

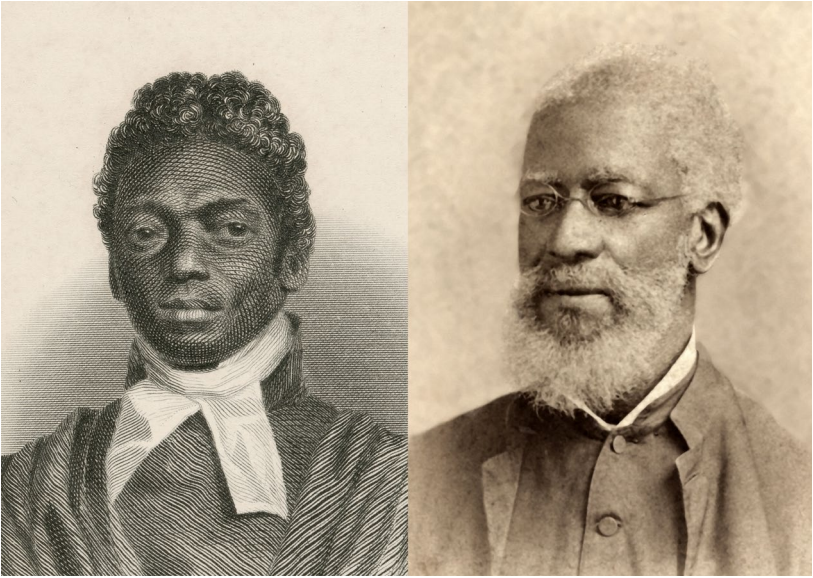


# Yale University

## HONORS

The Reverend James W. C. Pennington, M.A.H. '23  
& The Reverend Alexander Crummell, M.A.H. '23

September 14, 2023 • Battell Chapel



James W. C. Pennington (left), 1807–1870

Alexander Crummell (right), 1819–1898

## WE GATHER TODAY TO HONOR

the lives and work of two Black men – the Reverend James W. C. Pennington and the Reverend Alexander Crummell – both of whom studied theology at Yale in the mid-nineteenth century but were not allowed to register formally for classes or matriculate for degrees. Yale’s board of trustees recently conferred M.A.H. degrees on both men in recognition of their scholarship and their significant contributions to our community, country, and world.

We are able to highlight the achievements of Pennington and Crummell today – and to underscore their painful struggles for racial equality and respect – because of the research conducted by the Yale and Slavery Working Group as well as the work of student and alumni organizations. Appointed by President Salovey in 2020, the Yale and Slavery Working Group is led by Sterling Professor of History David Blight and includes Yale faculty, staff, students, and community members. The group has spent three years examining the university’s formative ties to slavery and the wider effect of anti-Black racism on the Yale community from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The similar discrimination faced by Pennington and Crummell was also noted in a 2003 publication on the Black presence at the Yale Divinity School by then-students Terrence Taylor and Teresa Howell.

Yale has honored Pennington, who attended the university from 1834 to 1837, in several ways, including a Yale Divinity School classroom named for him; a portrait in the Divinity School’s Common Room; and the Yale-funded Pennington Fellowship, a scholarship for New Haven high school graduates to attend historically Black colleges and universities. The Pennington Legacy Group, Graduate and Professional Student Senate, Yale Divinity Student Government, Yale College Council, and many others have worked thoughtfully to ensure Pennington’s accomplishments and contributions are remembered. The trustees felt it was right also to honor Crummell, who attended Yale in 1840 and 1841 and went on to become a leading Black pastor and an influential activist. With these honorary degrees, Yale aims to

extend the remembrance of Pennington, broaden the understanding and commemoration of Crummell, and inscribe, in perpetuity, both of their names in the official records of the university.

Today's ceremony features a procession that begins at Center Church, where Yale commencement ceremonies were held when Pennington and Crummell would have celebrated their graduations had they been given that opportunity. It ends at Battell Chapel, where degree conferral took place starting in 1895. We hope this will be an opportunity for all of us to reflect upon our history and reaffirm our commitment to creating a stronger, more knowledgeable, and more inclusive Yale.



Center Church on the Green, New Haven, *ca.* 1880

## PROGRAM

### DRUM LINE

Michael Mills & Rhythms from the Heart Drum Ensemble

### PROCESSIONAL

A. Nathaniel Gumbs, Director of Chapel Music, organist  
“Organ Improvisation on ‘We Shall Overcome’”

Carl Haywood, b.1949

### WELCOME

Kimberly Goff-Crews, Secretary and Vice President for  
University Life

### INVOCATION

Maytal Saltiel, Interim University Chaplain

### STUDENT & ALUMNI READINGS

*Representing four student groups whose work helped ensure that the  
Reverend Pennington’s and the Reverend Crummell’s accomplishments  
and contributions are remembered and recognized*

