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African American missionaries serving overseas: A surprising numerical and demographic analysis of US-born Blacks in missions

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Abstract

A census of African American cross-cultural overseas missionaries was completed between 2020 and mid-2021. Over 600 mission agencies listed in the *North American Mission Handbook* were checked for US-born Black missionaries, and comparisons made between data from the 21st and 22nd editions. A slight majority of the 179 African American foreign missionaries located were single, and 57% of marrieds were in inter-ethnic marriages. Almost half of these cross-cultural workers served in Africa. Not more than 10% were found in any one mission agency, and 21% of missionaries were salaried.

Keywords

African American, overseas, Black, census, interethnic marriage, missionary, cross-cultural, Black church, Africa, mission agencies, US-born Black, raising support, single missionaries, White, salaried

Research background

African Americans surpass other US ethnic groups in almost every measure of self-reported Christian spirituality. The Barna Group found that US Black adults had a higher frequency of church attendance, Bible engagement and prayer than White or Hispanic adults for every year between 2001 and 2021 (Barna Group, 2021: 24-25). A 2021 Pew Research study found that 74% of all Black American adults surveyed said that "they believed in God as described in their religion's holy scripture (such as the Bible…)", compared to 59% of all US adults (Pew Research Center, 2021: 57; N=8,660 Black adults and N=4,574 non-Black US adults). On the question of whether or not "people of faith have a religious duty to try to convert nonbelievers", 51% of U.S.-born Blacks agree, 69% of Black Protestants who attend a Black church agree, while among all U.S. adults, 34% agree (Pew, 2021: 67). Pew asked Black Americans who said that they had a formal or informal leadership role in their church, what that role was. Only four percent indicated that they led in "Community outreach (nurse, sick and shut in, missionary)" (Pew, 2021: 77). This is the only mention of Christian missionary work in the 175-page research report. Another 2021 study by Barna.com, billed as "The most robust study of the Black Church in 20+ years….", in its 160 pages, there is one allusion to "missionaries", and that is to women in the context of other local church work, similar to the Pew report. Responding to the question, "What are the top issues Black churches should address?" among 20 issues identified, none concerned cross-cultural or global missions (Barna Group, 2021: 82). The issues were identified by 950 Black US adults familiar with the Black church, and an additional 293 Black pastors whose churches were at least 50% Black.

Historically, the AFAM church focused upon the needs of AFAMs, as illustrated by W. E. B. Du Bois' six functions of the AFAM church, none of which extended outside the AFAM community (Bunch, 2013: 12). Given the outsized Christian spiritual markers within the Black community mentioned above and in the absence of any focus upon cross-cultural ministry among Black leaders cited in the two above surveys, it is fair to ask if the bottleneck in cross-cultural ministry is primarily at the leadership level. George Barna, who polled AFAMs annually since a 1996 special commission, together with AFAM Bishop Harry Jackson, Jr., wrote that "[T]he senior [AFAM] pastor is clearly 'da man' in the typical black church. He is given authority, expected to use it and counted upon by congregants to take the church where it otherwise would not go." (2004: 29-30, 46). They added that "He realizes that he is the primary change agent for his church." (2004: 54). The implication is that the pastor will likely direct

the congregation--if overseas missions is not important to leadership, it will probably not be to the church.

As of July 2019, there were approximately 44 million "Black alone" US residents, or 13.4% of the total US population (US Census Bureau, 2021). In 2008, there were a reported 40,501 US Protestant full-time overseas workers serving for at least two years, according to the *Mission Handbook* (Weber, 2010: 44). The following twenty-second edition in this series revealed approximately 31,775 (Newell, 2017)[1]. Given the spiritual indicators cited above, it would not be surprising if the African American (AFAM) Protestant missionary force roughly corresponded to its population proportion—around 3,000 Protestant overseas missionaries[2]. This equivalent number is tempered to the degree that, as of 2019 "…the typical White family has eight times the wealth of the typical Black family…." (Bhutta et al., 2020). The AFAM community is not able to fund missionaries or global ministry as easily as the White community. However, the total income of all US Blacks ("Black alone") over 15 years of age in 2020 was approximately 1.2 trillion dollars, and average income for the 29.4 million "with income" was $41,567 (US Census Bureau, 2020).

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What is the current AFAM overseas missionary population, and what insights are gained for recruitment from that profile? US mission organizations struggle to recruit AFAM missionaries. This is so regardless of the size, ethnic history, ethnic composition or ethnic leadership of an agency. Due to their unusually high and consistent (though declining) measures of spiritual practices, as well as their cross-cultural skills inherent in having been a minority, AFAMs can be an excellent source of new missionaries, being more welcome and less obtrusive on some fields than are Whites. James Sutherland, who recruits AFAMs for short-term ministry, has seen this firsthand in leading 28 AFAMs on short-term ministry teams in India, Uganda, Kenya and S. Sudan between 1996 and 2015. Four of these workers traveled a total of 24 times, indicating the warmth of their receptions. His strategies for recruiting AFAM missionaries, based upon earlier research, were published previously (2004: 505-509).

