

Profiles

Dr. Gordon Hancock, a teacher by age 19, eventually taught what is thought to be the first race relations university course.

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To Dr. Gordon Blaine Hancock, the Three Rs were Race relations, Religion and Reciprocal spending in the black community.

A South Carolinian by birth, Hancock taught at Virginia Union University, was the pastor at Richmond's Moore Street Baptist Church, wrote a nationally syndicated newspaper column and was a widely known speaker.

Born June 23, 1884, in Ninety Six, a town reliant on cotton crops, Hancock grew up seeing African-Americans working as sharecroppers, bonded to the plantations that formerly enslaved them.

The son of a minister, Hancock was teaching in nearby towns before his 19th birthday.

In 1912 Hancock graduated summa cum laude from Benedict College, based in Columbia, S.C., with two degrees. He became pastor of nearby Bethlehem Baptist Church and married Florence Marie Dickson.

Stressing racial pride and Christian values, Hancock became principal of Seneca Junior College, a private high school for Negroes. In an age when black leaders chose sides between education and vocation, Hancock stressed both.

With urging from his wife, at age 34 Hancock went back to school. At Colgate he completed his undergraduate and seminary studies with honors. At Harvard he earned a master's degree in sociology.

Accepting a salary a third of what he would have commanded at Northern colleges, Hancock came to Virginia Union as a professor to organize and lead a sociology and economics department.

Hancock taught that the black race was neither innately inferior to whites nor prone to criminal activity. With better income opportunities, Hancock insisted, black people could break the bonds of cyclical poverty. His course in race relations at Virginia Union was believed to be the first in the country.

Dr. Allix B. James, Virginia Union's president emeritus and a former student of Hancock's, said Hancock brought prestige to the university. "He was a very conscientious person and deeply interested in progressing race relations forward," James said.

Hancock proposed a "Double Duty Dollar" spending plan, which encouraged blacks to hold fast to jobs, land and money while spending in the black community. He called unemployment "the number one Negro problem," which spawned his "Hold-Your-Job" campaign.

He welcomed white philanthropists and teachers who supported African-Americans in their struggle for a quality education. "Segregation," Hancock said, "means death to the Negro race."

He wrote about these topics in his weekly newspaper column "Between the Lines," that ran in 114 publications.

These were the same tenets he preached at Moore Street Baptist Church in Jackson Ward, Richmond's largest black neighborhood.

Hancock took over the church's pulpit in 1925. During his pastorate, Moore Street had an employment bureau, evening classes and a nursery.

Before his retirement from the pulpit in 1963, Hancock helped the church erase a \$35,000 debt, built a \$100,000 youth center and add 1,500 members. Hancock studied at Oxford and Cambridge universities during two of his summer breaks.

Hancock died in his Noble Avenue home July 26, 1970, at the age of 86.

SOURCES: The Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership: Gordon Blaine Hancock 1884-1970 by Raymond Gavins; Dr. Allix B. James

The Times of Gordon Blaine Hancock

1884

Hancock born

1921

Hancock arrives in Richmond to teach at Virginia Union University

1935

Congress passes U.S. Social Security Act

1950

Edith Sampson is first black appointed as U.S. delegate to the United Nations

1963

Hancock retires from Moore St. Baptist Church pulpit

1968

Major protests in U.S. against Vietnam War

1970

Hancock dies