to think in logical terms. Bishop Codrington says, "The Melanesian mind is entirely possessed by the belief in a supernatural power of men, outside of the common processes of nature; it is present in the atmosphere of life, attaches itself to persons and to things, and is manifested by results which can only be ascribed to its operations."  

If a peculiarly shaped stone attracts a man's attention it may have mana in it. If it resembles a certain kind of fruit, he will lay it at the roots of that particular fruit tree and if the tree bears abundantly that year the existence of mana is established.

Human sacrifices used to be made and young men ate human flesh to gather courage in fighting or to have fighting mana. Many of the negro race are now, or have been habitual cannibals.

Wright says in speaking of the Melanesians, "If a man has been successful in fighting, it has not been his natural strength of arms, quickness of eye, or readiness of resource that has won success; he has certainly got the mana of a spirit or of some deceased warrior to empower him, conveyed

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in an amulet or a stone around his neck, or a tuft of leaves in his belt, in a tooth hung upon a finger of his bow hand, or in the form of words with which he brings supernatural assistance to his side. 7

Other primitive races have the same conception of an impersonal power. Among the Pygmies this force is called oudah, the Algonquin, a North American Indian tribe, term is manitou, the Sioux term is wakonda, the Iroquois, orenda.

Traces of this conception are to be found among higher civilizations. Some classes of American Negroes carry a rabbit's foot to bring them good luck. They do not attribute the good luck to any physical causation in accordance with natural law. It is that impersonal power that brings about a favorable change of circumstances, on account of the presence of the rabbit's foot.

A Central African tribe, known as the Baganda, possesses all the different forms of rituals. The Reverend John Roscoe 8 made an extensive study of these people. One of their most outstanding practices, and one which has come down to us in a modified form, are their fetiches. Fetiches are manufactured objects supposed to possess supernatural powers for averting evil and bringing good luck to their possessor. Every home had its own supply and offerings of food and drink were placed regularly before them. Certain smaller fetiches were designed to wear upon the person. Some were horns of antelopes or buffaloes, filled with herbs and clay

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8 John Roscoe, The Baganda, p...
by the medicine men. The mere possession of a fetich is thought to ward off evil, insure the recovery of the sick, and bring blessing upon the homes.

This tribe also possess amulets, objects similar to the fetiches. They are usually made of wood and never receive offerings. They are made and sold by the medicine men to be worn on the person. The amulet is powerful for one thing only—to heal or prevent some particular disease.

Similar customs are still practiced by certain American negroes. The roots of certain herbs are gathered, cut into small pieces and strung about the neck of babies, to insure good health and a happy future. Then serious epidemics break out certain herbs and gums are tied in little bags and worn about the neck to ward off the disease.

The use of magic plays an important part in all primitive groups. Enemies could be cursed or killed by the use of magic. One of the ways the Baganda kills an enemy is to "take a fowl, dig a hole in the path leading to the man's house, kill the fowl there, let the blood run into the hole, cut off the fowl's head and bury it with the blood; he would then ask the gods to bless his medicine, and make it work death to his enemy. The enemy, unconscious of the trap, will walk over it, and in a few days' time he would fall ill and die." If an enemy should get hold of one's hair, nail parings or spittle he could, by means of magic cause one to die a horrible death. An epidemic of some dreaded disease could be averted by the offering of a woman and a child together with domestic animals. The

9 W. K. Wright, op. cit., p. 37
offering would be taken into the country from which the epidemic had spread, their limbs were broken and they were left to die a lingering death. The disease would then be transferred to the country from which it came. Diseases could be transferred from persons to animals or to other persons in much the same manner.

In the very recent past evidences of this ritual were evident in one of our most advanced cities of the United States. A certain religious sect, composed largely of illiterate negroes, were about to boil alive a negro woman and her eleven year old daughter to insure the growth and welfare of their religious group. Fortunately police averted the tragedy.

Magic, when hair, nail parings, and spittle are used, also exists among illiterate negroes of the United States and a few in Omaha.
There are several definite things which leading sociologists have tried proved about ceremonials:

1. Primitive man engaged in rituals and ceremonies to insure economic security.

2. Religion has always existed in some form in the mind of man, therefore rituals reach as far back as the animal world.

3. Sacrifices exemplified in the Bible are descendant from the intichuima ceremonies of Central Australia.

4. Initiation ceremonies of the Lodges resemble very closely the intichuima ceremonies of an Australian black people.

5. The practices of sorcery in the southern hills of India are evolutionary forerunners of voodooism practiced by American Negroes.

