

**Black Is Beautiful III**  
**By**  
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**Week of February 19, 2017**

Last week, the acerbic comedian Chris Rock returned to the stage in Durham, N.C. to deliver his long-awaited “Blackout Tour.” Last year, he divorced his wife Malaak, an accomplished woman in her own right—the founder and executive director of StyleWorks, a non-profit, full-service salon that provides free services for women leaving welfare and entering the workforce. They were married sixteen years and have two daughters. Though the divorce has been finalized and out of sight, it is not out of mind.

The 52-year old comedian began his program with what the New York Times called “startling frankness” as he admitted “his vanity, insecurities, and failures.” “I wasn’t a good husband,” he confessed, “I didn’t listen. I wasn’t kind. I cheated.” Gone was his acerbic wit. Instead, he revealed his new quest, “I want to find God before God finds me.”

**The Black Family**

In 1965, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan issued a report entitled, “The Negro Family: the Case for National Action.” Drawing on the work of sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, the Senator from New York traced unimaginable problems of the African American community back to slavery: mistreatment by white slave masters are blamed on the disintegration in black families, and a “fatherless,” mother-centered pattern within black families. Moynihan called this “a tangle of pathology.” Men, he claimed, did not learn roles of providing and protecting, and this shortcoming passed down through generations.

“TeacherServe,” from the National Humanities Center has described how slavery has affected African American families, and at the same time, praises those families for their efforts

to keep their families in tact: “Abolitionists living mainly in the North attacked slavery by pointing to the grave harm it inflicted on families. . . . Slavery not only inhibited the formation of strong family units but also made stable, secure family life difficult, if not impossible. A father might have one owner, his wife and children, another.” . . . “Following the Civil War, former slaves took measures to formalize their family relations, to find family members, and to put their families back together. They even sent letters to the Freedmen’s Bureau to enlist the government’s assistance in finding relatives.”

Eventually, families were reunited, or new family units coalesced, a fitting tribute to the resiliency among African Americans. Further studies showed that perhaps these men and women had been underestimated in their capacities to bond anew.

### **Model Fathers**

It has often been noted that former President Barack Obama provides a sterling role model for black men. In place of his absent father, his maternal grandparents raised him. Mr. Rock considers Mr. Obama an anomaly among black fathers.

### **Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver in Support of Black Families**

In 1909, the Knights of St. Peter Claver were founded in Poland by several Josephite priests and laymen; in 1922, the Ladies Auxiliary was founded. The Knights and the Ladies focus their ministry on the needs of African American families, engaging in a variety of church and community service. It supports charitable appeals of national and international organization such as the NAACP and the United Negro College Fund, Catholic elementary and secondary schools and Xavier University in New Orleans.

The Society of St. Peter Claver is named after the Spanish Jesuit, priest and missionary (1580-1654) who ministered to African slaves in Cartagena, Colombia, South America. He dedicated his entire life to the slaves living there and is known as “The Saint among the Slaves.” With headquarters located in New Orleans, LA., the Knights and the Ladies focus specifically on supporting local pastors, parishes, and bishops to look after black boys who need role models.

The Knights and Ladies arrange for activities that will encourage members to demonstrate their Catholicism. By way of education, they award scholarships and develop the character of black youth instilling in them civic pride and love of country. The current leader of the Supreme Knights is James Kenneth Ellis; the current leader of the Supreme Ladies is Vertelle Amos Kenion. The historic Peter Claver Building in New Orleans serves as the National headquarters of the organization.

### **The Power of One: Monsignor Raymond East**

Monsignor Raymond East is a nationally known Roman Catholic priest, black speaker, and evangelist who has served as director of the Office of Black Catholics until recently when he requested a return to full-time ministry as pastor of St. Teresa of Avila Parish, Washington, DC.

During his term as director of the Office of Black Catholics, Msgr. East said he was proud of “the bridge building between the different communities of African ancestry within the archdiocese. We have been working so that African-American Catholics work with Haitian and other English- and French-speaking Caribbean Catholic communities and with African Catholics.” Out of the 580,000 Catholics in the Archdiocese of Washington, about 100,000 are of African descent. Some are newly arrived from Africa and the Caribbean, and some can trace their roots to settlers who arrived here in the 1600s.

In 2002, he became director of the Office of Black Catholics. That office is responsible for the Council of Black Catholics, a group of black Catholics that advises the director on archdiocesan matters and matters pertinent to the black community. The Archdiocesan Black Catholic Congress team work in parish and archdiocesan programs to evangelize and encourage full participation by black Catholics in parish life. The office is also involved in coordinating racial, ethnic and cultural sensitivity and awareness seminars, materials and workshops, and training African-American Catholic parish leaders and other parish leaders preparing for work in our parishes.

The efforts coordinated by the office include the Archdiocese of Washington Mass Choir are many and diverse: it seeks to evangelize through liturgical and sacred music; maintains the Black Catholic History Archives, that provides educational workshops, seminars, research and resource materials on or about black Catholics; coordinates an archdiocesan chapter of the National Black Catholic Apostolate for Life; and an archdiocesan chapter of Sisters in the Spirit, an organization of lay women organized for spiritual renewal and service to the community.

Monsignor East said that as he changes the focus of his ministry, he sees a future of good work coming from the Office of Black Catholics. “Because we have one of the most significant populations of black Catholics in the country, the Archdiocese really needs to have one of the finest offices (of Black Catholics), and we do,” said Monsignor East. “We do a very good job, but the best days are yet to come,” he said. “You are evangelizing and catechizing and encouraging the people to be active in the parish,” he said. “You’re always working with people to bring Christ to them, and to bring them to Christ.”

As he steps down after serving for more than six years as director of the archdiocesan, Monsignor Raymond East said he is proud of the work he has done there, but looks forward to

being a full-time parish priest. "I'm going to miss the work, but the ministry is all around me; now I am already enjoying full-time parish ministry."

The priest said he wanted to step down from directing the office because "my parish has needs that have to be met; they need a full-time pastor." "I love being a pastor. I love being a pastor in Anacostia in the Southeast Deanery in the Archdiocese of Washington," he said. "The high point of being a pastor is celebrating Mass, because the Eucharist is such an intimate encounter with Christ. I love bringing Christ to people at all the critical moments of their lives—to be there to baptize a child, to prepare a couple for marriage and then baptize their children and watch those children grow; then to marry those children, and to be there at their bedside with their families as they are crossing over."

Last year, David Brooks, a writer for the New York Times, described Monsignor East as 'an indescribably happy person.'

### **Boys Choir of Harlem: a Defunct Project in Need of Restoration**

Though Boys Choir of Harlem, founded in 1968, ceased to exist in 2007, its accomplishments are to be noted in the hope that a similar organization will be established in the near future. At first the choir was limited to rigorous music training, and the choir sang in different countries all over the world; they sang for Presidents at the White House and at the United Nations. The choir established a professional school that incorporated a regular academic curriculum; it was known as the Choir Academy of Harlem. In 2006, the student body numbered 500 boys and girls.

For many years, the organization was sponsored and supervised by the New York City Department of Education until it was found that the staff of the school had been embroiled in a

number of financial and sexual scandals. In 2009, choir alumnus Terrance Wright announced at the Metropolitan Community Methodist Church that the Choir was officially closed down.

It is a well-known fact that black children sing beautifully; it's part of their genius. Instead of joining Rappers and gangs, adults should encourage them to participate in choral groups, thereby educating them culturally, artistically, and sociologically. We need to save our boys and girls, especially those at risk

(Next week, the final essay of Black History Month, "Education: the Greatest Gift We Can Give to Our Children—Regardless of Color.")