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# The Life and Impact of Daniel Alexander Payne

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# The Life and Impact of Daniel Alexander Payne

## Description

On Washington Street, across from McKnight Hall and adjacent to the Intercultural Resource Center, a sign stands in commemoration of the life and accomplishments of an African American who studied at the seminary from 1835 to 1837. The plaque reads: *Daniel Alexander Payne (1811-1893). Born a free African American. He taught the colored people at this college, 1837, while a student at the Lutheran Seminary. A historian, he was elected bishop of the AME Church, 1852, and was president of Wilberforce University, 1863-76.* What Payne was able to achieve in his life is matched by few of his contemporaries considering the fact that he was a black who grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. Believing that he was ordained by God, he became an educator and an ordained minister. Later in his life, Payne became the first African American president of a college when the African Methodist Church bought Wilberforce University in 1863. Daniel Payne, with his intellectual ideas, influenced the policy of the AME Church for years to come. The Gettysburg College Intercultural Resource Center claims that Pennsylvania College's acceptance of Daniel Payne was "the first step at addressing cultural diversity at Gettysburg College." Payne's personal ambition and his influence in both the abolition movement and the education of black Americans present an example of a model citizen.

## Course Information:

- Course Title: *HIST 300: Historical Method*
- Academic Term: Spring 2006
- Course Instructor: Dr. Michael J. Birkner '72

*Hidden in Plain Sight* is a collection of student papers on objects that are "hidden in plain sight" around the Gettysburg College campus. Topics range from the Glatfelter Hall gargoyles to the statue of Eisenhower and from historical markers to athletic accomplishments. You can download the paper in pdf format and click "View Photo" to see the image in greater detail.

## Keywords

Gettysburg College, Hidden in Plain Sight, Daniel Alexander Paine, African American, Seminarian

## Disciplines

African American Studies | Public History | United States History

## Campus Location

McKnight Hall

Gettysburg College

Hidden in Plain Sight:  
The Life and Impact of Daniel Alexander Payne

History 300

Historical Methods

Dr. Michael Birkner

By

Brian Vazzano

Spring 2006

On Washington Street, across from McKnight Hall and adjacent to the Intercultural Resource Center, a sign stands in commemoration of the life and accomplishments of an African American who studied at the seminary from 1835 to 1837. The plaque reads:

Daniel Alexander Payne (1811-1893). Born a free African American. He taught the colored people at this college, 1837, while a student at the Lutheran Seminary. A historian, he was elected bishop of the AME Church, 1852, and was president of Wilberforce University, 1863-76.<sup>1</sup>

What Payne was able to achieve in his life is matched by few of his contemporaries considering the fact that he was a black who grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. Believing that he was ordained by God, he became an educator and an ordained minister.<sup>2</sup> Later in his life, Payne became the first African American president of a college when the African Methodist Church bought Wilberforce University in 1863.<sup>3</sup> Daniel Payne, with his intellectual ideas, influenced the policy of the AME Church for years to come.<sup>4</sup> The Gettysburg College Intercultural Resource Center claims that Pennsylvania College's acceptance of Daniel Payne was "the first step at addressing cultural diversity at Gettysburg College."<sup>5</sup> Payne's personal ambition and his influence in both the abolition movement and the education of black Americans present an example of a model citizen.

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<sup>1</sup> "Gettysburg marker to honor Daniel Alexander Payne," *Gettysburg Times*, March 6, 1991

<sup>2</sup> Nelson T. Strobert, "Daniel Alexander Payne: Venerable Preceptor for the African Methodist Episcopal Church," in *Witness at the Crossroads: Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary Servants in the Public Life*, ed. Frederick K. Wentz (Gettysburg: Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, 2001), 28, 34.

<sup>3</sup> "Gettysburg marker to honor," *Gettysburg Times*

<sup>4</sup> Paul R. Griffin, *Black Theology as the Foundation of Three Methodist Colleges: The Educational Views and Labors of Daniel Payne, Joseph Price, Isaac Lane* (New York: University Press of America, 1984) 78-79.