6. Good luck charms of American Negroes are modified forms of fetiches and amulets of the Baganda tribe of Central Africa.
THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGION
Chapter III

THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGION

"Religion is the serious and social attitude of individuals or communities toward the power or powers which they conceive as having ultimate control over their interests and destinies," so writes Dr. J. B. Pratt in his, "The Religious Consciousness."¹

Man has not always had serious and social attitudes toward this impersonal power. The religious idea emerged gradually into human life. There were four stages in the development of religion: ritual, emotion, belief and rationalization. Ritual and emotion were the first and cruder forms of religion. It was not until belief and rationalization were well established that the great religious conceptions of civilized mankind developed.

Ritual goes back beyond the dawn of human history. It may be found in the individual habits of animals. Professor Whitehead gives a good definition of a ritual.

"Ritual may be defined as the habitual performance of definite actions which have no direct relevance to the preservation of the physical organisms of the actors."²

Flocks of birds perform their ritual evolutions in the sky. Notable examples are the English sky-lark and the flight of wild goose. Ritual is the primitive outcome of superfluous energy and leisure. It is the stimulus to emotion and leads to religion in a higher form.

¹J. B. Pratt, The Religious Consciousness 1921, p.2
²Alfred Whitehead, Religion in the Making 1926, p.20
Collective ritual and collective emotion were the binding forces of primitive tribes. They represent the first faint glimmerings of the life of the spirit raised beyond the activities of merely supplying animal necessities.

But ritual and emotion could not go for long untouched by the intellectual side of man's being. Because man is a rational animal, he found himself practicing various rituals and began to question the purpose of them. This rationalization led to the belief in a hero. If the hero were a person we call the ritual with its myth, "religion"; if the hero were a thing it is known as magic.

Rational religion is a religion whose beliefs and rituals have been reorganized with a purpose or objective in view. It is a development conditioned by the general progress of the races in which it arose. It followed the development of human consciousness. Its evolution is still going on and will continue to do so as long as there are human progress and change. The influence of the primitive religion, ceremonial and mythical, has been great. For thousands of years, before the Christian era, there was a constant, intense struggle on the part of rationalism to transform the more primitive type.

In man's struggle for existence he always turned to religion when everything else failed. Religion has been the main instrument of progress. One reason why the negro's religion is of the emotional type is that in times of oppression and slavery he groped blindly for a
way out of his troubles. He did not stop to reason out the principles of religion because he had not reached the rational stage. He glung to the religion that offered him the most coveted reward, freedom.

The coming of rational religion is the result of the growth of world-consciousness. It is the conscious reaction of individuals to the feeling of a higher, impersonal power. When Christianity had established itself throughout most of the civilized world, there were two main rational religions: Christianity and Buddhism. There were various other religions that rivaled them but these two types had greater survival power.

The great rational religions are the result of the emergence of religious consciousness throughout the civilized world. It is an attempt to find something permanent and intelligible on which man can base his hopes. Religion is a powerful social control. It influences the child from birth or even before birth. In a racial group, a certain type of religion becomes a tradition. An infant is born into a maze of inherited traditions which determine his general development. He finds himself in a network of established rules of conduct, at home, in school, on the playground and at church.

Dr. Emory S. Bogardus states that, "The prestige of custom affects the adolescent tremendously. Ceremony and ritual combine to mold his habits and his feeling -- attitudes. When an individual is initiated into either a

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3E. S. Bogardus, Essentials of Social Psychology, 1923, p. 277
fraternal or a religious organization, he is impressed, by means of the ritual, with the importance of the given organization, of the ideals of the group, and often of his own significance. Then individuals regularly join together in singing, they become united and perhaps permanently socialized. Thus consciously and unconsciously they feel the force of ritual and ceremony."