Ellen VanDyke Bell, M.A.R. ’24

J. Nic Fisk, PH.D. ’23, Assistant Professor of Computational  
Biology, University of Rhode Island

Maya Fonkeu, B.A. ’25

Noah Humphrey, M.DIV. ’23, Community Organizer

### ANTHEM

Marquand Chapel Choir, Alex Whittington, Director  
University Church in Yale Choir, Sarah Shapiro, Director  
“Lift Every Voice and Sing”

James Weldon Johnson, 1871–1938 (lyrics)

John Rosamond Johnson, 1873–1954 (score)

*To be sung with the choirs by all in attendance. Words and music are  
printed on the following pages.*

## ANTHEM

### “Lift Every Voice and Sing”

1. Lift ev - ery voice and sing till earth and heav - en ring.  
 2. Ston - y the road we trod, bit - ter the chas - tening rod,  
 3. God of our wea - ry years, God of our si - lent tears,

Ring with the har - mo - nies of lib - er - ty,  
 Felt in the days when hope un - born had died;  
 Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;

Let our re - joic - ing rise high as the lis - tening skies;  
 Yet, with a stead - y beat, have not our wea - ry feet  
 Thou who hast by Thy might led us in - to the light;

Let it re - sound loud as the roll - ing sea.  
 Come to the place for which our pa - rents sighed?  
 Keep us for - ev - er in the path, we pray.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;  
 We have come o - ver a way that with tears has been wa - tered;  
 Lest our feet stray from the plac - es, our God, where we met Thee;

Sing a song full of the hope that the pres - ent has brought us;  
 We have come, tread - ing our path through the blood of the slaugh - tered.  
 Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we for - get Thee;

Fac - ing the ris - ing sun of our new day be - gun,  
 Out from the gloom - y past, till now we stand at last  
 Shad - owed be - neath Thy hand may we for - ev - er stand,

Let us march on, till vic - to - ry is won.  
 Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.  
 True to our God, true to our na - tive land.



Scan for additional information  
 about "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

PROGRAM, continued

READING

*Representing the Reverend Crummell*

The Reverend Kim Turner Baker, Rector of St. Luke's  
Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C.

READING

*Representing the Reverend Pennington*

The Reverend Cleo Graham, Pastor of Faith Congregational  
Church, Hartford, Connecticut

POEM

Zora Howard, B.A. '14

RECOGNITION OF THE DEGREE CONFERRAL

Peter Salovey, President of Yale University and Chris Argyris  
Professor of Psychology

BENEDICTION

Greg Sterling, The Reverend Henry L. Slack Dean of Yale  
Divinity School and the Lillian Claus Professor of New  
Testament

RECESSIONAL

A. Nathaniel Gumbs, Director of Chapel Music, organist  
"Jubilate!"

Fela Sowande (1905–1987)

DRUM LINE

Michael Mills & Rhythms from the Heart Drum Ensemble



## JAMES W. C. PENNINGTON,

who liberated himself from slavery as a young man, became the first African American known to study at Yale. He was barred from formal enrollment and not permitted to speak in class but still managed to use what he learned at the Yale Theological Seminary (later the Yale Divinity School) to thrive as a renowned pastor, respected civic leader, and leading abolitionist. Seeking to educate the public about Black history and slavery, Pennington in 1841 published *A Textbook of the Origin and History of the Colored People*, which scholars have described as the first textbook devoted to the history of African Americans.

Pennington was born enslaved in 1807 on Maryland's Eastern Shore. In an 1849 memoir, *Fugitive Blacksmith*, he recounted the horrors he endured as a child. He had little contact with his parents as they toiled on the plantation, and he often suffered from hunger. "To estimate the sad state of a slave child, you must look at it as a hopeless human being thrown upon the world without its natural guardians," he wrote. A turning point occurred when Pennington witnessed a savage whipping of his father, Bazil: "Although it was some time after this event that I took the decisive step [to escape]... in my mind and spirit, I was never a Slave after it."

Pennington fled the plantation in the fall of 1827. "*Hope, fear, dread, terror, love, sorrow, and deep melancholy were all mingled in my mind together,*" he recalled. Captured on a road outside Baltimore, he managed to flee again. The 19-year-old fugitive made his way to Pennsylvania, where he was welcomed into the home of Quakers William and Phoebe Wright. William began to teach Pennington how to read and write. Eventually, Pennington found his way to New York City. He continued his education and became a schoolteacher on Long Island.

Pennington then had an epiphany that he "was a lost sinner, and a slave to Satan." He resolved to become a Christian minister, and that pursuit led him in 1834 to New Haven, where he sought enrollment in the Theological Seminary. He did not meet Yale's entrance

requirements and was, in any case, barred from enrolling according to a Connecticut law forbidding the instruction of Black students from out of state – a law passed in the wake of a vote at an 1831 New Haven town meeting to prohibit the establishment of the nation’s first college for Black men. Pennington was allowed to attend – but not participate in – Yale classes. He began on Oct. 1, 1834, and continued to attend classes for at least two years. In an 1851 lecture in Scotland, covered in *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, he described his time at Yale as his “visitorship” and cataloged the “oppression” he faced, including that he “could not get a book from the library, and my name was not to appear on the catalogue.”

