

The Twentieth Century

The twentieth century was a time of tremendous change in the Episcopal Church.

At the beginning of the century, there were yet those seeking to make us the “national church” of the United States. Among these were many of the captains of industry and commerce at the time, including



J. P. Morgan

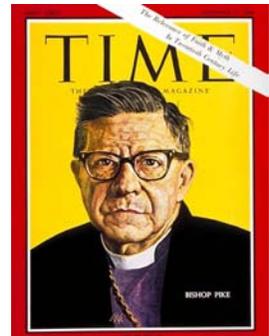
J. Pierpont Morgan

Remember that the Episcopal Church has produced political leaders disproportionate to our numbers. We boast of having produced more U.S. presidents than any other denomination: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Zachary Taylor, Franklin Pierce, Chester A. Arthur, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gerald Ford, and George H. W. Bush. Thirty three of the first 106 Supreme Court justices (including seven of the first seventeen chief justices) were Episcopalians. U.S. Senators have included both Byrds and John Warner of Virginia, Phil Gramm of Texas, John and Lincoln Chaffee and Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island, Barry Goldwater and John McCain of Arizona, and Ted Stevens of Alaska. At least twenty Anglicans signed the U.S. Constitution, including Rufus King and David Brearly of New Jersey and Alexander Hamilton.

When it comes to the captains of industry and leaders of society, consider these: John Jacob Astor, J. P. Morgan, Leland Stanford, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Pierre S. du Pont, McGeorge Bundy, Eliot Richardson, Claiborne Pell, John Danforth, Fairleigh S. Dickinson, Jr., Henry Clay Frick, Paul Mellon, and Isabella Stewart Gardner. Families such as the duPonts, Vanderbilts, Whitneys, Roosevelts, Astors, Mellons, and Morgans have traditionally been Episcopalians, and *Fortune* magazine reported in 1976 that Episcopalians headed twenty per cent of the Fortune 500 companies, perhaps making us second to none in terms of power and influence—not bad for a denomination that has only two million members! Our reputation as the church of the privileged few is well deserved—if a bit of an embarrassment in the twenty-first century.

Among those who helped change things is James Albert Pike. A Roman Catholic whose first marriage ended in divorce, Pike earned a doctorate at Yale Law School, and after the Second World War converted to the Episcopal Church. From the *Wikipedia* entry on Pike:

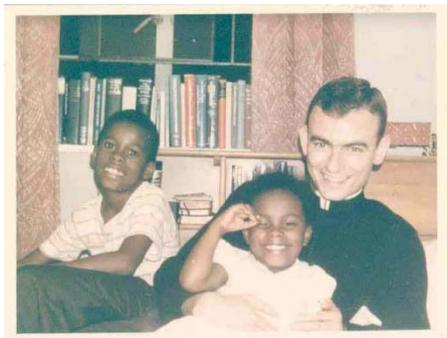
He was ordained in 1946, first serving as an assistant at St. John's, Lafayette Square in Washington, DC, and then as Rector of Christ Church in Poughkeepsie, New York, before becoming head of the Department of Religion and chaplain at [Columbia University](#). He left Columbia in 1952 to become the Dean of the [Cathedral of St. John the Divine](#), New York. Using his new position and media savvy, he picked a fight with local Catholic bishops over their attacks on [Planned Parenthood](#) and their opposition to birth control and when invited to receive an honorary doctorate from [Sewanee: The University of the South](#) in Tennessee, he accepted but then publicly turned down the invitation after finding that the university did not admit African



Americans. In an example of Pike's use of the media, he released his letter to the [New York Times](#) before it was delivered to Sewanee's trustees: they heard the news when reporters called for reactions.^[1] It was also at this time that he publicly challenged Senator [Joseph McCarthy](#)'s allegation that 7,000 U.S. pastors were part of the Kremlin's conspiracy and when the newly elected President [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) backed up Pike, McCarthy and his movement began to lose their influence.

Pike became dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, and was in 1958 elected Bishop of California. (Can it be a coincidence that our rector was ordained in Grace Cathedral in San Francisco some forty years later?) With others, he helped begin the Episcopal Church's foray into the real world, helping to promote justice and equality for all God's people.