The ritual and ceremony are the forces which have held our great religions together.
Chapter Summary

The study of the evolution of religion has brought to light the following things:

1. There are four stages in the evolution of religion; ritual, emotion, belief, and rationalization.
2. Ritual goes back beyond the history of mankind, into the animal world.
3. Ritual and emotion are forces which have held our various religions together.
4. The religion of the Negro has not fully reached the rational stage.
5. Rational religion is a religion whose beliefs and rituals have been reorganized with the definite purpose or objective in view.
6. The evolution of religion will continue as long as there is change.
7. Religion is an instrument of progress and a powerful social control which makes constant use of ritualistic ceremonies.
8. Rational religion is the result of the growth of world-consciousness.
THE NEGRO CHURCH
Chapter IV.

THE NEGRO CHURCH

Before the Civil War, Negroes in certain parts of the United States were accepted in the churches with the whites and accorded equal privileges, but in the South they had to accept whatever religious privileges were allowed them. During this period they belonged to the white churches, occupied certain seats or the negro pews, or met in the basement for worship at a special hour on Sunday.

After the war there was an independent movement among negroes to establish their own local churches. This movement was initiated in the North and spread throughout the South. But in the South the development was retarded, somewhat, because of the restrictions of slaveholders who feared an uprising among the slaves. The two most outstanding churches that appealed to the slaves were the Baptist and the Methodist churches. The Baptist won more members than the Methodist because of its attack upon slavery. They were unusually outspoken and effective in waging war on this institution. The first Negro Baptist Church in America was founded by Rev. Palmer at Silver Bluffs, near Augusta, Georgia about 1774. After the establishing of separate churches, negro preachers took charge of the congregations. The first Methodist Episcopal Church was established in 1794 by Richard Allen, a negro minister. There was a general secession of the negroes from the white churches and separation became final.
The independent church movement among negroes was directed toward Baptism and Methodism. To many observers this seemed strange because in the parts of the country in which most negroes were found, the most dominant church among the whites was Episcopal. The Presbyterians and the Quakers were numbered among the negroes' best friends. They extended to them an eager hand of welcome and offered them equal privileges. But nevertheless, the Negroes continued to flock to the Methodist and Baptist Churches. This was due to the emotional nature of the Negroes to which the Baptists and Methodists appealed. The more enlightened heads of the Church believed that by blending together the emotional and the intellectual, the minds of the Negroes could be better developed along religious lines, and they felt that there were no religious denominations which could suit the capacity of their people as well as the Baptist and Methodist.

The Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches disregarded the "emotional character of experimental religion." It was felt that "their appeal was too intellectual." Carter G. Woodson has said that this same appeal of the evangelical rather than the ritualistic explains also the slow progress of the Catholic work among Negroes. The Catholics were the first to condemn slavery, and the first to concern themselves with

\[1\text{Carter G. Woodson, The Negro Church, 1921, p. 121}\]
\[2\text{Ibid.}\]
bettering the conditions of the Negroes. They opened schools for the children of slaves and established missions, yet they did not make much impression on the Negroes. Only a small percentage of the race went over to the Catholic Church. The Congregationalists became interested in the welfare of the Negroes. They aided the fugitives and made them welcome within their fold, but were not very successful in winning them over, so great was the hold of ritualistic religions.

The Baptist Churches greatly outnumber the Methodist, which can be explained by the peculiar feature of the Baptist policy. In the first place, the local Baptist Church is independent of any other church or organization. This unusual liberty sometimes proves to be detrimental in that the standard of the ministry and the morale of the churches are not so high as the Methodist churches, whose conferences have the power of control over local churches. Any group of Baptists, of not less than four in number may leave the Mother Church and organize a church of their own. Thus Negro Baptist Churches split and multiply rapidly, because there are always members who find fault and disagree with the rulings of the Mother Church. The Baptist and Methodist Churches were characterized by their periodical "camp meetings." Carter Woodson gives a well written account on the subject.

These meetings were looked forward to with a great deal of anticipation and persons, knowing of the good supposedly derived therefrom, came from afar and remained about the place, thus giving to such convocations the well-known name of camp meetings. As these assemblages were social as well as religi-
ous and sometimes partook of a festive nature, the Negroes easily became attracted to this more liberal method of promoting the cause of Christ.

The Negroes in these meetings appealed especially to the white ministers because of their quick response to the appeal to come out of darkness into light. While an Episcopal clergyman with his ritual and prayer book had difficulty in interesting the Negroes, they flocked in large numbers to the spontaneous exercises of the Methodists and Baptists, who, being decidedly evangelical in their preaching, had a sort of hypnotizing effect upon the Negroes, causing them to be seized with certain emotional jerks and outward expressions of an inward movement of the spirit which made them lose control of themselves. The program of the day was a delivery of sermons at intervals, interspersed here and there by appeals to sinners to come forward to be prayed for at the anxious seat, while various members, having unusual influence over the converted and in touch with God, whispered in their ears the way to find salvation and life.

