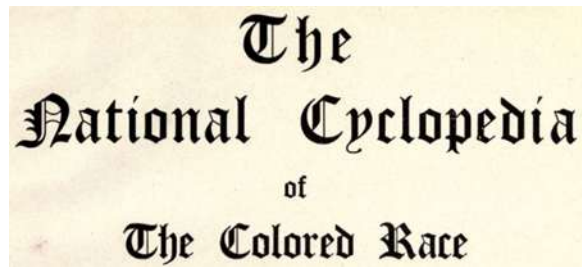


Rev. John Elijah Ford (1862-1943)

By Jerry Long
c.2026



**The National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race, Clement Richardson, Editor-in-Chief
(Montgomery, Alabama: National Publishing Company, Inc., 1919) p.472:**

Reverend John Elijah Ford, D.D., President of Leland University



Rev. John Elijah Ford

Leland University was located on St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, La. until 1916. It was founded in 1869, by Holbrook Chamberlain, a philanthropist of Brooklyn, N. Y., who purchased the land and erected the buildings. It was incorporated in 1870.

Title to the property is invested in an independent, self perpetuating board of trustees. The act of incorporation provides that: The trustees shall not have the power to encumber by mortgage, the whole, or any part of the property or to use the principal of any endowment funds for the current expenses of its work. The last scholastic year, there was a total attendance of 300 pupils. There were fourteen teachers, six men and eight women. The sources of income at that time were: Endowment fund \$8,000, tuition and fees \$2,240, Alumni and Baptist Associations \$362.00. The non-educational receipts were from the boarding department, and amounted to \$5,760.00. The school was closed in 1916, and the plant sold, as the trustees had decided to move to Alexandria, La., where they could obtain sufficient land to build and operate an Industrial College in keeping with the need and training of present conditions of this section of the country. To this end, 258 acres of land has been bought and paid for; \$75,000.00 added to the endowment fund. A plant which will be a model in every respect is in course of construction. The trustees have taken a long step forward in electing Rev. John E. Ford, D. D., of Jacksonville, President and assuring him their support in the selection of an able faculty. He is splendidly endowed, both by education and native ability to fill the chair of President of the new and finer Leland University. Born in Owensboro, Ky., his parents moved to Chicago, while he was yet a child, he obtained his early education in the public schools of Chicago, under the most adverse and trying circumstances. His parents were twice burned out, once in the great fires of 1871 and again in 1874.

Nothing daunted, young John not only continued his duties but working out of school hours, aided his parents in rebuilding their home and in educating his younger brothers and sisters. Determined to have a thorough training at all cost, he worked his way, with the aid of one white friend, successively through Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn., Beloit College, Wisconsin, and the University of Chicago. Not satisfied with this he took a post graduate course at the University of Denver. Most of his college courses were paid for by money earned while working as a stenographer in Chicago. After graduating from Chicago University Divinity School, Dr. Ford pastored the Bethesda Church, Chicago, Tabernacle Church, Los Angeles, Cal., Zion Church, Denver, Col., and is at present pastor of Bethel Institutional Church, Jacksonville, Fla. He served one year, 1906, as President of State University of Kentucky. Was delegate in 1907 to the World's Sunday School Convention, at Rome, Italy. While there he visited England, France, Spain and Switzerland. Dr. Ford has also visited Cuba and South America. He is president of the Progressive Baptist State Convention of Florida, and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Florida Baptist College. Dr. Ford is also a member of the American Geographical Society of Applied Science. By this it will be seen that, to one of the finest academic educations obtainable, Dr. Ford has added a wonderful course of practical experience in the schools of travel and human nature. In him is found a combination of the highly educated, aggressively constructive Yankee, and the whole-souled sympathetic Southerner. He has the knack of spurring his co-workers on to a pitch of enthusiastic energy that makes him peculiarly fitted for the task of presiding over a southern college. Dr. Ford was married to Miss Elizabeth Walker Wilson, of Raleigh, N. C., in 1918.



Who's who among the colored Baptists of the United States, Volume I,
Samuel William Bacote (Kansas City, Mo.: Franklin Hudson Pub. Co., 1913) pp.283-285:

JOHN ELIJAH FORD, B.D., Ph.D.
Noted Lecturer and Biblicist-Educator.



The Reverend John Elijah Ford, the noted Biblicist of Jacksonville, Florida, was born October 21, 1863, at Owensboro, Kentucky. His parents, Isom and Anna Elizabeth Helen Ford, were slaves and had fifteen children, John Elijah being the oldest; and of the fifteen, ten have died.

Young Ford moved to Chicago at a very early age and matriculated in the public schools of that city. He made exceptionally good grades, and while in his "teens" graduated from the high school of the city, being the only colored pupil in the class. He was especially fond of Latin, and the four-years course in the high school of "The Windy City" served him well during his college life at Fisk University (1882-9) and Beloit College (Wisconsin, 1889-91). In 1891 he matriculated in the Divinity School, Chicago University, and graduated three years later with the degree of Bachelor of Divinity, being the first colored student to take that degree from the University. While in Chicago Mr. Ford served as pastor of the Bethany Baptist Church, and he was constantly in demand as a lecturer, debater and public speaker before lyceums of the city.

He was called from Chicago to the pastorate of the Zion Baptist Church, Denver, which he accepted, while taking a post-graduate course in the University of Denver, Colorado, leading to the degree of Ph.D. in 1905. Mr. Ford is a veritable book-worm and has a great fondness for the classics, and his knowledge of Latin and Greek has made him one of the great Biblicists of the country.

In 1906 he was elected to the presidency of the State University and while acting in that capacity added new laurels to his already illustrious record. To further his study in Bible research, Doctor Ford visited Europe in 1907, taking in the great capital cities of the Old World, visiting the great libraries and museums of the universities. He returned to the States the latter part of that year and accepted the pastorate of the Bethel Institutional Church, Jacksonville, Florida, probably the finest in the South. He is still its pastor, and an assistant minister, a clerk and a large teaching force are allowed him in the prosecution of the institutional work. Mr. Ford is a trustee and an instructor of theology in the Florida Baptist College, Jacksonville, of which Professor N. W. Collier is president.

The Reverend Doctor Ford has, in addition to his pastoral work, conducted for the past few years the Bible institute work of the Sunday-School Congress, and his learned exposition of the Scriptures in simple yet choice language, reinforced with an earnestness characteristically his own, has inspired the members of the Congress to look forward to this particular feature each year with increasing pleasure.

Mr. Ford was married to Miss Justina L. Warren, a charming and talented alumna of the Galesburg (Ill.) High School, in 1893. In 1899 Mrs. Ford was graduated from the Hering Medical College of Illinois; and so thirsty was she for the best possible knowledge of the science of

medicine that she took a post-graduate course in the Hahnemann Post-Graduate Medical College, Chicago. Mrs. Ford was instrumental in building the hospital at the State Normal and Agricultural College, Huntsville, Alabama, while engaged in the practice of medicine at that point. She now enjoys a large practice in the city of Denver and her skill is recognized by the best medical students of the Rocky Mountain State.