<sup>5</sup> Gettysburg College, Intercultural Resource Center web page, [http://www.gettysburg.edu/college\\_life/irc/mission.html](http://www.gettysburg.edu/college_life/irc/mission.html)

Payne was born in the year 1811 in Charleston, South Carolina during an era of conflict between black and white Americans. His parents, London and Martha Payne were free blacks who both died while Daniel was at a young age.<sup>6</sup> Payne was taken in by his great-aunt, Sarah Bordeaux, who instigated Payne's interest in education.<sup>7</sup> Henry J. Young, in his book Major Black Religious Leaders: 1755-1940, explains that from a young age, Payne "developed a great fascination for books, education, and the discovery of new things."<sup>8</sup> He was taught to read and write by the Minor's Moralists Society and gained interest in classical learning.<sup>9</sup> The book that was most influential to Payne's life was John Brown's Self-Interpreting Bible.<sup>10</sup> Young explains, "The preface to this Bible contained a brief biographical sketch of John Brown of Haddington, Scotland. It revealed that Brown mastered Latin, Greek, and Hebrew without a teacher."<sup>11</sup> With as much ambition, Payne decided that he could do the same and eventually achieved his goal. Payne's daily schedule reflected his work ethic, for while working as a carpenter in Charleston, Payne woke up at four in the morning and read for two hours. Then after a long day of work, Payne would read again until midnight. He used the money he made from his carpentry business to buy more books.<sup>12</sup> Payne did all this before he was twenty years of age.

In 1828, when Payne was eighteen years old, he had a vision in which God told him "I have set thee apart to educate thyself in order that thou mayest be an educator to

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas R. Noon, "Daniel Payne and the Lutherans," in *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (Summer 1980): 52.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Henry J. Young, Major Black Religious Leaders: 1755-1940 (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1977), 61.

<sup>9</sup> Charles D. Killian, Bishop Daniel A. Payne: Black Spokesman for Reform (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1971), 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Young, Black Religious Leaders, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Killian, "Bishop Daniel A. Payne," 8.

thy people.”<sup>13</sup> Young comments that after his “encounter with God, Payne decided to commit himself to the ministry of education. He devoted every moment of leisure to study and the purchase of books. He soon forsook the carpenter’s trade and decided to become an educator.”<sup>14</sup> Another influential moment in Payne’s life that directly affected his choice of vocation occurred in 1829, soon after he established his first school. He was asked to accompany a slave holder to the West Indies in order to be educated more fully. The man said to him, “Do you know what makes the difference between the master and the slave? Nothing but superior knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> At this, Payne declined the man’s offer and decided to devote his life to improving the social standing of black people by educating them.

In 1829, Payne established his first school. He taught three children during the day and three adults at night for fifty cents a month, making his income three dollars a month. It was not nearly enough to live on and the school closed after a year. But because Payne was determined to prove the slaveholder wrong who told him that it was the lack of knowledge that kept black people in slavery, Payne reopened the school and it grew considerably.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, Payne’s vision was shattered when the South Carolina General Assembly passed a law prohibiting the education of slaves. Payne’s school was forced to close and he had to find a career elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> The law was in response to slave insurrections, most notably the revolts under the leadership of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner. Both of these leaders were educated so the whites in power feared

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<sup>13</sup> Young, Black Religious Leaders, 61-62.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Griffin, Black Theology, 3. Charles Killian says that the man said the word “power” rather than “knowledge” but most texts say “knowledge.”

<sup>16</sup> Young, Black Religious Leaders, 62.