Among the Baptists, the soul stirring reunion was known as a protracted meeting, which differed very little from that of the Methodist camp meeting. The preacher came forward, declaring the dawn of a new day and the shower of blessings that everyone could receive. The burden of his message was that he had come to set forth those things which had been hitherto kept from the wise and prudent but lately revealed unto fools. Seeing that they were made a special object of the philanthropy of these new workers, the Negroes
became seized with hysteria because of this new boon; and the interest in the work passing from one to another, spread almost like a contagion, moving communities to seek salvation. Persons passing as sinners were made to feel that they were wretches in the sight of God and that direful punishments awaited them as the lot of the wicked. Their state was awful to behold, and their opportunities were swiftly passing away. That moment was the accepted time; for their delay would mean damnation. Persons fell helpless before the altar of the Church and had to be carried out to be ministered unto, and when they emerged from their semi-conscious state they came forward singing the song of the redeemed who had been washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

Statistics show, however, that such a conversion of people who were given no opportunity for mental development amounted to very little in the edification of their souls. Not long after these exciting camp meetings and protracted efforts had passed over many of these persons, who had been most vociferous in their praise of God for cleansing them of their many sins, readily fell thereafter by the wayside in engaging in what is known as pleasureable evils.

Many of these characteristics are noted in a large number of the Negro Churches in Omaha as is pointed out in the next chapter.
Chapter Summary

The church preference of the Negro has established certain assumptions about his spiritual and emotional make-up:

1. The Baptist and Methodist churches furnish an emotional outlet for the negro's highly emotional nature.

2. Other churches, less emotional, tried but failed to win the interest of the negroes during slavery, because "their appeal was too intellectual."

3. Negro Baptist churches multiply fast because of their lax by-laws.

4. "Camp meetings" are looked forward to with anticipation because of the emotional outlet they afford.

5. The evangelical "soul-stirring sermons of the Baptist and Methodist preachers have a sort of hypnotizing effect upon the congregation and they react by mob hysteria."
 negro churches of clara
Chapter V

NEGRO CHURCHES OF OMAHA

The Negro Church is a social force in the life of the community. In many cases it is the only avenue for the social and expressive activities of the race. Out of about fourteen thousand Negro population of Omaha, about four thousand are members of some church. There are forty-three Negro churches in Omaha. Following is a table of the chief denominations and the number of churches to each:

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<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiness</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritualist</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Presbyterian</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>People's Interdenominational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seven Day Adventist</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father Divine</td>
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The churches that are the most important in my study of negro ritualism are the Baptist, Methodist, Holiness and Spiritualist, because they are of the emotional type. The Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Catholic are exact copies of the white churches from which they are a branch. There is very little emotionalism shown, even at funerals, where

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\text{I. Earl Sullenger and J. Harvey Kerns, } \text{The Negro in Omaha, 1931}\]
emotions usually run high; there is sustained self-control.

The Methodist Church

The rites and ceremonies of the Methodist Church may be changed at will or as the spirit moves them:

"It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing e ordained against God's word."

"Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification."

When a change is made in the rites or ceremonies it is usually to satisfy an emotional need.

Ritual of the Love-feasts of the Negro Methodist Church

1. Love-feasts shall be held quarterly or at such other times as the preacher in charge may consider expedient, with closed doors, to which besides church members, other serious persons may be admitted by him.

2. In conducting the love-feast, after singing and prayer, the preacher may make a short address, setting forth the nature and design of this institution; everyone present then partakes of a little bread and water in token

\textsuperscript{2}The Doctrines and Discipline, 1930, p. 461

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid, p. 14
of brotherly love. The members then give brief details of their religious experience; and the meeting is closed with singing and prayer. Visitors are not allowed more than twice.

This ritual is a relic of the Feast of Souls, practiced by a primitive tribe of Central Africa, the Buganda. Members of the tribe gather at certain times of the year for a feast in token of reverence for their deceased ancestors. None but direct descendants are allowed to participate.