Some men of eloquence speak to the understanding; others speak to the imagination; while still others address the heart. But Rev. Ford has the happy faculty of speaking to all three. Being a man of great faith, reverting constantly to prayer, and with the Bible seemingly "transfused" into him, he is doing a service for the denomination that cannot be overestimated. May he continue to grow in the hearts of the people as he advances in years.



Who's Who Of The Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent, Volume I, Frank Lincoln Mather, editor (Chicago, 1915) p.105:

FORD, John Elijah, clergyman, teacher, lecturer; born at Owensboro, Ky., Oct. 21, 1862; son of Isom and Anna Eliza (Helm) Ford; grad. High school, Chicago, Ill., 1885; took shorthand course, 1886; student Fisk Univ., Nashville, Tenn., 1886-8, Beloit College, Wis., 1889-91; B.D., Univ. of Chicago, 1895; (D.D., Western College, Macon, Mo., 1906); married Justina L. Warren, of Galesburg, Ill., Dec. 27, 1893. Pastor of Providence Baptist Church, Chicago, 1890-2; ordained, Apr. 19, 1891; pastor Bethesda Church, Chicago, 1893-6, Tabernacle Church, Los Angeles, Cal., 1897-9, Zion Baptist Church, Denver, Col., 1900-6, Bethel Baptist Institutional Church, Jacksonville, Fla., since 1907. Treas. Florida Farm & Home Co.; director Standard Life Ins. Co. Chairman board of trustees Florida Baptist Academy. Republican. Member American Academy Political and Social Science, Southern Sociological Congress, Federal Council of Churches of America, Progressive Order of Men and Women (vice-pres.). Home: 625 W. Union St., Jacksonville, Fla.



African American Registry

<https://aaregistry.org/story/john-e-ford-minister-and-more/>



John Elijah Ford

John Elijah Ford was born on 21 October 1862. He was a Black minister and businessman.

From Owensboro, KY., John Elijah Ford was the eldest of fifteen children of Isom and Anne Helm Ford. Nine of his siblings died at birth or of childhood diseases, and he was the only one born in Kentucky. His family moved to Chicago as a child, where he grew up near 33rd and Dearborn Street. Georgie, Dotie, Lola, Vertel (Bud), and Milton were his brothers and sisters. Ford graduated from high school as the only Black in his class, and he was proficient in Latin and had good grades.

He attended Fisk University in 1889 and Beloit College (Wisconsin), graduating in 1891. From there, Ford attended the Divinity School of Chicago, where he finished as its first African American graduate in 1894. His first ministry was at the Bethany Church in Chicago. During this time, he married Justina Warren. In 1900, he and his wife moved west, where he began his postgraduate studies at the University of Denver. He was called to minister at Denver's Zion Baptist Church. Under the leadership of Rev. John E. Ford and Dr. Justina L. Ford, Colorado's first black woman doctor, Zion's membership grew to over 400. The debt on the church was retired, and the property's value increased.

Rev. Ford traveled to Europe in 1907, taking in the great capital cities of the Old World and visiting libraries and museums. He returned to America in late 1907 to take the post of pastor at Bethel Baptist International Church in Jacksonville, Florida. Ford later became a trustee and instructor of theology at Florida Baptist College, where he served Bethel for over thirty years. John Ford died on August 9, 1943, and is buried beside his parents in Chicago's Graceland Cemetery. His grand-nephew, Benjamin Mchie, became the founder of the African American Registry®.



Annie Helm Ford

Annie Ford's birth is celebrated on 15 October 1842. She was a Black slave and homemaker.

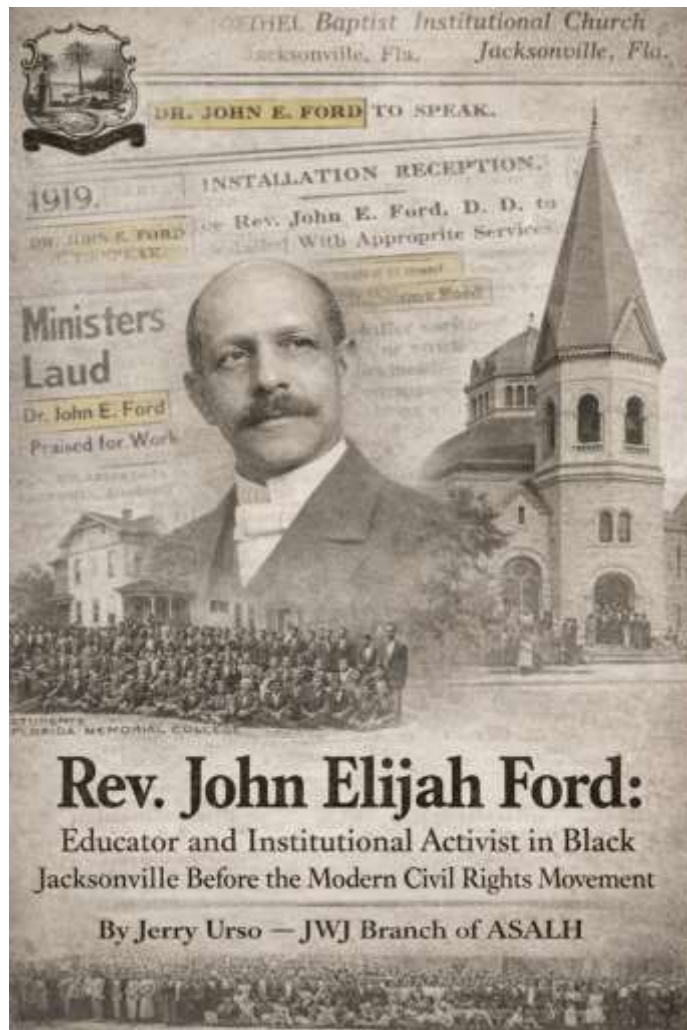
Born Annie Helm, she was from Owensboro, Kentucky, and was one of two daughters of an African slave woman and her white-American master. As a child, she worked in her master's house, mainly taking care of his only daughter. During this time, she learned to read by interpreting the words on prescription bottles. From there, her owners used her aptitude and knowledge, and she was chosen to read the Bible to the other slaves.

At a very young age, she met and eventually married Isom Ford. He was born a slave in Mississippi of an African woman and an Irish father. Before the American Civil War, her sister Julia had run away from slavery with the help of the Underground Railroad. In her sister's journey, Julia was put on a stagecoach to Chicago after hiding in southern Illinois for a while when the time was right. A young white man with a fugitive slave notice for Julia told her, "I know who you are,

but I will help you.” He was a member of the Kimball piano family of Chicago. Julia was given a cleaning job in their factory and soon contacted her sister Annie.

During that time (1862), Annie and Isom had their first child, John Elijah, while living in Kentucky. Not long afterward, Julia sent Annie and her family on a small family journey north to live with her in Chicago. Annie and Isom Ford eventually lived near 33rd and Dearborn Street. Together, they had fifteen children, nine of whom died of childhood diseases or were stillborn. Six children survived: John, Georgie, Dotie, Lola, Vertel (Bud), and Milton. On October 8, 1871, the day of the “Chicago Fire,” Ford was in bed with their 3-day-old daughter Georgie. The police ordered her to leave because of the danger, but she refused.