<sup>17</sup> Nelson T. Strobert, “Education for Liberation: Daniel Alexander Payne,” in Critical Voices of Black Liberation: Resistance and Representations in the Americas, ed. Kimberley L. Phillips, Hermine D. Pinson, Lorenzo Thomas, Hanna Wallinger, 120 (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003.)

that if the blacks were educated, they would rise up against them or at least become economic rivals. Keeping blacks uneducated and ignorant kept them down at the bottom of the ladder.<sup>18</sup> But the whites in power were not the only ones to realize this fact; Daniel Payne tried to educate blacks so that they gained more status, exactly what the whites did not want. Unable to teach in his home state but unwilling to give up his vocation as a teacher, Payne ventured north, led by a dream of himself traveling north dressed in teaching garment.<sup>19</sup>

In May of 1835, the Society of Inquiry on Missions offered a scholarship “for a young man of color who demonstrated talent and piety in order for that person to help with the social uplift of his people.”<sup>20</sup> The Society was a Lutheran organization that wished to support an African American for four years of study at Gettysburg Seminary. At first, Payne was hesitant because he had not considered becoming a minister, much less a Lutheran minister. He decided to study at Gettysburg after reading Samuel Schmucker’s, *Popular Theology*.<sup>21</sup> Schmucker was the president of the seminary at the time and he corresponded with Payne after his years at the seminary. So from 1835 to 1837, Payne studied at the Gettysburg Seminary.

In his two years at Gettysburg, Payne educated the black people of the town along with learning at the Seminary. Charles Killian writes that Payne’s

journal revealed that he spoke at least seventy times during his years at Gettysburg. He preached, gathered the Negro children in the neighborhood together for religious instruction, taught Sunday school classes, and addressed groups. He delivered lectures on temperance, attended anti-slavery meetings, established Societies for Moral and Mental Improvement, and on one occasion walked twenty-five miles just to deliver English grammars to ladies and to speak

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 119.

<sup>19</sup> Strobert, “Daniel Alexander Payne,” 28.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 30.

to them about geography. His preaching assignments covered a thirty-mile radius of Gettysburg, and he traveled to most of his appointments on foot.<sup>22</sup>

Payne was allowed to use a classroom at Pennsylvania College, now Gettysburg College, for teaching a Bible study class for African Americans in the area.<sup>23</sup> Although it may seem that Payne concentrated all of his efforts on teaching others, he also excelled in his own formal education at the Seminary. Both President Schmucker and his professor C.P. Krauth commended Payne for his success in his studies. Krauth told Payne exactly what he had been striving for during his entire life, “You have convinced many who may have been skeptical of the capacity of the colored man to achieve the intellectual victories which adorn and exalt human nature.”<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, Payne was not able to finish all four years of education at the seminary because of trouble with his eye that was caused by observing a solar eclipse.<sup>25</sup> Payne sustained the injury when he lived in South Carolina but the damaged eye flared up again while he was in Gettysburg. But the education he received was significant for Payne because while he at Gettysburg, he realized that his future vocation would be in the ordained ministry. As he writes in his diary, his realization came while he was lying on a bed, pondering his future. A voice inside of him (as if from God) screamed out “Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!”<sup>26</sup> From that moment on, Payne was convinced that he should preach for the rest of his life. His two years at Gettysburg were a stepping stone for Payne, preparing him for the contribution that he would make later in life.

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<sup>22</sup> Killian, *Bishop Daniel A. Payne*, 19

<sup>23</sup> “Gettysburg marker” *Gettysburg Times*.

<sup>24</sup> Killian, *Bishop Daniel A. Payne*, 21.

<sup>25</sup> Strobert, *Daniel Alexander Payne*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

Payne was reluctant to leave but he departed with the support of those who gave him the opportunity to study at the seminary. Schmucker said that he would have liked Payne to have become a Lutheran minister, but thought that he would do better in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.<sup>27</sup> Payne was ordained in 1839 and joined the AME Church in 1841. He was, under the guidance of Bishop Morris Brown, elected the sixth Bishop of the AME Church in 1852.<sup>28</sup> As a bishop, Payne served in his most influential role. His mission was to transform the clergy and the laity of the AME Church, most of them with little or no education, into an ambitious church. By improving their education, Payne believed that black people could improve their social condition; education and social standing were directly related.<sup>29</sup> As Paul R. Griffin observes, “Payne saw intellectual development as the solution to spirituality and morality.”<sup>30</sup> If blacks are educated, they can move past their superstition and their lack of knowledge, they would learn God’s laws and become better Christians. Payne wanted his church members to become intelligent worshipers, not superstitious fools.<sup>31</sup> The blacks’ denial of education “was the single greatest corruption that slavemasters and racist whites had inflicted upon the black people.”<sup>32</sup> Along with education, Payne was vigilant about improving the morality of AME clergy, which he viewed “as ‘immoral,’ ‘ungodly,’ and ‘recreant’ preachers who were driving ‘the more intelligent members’ away from the denomination.”<sup>33</sup> Payne’s ultimate conclusion was that blacks should be

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 33.