Pike's life ended in obscurity, but he was part of a concerted effort in this country to end racism and promote civil rights, to value women and men equally, and to promote progressive social causes generally. There are notable exceptions to his liberalism from today's perspective, but he stands as the icon of the shift in the Episcopal Church in twentieth century.



Jon Daniels and friends

Another exemplar of this shift was a man named Jonathan Myrick Daniels. A seminarian at the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Mass., Daniels and some of his classmates went to Selma, Ala., in 1965. There, he helped register people of color to vote, and for this effort served jail time. The last words he heard in this mortal life were these: "Get off this property, or I'll blow your goddamn heads off, you sons of bitches."¹ These are words of heartless hostility and ruthless rage. Yet his response was one of composed calm, one of quiet questioning, one of sacrificial shielding of humanity: he pushed a young girl out of the way of gunfire from a renegade shop owner, and took a fatal bullet in her stead. That girl is now a priest in the Episcopal Church.

The great changes in the twentieth century also included welcoming all of humanity into the ordained ministry, thus increasing the catholicity of the church. Women and gay people are among those formerly—but no longer—officially excluded. These changes did not come easily, and we are greatly indebted to eleven courageous women who were ordained priests in the summer of 1974 in Philadelphia's Church of the Advocate: Merrill Bittner, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, Alison Cheek, Emily Hewitt, Carter Heyward, Suzanne Hiatt, Marie Moorefield Fleisher, Jeannette Piccard, Betty Bone Schiess, Katrina Martha Swanson, and Nancy Hatch Wittig. The ordination of women to the priesthood was finally authorized in 1976, and the "irregular" ordinations of the "Philadelphia Eleven" were eventually accepted.

In 1988, the Diocese of Massachusetts elected Barbara C. Harris as suffragan bishop (a bishop who assists the primary bishop of a diocese). She had served as crucifer at the ordination of the Philadelphia

¹Tom Coleman, quoted in *Eagles*, 179.

Eleven. The first woman to be ordained a bishop in the Anglican Communion, Bishop Harris is now among some two dozen women who are bishops worldwide.

In the 1970s, we revised *The Book of Common Prayer*, producing the document that serves as the basis of our faith to this day. Now seen as part of the Liturgical Movement that swept over all Western Christianity, our Prayer Book revision gave larger and more significant roles to lay people leading parts of our worship, declared Baptism to be full initiation in Christ's Body the Church, and translated the rites of the church into more contemporary vocabulary from the inherited Elizabethan English. It also proclaimed the Holy Eucharist as "the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day," effecting a shift from Morning Prayer as the predominant form for Sunday worship.



Bishop Harris

At the end of the twentieth century, the Episcopal Church's two million members included all sorts and conditions of men and women. No longer "the church of the American aristocracy" or "the Church of England in the United States," we now embrace diverse cultures and languages, lesbian and gay people, divorced persons, and a great variety of worship styles. We are numerically strongest in the east, particularly in urban areas. Polls have reported that up to three times as many Americans consider themselves Episcopalians than are listed on our churches' rolls. More than half of our members came into the church as adult converts.

In addition to the Presidents and capitalists mentioned above, the more notable Episcopalians have included: Fiorello La Guardia, Margaret Mead, Tallulah Bankhead, Robert E. Lee, George Gallup, Nat "King" Cole, Charlie Chaplain, Cecil B. DeMille, Dean Acheson, Eli Lilly, Richard Upjohn, Fred Astaire, Jefferson Davis, Cary Grant, Olivia de Havilland, Sandra Day O'Connor, David Souter, and Thurgood Marshall. We even welcomed Spiro Agnew and former New Jersey Governor James McGreevey into our ranks! In literature, we have been represented by such authors as Washington Irving, Annie Dillard, Clement Clark Moore, C. S. Lewis, Francis Scott Key, Willa Cather, John Dos Passos, T. S. Eliot, and John Cheever. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John Updike are among those who entered this church during their later years.² Among the artists, authors, and actors in our band are Sam Waterston, Bette Davis, Edward Albee, Judy Garland, Lillian Gish, George O'Keefe, J. Fenimore Cooper, Norman Rockwell, and Humphrey Bogart.

² David Holmes, *A Brief History of the Episcopal Church*, 177.