The formal rituals of the Negro Methodist Church are copies from the White Methodist Episcopal Church. Their "camp meetings" have given way to "revival meetings," which are carried on in the traditional way. There are soul-stirring sermons accompanied by much shouting and yelling. Sometimes it requires several men to hold a shouting sister who fools the spirit and gives vent to her emotions by running wild over the church. Sinners fall prostrate before the anxious seat, and arise in hysterics, shouting prayers to the Redeemer. Revival meetings usually last about two weeks.

The Negro Baptist Church in Omaha

The Baptist differs from the Methodist in that they advocate immersion in water rather than of sprinkling of

water during baptism. Their rituals and ceremonies are much the same as the Methodist Church. Services are very emotional and often so loud that they disturb the neighbors. There is much groaning and lamenting for lost souls. There are periodic "protracted meetings" which last about two weeks. There are exactly twice as many Negro Baptist Churches in Omaha as there are Methodist, due to the fact that any four persons who are displeased with the church may leave the Mother Church and start a new one. Their ceremonies are not so ritualistic, but are determined by momentary feelings.

The Spiritualist Church

There are three Negro Spiritualist Churches in Omaha. The services are more emotional than either the Baptist or Methodist. They believe in prophesy and have certain evenings, usually Tuesdays and Thursdays, set aside for fortune telling. The prophets wear long flowing robes of white while at work. After they have proved their worth as prophets they are ordained as Healers. Their business is to cure functional diseases and relieve physical ailments. A fee is charged for all services performed, and "blessed" roses and water are sold for fifty cents and up. Members may have small articles, as handkerchiefs, rings, and pins, blessed by the pastor for the small fee of twenty-five cents.

The pastor handles all money, without the assistance of a clerk or secretary. He wears a different robe for every occasion: red for communion, black and white for general
service, and lavender for funerals.

General religious service is held Sunday evenings. The order of these services is: The first half hour is devotional service. Anyone may talk or testify. They believe in talking in unknown tongues, so most of the devotional services is done in a babbling of voices. After a half hour of this the lights are dimmed or turned out and candles lighted, everyone kneels and chants, in any tongue he desires. After the chanting service the "shout service" begins. This is also conducted under dim lights. The shout service may last indefinite. It all depends on what the spirit dictates.

The diviners of the Todo tribe of Southern India are the fore-runners of the prophets and healers of the negro Spiritual Church of Omaha. The diviners were spiritual mediums who told fortunes, gave information and advice, and lifted curses that had been placed on individuals by sorcerers. They also sold good luck charms.

The prophets and healers of the Spiritualist church, tell fortunes, give information and advice, cure functional diseases, relieve physical ailments, and sell blessed articles that will bring good luck to the bearer as previously noted.

The Holiness Church

This is the church where emotions run riot. There are ten Holiness Churches in Omaha. They are commonly known as the Church of God. Members are living free from sin. Services are on the order of the Spiritualist Church, although they differ on the matter of prophecy. Holiness
followers do not believe in prophesy. Most of their services are conducted in unknown tongues, under aimed lights. Anyone, who is moved by the spirit, reads from the scriptures then follows singing, clapping of hands, shouting, and tap dancing. Every member seems to be a good tap dancer. Their songs have the rhythm of the Southern Negro jazz, so it is a good accompaniment for dancing. Members often go into trances, faints, jerks. Their services last until far into the night. This religion is far removed from the rational religion.

Father Divine

The newest denomination to spring up in Omaha is the Father Divine cult. This religious sect was initiated by a Georgia negro who now resides in New York. His followers believe him to be God in his bodily form and worship him as such. They live as a great brotherhood. Marriages are dissolved and children are not born into the cult. There is no danger of the population decreasing because followers are going to live forever, so say the members. Worldly names are dropped and divine names are given them by the Father. Followers give all their worldly possessions to the Father and live in missions. He has a mansion in Harlem and several cars at his disposal.

Services are very emotional: First the "secretary" reads, then there is singing and testifying. After this followers do "whatever the Father dictates." His spirit is present at all meetings and it is an easy matter to converse
with him by "relaxing the intelligence and contacting him."  

The most peculiar thing about this cult is that Whites as well as Negroes are flocking to its missions. Some of them supposedly intellectuals. It is just gaining a foot-hold in Omaha and will take some time to determine what will develop from it. Its ritualistic ceremonies seem to be based entirely on the personal ideas of this one dictatorial leader plus the basic elements of emotionalism.