All of the houses around her burned down except their home. There is very little information on Annie in her elder years. Her husband, Isom, died on September 18, 1900, and Annie Ford died on February 25, 1912. The couple and Isom’s sister Corcia are buried in Graceland Cemetery in Chicago, Illinois. Her granddaughter was Beneta Edwards, and her great-grandson, Benjamin, became the founder of African American Registry®.



<https://www.correctingtherecord.com/rev-john-e-ford>

**Rev. John Elijah Ford: Educator and Institutional Activist in Black Jacksonville
Before the Modern Civil Rights Movement By Jerry Urso — JWW Branch of ASALH**

Introduction: Institutional Activism and the Making of Black Jacksonville

In the decades before the emergence of the modern Civil Rights Movement, African American leadership in cities across the South often took shape through what historians now describe as institutional activism—the deliberate use of churches, schools, voluntary associations, and denominational networks to build social stability, economic capacity, and educational opportunity within segregated communities. In Jacksonville, Florida, few figures embodied this model of leadership more fully than Rev. John Elijah Ford, longtime pastor of Bethel Baptist Institutional Church and one of the most influential religious educators in the city during the early twentieth century. Installed as pastor in 1907 and serving for more than three decades, Ford helped transform Bethel into one of the most important centers of Black civic life in Florida during the Jim Crow era.[1]

Ford's leadership belonged to a generation of ministers who understood that the Black church in the post-Reconstruction South could not function solely as a site of worship. Instead, it had to operate as a community institution capable of addressing the educational, economic, and social needs created by segregation and exclusion from public services. Under his direction, Bethel Baptist Institutional Church expanded far beyond its traditional congregational role, developing programs in literacy training, domestic science instruction, lecture courses, youth education, and community recreation. These initiatives reflected the broader institutional church movement that reshaped urban Black religious life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and positioned churches as engines of social advancement as well as spiritual guidance.[2]

Ford's approach to ministry was grounded in rigorous theological preparation and shaped by experiences in major American cities before his arrival in Jacksonville. A graduate of the University of Chicago Divinity School, he belonged to a cohort of African American clergy who combined formal theological training with an expanding vision of the church's civic responsibility. His pastorates in Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago exposed him to emerging models of urban religious leadership that emphasized education, social uplift, and organized community service. When he accepted the call to Bethel Baptist Institutional Church, he brought with him a national perspective on ministry that would influence Jacksonville's Black religious and civic landscape for decades.[3]

Within a few years of Ford's arrival, Bethel Baptist Institutional Church had become one of the best-known examples of institutional church work in Florida. Contemporary denominational reports described the church as a center offering kindergarten instruction, domestic training programs, reading facilities, lecture opportunities, and other services designed to strengthen the intellectual and economic life of Jacksonville's African American population. These developments reflected Ford's conviction that education and organized social service were essential foundations for racial advancement in the early twentieth century South.[4]

Ford's influence extended well beyond Jacksonville's local congregational life. Through his participation in statewide Baptist associations, educational initiatives connected with Florida Baptist Academy and Florida Normal and Industrial Institute, and cooperation with national religious and reform organizations, he helped shape the infrastructure of Black institutional leadership across Florida. His standing within national religious circles was further demonstrated by his published reflections on Jacksonville's religious life in *The Crisis*, the official magazine of

the NAACP, where he interpreted the role of churches in sustaining community strength during a period marked by segregation and inequality.[5]

By the time of his death in 1943, Ford had served Bethel Baptist Institutional Church for thirty-six years and had earned recognition as one of Jacksonville's most respected religious leaders. Contemporary accounts credited him with helping strengthen church organization across the region and with contributing significantly to the development of educational and civic institutions that supported African American advancement in northeast Florida.[6] His career illustrates how institutional church leadership functioned as a powerful form of community-based civil rights work decades before the emergence of mass protest movements, and it places him among the generation of ministers who helped construct the civic and educational foundations upon which later struggles for equality would build.

Early Life in Owensboro, Kentucky

Rev. John Elijah Ford was born in 1862 in Owensboro, Kentucky, during the closing years of the Civil War, at a moment when the social and political future of African Americans in the United States remained uncertain but full of possibility. His birth in a border-state community shaped by both slavery and early emancipation placed him within the first generation of Black Americans whose adulthood would unfold during Reconstruction and its aftermath. Like many future leaders of the institutional church movement, Ford's formative years were shaped by the expanding importance of education, denominational organization, and self-help institutions within African American communities seeking stability in the post-emancipation era.[7]

Owensboro in the decades immediately following the Civil War was part of a region where African American churches quickly became the primary centers of community organization and intellectual development. Baptist congregations in particular played a leading role in promoting literacy, ministerial training, and mutual aid networks among newly freed populations. It was within this environment that Ford's early religious and educational interests developed. Although the surviving documentation of his childhood remains limited, later biographical summaries confirm that he pursued formal education at institutions associated with the expanding network of Black Baptist and mission-supported schools that emerged across the South in the late nineteenth century.[8]

The importance of education in Ford's early life is evident from his subsequent academic trajectory. His preparation eventually led him beyond regional schooling opportunities to advanced theological study at the University of Chicago Divinity School, one of the most influential centers of Protestant theological education in the United States. Such a progression was uncommon for southern-born African American ministers of his generation and reflects both personal determination and the support of denominational networks committed to preparing a professionally trained clergy for leadership in Black congregations across the country.[9]

Ford's early formation occurred during a period when African American ministers increasingly served as both spiritual leaders and community organizers. In many southern communities, pastors were expected to function simultaneously as teachers, advocates, institutional builders, and representatives of Black civic interests. This expectation shaped Ford's understanding of ministry from the beginning of his career and helps explain the broad scope of his later work in Jacksonville, where he would combine theological leadership with educational advocacy and civic engagement across multiple organizational settings.[10]

By the time Ford entered advanced theological training, he already belonged to a generation of African American religious leaders whose work reflected the transition from

Reconstruction-era survival strategies to the more structured institutional development that characterized Black civic leadership in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His early life in Kentucky thus formed the foundation for a career that would eventually place him among the most important builders of institutional church leadership in Florida during the Jim Crow era.[11]

Higher Education and Formation at the University of Chicago Divinity School

One of the most decisive influences on the development of Rev. John Elijah Ford's ministry was his advanced theological training at the University of Chicago Divinity School, an institution that stood at the forefront of modern Protestant scholarship at the turn of the twentieth century. At a time when relatively few African American ministers in the South had access to formal graduate theological education, Ford's studies there placed him among a small but growing cohort of Black clergy whose leadership combined intellectual preparation with institutional vision. His Divinity School training helped shape the educational, social, and organizational strategies that later defined his long pastorate at Bethel Baptist Institutional Church in Jacksonville.[12]