Do the spiritual and demographic profiles cited above correspond at least proportionally to the actual number of AFAM overseas missionaries? This current missionary census continues others' research dating back to at least 1953, showing consistent numbers of between 240 and 300 AFAM missionaries--either located, or postulated from research. Sutherland postulated the existence of 242 AFAM cross-cultural missionaries, based upon his research in 1998 in which 102 AFAM missionaries were located who served at least one year in cross-cultural missions overseas, and in the US. This present research includes only those serving overseas for a minimum of 2 years, instead of 1 year in earlier research (Sutherland, 1998:5; 2004:501). Our research questions include How many AFAM overseas missionaries are there, Where do AFAM missionaries serve overseas (we include countries outside the USA), and What ministries are prominent? We also ask What agencies are more successful in attracting Blacks, and why? This present analysis concluded in mid-2021.

Delimitations

This research is delimited to US-born Blacks, serving full-time overseas, for a minimum of two years. We made an exception to include those already on the field who intended to stay for at least 2 years, but did not include those still raising support to go to the field for their first term. We did not include AFAM full-time mission office staff, salaried or otherwise[3]. If a married couple was of different ethnic backgrounds, we counted only the AFAM spouse.

Data acquisition

We located 179 individuals, all but one serving overseas sometime between March 2020 and June 2021. This is 63 more than was located in similar preliminary, unpublished research in 2015. Overseas missionary "units" (a single or widowed person, one married typically to a non-AFAM spouse, or a married couple in which both are AFAM) in our database, that has been updated for over 20 years, are 154 (179 less 25 AFAM spouses). Since AFAM missionaries are so difficult to document, and to provide as complete a picture as our research allows, another 6 missionaries across 4 agencies were located. Their names are unknown, but if included would mean a total of 160 missionary "units" and 185 individuals. In other words, fulltime African American missionaries are found in approximately 154-160 places around the globe.

The website of Reconciliation Ministries Network (www.RMNI.org) has had our AFAM missionary survey form[4] on it since 2008, which some missionaries completed, while others simply used our "Contact" page. The 102 cross-cultural missionaries located in Sutherland's 1998 survey were also checked to see if they were still in full-time overseas mission work.

An effort was made in 2015 to contact the most likely mission agencies listed in the 15th (1993-95) edition of the *Mission Handbook*, which lists probably the majority of well-established agencies. This was done using email, phone calls and agency websites. Approximately 562 agencies were contacted between April 2013 and June 2016, primarily those listed as Baptist, Evangelical, Fundamentalist and Independent, and that data was entered into an Excel database.

A second effort was made between August 2018 and December 2020 to directly contact or to carefully examine websites of agencies (except Canadian and small overseas-based agencies), based upon listings in the 2017-2019 22nd edition of the *Mission Handbook*, which represents 2016 data. This time all categories of agencies were included, except Canadian-based, and totaled 639. Larger agencies were contacted more often, due to their influence upon totals. If a large agency did not post missionary photos or sufficient bio information, information that the agency did release was used[5]. Facebook and LinkedIn were especially helpful to verify a person's current status, although information may not have been updated. An imperfect verification method was to see if a person had an active account to receive donations.

We asked agencies if they currently had any US-born Blacks serving with them fulltime overseas, for at least two years. We inquired after country location, the kind of ministry performed, and requested a first name, to avoid duplications. For missionaries working in sensitive areas, we asked for the global region served, not the country. As mentioned, we did not include those working in the US mission office, to be in line with *Mission Handbook* overseas statistics.

While significant help was received from White mission personnel, indispensable was assistance from Black colleagues who helped specially to locate missionaries not affiliated with an agency[6]. Leads were provided by members of the Operation Mobilization Roundtable, which has focused upon AFAM mission mobilization for several years. Members of the COMINAD (Cooperative Mission Network of the African Dispersion) Facebook group provided missionary contacts. The Assemblies of God AFAM mission mobilizers provided excellent help, as have many mission executives. AFAM missionaries also provided many leads, as did numerous AFAM mission mobilizers.

The data set was fixed after a good-faith effort was made to contact or investigate all relevant US agencies listed in the 22nd edition of the *Mission Handbook*[7]. We then verified that all missionaries who fit the parameters, regardless of when located, were still on the field between March 2020 and June 2021—our data set[8]. Of course, it is impossible for a data set to be totally valid at any one point in time, since there is no real-time central database.

The biggest hindrance to gathering information is ever-tightening security and personnel policies. Some large agencies, particularly those working in sensitive areas, would provide little or no information, despite a promise of anonymity. Others simply did not respond to inquiries made on their website contact forms. One large global agency has no central database even of its own missionaries, so it was necessary to contact many of their global branches.