Over the course of his career, Pennington served at Congregational churches in Connecticut, New York, Maine, Florida, and Mississippi. He raised funds to support the *Amistad* captives while pastor at the First Hartford Colored Congregational Church, now known as Faith Congregational Church. (A Bible he used there is currently on loan to the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.) In 1838, he presided over the wedding of Frederick Douglass, who was a fellow escapee from slavery before becoming a powerful and celebrated Black abolitionist, and Anna Murray. After becoming pastor at Shiloh Presbyterian Church in New York City in 1848, Pennington launched a campaign against the segregation of the city’s trolley services. The following year, Heidelberg University in Germany awarded Pennington an honorary doctorate. During the Civil War, Pennington helped raise a regiment of Black soldiers to fight for the North. After the war, he served briefly as a minister in Natchez, Mississippi, in the former heart of slave country. He died in October 1870 while serving as a pastor in Jacksonville, Florida.

For further reading:

*The Fugitive Blacksmith*, by James W. C. Pennington

*American to the Backbone: The Life of James W. C. Pennington, the Fugitive Slave Who Became One of the First Black Abolitionists*, by Christopher L. Webber

## ALEXANDER CRUMMELL,

an Episcopal priest and scholar who battled racism throughout his life and came to espouse a pan-Africanist ideal, attended the Yale Theological Seminary (later the Yale Divinity School) in the 1840s. Little is known about his time at Yale, but it seems that like James W. C. Pennington, he was not allowed to speak in class, use the library, or graduate with a degree. Crummell still made the most of his education as he became an original thinker and influential speaker who late in life founded the American Negro Academy, dedicated to Black uplift and self-improvement as part of a wider effort toward racial equality.

Crummell's father, Boston Crummell, "was stolen from the neighborhood of Sierra Leone about the year 1780," according to an 1866 article in *Harper's Weekly*, and his mother was born free, living amongst a family of Quakers. Alexander was born in New York City in 1819 and attended a school established by the Manumission Society, an organization of wealthy white people including Alexander Hamilton and John Jay. Crummell then attended Canal Street High School, founded by his father and other prominent people of color. "The black schoolchildren, who were jeered in the streets and pelted with stones, often had to be escorted to and from school by their parents," writes Crummell biographer Wilson Jeremiah Moses.

In 1835, hungry for more education, Crummell traveled to Canaan, New Hampshire, to attend another abolitionist school, but a racist mob "assembled with 90 yoke of oxen, dragged the Academy into a swamp, and a few weeks afterward drove the black youths from the town," he later recalled. Crummell then attended yet another school for non-white youth in Whitesborough, New York. Nevertheless, because of the color of his skin he was denied entry to the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church.

Undeterred, Crummell found Episcopalian supporters in Boston and around the same time moved to New Haven to study at the Yale Theological Seminary. After completing his time at Yale, Crummell was ordained a deacon in St. Paul's Church, Boston, and then a priest

in St. Paul's Church, Philadelphia, where he continued to face racial prejudice. From 1848 to 1853, Crummell lived in England, where he lectured, raised money for his then-parish, The Church of the Messiah in New York, and was offered a place to study at Queens' College, Cambridge. After more than three years of study, he attained his B.A. and traveled as a missionary to West Africa, becoming a citizen of Liberia. He led a high school there, then became a professor at Liberia College in Monrovia.

Throughout his career Crummell was an outspoken activist who promoted Black self-help. *Because the white American mind "revolts from Negro genius," Crummell argued, "the Negro himself is duty bound to see to the cultivation and fostering of his own race-capacity."* He decried Christian hypocrisy on the issue of slavery, and often urged Black emigration to Africa to help in what he called "the regeneration of that continent." A central theme, as noted by *Harper's Weekly*, was "that the colored man, then shut out from a worthy career in Europe and America, has a promising future before him in Africa, where he has been called to meet the demands of civilization, commerce, and nationality." Yet after roughly sixteen years in Liberia, political and social unrest spurred Crummell to return to the United States. Settling in Washington, D.C., he founded St. Luke's Episcopal Church and taught at Howard University. In the penultimate year of his life, he founded and became the first president of the American Negro Academy. Crummell died in Point Pleasant, New Jersey, in 1898.

For further reading:

*Africa and America*, by Alexander Crummell

*Alexander Crummell, A Study of Civilization & Discontent*, by Wilson Jeremiah Moses

*Yale University's M.A. Privatum degree*

In the nineteenth century, the board of trustees awarded this honorary master's degree to individuals who were unable to complete their studies due to special circumstances. That historical context has resonance for honoring the Rev. Pennington and the Rev. Crummell, two visionary leaders who studied at Yale and took bold action in the face of unrelenting racism during the nineteenth century.