The University of Chicago Divinity School represented one of the most influential centers of Protestant theological education in the United States during this period. Its curriculum emphasized biblical scholarship, social ethics, and the relationship between Christianity and modern society—ideas that would later become closely associated with the institutional church movement. Ministers trained within this environment were encouraged to view congregations not only as centers of worship but also as agencies capable of addressing social inequality, educational need, and community development. Ford's later work in Jacksonville clearly reflected these priorities, especially in his emphasis on education, organized social services, and cooperation with civic reform initiatives.[13]

Ford's theological preparation also connected him with national Baptist networks that supported the professionalization of African American ministry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Northern-supported training opportunities played a crucial role in preparing a generation of clergy who would return to southern communities equipped to build durable institutions under the constraints of segregation. Ford belonged to this generation of educated ministers whose work bridged regional divides and helped transmit ideas about institutional church organization from northern urban centers to the rapidly growing Black communities of the South.[14]

The significance of Ford's education becomes even clearer when considered alongside his later participation in organizations such as the Federal Council of Churches, the Southern Sociological Congress, and the American Negro Academy, all of which reflected the expanding intellectual engagement of African American clergy with national religious and reform movements. These affiliations were not incidental honors but evidence of his standing within a network of ministers who understood education as a central instrument of racial advancement during the Jim Crow era. His theological training provided the intellectual foundation for this broader engagement and shaped his understanding of the church's responsibility to address both spiritual and social needs.[15]

Ford's academic preparation also influenced his reputation within denominational circles. Contemporary biographical references consistently identified him as one of the best-educated ministers serving African American Baptist congregations in Florida, a distinction that strengthened his authority as both a pastor and an institutional leader. His education helped position him for pastorates in major western cities before his arrival in Jacksonville and contributed

to the confidence placed in him when he was called to lead Bethel Baptist Institutional Church in 1907. In this way, his training at the University of Chicago Divinity School served not only as a personal achievement but also as the foundation for a career devoted to building educational and civic infrastructure within one of Florida's most important African American congregations.[16]

Western Pastorates: Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago

Before accepting the call to Bethel Baptist Institutional Church in Jacksonville in 1907, Rev. John Elijah Ford developed his ministerial reputation through pastorates in several major American cities, including Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago. These appointments placed him within a national network of African American Baptist congregations at a time when urban Black religious life was undergoing important transformations shaped by migration, expanding educational opportunities, and the growing influence of institutional church models. His experience in these western and Midwestern cities helped prepare him for the unusually broad civic and educational responsibilities he would later assume in Jacksonville.[17]

Service in these cities exposed Ford to congregations that operated in environments very different from those of the rural South. In rapidly expanding western communities such as Los Angeles and Denver, African American churches functioned not only as centers of worship but also as focal points for mutual aid societies, educational programs, and civic leadership organizations that helped support newly arrived residents navigating unfamiliar social landscapes. Ministers in these settings were expected to combine pastoral leadership with organizational initiative, and Ford's work within these congregations helped shape the administrative approach that later characterized his long pastorate at Bethel Baptist Institutional Church.[18]

Chicago, where Ford also served prior to his relocation to Florida, represented one of the most influential centers of African American religious and intellectual life in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. The city's churches were closely connected to educational institutions, reform movements, and national Baptist organizations that promoted literacy, professional training, and social service initiatives. Ford's association with Chicago congregational leadership complemented his earlier theological training at the University of Chicago Divinity School and strengthened his familiarity with institutional approaches to ministry that emphasized community development alongside spiritual instruction.[19]

These western pastorates also contributed to Ford's reputation as a minister capable of leading congregations in complex urban environments. By the early twentieth century, African American churches in major cities increasingly served as anchors for expanding populations seeking stability amid economic uncertainty and racial discrimination. Ministers who demonstrated success in such settings were often called to leadership positions in other growing communities where congregations sought pastors with administrative experience and educational vision. Ford's record of service in Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago helped establish precisely this reputation and made him an attractive candidate when Bethel Baptist Institutional Church in Jacksonville began searching for a successor capable of continuing and expanding the institutional work already underway within the congregation.[20]

The significance of these western pastorates becomes especially clear when viewed in light of Ford's later achievements in Jacksonville. His experience in multiple regions of the country allowed him to bring a broader perspective to southern ministry than many of his contemporaries possessed. Rather than developing his leadership exclusively within a single denominational or regional environment, he entered Jacksonville with the benefit of national experience that prepared him to guide one of Florida's most important African American congregations during a period of

rapid urban change and institutional growth. This combination of theological training and urban pastoral experience positioned him to play a central role in shaping the institutional character of Bethel Baptist Institutional Church during the first decades of the twentieth century.[21]

Arrival in Jacksonville and the Call to Bethel Baptist Institutional Church

Rev. John Elijah Ford arrived in Jacksonville in 1907 at a pivotal moment in the history of both Bethel Baptist Institutional Church and the broader African American community of the city. Jacksonville was still recovering from the profound physical and social dislocation caused by the Great Fire of 1901, which had destroyed large portions of the urban landscape, including many structures in neighborhoods central to Black civic life. In the years following the disaster, African American churches assumed an increasingly important role as anchors of stability and reconstruction within the city's segregated environment. Ford's call to Bethel placed him at the center of this rebuilding generation of religious leadership that helped guide Black Jacksonville through the early decades of the twentieth century.[22]

Bethel Baptist Institutional Church already held a distinguished position within Jacksonville's African American community before Ford's arrival. Under the leadership of his predecessor, Rev. Jerome Milton Waldron, the congregation had embraced the institutional church model that emphasized education, social service, and organized community engagement alongside traditional worship. When Ford accepted the call to serve as pastor, he inherited not simply a congregation but one of the most influential religious institutions in Florida's Black Baptist community. Contemporary newspaper coverage confirmed that his installation as pastor in 1907 marked the beginning of a long and productive relationship between Ford and one of the region's most important churches.[23]

The transition from Waldron's leadership to Ford's pastorate represented continuity rather than rupture. Waldron had helped establish Bethel as a center of educational and civic activity, and Ford expanded that vision through the development of additional programs designed to strengthen the intellectual and economic life of Jacksonville's African American residents. His earlier experience in major urban congregations and his formal theological training made him particularly well suited to continue the institutional direction already established within the church. As a result, Bethel's influence grew steadily during the early years of his pastorate, reflecting both his administrative ability and his commitment to community-centered ministry.[24]

Ford's arrival in Jacksonville also coincided with a period of expanding civic organization within the city's African American community. Churches, fraternal organizations, women's clubs, and educational institutions worked together to address the challenges created by segregation and economic exclusion. Within this network of institutions, Bethel Baptist Institutional Church served as one of the most visible centers of leadership and coordination. Ford's role as pastor therefore extended beyond congregational responsibilities and placed him among the ministers whose influence shaped the direction of Black civic life across the city during the Progressive Era.[25]

The importance of Ford's call to Bethel becomes even clearer when considered in light of the longevity of his service. Remaining pastor of the church for more than three decades, he provided continuity of leadership during a period marked by rapid demographic change, expanding educational initiatives, and increasing civic organization within Jacksonville's African American neighborhoods. His arrival in 1907 thus marked the beginning of one of the longest and most consequential pastorates in the history of Black religious leadership in northeast Florida, laying the foundation for the institutional programs that would define Bethel Baptist Institutional Church throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[26]