We do not claim to have located all AFAM overseas missionaries, but our data is generally in line with earlier-mentioned research. Our data supports the consensus among mobilizers who are of various ethnicities, and among many mission executives, that AFAM missionaries are difficult to recruit[9].

Findings

Marriage status

Of the 179 located missionaries, 25 couples with both spouses are in our database. There are 71 confirmed singles. The marriage status of another 9 could not be confirmed.

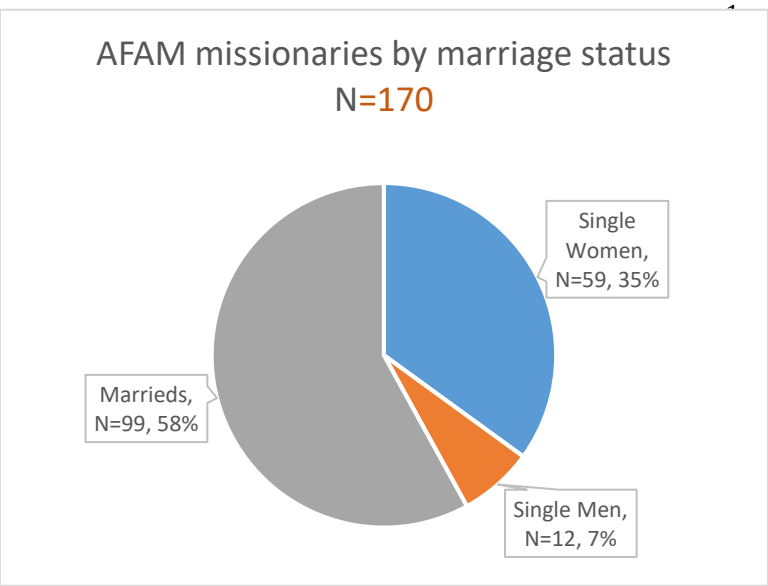

Figure 1. African American missionaries by marriage status.

Fully 42% of overseas missionaries in our AFAM population are single, compared to 19% of all field workers in the 22nd *Handbook* survey (Newell, 2017: 48, 52)[10]. The ratio of female to male singles shows more females in our group, at 83% women and 17% men, versus 72% women and 28% men in the overall 22nd *Handbook* population. This reflects fewer AFAM marrieds nationally than in the total US Protestant missionary population (Newell, 2017: 51). As of 2021, 54.7% of White men, 45.8% of Hispanic men and 36.8% of Black men were married (USA Facts, 2022). Among women, 52.6% of Whites, 48.1% of Hispanics and 32.4% of Black women were married (USA Facts, 2022).

As of 2015, 17% of US newlywed couples were interethnic (Livingston G and Brown A, 2017). According to US Census figures, approximately 10% of US marriages were interethnic by 2016 (Rico B et al., 2018). An astonishing 57% of the 74 marriages represented in our study are interethnic marriages—a US-born Black married to someone who is not a US-born Black. These inter-racial/ethnic marriages are easily noticed by photos of missionaries on agency websites, social media and missionary communications. Some may be disqualified by obvious foreign language accents on videos, and others verified by those who personally know them. Such verifications are not foolproof.

According to Kenney and Kenney (2012: 101-103, 108), it is well documented that biracial couples have been challenged for being such. They have experienced 'societal hostility', 'rejection', and 'discrimination'. These couples have embraced different worldviews and cultural backgrounds within their marriages. Such a background would tend to prepare them to handle conflict, and to sensitize them to other worldviews and cultures more than would be the case with monocultural couples. That a majority of the 74 marriages of AFAM missionaries are interethnic should alert recruiters to the potential of interracial couples for overseas ministry. Since the second greatest hindrance to AFAMs getting to the field, mentioned in Sutherland's 1998 research (1998: 167-170) was difficulty raising financial support--having wider church connections by marriage may also be an advantage. This is more fully illustrated below.

Ministry location

The country or geographical region of service is known for all but one missionary. As shown in Figure 2, Africa is the destination of choice. According to a 2021 Pew Report, among Blacks, 55% said that their origin was central to their identity, compared with 23% of Whites (Cohn D et al., 2021). Some consider Africa their mother continent, and want to help.