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Chapter Summary

The Negro Churches of Omaha follow the general rule of Negro Churches everywhere, both past and present. They have certain characteristics that brand them as definitely negroid:

1. There are more Baptist and Methodist Churches than any other kind.
2. Services are very emotional.
3. Rituals and ceremonies may be changed at will, thus they are not formal.
4. The Methodist ritual of the Love-feast has survived from the practices of a Central African tribe.
5. Camp meetings are emotional orgies.
6. Prophets and healers of the Spiritual Church are replicas of the Diviners of the Toda tribe in Southern India.
Chapter VI

THE ORIGIN OF SECRET SOCIETIES

We owe the existence of our clubs, lodges, and fraternities to the practice of primitive tribes of separating the sexes. It is the result of the feeling of sexual solidarity or of consciousness of kind. This sexual separation established the habit of building large dormitories for men, which is known as the men's house.

Dr. Webster says, "The men's house is usually the largest building in a tribal settlement. It belongs in common to the villagers; it serves as a council-chamber and town hall, as a guest-house for strangers, and as the sleeping resort of the men."¹

The most important things belonging to the community, trophies of war and religious emblems were housed in this building. Women, children and men not fully initiated members of the tribe were not allowed to enter. Dr. Webster, who is an authority on this subject says again, "Among some tribes the men's house is used as the center of the puberty initiation ceremonies. With the development of secret societies, replacing the earlier tribal puberty institutions, the men's house frequently becomes the seat of these organizations and forms the secret lodge." The presence then in a primitive community of

¹ Hutton Webster, Primitive Secret Societies, 1907, p. 223
the men's house in any one of its numerous forms points strongly to the existence, now, or in the past, of secret initiation ceremonies. The crudest form of this institution today exists in the Arunta tribe in Australia. Primitive forms are also found in New Guinea and Melanesia.

The tribe becomes a secret association divided into grades or classes out of which arise the "degrees" of the secret society. The passage from one class to another is usually attended by secret ceremonies.

"Of these ceremonies of initiation, the most interesting and important are those which transfer the youth, arrived at puberty, from association with the women and children and introduce them to the wilder life of the tribe, and to the society of men. During the years of infancy and early boyhood, whatever care and training the lad receives naturally comes from his mother, as he gains in years and experience the mother's influence over him declines and the father begins to assume a greater part in his education. The initiation ceremonies at puberty serve to complete this transfer of the child from mother-right to father and tribal-right. The period of their celebration constitutes the most solemn and important epoch in his entire life." 3

The initiation ceremonies of the girls are less impressive than those of the boys. In speaking of these

2 J. G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, 1255, p. 17
3 Spencer and Gillen, Native Tribes of Central Australia, p.p. 280-281
ceremonies Mr. Haddon says, "It is difficult for us to realize the awe and reverence that was felt by those people for their sacred ceremonies, and it must be admitted that this intense feeling, combined as it was with reticence and discipline, had a strong educative effect on the people."

The chief characteristics of primitive initiation ceremonies are: they are tribal, that is, every male member of the tribe must pass through them; they are secret and jealously guarded from the uninitiated; they are communal rites and call for great festive celebration; they are organized and conducted by the elders who are guardians of the state; they have a definite purpose.

"The secret societies found among Melanesian and African peoples are organizations more or less narrowly limited in membership, divided into degrees, through which candidates able to pay the cost of initiation may progress, and localized usually in some definite lodge, where the members resort for their mysterious ceremonies. The use of the masks, bull-roarers, and other devices serves at once to emphasize the pretended association of the members of these societies with the spirits of the dead, and to terrify and overawe those who are not admitted into the mysteries." The decline of the earlier puberty institutions has been definitely associated with the rise of

4 J. G. Frazier, op. cit., p. 42
of secret societies. These characteristics are clearly evident in the ritualistic ceremonies of these organizations in Omaha as pointed out in the next chapter.
Chapter Summary

Secret societies were originated by primitive men. Leading sociologists, who have made a study of primitive man, have established certain facts:

1. The practice of primitive tribes of separating the sexes has given rise to our lodges, fraternities, and sororities.

2. The "men's houses" of the Arunta tribe are the fore-runners of our dormitories, and lodge houses.

3. Our secret lodges are direct descendants of tribal puberty institutions.

4. Devices used in puberty initiation ceremonies are still used in our modern lodges.
NEGRO LODGES OF OMAHA
Chapter VII

NEGRO LODGES OF OMAHA

There are six active Negro lodges in Omaha:

1. The Mason Lodge—a secret fraternal organization.
2. Order of the Eastern Star—women's auxiliary of the Masons.
5. The Order of Elks—men's lodge.
6. Daughters of Isis—women's auxiliary of the Elks.