Building an Institutional Church in Jim Crow Jacksonville

During the early decades of the twentieth century, Rev. John Elijah Ford helped transform Bethel Baptist Institutional Church into one of the most important centers of organized African American civic life in Jacksonville. His leadership reflected a deliberate commitment to what contemporary observers described as the institutional church model—a philosophy of ministry that treated the church not only as a place of worship but also as a structured agency for education, social service, and community advancement in a segregated society. Under Ford's direction, Bethel expanded its role as a stabilizing force within Black Jacksonville at a time when public services for African Americans remained limited by law and custom.[27]

The institutional church movement emerged in the late nineteenth century as ministers across the United States responded to the social challenges created by industrialization, migration, and urban inequality. Among African American congregations in the South, this approach carried additional significance because segregation restricted access to schools, libraries, recreation facilities, and professional training opportunities. Churches therefore assumed responsibilities that municipal governments often refused to fulfill. At Bethel Baptist Institutional Church, Ford embraced this model fully, developing programs designed to strengthen both the intellectual and practical capacities of the community he served.[28]

Contemporary descriptions of Bethel's activities during Ford's pastorate demonstrate the breadth of these initiatives. The church maintained a kindergarten program, offered domestic science instruction, supported reading-room facilities, and organized lecture courses and educational classes for both youth and adults. These programs reflected a clear understanding that literacy, vocational preparation, and structured learning environments were essential tools for advancement in the Jim Crow South. By integrating such activities into congregational life, Ford helped ensure that Bethel functioned as a center of organized uplift rather than simply a Sunday gathering place.[29]

Equally important were the church's efforts to provide opportunities for social and physical development among young people. Institutional churches frequently included recreational facilities designed to counteract the lack of public resources available to African American residents of segregated cities. At Bethel, programs connected with youth instruction and community engagement reinforced the church's reputation as one of Jacksonville's most active centers of organized social improvement. These initiatives helped cultivate leadership among younger members of the congregation and strengthened connections between families and the broader institutional life of the church.[30]

The scale of Bethel's institutional work during Ford's pastorate also reflected the congregation's remarkable capacity for collective organization and financial commitment. Reports from denominational sources noted that the church raised tens of thousands of dollars within a relatively short period to support its expanding programs and facilities. Such fundraising efforts represented a significant achievement within a segregated economy that limited access to capital and employment opportunities for African Americans. They also demonstrated the degree of confidence that members of the congregation placed in Ford's leadership and in the institutional vision guiding the church's development.[31]

Bethel's institutional programs were not isolated efforts but formed part of a broader network of Baptist educational and missionary activity extending across Florida and the South. Through cooperation with denominational organizations and educational initiatives associated with Florida Baptist Academy and other training institutions, Ford helped connect local

congregational work with statewide strategies for leadership development and community advancement. These relationships ensured that Bethel remained closely aligned with the evolving priorities of Black Baptist institutional life during the early twentieth century.[32]

The importance of Bethel Baptist Institutional Church under Ford's leadership can also be measured by its role as a gathering place for regional and national visitors engaged in educational, religious, and reform work. Touring lecturers, denominational representatives, and musical groups such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers appeared before large audiences at the church, reinforcing its reputation as one of the most influential cultural and intellectual centers in Jacksonville's African American community. Events of this kind demonstrated that Bethel functioned not only as a local congregation but also as a regional platform for religious and educational exchange during the Jim Crow era.[33]

Taken together, these developments illustrate how Ford's pastorate strengthened Bethel Baptist Institutional Church as a cornerstone of Black Jacksonville's civic infrastructure. By integrating worship with education, social service, and organized community programming, he helped establish a model of ministry that addressed both spiritual and material needs at a time when African American communities were largely excluded from public support systems. In doing so, Ford contributed to a tradition of institutional activism that laid essential groundwork for later generations of religious and civic leaders working toward equality in northeast Florida.

Educational Leadership: Florida Baptist Academy and Florida Normal and Industrial Institute

Rev. John Elijah Ford's influence extended beyond the walls of Bethel Baptist Institutional Church through his sustained commitment to the development of African American education in Florida and the broader Baptist denominational community. Like many ministers associated with the institutional church movement of the early twentieth century, Ford viewed education as one of the most effective instruments available for strengthening Black communities in a segregated society. His leadership in connection with Florida Baptist Academy and his support for Florida Normal and Industrial Institute placed him among the ministers who helped shape the educational infrastructure that sustained African American advancement in the state during the Jim Crow era.[34]

Ford's role as chairman of the board of trustees of Florida Baptist Academy reflected his standing within Baptist educational leadership circles. Florida Baptist Academy functioned as an important training center for ministers, teachers, and lay leaders within the African American Baptist community of Florida. Trusteeship responsibilities required coordination with denominational mission agencies, participation in institutional planning, and support for fundraising initiatives necessary to sustain the school's work. Ford's participation at this level demonstrates that his influence extended well beyond congregational leadership and into the broader organizational framework supporting Black Baptist education across the region.[35]

His educational commitments were closely aligned with the priorities of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, which supported schools serving African American communities throughout the South. Reports describing Bethel Baptist Institutional Church during Ford's pastorate emphasized both his leadership within the congregation and his connection to statewide educational initiatives associated with Baptist mission work. These relationships helped ensure that Jacksonville remained an important center within the network of Baptist educational institutions working to prepare teachers and ministers during the early twentieth century.[36]

Ford's participation in educational leadership was also evident in his connection with Florida Normal and Industrial Institute, one of the most significant African American educational

institutions in the state and a predecessor of what later became Florida Memorial University. His public remarks supporting the institute reflected his commitment to strengthening opportunities for teacher training and higher education among African Americans in Florida. At a time when access to formal schooling remained limited by segregation, such advocacy represented a vital contribution to the long-term development of professional leadership within Black communities across the region.[37]

The educational vision guiding Ford's work reflected a broader philosophy shared by many institutional church leaders of his generation. Ministers associated with this movement frequently understood education as essential to both spiritual growth and civic advancement. Through lecture programs, theological instruction, youth training initiatives, and cooperation with denominational schools, Ford helped reinforce the connection between congregational life and educational opportunity. These efforts strengthened Bethel Baptist Institutional Church's reputation as a center of intellectual as well as religious leadership within Jacksonville's African American community.[38]

Ford's commitment to education also complemented his participation in organizations devoted to the study of social conditions affecting African Americans. His affiliations with bodies such as the Southern Sociological Congress and the Federal Council of Churches reflected a continuing interest in the relationship between education, social reform, and religious leadership. Ministers involved in these organizations frequently advocated expanded access to schooling and professional training as part of a broader strategy for addressing racial inequality in the early twentieth century South. Ford's participation in these networks demonstrates that his educational leadership formed part of a wider movement linking church-based activism with institutional reform.[39]