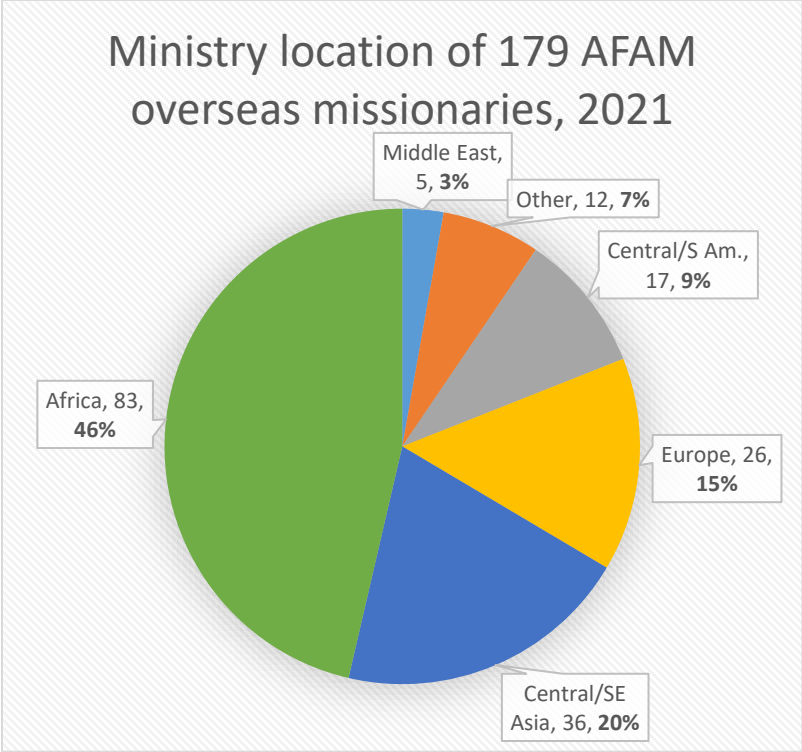

Figure 2. Ministry location of 179 African American overseas missionaries.

Accordingly, 46% percent (N=83) are based in Africa, compared to 21% of all US and Canadian missionaries in the 22nd *Handbook* (Newell, 2017: 63).[11] Of these, 16 serve in Kenya, or 9% of the total AFAM missionary population. Twenty percent of AFAM missionaries in our data are in Asia, compared with 36% in the 22nd *Handbook* population. Twenty-three percent of AFAM missionaries are in majority Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu areas, or where Christianity is not the major religion (Central/SE/East Asia, Middle East—N=41), but another 12 work with Muslims throughout Africa (N=8) and Europe (N=4), bringing the total to 53, or 30% of the total missionary force. Three missionaries not in the database for security reasons are also in Africa, N. Africa or the Middle East, which would bring the total to 31%. Agencies would do well to consider AFAM candidates for these areas of service. At least in the Middle East and Africa, they are less obtrusive than Whites due to skin color. Of the 26 working in 12 European nations, France, England and Spain receive the most missionaries (6, 5 and 3, respectively). Seventeen missionaries serve in Central and South America. In the "Other" category, 5 of the 12 serve in Oceana, 5 work in Mexico, one works in Canada, while one's area is unknown.

The 22nd *Handbook* initiated the regional category "North America" to include cross-cultural ministry there, which comprised 1% of all their missionary population (Newell, 2017: 63). While this study focuses upon overseas missionaries, we verified another 68 missionaries working primarily cross-culturally[12] within the USA by 2021. If we included them, they would be 28% of a total of 245 AFAM cross-cultural workers. Work within the US is easier compared with the complications of living abroad, including separation from extended family. Of course, with increased immigration into the US, cross-cultural stateside ministry is certainly appropriate.

Kinds of ministry

The three largest categories of ministry in Figure 3 comprise 46% of the primary ministries of the 153 AFAM overseas missionary "units" (of the 179 missionaries in our database) for whom we have this kind of information. In the 22nd *Handbook* data, of 627 agencies, 46% indicate that one of those 3 categories is their primary activity, clearly matching the top "primary activities" of North American agencies (Newell, 2017: 59). Our social work category includes protecting women (4), trauma counseling (3), refugee work (2), and promoting justice (2). The

"Other" category includes 3 doing Business as Mission (BAM). Often mission is highly relational--one-to-one--as was Jesus' ministry, and over 90% of ministries identified are of that nature.

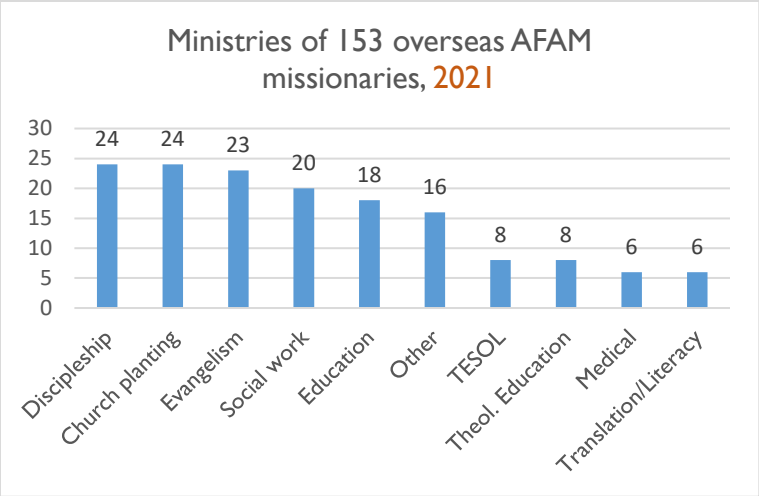

Figure 3. Ministries of 153 overseas African American missionaries.
TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Mission agencies

