



That "Great African-American Woman," Ellen Gould Harmon White

The Genealogy of Ellen Gould Harmon White, Charles Edward Dudley Sr. Nashville, Tenn.: Dudley Publishing Services, 1999; 172 pages.

Reviewed by Ronald D. Graybill

Charles Dudley is a skilled, respected, veteran Seventh-day Adventist church administrator, but his venture into genealogy, history, authorship, and book publishing leave much to be desired.

Essentially this book claims that Ellen White, the cofounder and prophetess of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, had African-American ancestry.

Dudley bases his argument on the discovery of a line of Goulds in New Jersey who are of African-American descent. But nowhere does he make a direct connection between these Goulds and the Eunice Gould who was Mrs. White's mother.

Because I am Anglo, I can assume that some will say I am in "denial" to come away from this book unconvinced. But prior to this book, I myself raised the question of Ellen White's racial ancestry (albeit only briefly in a 1982 *Adventist Heritage* article¹). Furthermore, although Dudley says in his book "No one has come forward with the genealogy of the prophetess except on the side of her husband," he is incorrect.

It was I who, back in the 1970s, sought out, in behalf of the E. G. White Estate, where I then worked, a qualified, experienced, licensed genealogical researcher. The White Estate then paid this skilled woman, a Mormon, to trace Ellen White's ancestry back through all lines. She had at her disposal the vast genealogical resources of the Mormon Church. She not only traced Ellen White's ancestry, but also provided photocopies of original documents to support her work. A chart that shows the results of this research has been on sale at all White Estate offices for many years. This research did not support any claim to black ancestry.

The absence of a historical record of black ancestry is not, of course, conclusive. But unlike the question of Thomas Jefferson's relationship to Sally Hemmings, where circumstantial evidence abounds, we have nothing other than Ellen White's facial features and the existence of some African Americans who bear the Gould name to even hint at black ancestry for Ellen White.

Dudley's book has many problems. In small details where I do have personal knowledge, it is appallingly careless. Speaking of the grandchildren of Ellen White, Dudley says Grace married John Gawks (it was Jacques), Arthur married Fried (instead of Frieda) Swingle, and most remarkable of all, Arthur's brother Francis is said to have married a Richard Rub. (Dudley apparently took the name Francis to be that of a female.)

There are references in the back of the book and in some cases reference notes in the text, but some of the works cited cryptically in the notes are not listed in the references. Often cited are the "records of the Ellen G. White Estate," but never with a document file number, and the reader is never told that the "records" of the White Estate are often undigested, unconfirmed raw material, some original, some secondary, some reliable, some wildly fanciful. So although Dudley thanks the White Estate and scholars elsewhere for their help, there is no evidence that anyone with genealogical or historical training—white or black—ever read or approved the final manuscript.

Dudley says, in so many words, "Eunice Gould Harmon, Ellen's mother, was a mulatto." He says that Hazen Foss, her brother-in-law's brother, was a Negro. Dudley's book is full of African Americans named "Gould" and the implication is clear that these were genetically related to Ellen White, indeed, they are sometimes referred to as "cousins." However, the proof is woefully lacking, and what we do find in this book is too often inaccurate.

Notes and References

1. "Leaves from Ellen White's Family Album," *Adventist Heritage* 7 (spring 1982): 6-19.

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