Through his work with Florida Baptist Academy, his support for Florida Normal and Industrial Institute, and his leadership within Bethel Baptist Institutional Church's own instructional programs, Ford helped strengthen the educational foundations of Black Jacksonville during a critical period in the city's development. His efforts contributed to the preparation of teachers, ministers, and community leaders whose work extended the influence of institutional church activism across northeast Florida and beyond. In this way, his educational leadership formed a central component of his broader commitment to community advancement before the emergence of the modern Civil Rights Movement.[40]

Civic Reform Networks in Progressive-Era Jacksonville

Rev. John Elijah Ford's leadership in Jacksonville extended well beyond the pulpit and classroom into the organized civic reform networks that shaped African American community life during the Progressive Era. Like many ministers associated with the institutional church movement, Ford understood that the work of the church required cooperation with women's organizations, educational societies, labor associations, denominational bodies, and interracial reform initiatives operating across the city. Through his participation in these networks, he helped strengthen the infrastructure of Black civic leadership in Jacksonville during the decades preceding the modern Civil Rights Movement.[41]

One of the clearest demonstrations of Ford's civic engagement appeared in his participation in organized efforts connected with the Sunday School Congress movement, one of the most important educational initiatives within African American Baptist life during the early twentieth century. Newspaper reports placed him among those responsible for assisting in the organization and transportation arrangements for delegates traveling to national Sunday School gatherings,

illustrating his role within denominational education structures that extended far beyond Jacksonville itself. Such responsibilities reflected both his standing among Baptist leaders and his commitment to strengthening religious education across the region.[42]

Ford also participated actively in civic mobilization efforts associated with the War Savings Stamp campaigns during the First World War. These campaigns formed part of a nationwide effort to encourage financial participation in the federal war program, and African American ministers frequently served as key organizers within their communities. Ford's presence on executive committees connected with these initiatives demonstrates his involvement in wartime leadership efforts that linked patriotic service with community organization and economic participation. In segregated southern cities, such campaigns provided opportunities for Black civic leaders to assert both loyalty and leadership within national public life.[43]

Closely related to these wartime activities was Ford's involvement in the War Thrift Stamp movement, another important component of federal mobilization during the conflict. Ministers played a central role in explaining the significance of these campaigns to their congregations and encouraging participation among residents who were often excluded from other forms of public engagement. Ford's participation in these efforts reflects his broader commitment to strengthening the economic stability of the African American community while simultaneously reinforcing its connection to national civic life during a period marked by racial discrimination and limited political opportunity.[44]

Ford's civic influence also extended into cooperation with organizations working to address employment conditions affecting African Americans in Jacksonville. During the First World War period, ministers across the city participated in advisory efforts designed to provide guidance to Black workers navigating rapidly changing labor conditions. Newspaper accounts identified Ford among those contributing to public statements offering direction regarding employment opportunities and responsibilities within the wartime economy. Such activities demonstrate the extent to which African American clergy functioned as intermediaries between local communities and broader economic developments during the early twentieth century.[45]

Another important dimension of Ford's civic engagement appeared through his involvement with visiting representatives connected to the Urban League movement, particularly during the visit of Eugene K. Jones, one of the organization's most influential national leaders. Events associated with the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and related civic gatherings brought together ministers, educators, and reform advocates working to strengthen institutional cooperation within African American communities. Ford's participation in these activities placed him within a network of leaders committed to improving employment opportunities, educational access, and community organization during a formative period in Jacksonville's development.[46]

Ford's election as secretary of the Interdenominational Ministers' Union of Jacksonville further illustrates the scope of his civic leadership. The Ministers' Union functioned as an important coordinating body linking clergy across denominational boundaries in support of common educational, social, and civic objectives. Serving in a secretaryship role required organizational ability as well as the confidence of fellow ministers, and his selection for this position demonstrates the respect he commanded within Jacksonville's broader religious community. Through this work he helped strengthen cooperation among churches that served as the primary institutional foundation of African American civic life in the city.[47]

His participation in public gatherings connected with the National Alliance of Postal Employees, one of the most significant African American federal employee organizations of the early twentieth century, further reflected his standing within national reform networks. Invitations

to address such conventions were typically extended to ministers recognized for their leadership within both religious and civic spheres. Ford's appearance before the organization illustrates the extent to which his influence reached beyond denominational circles into the wider landscape of African American professional and labor advocacy during the interwar period.[48]

Taken together, these activities demonstrate that Ford's leadership operated at the intersection of religious ministry and civic organization. Through cooperation with Sunday School Congress initiatives, wartime mobilization campaigns, employment advisory efforts, Urban League networks, interdenominational clergy organizations, and national labor associations, he helped strengthen the institutional framework that supported African American advancement in Jacksonville during the early twentieth century. His work within these reform networks represents a central dimension of the institutional activism that defined his career and positioned Bethel Baptist Institutional Church as one of the most influential centers of organized community leadership in the city before the emergence of mass civil rights protest movements later in the century.[49]

Statewide and Denominational Leadership

Rev. John Elijah Ford's influence extended beyond Jacksonville through his active participation in statewide Baptist associations and denominational leadership structures that shaped the direction of African American religious life in Florida during the early twentieth century. As pastor of Bethel Baptist Institutional Church—one of the most prominent Black Baptist congregations in the state—he occupied a position that naturally connected him with regional conventions, mission boards, and educational initiatives designed to strengthen church organization and ministerial training across Florida. His work within these bodies illustrates the extent to which his leadership contributed to the broader development of Baptist institutional infrastructure during the Jim Crow era.[50]

Ford played a visible role in the work of the East Florida and Bethany Baptist Association, where he served as a member of executive leadership connected with mission activities and organizational planning. Contemporary newspaper coverage described him as a “leader of men,” a characterization that reflected both his reputation within denominational circles and his influence in shaping the direction of Baptist cooperative work in northeast Florida. Participation in association-level leadership required not only theological authority but also administrative skill and the confidence of fellow ministers representing congregations across multiple counties.[51]

His involvement in the Progressive Baptist State Convention of Florida further demonstrates his standing within statewide denominational networks. The Progressive Baptist movement played a significant role in coordinating missionary activity, educational development, and ministerial training throughout the region, and its conventions served as important forums for discussion of strategies addressing the needs of African American churches operating under conditions of segregation. Ford's participation in these gatherings placed him among the ministers responsible for shaping the institutional priorities of Black Baptist congregations across the state during a critical period of expansion and organization.[52]

Through his denominational work, Ford also helped strengthen connections between local congregations and educational institutions serving African American communities in Florida. Baptist conventions frequently coordinated support for teacher training programs and ministerial preparation schools, and his leadership roles in association structures complemented his work as chairman of the board of trustees of Florida Baptist Academy. These overlapping responsibilities positioned him at the intersection of congregational ministry and statewide educational planning,

reinforcing the importance of education as a central component of Baptist institutional activism during the early twentieth century.[53]

Ford's participation in statewide denominational leadership also reflected the broader expectation that pastors of major urban congregations would serve as representatives of their communities in regional religious affairs. Bethel Baptist Institutional Church functioned as one of the most influential congregations in Florida's African American Baptist network, and its pastor naturally occupied a position of visibility within convention structures that coordinated missionary efforts and educational initiatives. Ford's service within these organizations therefore strengthened both his personal influence and the institutional standing of Bethel within the state's religious landscape.[54]