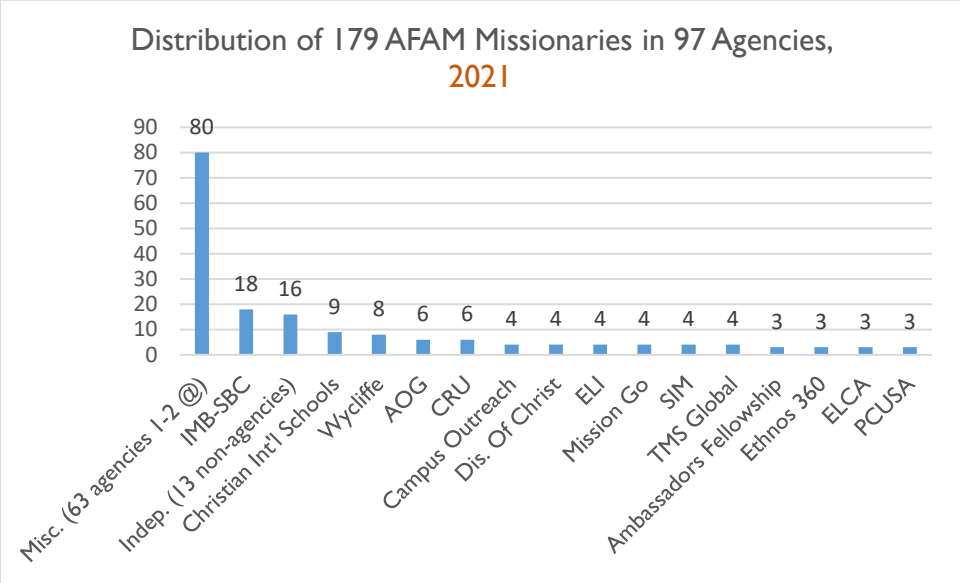

Figure 4. Distribution of 179 African American missionaries serving with 97 agencies.
IMB-SBC: International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention; AOG: Assemblies of God; Dis. Of Christ: Disciples of Christ; ELI: English Language Institute; ELCA: Evangelical Lutheran Church of America; PCUSA:

Presbyterian Church (USA).

As is obvious from Figure 4, no agency that we could locate has a large number of AFAM cross-cultural missionaries. It is a seemingly insuperable and discouraging problem to many mission administrators with whom we have communicated. Agencies in the "Miscellaneous" category have 1 or 2 AFAM workers per agency, and comprise 45% of the total. The "Independent" category has 16 missionaries, or 9% of all workers. These go without typical agency affiliation or supervision. They do not have to raise high levels of support, have low overhead and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Raising support is more difficult for AFAM than for White missionaries, in part because global missionaries are generally not prioritized as much by AFAMs as are those working within the AFAM community. One White executive wrote regarding AFAM recruitment:

> Our largest challenge is our model of funding by support raising. In the past approved Black candidates were not able to raise sufficient support from their own circles or sufficient additional from our contacts and resources. And [agency] not having a denominational source or foundations yet involved, our ability to reliably field someone from what we could raise generally has not been sufficient. At least not yet.

Raising support takes perhaps a year longer than for a White candidate (Sutherland, 1998: 243-45). A 2020 Barna Report found that among "engaged churchgoers" Blacks were less likely to give to international missions than Whites. Those who would "definitely" or "probably" give to missions within the next five years included 35% of those 18-34 who would give versus 56% Whites, and among those over 35, 42% would give versus 60% Whites (Barna Group, 2020: 52). So, agencies that provide a salary or supplemental income have an advantage. A remarkable 21% of the 179 missionaries are salaried. Agencies paying a salary include the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention, various international Christian schools, the Disciples of Christ, the Christian & Missionary Alliance (church planters), the Presbyterian Church (USA) [PCUSA], and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). CRU, which has both high school and college ministries, has had an Ethnic Minority Fund of voluntary gifts from other CRU missionaries, which supplements income.

The theme of AFAM creative access to both missionary vocation and mission fields runs through the data. If a larger personal support package is not possible, AFAM missionaries find scarce salaried positions. They go overseas through educational institutions. Instead of complying with high agency support requirements, they go independently, setting more realistic support levels for themselves.

A second observation is that agencies with personnel dedicated to recruiting and coaching AFAM missionaries have better success. These include Wycliffe, CRU, SIM, OC International, the IMB-SBC, TMS Global, and the Assemblies of God (AOG). Further, 6 clearly Pentecostal/Charismatic agencies are represented by *at least* 14 missionaries, representing 8% of the AFAM missionary force. The only AFAM-led agency that we located with at least 3 workers within our data timeframe was Ambassadors Fellowship.

Agencies that have the longest time to disciple potential missionaries are at a potential advantage. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention has approximately 5,000 predominately AFAM churches in their denomination. At their annual Black Church Leadership and Family Conference, AFAM missionaries may lead mission workshops and set up displays to interact with attendees. Mission-minded denominations can disciple a budding missionary from Sunday School, to short-term mission trips, to annual mission conferences—then provide financial support to get to the field.