<sup>28</sup> Griffin, Black Theology, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 4.

educated so that they become more perfect Christians.<sup>34</sup> His zealousness almost split the AME Church after he published essays concerning education and a call for legislature requiring education for ministers. His essays created an uproar among the clergy and laity but Payne eventually got his wish and a committee on education was created and Payne selected as chairman.<sup>35</sup>

Another aspect of Payne's life was his philosophy and involvement in the abolitionist movement. He used scripture to support his argument that slavery is wrong. Slavery oftentimes separated husband and wife but Payne argued that this was unchristian considering Matthew 9:6. In it Jesus says that God unites a man and a woman in marriage and "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."<sup>36</sup> Also, many slave owners engaged in sexual relations with their slaves despite Jesus' denouncement of adultery. Slavery, as an institution required the slaves to obey master over God, a sin according to Christianity.<sup>37</sup> In relation to education, slavery violated Christianity. To Payne, being a Christian requires one to read the scripture for improving an individual's religion; slavery denied this requirement to blacks<sup>38</sup>. "From 1842 to 1843," Young explains, "Payne was a leader of the Vigilance Committee which was organized for the purpose of hiding runaway slaves from state, local, and federal authorities who sought to take the slaves back to their masters."<sup>39</sup>

Payne's most significant achievement occurred during the Civil War with the purchase of Wilberforce University. He served as president of this university from 1863

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<sup>34</sup> Strobot, *Education for Liberation*, 122.

<sup>35</sup> Killian, *Bishop Daniel A. Payne*, 34-36.

<sup>36</sup> Young, *Black Religious Leaders*, 66.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 72-73.

to 1876, thus making him the first African American president of a college in American history.<sup>40</sup> Wilberforce was the supreme example of Payne's way of thinking and his ideas reflected in how he ran Wilberforce. In order for an applicant to be entitled to a scholarship at the university, he or she would have to firmly believe that the education received there will "develop a strong moral and religious character."<sup>41</sup> Under Payne's leadership, Wilberforce University grew from twelve students in 1863 to 150 students in 1876.<sup>42</sup>

What does Payne's life and accomplishments mean to Gettysburg College? In a personal interview, Monique Matthews, president of the Black Student Union, expressed her views on Daniel Payne. Matthews agreed with Payne's emphasis on education as a means of social equality. She explained that "education is vital, it provides opportunity and allows for a certain level of equality. With education, you have power and the ability to compete."<sup>43</sup> Matthews added that Payne's accomplishment in teaching himself Greek, Latin, and Hebrew "proves that we're all human, we all have the same capability. Payne had to work ten times as hard because he had to teach it to himself. He had to prove that he was an intellectual being because he was seen as less than a man."<sup>44</sup> Gettysburg College cites Payne's acceptance into the seminary as one of the first steps into integrating minorities into the college community.<sup>45</sup> As a bishop, Daniel Payne transformed the AME Church from ignorant to knowledgeable and with that had a profound impact on American Society.

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<sup>40</sup> Strobert, *Education for Liberation*, 121.

<sup>41</sup> Griffin, *Black Theology*, 78.

<sup>42</sup> Killian, *Bishop Daniel A. Payne*, 119.

<sup>43</sup> Monique Matthews, personal interview, February 27, 2006.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Gettysburg College, Intercultural Resource Center web page, [http://www.gettysburg.edu/college\\_life/irc/mission.html](http://www.gettysburg.edu/college_life/irc/mission.html)

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