The significance of Ford's denominational leadership becomes especially clear when considered in relation to the cooperative character of Black Baptist organization during this period. Associations and conventions provided essential mechanisms through which congregations shared resources, coordinated missionary activity, and supported educational institutions serving African American communities throughout Florida. By participating actively in these structures, Ford helped ensure that Jacksonville remained closely connected to the wider network of Baptist institutional life that supported community advancement across the state in the decades preceding the modern Civil Rights Movement.[55]

A National Religious Voice

Rev. John Elijah Ford's influence was not confined to Jacksonville or even to the state of Florida. Over the course of his long pastorate at Bethel Baptist Institutional Church, he emerged as a minister whose work placed him within national networks of African American religious leadership, sociological reform advocacy, and historical documentation efforts that shaped Black intellectual life in the early twentieth century. His participation in these organizations reflected both his educational preparation and the reputation he earned as one of the most respected institutional church leaders in the South during the Jim Crow era.[56]

Among the clearest indicators of Ford's national standing was his authorship of an article titled "Religious Life in Jacksonville," published in *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Publication in *The Crisis* placed Ford within a circle of ministers, educators, and reform leaders whose interpretations of African American religious life reached a national readership during a period when the Black press served as one of the principal vehicles for intellectual exchange within the African American community. His contribution demonstrated both his familiarity with the broader issues affecting Black religious institutions and his ability to interpret Jacksonville's experience within a national framework of community development and racial advancement.[57]

Ford's national visibility was also reflected in his association with the American Negro Academy, one of the most important intellectual organizations of African American leadership in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Membership in the Academy connected him with a distinguished circle of scholars and ministers committed to advancing historical research, education, and cultural achievement among African Americans. Participation in such an organization confirmed his standing not only as a pastor but also as a contributor to the intellectual life of the race during a period when professional networks of this kind played a crucial role in shaping strategies for advancement under segregation.[58]

His affiliations with the Federal Council of Churches and the Southern Sociological Congress further illustrate the breadth of his engagement with national reform movements

concerned with the relationship between religion and social progress. These organizations provided important forums through which ministers addressed issues such as education, labor conditions, race relations, and community welfare. Ford's participation in these bodies demonstrates his commitment to understanding ministry as a vocation that extended beyond congregational boundaries into the wider arena of social reform and public responsibility.[59]

Ford's reputation as a leader of institutional church work was also strengthened by his cooperation with historical documentation efforts connected to Carter G. Woodson and the Journal of Negro History. Records identifying ministers and educators who assisted in gathering historical information about African American communities in Florida included Ford among those whose contributions supported the preservation of Black institutional memory during a period when such work remained largely excluded from mainstream historical scholarship. His participation in this effort reflected both his intellectual interests and his recognition of the importance of historical documentation in strengthening community identity and educational development.[60]

Equally significant was Bethel Baptist Institutional Church's role as a host congregation for national visitors engaged in educational and cultural work, including appearances by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, whose tours served as important vehicles for promoting higher education and strengthening connections between southern congregations and national Black institutions. Ford's cooperation in hosting such events demonstrated the extent to which Bethel functioned as a regional platform for religious and intellectual exchange during his pastorate. Through these activities he helped position Jacksonville as an important site within the network of African American institutional leadership operating across the United States in the early twentieth century.[61]

Taken together, these affiliations and activities confirm that Ford's ministry operated within a national framework of religious and intellectual leadership that extended far beyond his local congregation. His published writings, organizational memberships, participation in historical documentation projects, and cooperation with visiting educational institutions illustrate the degree to which he belonged to a generation of African American ministers who understood the church as both a spiritual center and a platform for intellectual engagement and social reform. In this way, Ford's career reflects the expanding national reach of institutional church leadership during the decades preceding the modern Civil Rights Movement.[62]

Thirty-Six Years at Bethel and Community Transformation

Rev. John Elijah Ford's thirty-six-year pastorate at Bethel Baptist Institutional Church stands as one of the longest and most consequential ministerial tenures in the history of Black religious leadership in Jacksonville during the early twentieth century. From the time of his installation in 1907 until his death in 1943, Ford guided the congregation through decades marked by rapid demographic change, expanding institutional development, wartime mobilization, and the continuing challenges of segregation. His sustained leadership provided continuity during a period when African American churches served as the principal centers of organization, education, and social support within Jacksonville's Black community.[63]

Under Ford's direction, Bethel strengthened its reputation as one of the most influential African American congregations in Florida. Contemporary accounts emphasized not only the church's institutional programs but also its broader role in shaping religious organization across the region. Ministers and denominational leaders credited Ford with helping influence the development of numerous congregations throughout northeast Florida, reflecting his standing as a mentor and advisor within Baptist association networks extending beyond the city itself. Such

recognition demonstrates that his pastorate contributed directly to the expansion of organized Baptist life across the wider region.[64]

Ford's long service at Bethel also coincided with a period in which churches increasingly functioned as centers of community coordination within segregated urban environments. Through educational programs, lecture series, youth instruction, and cooperation with civic organizations, Bethel remained closely connected to the everyday needs of Jacksonville's African American residents. The church's institutional activities reflected Ford's conviction that congregational leadership required attention not only to spiritual concerns but also to the intellectual and social development of the community. This approach strengthened Bethel's position as one of the most important centers of organized African American civic life in the city during the first half of the twentieth century.[65]

Equally significant was Ford's ability to maintain stable leadership across multiple generations of congregational members during a period of profound social change. Jacksonville's African American population expanded steadily during the early twentieth century as new residents arrived seeking employment opportunities and educational advancement. Churches such as Bethel played a crucial role in helping families adjust to these changes, and Ford's long pastorate ensured continuity of institutional direction as the congregation adapted to new conditions within the city's evolving social landscape.[66]

Ford's leadership also contributed to strengthening relationships between churches and educational institutions serving African American communities throughout Florida. His work with Florida Baptist Academy and his support for Florida Normal and Industrial Institute complemented Bethel's own instructional programs and reinforced the church's reputation as a center of intellectual development as well as religious instruction. Through these connections he helped prepare teachers, ministers, and community leaders whose work extended the influence of institutional church activism across northeast Florida and beyond.[67]

By the final years of his pastorate, Ford had become widely recognized as one of Jacksonville's most respected religious leaders. Newspaper accounts published near the time of his death described him as a minister whose influence extended across denominational boundaries and whose leadership contributed to the establishment and strengthening of churches throughout the region. Such recognition reflected the cumulative impact of more than three decades of institutional work that helped shape the character of Black religious life in Jacksonville during the early twentieth century.[68]

The length and stability of Ford's pastorate at Bethel Baptist Institutional Church represent one of the defining features of his career. Through sustained leadership across a generation marked by segregation, war, and economic transformation, he helped ensure that the church remained a center of education, civic organization, and community support within Jacksonville's African American neighborhoods. His thirty-six years at Bethel therefore stand as a testament to the enduring importance of institutional church leadership as a foundation for community advancement before the emergence of the modern Civil Rights Movement.[69]

References

1. Jacksonville Journal, July 29, 1907, p. 7.
2. Monroe N. Work, ed., Negro Year Book: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro, Tuskegee Institute Press, relevant institutional church section.
3. National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race, Montgomery, Alabama: National Cyclopedia Publishing Company, biographical entry for Rev. John Elijah Ford.

4. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, report describing Bethel Baptist Institutional Church, Jacksonville.
5. John E. Ford, "Religious Life in Jacksonville," *The Crisis*, January 1942.
6. *Jacksonville Journal*, September 14, 1943, p. 5.
7. National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race, biographical entry for Rev. John Elijah Ford.
8. *Who's Who of the Colored Race*, Chicago: Who's Who Publishing Company, entry for Rev. John Elijah Ford.
9. National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race, entry for Rev. John Elijah Ford.
10. *Journal of Negro History*, contributors and collaborators listing referencing Florida educational contacts including Rev. John E. Ford.
11. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, institutional leadership references.
12. National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race, education listing for Rev. John Elijah Ford.
13. University of Chicago Divinity School alumni reference as cited in *Who's Who of the Colored Race*.
14. Hampton Leaflets, American Baptist institutional church reporting.
15. *Who's Who of the Colored Race*, organizational memberships.
16. *The Deacon Problem Solved*, Rev. A. E. P. Tileston, discussion referencing Rev. John E. Ford, D.D.
17. *Who's Who of the Colored Race*, pastorates listed (Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago).
18. National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race, pastoral service listing.
19. *Who's Who of the Colored Race*, Chicago pastorate reference.
20. National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race, ministerial career summary.
21. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, denominational leadership summary.
22. Jacksonville municipal historical context reflected in *Jacksonville Journal*, July 29, 1907, p. 7.
23. *Jacksonville Journal*, July 29, 1907, p. 7.
24. Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Year Book*, institutional church description.
25. *Jacksonville Journal*, April 14, 1916, p. 19.
26. *Jacksonville Journal*, September 14, 1943, p. 5.
27. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, Bethel Institutional Church report.
28. Hampton Leaflets, institutional church movement description.
29. Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Year Book*, Bethel Baptist Institutional Church facilities description.
30. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, Bethel educational programming description.
31. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, fundraising summary.
32. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, Florida Baptist institutional cooperation reporting.
33. Fisk Jubilee Singers circular correspondence referencing Bethel Baptist Institutional Church appearance.
34. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, Florida Baptist Academy trusteeship listing.
35. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, Florida Baptist Academy governance reference.
36. Hampton Leaflets, Baptist mission education reporting.

37. St. Augustine Record, June 2, 1924, p. 5.
38. Monroe N. Work, ed., Negro Year Book, instructional programming references.
39. Who's Who of the Colored Race, membership listings (Southern Sociological Congress; Federal Council of Churches).
40. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, Florida Baptist educational leadership reporting.
41. Jacksonville Journal, April 14, 1916, p. 19.
42. Jacksonville Journal, May 26, 1915, p. 15.
43. Jacksonville Journal, June 8, 1918, p. 6.
44. Jacksonville Journal, March 20, 1918, p. 13.
45. Jacksonville Journal, August 7, 1916, p. 9.
46. Jacksonville Journal, April 14, 1916, p. 19.
47. Jacksonville Journal, December 9, 1919, p. 15.
48. Florida Times-Union, August 20, 1935, p. 18.
49. Jacksonville Journal, February 15, 1919, p. 15.
50. Jacksonville Journal, February 15, 1919, p. 15.
51. Jacksonville Journal, February 15, 1919, p. 15.
52. Jacksonville Journal, May 22, 1920, p. 17.
53. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, Florida Baptist Academy governance reporting.
54. Monroe N. Work, ed., Negro Year Book, Baptist institutional cooperation reporting.
55. Jacksonville Journal, June 21, 1920, p. 11.
56. Who's Who of the Colored Race, organizational affiliations listing.
57. John E. Ford, "Religious Life in Jacksonville," The Crisis, January 1942.
58. National Cyclopaedia of the Colored Race, American Negro Academy membership listing.
59. Who's Who of the Colored Race, Federal Council of Churches; Southern Sociological Congress membership listing.
60. Journal of Negro History, Florida collaborators listing.
61. Fisk Jubilee Singers circular correspondence referencing Bethel Baptist Institutional Church appearance.
62. National Cyclopaedia of the Colored Race, ministerial leadership summary.
63. Jacksonville Journal, September 14, 1943, p. 5.
64. Jacksonville Journal, September 14, 1943, p. 5.
65. Monroe N. Work, ed., Negro Year Book, institutional church programming description.
66. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Missions, congregational development summary.
67. St. Augustine Record, June 2, 1924, p. 5.
68. Jacksonville Journal, September 14, 1943, p. 5.
69. Florida Times-Union, March 8, 1942, p. 22.



Chicago, Cook County, Illinois 1870 Federal Census, pp.291A-291B:

Ford, Isam 44 male black porter in store born North Carolina

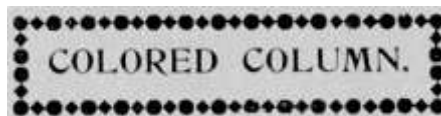
“	Anna	27	female	black	keeping house	born Kentucky
“	John	7	male	mulatto		born Kentucky
“	Watson	1	male	black		born Illinois



John Elijah Ford was the son of Isom Ford & Annie Helm., who were married about 1861. Isom Ford was born circa 1826 North Carolina and died 18 September 1900 in Chicago, IL. Annie Helm Ford was born 25 October 1842 in Kentucky and died 25 Feb 1912 in Chicago, IL. Isom and Annie were buried in the Graceland Cemetery in Chicago, IL.



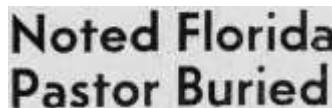
Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 20 May 1906, p.16:



Rev. John E. Ford, from Denver, Colo., will lecture Monday night at the Fourth- street church on "Helps and Hindrances of the Race." Mr. Ford is a graduate of the Chicago university, and was recently elected president of the state university in Louisville. He is one of the most entertaining speakers in the country and everyone should hear him.



The Pittsburg Courier, Pittsburgh, PA, Saturday, 28 August 1943, p.15:



CHICAGO, Aug. 26 (ANP) – Dr. John Elijah Ford, first Negro to graduate from the University of Chicago Theological seminary, was buried here Thursday following general services in Jacksonville, Fla., where he had died at the age of 75. Pastor of the Institutional Baptist church in Jacksonville for 36 years, Dr. Ford was noted as a leader in the National Baptist Convention, unincorporated. He had once been sent to Rome, Italy, for Bible instruction.

Born in Owensboro, Ky., Dr. Ford attended Fisk university and, Beloit college in addition to the University of Chicago. He was active until shortly before his death, the result of a stroke.

Surviving relatives include his widow, Mrs. Elizabeth Ford; a sister, Mrs. Lola Ford Edwards, of St. Paul, Minn.; two brothers, Virtell and Milton Ford of Chicago, as well as a number of nieces and nephews.