Majority White denominations with larger Black memberships generally have more AFAM missionaries than those with less. The Southern Baptists were 6% Black in 2014, and had approximately 14 million members in 2021 (Fahmy, 2019; Roach, 2020; Smietana, 2021); the AOG were 11% Black in 2020, with 3.2 million adherents in 2021 (Assemblies of God, 2022); the Disciples of Christ had 350,000 members in 2019 (Walton, 2021), the ELCA were 2% Black in 2014, with 3.3 million members in 2020 (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2022); and the PCUSA was 3.1% Black around 2018, with 1.2 million members in 2020.

Seven historically US Black denominations were contacted in 2016 by phone and/or email, and their websites examined. While most did not provide information (cf. similar non-response experienced by Barna [Barna and Jackson, 2004: 26]), three overseas missionaries were located (1 supported by a women's organization within the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., and 2 with the United Pentecostal Church International). One of these is still on the field. Data from the online Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches in 2016 for all these denominations revealed no missionary information, with most information being at least 11 years old. Three of these denominations were not listed in the 2022 Yearbook. Sutherland (1998: 118-120) located overseas giving information for 5 historically Black churches in years between 1991 and 1994. For example, the National Baptist

Convention USA gave an average of $99 per church for overseas missions in 1992. However, some churches within these denominations partner with the independent (Black) Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention. Their policy is to support indigenous national missionaries. They do not send US citizens, except short-term, but sent $842,000 abroad, according to their 2020-2021 report (Lott Carey, 2021: 4). How much of this went to support indigenous missionaries was not stated.

Missio Nexus data report of November 2021

Missio Nexus provided a report from 2020 data submitted by a total of 367 mission agencies, US and Canadian. This is not a 23rd edition of the *Mission Handbook*, but is Missio Nexus' first inclusion of ethnic diversity statistics of reporting agencies. They found 2,619 Black/African American staff members among the 242 agencies which reported both staff and diversity information. This is 7% of the total of 35,156 staff members reported. How can the 2,619 figures be reconciled with our figures (Missio Nexus a, 2021)?

"Short term" comprises 35% of the total staff of all 367 reporting agencies, so 35% is the assumed percentage of short-term workers in the 242 agencies reporting ethnicity (Missio Nexus a, 2021). Since only a few short-term workers stay 2 years (approximately 4%), this would reduce the number of *potential* AFAM overseas missionaries from 2,619 to 1,807[13].

The Missio Nexus figures include home office staff members, averaging 14% of total staff members (probably salaried) of the 367 agencies which reported staffing numbers (Missio Nexus b, 2021). As mentioned, our numbers do not include home office staff. We do not know how many Black/African American staff work in the home office. The highest percentages of Black/African Americans are within agencies described by Missio Nexus as service agencies (9.7%), specialized agencies (15.7%) and support agencies (6.9%), less likely than "sending" agencies (5.3%) to have overseas personnel. Sending agencies reported 1,328 Black/AFAM members (Missio Nexus a, 2021).

Sixteen percent of 162 sending agencies are Canadian, unlikely to have AFAM members (Missio Nexus b, 2021). We do not know how many of the Black/African American staff work within the USA, which we did not include. We also do not know how many Black staff are US-born. Our data does not include non-African American missionaries such as Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Hispanic, or Afro-Native American, etc., although some were identified. Finally, some data submitted to Missio Nexus by agencies has been inaccurate in the recent past (Newell, 2017: 48). For example, in "few cases" did the total number of singles and marrieds equal the total number of employees in an agency.

To protect individual identities, we required only minimal personal identification, such as a first name and region, to avoid duplications. Missio Nexus offered complete anonymity and is a respected, nationally recognized mission agency network. So, it is very probable that more than the 179-plus AFAM overseas missionaries that we found are included in Missio Nexus figures. Whatever that increase, it is welcome. We appreciate Missio Nexus for initiating inclusion of staff diversity data and hope that some of the questions raised above will be answered in future surveys, particularly making a distinction between home office, and overseas AFAM staff members.

An historical perspective on reasons for few AFAM missionaries

It is not within the scope of this research to delve into historical reasons, although substantial and nuanced, for the relatively small numbers of AFAM overseas missionaries. The most obvious of these reasons are slavery, with its pernicious effects, and White racism within mission agencies, as documented in 1945[14]. Slavery has gradually lost explanatory power[15]. Slavery in America officially ended in 1863. Our research has found that US mission agencies now welcome AFAM candidates. Other reasons may lie behind the lack of focus upon, or interest in, global missions in the African American church, one example being the preference to send funds, rather than African Americans, globally. Underlying historical reasons were explored in earlier research by Sutherland (1998: 17-22, 24-59; 2004: 501-503).