There were five other lodges which are now inactive; Oddfellows, the Mysterious Ten, Knights and Daughters of Tabor, and United Brothers of Friendship.

Observation will show that these organizations have definitely grown out of the more primitive type. Their characteristics are almost identical with those of the secret societies of the primitive Melanesia tribe, the Brunta tribe in Australia, and the primitive tribes of New Guinea:

Among the primitive tribes, especially those known to practice totemism, it is customary for boys at puberty, to undergo certain initiatory rites. \(^1\) One of the rituals

\(^1\) J. G. Frazer, \textit{The Golden Bough}, 1925 p. 28
is the pretense of killing the boy and bringing him
to life again. It is a primitive belief that there is
an exchange of souls between the boy and his totem dur-
ing the ceremony.

This ritual is exactly analogous to a ritual in
the initiation ceremony of the Elk lodge. There is
a death scene, with a bier, hand torches and pall bear-
ers. The initiate is bound to the bier and members go
through all the pretense of burial. During this ritual
the high qualities of the Elk are transferred to the
initiate.

The choice of an animal as a sort of guardian
spirit of this lodge, definitely shows that it is direct-
ly descendant from the secret societies of these primi-
tive tribes, who practiced the use of totems.

Another thing that shows a close relation of these
organizations is that the initiation puberty ceremonies
of primitive tribes are supposed to change the initiate
from a boy into a man. The Elk initiation ceremonies
are supposed to do the same thing.

Comparing primitive secret societies with our
lodges:

1. Primitive secret societies were organized
and conducted by the elders of the tribe.
Our modern lodges are conducted by the
Grand Master, Exalted Ruler, or Worthy
Matron.

The Elk lodges are used as illustrative of the ritualis-
tic ceremonies of all of the lodges in Omaha. The Negroes
have taken the basic principles of the lodges as used by
the white men and injected an enlarged amount of emotion-
alisn into them. All of the general characteristics
2. *Primitive initiation ceremonies* called for blindfolds, masks, bull-roars, cords to bind the initiate and a death scene.

3. *Initiation ceremonies of present-day lodges* call for blindfolds, masks, rattling of heavy chains, a gong, chimes, trumpets, and a death scene.

4. *Primitive societies were divided into classes or degrees,* and the passing from one degree to a higher degree called for an elaborate secret ceremony. *Modern lodges have identical customs.*

5. *Primitive societies were organized to bring about sexual solidarity.* Modern lodges are organized, "to bring our brothers into closer communion and to cement more firmly the ties of friendship and fraternal love."

6. *Primitive initiation ceremonies were secret and jealously guarded.* In modern lodges all things are held in the utmost secrecy.

"Enumerated are found in the lodges."
Chapter Summary

Negro lodges of Omaha are almost identical with primitive secret societies:

1. In both types the secrets are jealously guarded.
2. In both the elders or older members are rulers.
3. In both types the initiation ceremonies are supposed to change the initiate from a boy into a man.
4. Both types usually use some sort of totem.
5. Both types were organized for sexual solidarity, with the exclusion of the opposite sex.
6. Both types are divided into classes or degrees.
7. The lodges in Omaha exemplify all of these characteristics in some form or degree.
Chapter VIII

GENERAL SUMMARY

A study of the Negro organizations of Omaha has pointed out that:

1. Ritualistic ceremonies of these organizations have come down to them from similar ritualistic ceremonies of primitive organizations.

2. The spiritual and emotional life of the Negro is still in its evolutionary stage.

3. A large part of the ceremonies of the Negro religious organizations are spontaneous and informal.

4. The rituals and ceremonies of Negro organizations have been a controlling and unifying force and serve as an emotional outlet.

5. It is evident that the Omaha Negro needs an analyzes many of his ritualistic ceremonies in light of current civilization and present needs and then eliminates or adjusts such forms of behaviour.
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