One more recently explored reason connects with the past. Forty percent of Black churchgoing Christians aged 18-34 "agree" with the statement, "In the past, missions work has been unethical", versus 33% of Whites. Forty-eight percent "agree" that "Christian mission is tainted by its association with colonialism", versus 39% of Whites (Barna Group, 2020: 79). Despite these perspectives, among engaged Christians, a surprising 61% of Blacks aged 18-34 would "definitely" consider overseas ministry, versus 48% of Whites and 54% of Hispanics (Barna Group,

2020: 78-80).

Conclusions and Implications

We recognize a variety of factors which combine to discourage AFAM overseas ministry. Currently, the major one is financial for those now determined to get to the field. We mentioned the potential financial advantage of access to more than one ethnic church inherent in interethnic marriages. While we do not know motivations, with almost half of AFAM missionaries going to Africa, it is perhaps easier to raise support from an AFAM financial base for ministry in Africa, due to the importance of origins among Blacks, than for ministry elsewhere. We have also documented how AFAMs have gotten around typically high support levels by finding salaried overseas positions, by starting their own mission organizations, or by going independently. For those called to cross-cultural ministry, it is generally easier for Americans to work within the USA than to go abroad. We've documented that 21% of overseas AFAM workers are salaried, obviating the need to "raise support." Those going independently do not have to raise the sometimes-staggering support levels required to get to the field and to stay there.

Others get to the field through agencies with personnel tasked with assisting AFAMs through the cultural, familial, missiological and financial challenges of reaching and staying on the field. Agencies accustomed to a married-couple composition will likely find fewer of them among AFAM candidates.

Probably the second most influential factor discouraging AFAM missionaries, tied to the first, is the AFAM pastor. If the pastor is not committed to missions, the church will rarely be. If the 293 leaders of AFAM churches from "a range across denominations, church sizes, geographic regions and urban / suburban / rural areas," who responded to the 2021 Barna Group survey, are an accurate indication, the typical AFAM pastor is not committed (Barna Group 2021: 10). Are the low percentages of AFAMs intending to give to international missions within the following five years, cited by the 2020 Barna Group study, a reflection of this lack of commitment? Judged by fielded overseas missionaries, the AFAM church in general is not committed. AFAMs desiring to engage overseas ministry in person or by support should look for pastoral leadership already supporting global ministry. The authors personally know them, or know of them, in many US cities.

There may possibly be a total of 400 US-born Blacks currently serving full time for at least two years overseas. In other words, over two hundred could have eluded our networks and years of searching. Two years is a relatively minimal commitment, and includes some in 2-year internships, who may or may not continue. Even if 400 were located within the time span of about a year, this would be roughly 1% of the US Protestant overseas force of 31,775, mentioned above. Past estimates agree with a relatively small force.

Since research into contemporary African American overseas missions is sparse, it is appropriate to suggest additional investigations. Further research into Pentecostal and Charismatic organizations would probably be fruitful, as would drilling down into overseas missionary diversity data to see how many are in fulltime overseas ministry for at least two years, in a future Missio Nexus survey. Does a focus upon need or grievance within the AFAM community obscure conditions of people groups arguably needier materially and spiritually? Put differently, Does the focus of AFAM churches upon local ministry in the US result in an AFAM church that is largely irrelevant to the Great Commission to carry the Gospel globally? Is there a de facto AFAM cultural or theological limiter to the spread of the Gospel globally? How much do historically Black denominations now give for overseas missions? What are the common elements among AFAM churches that have a strong overseas ministry? How can a nation such as Nigeria, with a Gross Domestic Product of only 441 billion US dollars in 2021, send 20,000 missionaries outside their nation (Sasu D, 2022; Johnson T and Zurlo G, 2022)? Does the number of Blacks traveling internationally motivate a return with explicit Christian motivation? As an example, TravelNoire.com, which serves the African diaspora, has about 425,000 Facebook followers (Travel Noire, 2022).

The AFAM overseas missionary force is exceptionally motivated, and risks running counter to its own culture, facing obstacles beyond those confronting other Christian missionaries (Sutherland, 1998: 228). Dr. Michael Johnson was excommunicated by his AFAM pastor for intending to go to Africa as a missionary surgeon, making him a deacon without a church, as one example (2006: 57). In personal correspondence and conversations, many mission executives are eager to have AFAM missionaries, but are frustrated in that attempt. If the AFAM church mobilizes for global mission, she could reach for God's glory many globally who esteem African Americans for moving from slave shack to White House.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. The 22nd edition did not distinguish between US and Canadian full-time overseas missionaries, nor did it include the category of missionaries serving 2-4 years. Canadian full-time overseas missionaries serving 4+ years were 6.5% of the total North American missionary force in 2008. Reducing the total US and Canadian missionary force serving 4+ years overseas in 2016 by 6.5%, the total US force would be around 31,775.
2. While Barna uses "Black" as a self-identifier in these surveys, our research findings are delimited to US-born Blacks. We use "African American" as a synonym for "Black." We use a US Black population percentage of around 12% in 2017.
3. Omitting administrative employees brings our data in line with criteria for *Mission Handbook* missionary qualification. "Full-time paid office staff" is a separate category in the 22nd edition (p. 54). We do not include US-born Black mission mobilizers, or Black pastors serving in the US in either majority-Black or -White churches. We did not verify if the missionary was Protestant, but mission agencies contacted were listed as Protestant. If the missionary self-identified as "US-born Black," that was sufficient in cases of mixed ancestry.
4. See www.rmni.org/african-american-missions/history-and-research/research-survey.html
5. Agencies were appropriately cautious in releasing information to protect identities, particularly in sensitive areas. In extreme cases we simply were given a first name and region, which avoided duplication. We promised to share aggregated data, not personally identifiable information. A few mission executives emailed their AFAM members to see if they wanted to contact us, which rarely yielded assistance. Some agencies shared no information, and a few likely AFAM missionaries did not want to be identified as such. Two agencies took up to a year to provide information, and that only after a face-to-face meeting. Other agencies do not have a racial metric for their workers.
6. Among these were Jacinta Russell, Richard Coleman, June Coleman, and Wil Jones. Among White colleagues were Steve Lutz, Peggy Rayman, and Terre Haas. Many staff members of individual agencies provided invaluable assistance.
7. US agencies not contacted were those whose work did not include sending cross-cultural missionaries for at least 2 years. If the agency provided photos of their missionaries, as a decreasing number do, it was usually unnecessary to attempt to contact that mission, except to ask if a missionary was a US-born Black. We learned that agencies were more likely to respond if an email was addressed directly to an upper-level staff member. Even an email sent to the regular "contact" form was often productive, especially with larger organizations. In some cases, phone calls were made, or follow-up emails sent.
8. In a few cases, Covid-19 prevented missionaries from being overseas, but they intended to return when permitted. There is some latitude in the span of data gathering. By comparison, it took over a year for the data in the 21st Edition of the *Mission Handbook* to be collected (p. 32).
9. We tried to verify all contacts provided by mission agencies or individuals. Usually a supporting social media or agency website URL could be associated with the person. On occasion someone who appeared to be AFAM was actually born in the Caribbean or was Native American. A missionary spouse who appeared to be White was actually a US-born Black, while a name provided by an agency turned out to be that of a White person. When available we checked newsletters and videos for evidence of status.

   A mission leader, now retired, thus requesting anonymity, wrote in on 20 October 2017, that he asked representatives from 20 mission boards if they knew of any AFAM overseas missionaries. "The answers were basically 'No' and 'very few,' due to the fact that there are so few African-American Bible College students.'

   We discussed the possible why's. Speculation was varied. But we noted the following:

   1. Most of our boards did not have any board members of color.
   2. Most of us knew no or few black pastors or pastors of black churches who were missions-minded enough to qualify as board members.
   3. In fact, most of us knew of none of our missionaries who had any supporting church pastored by a brother of color."
10. This includes both US and Canadian workers, but the data are approximate. We use data from the 22nd edition of the *Mission Handbook*, instead of the November, 2021 data report, since it includes over 525 more agencies than does the 2021 data.
11. US and Canadian missionaries are not separated in 2016 reporting, and a "Global Ministry—Non-specified" category of 11% throws off the 2016 comparison slightly.
12. Approximately 53-56% of these worked in cities with high school and college students. Agencies confirmed that these US-based workers served primarily cross-culturally, supported by demographic and website information, including photos, when checked. We cannot be certain in all cases.
13. A total of 1,872, or 7.5% of all short-term staff, serve 1-2 years. Assuming half of these serve 2 years, this is 4% of short-term workers (Missio Nexus, 2021b). Reducing the total of 2,619 AFAMs by 31%, instead of eliminating all 35% of short-term workers from consideration, results in 812 persons. Subtracting 812 from 2619 leaves 1807 who could qualify as serving for 2 years or more in some capacity.
14. Evidence of racism before 1945 was found in two denominations and 4 independent mission agencies, named in Sutherland's dissertation research (referencing the research of Wilbur Harr), chapter 2, p. 34, 41-46, 76, located at

https://www.rmni.org/files/dissertation/chapter2.PDF (accessed January 2, 2023).

15. Thomas Sowell found that Blacks had higher rates of marriage than Whites in the early 1900s, and "higher rates of labor force participation in every census from 1890 to 1950." (Sowell, 1994: 220; 2013: 120-21). Most Black children were raised in two-parent families during slavery, "and for generations thereafter" (Sowell, 1994: 220). "[I]t is not slavery alone, or even brutal treatment during slavery, that serves as a crippling handicap for generations after emancipation, but rather the occupationally and psychologically constructing world in which the American Negro developed in the United States." (Sowell, 1975: 102). Sowell describes how discriminatory hiring practices have historically put an employer at a competitive disadvantage, discouraging the practice among those seeking highest profits (Sowell, 1994: 87-89).

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