

Careers Across Color Lines: American Women Missionaries and Race Relations,
1870-1920

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ABSTRACT

KIMBERLY DEJOIE HILL: *Careers Across Color Lines: American Women Missionaries and Race Relations, 1870-1920*
(under the direction of W. Fitzhugh Brundage)

This dissertation traces the careers of three American female missionaries as they interacted with people of different races and nationalities at home and abroad between 1870 and 1920. Each of these women confronted or defied stereotypes to become a spiritual leader. The missionaries modeled various ways that American norms of cultural superiority and racial prejudice played out in a global context during the Jim Crow era. Martha Crawford convinced Southern Baptist leaders that Chinese Christian women were helpless without her, but she grew less reliant on American values near the end of her career. Methodist evangelist Amanda Smith preached a message of spiritual transformation that included criticism of racial prejudice, and she acted out her message by working among white Americans. Finally, Maria Fearing's career within a racially integrated Presbyterian mission in Congo brought her leadership opportunities that her denomination denied to black people in the United States. Each woman's experience provided a glimpse of how leaders in the largest American Protestant denominations understood interracial relationships as part of their quest to spread Christianity throughout the world.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AME</i>	<i>African Methodist Episcopal Church</i> Founded in 1816; Amanda Berry Smith retained membership in this denomination.
<i>ME</i>	<i>Methodist Episcopal Church/Northern Methodists</i> Founded in 1780; Amanda Smith preached in America and England with members of this denomination.
<i>PCUS</i>	<i>Presbyterian Church in the United States/ Southern Presbyterians</i> Founded in 1861; Maria Fearing worked for the PCUS in Congo.
<i>SBC</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Convention</i> Founded in 1845; Martha Foster Crawford worked for the SBC in China.

Introduction

In 1947, an editorial in a Hawaiian newspaper criticized a group of Southern Baptist short-term missionaries visiting the territory. The writer wondered if the missionaries planned to introduce “undemocratic prejudices” during their stay. He could not be sure of their motives, but, as a representative of all Hawaiians, the writer “reserve[d] the right to question the appropriateness of missionaries coming from a bi-racial, segregation-hamstrung, caste culture to bring the light of truth to us.”¹ In his opinion, if Christian religion came to Hawaii laden with signs of racial prejudice, then the religion was not worth having.

American Christian missionaries traveled to help other groups of people find spiritual salvation, but sometimes their message of freedom contained the legacy of bondage. Missionaries contended with the consequences of American slavery, specifically racial prejudice and segregation. People who dedicated their careers to establishing cross-cultural relationships could not avoid racial issues.

Women missionaries in the late nineteenth century faced an extra challenge because of the type of domestic ministry they performed.² American women

¹ Foy Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 3-4.

² For analysis of women’s mission work, see: Rhonda Anne Semple, *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission* (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2003); Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: the Search For Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996); David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 2003); Susan Hill Lindley, “*You Have Stept Out of Your Place:*” *A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville:

missionaries tried to teach through personal connections; they wanted to take the message of Christ into other people's homes or other non-threatening venues. These women needed to integrate themselves into communities in China and Africa so that they could introduce their views on personal topics like housekeeping, education, and spiritual transformation. The missionaries needed to relate to people who had probably never interacted with someone of their racial background before. Women missionaries could not inspire their potential converts to seek personal change if those people assumed that the missionaries brought a biased and harmful message. Meanwhile, these American women worked within Protestant denominations that relied on racial segregation as a method of church organization.

This study examines the ways that three American women missionaries and the denominations that sponsored them dealt with racial prejudice and segregation during Reconstruction and its aftermath. These missionaries were affiliated with some of the largest, most influential Protestant denominations of the late nineteenth century. Two of these women were African Americans who chose to minister within mostly white Christian organizations. Maria Fearing (1838-1936) of the Southern Presbyterian

Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); Leslie A. Flemming, ed., *Women's Work for Women* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1989); Jane Hunter, *Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Patricia S. Hill, *The World Their Household* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985); Lydia Huffman Hoyle, "Nineteenth-Century Single Women and Motivation for Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 2 (1996): 58-65; Barbara Welter, "She Hath Done What She Could," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (Winter 1978): 624-38; Sylvia M. Jacobs, "Give a Thought to Africa: Black Women Missionaries in Southern Africa," in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History"*, ed. by Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1995), 103-123; Sylvia Jacobs, "Three Afro-American Women: Missionaries in Africa, 1882-1904," in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

Church raised her own support to rescue child slaves while serving in a racially integrated mission station in the Belgian Congo.³ Amanda Berry Smith (1838-1915) traveled as an evangelist to white Methodist camp meetings in the northern United States before working as an independent missionary in the United Kingdom and other countries.⁴ Martha Foster Crawford (1833-1909) modeled white women's mission work within the Southern Baptist Convention by supervising Chinese Christian women.⁵

These character studies provide a glimpse into the lives of three women who pioneered Protestant female mission work in the late nineteenth century. Though these women helped train some of the most well-known female leaders of their time, their

³ For studies of Maria Fearing, see: Sylvia Jacobs, "Their Special Mission:" Afro-American Women as Missionaries to the Congo, 1894-1937," in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 155-176; Althea Brown Edmiston, "Maria Fearing: A Mother to African Girls," in *Glorious Living: Informal Sketches of Seven Women Missionaries of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.*, ed. Hallie Paxson Winsborough. (Atlanta, Ga.: Committee on Women's Work, Presbyterian Church, U.S., 1937); Patricia Sammon, *Maria Fearing: A Woman Whose Dream Crossed an Ocean* (Huntsville: Writers Consortium Books, 1989).

⁴ For studies of Amanda Smith, see: Adrienne Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith: From Washerwoman to Evangelist* (Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, 1998); Kelly Willis Mendiola, "The Hand of a Woman: Four Holiness-Pentecostal Evangelists and American Culture, 1840-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2002); Elizabeth Elkin Grammer, *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Richard J. Douglass-Chin, *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: The Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Evangelists* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001); William L. Andrews, ed., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Jualynne Dodson, introduction to *An Autobiography*, by Amanda Berry Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Jualynne Dodson, "Nineteenth-Century A.M.E. Preaching Women: Cutting Edge of Women's Inclusion in Church Polity" in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, vol. 1, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981); Sylvia Jacobs, "Three Afro-American Women: Missionaries in Africa, 1882-1904," in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, vol. 2, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981). Jacobs, "Three Afro-American Women: Missionaries in Africa, 1882-1904."

⁵ For studies of Martha Crawford, see: Carol Ann Vaughn, "Missionary Returns and Cultural Conversions in Alabama and Shandong: The Latter Years of Madam Gao," in *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Carol Ann Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men: a Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Journey from Alabama to Shandong, 1930-1909" (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1998); Wayne Flynt and Gerald Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Irwin T. Hyatt, Jr., *Our Ordered Lives Confess* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

lives received relatively little specific scholarly attention.⁶ This is the first time that Maria Fearing has been featured as the main subject in a chapter-length scholarly study. By comparing these women's mission careers, this study describes the religious and social culture that praised interracial mission work while condemning interracial cooperation in other venues. In the process, readers get to know three women who persevered against many obstacles to receive recognition in their own lifetimes.

American historians often address the intersections between racial prejudice and Christianity in terms of the ways church leaders validated the status quo. In terms of foreign missions, the earliest scholarly studies generally argued that American missionaries assisted the quest for global empires by acting as frontrunners in the Western campaign to devalue and subjugate native cultures outside of America and Europe.⁷ These histories focused on male missionaries, highlighting their disregard for traditions in other countries and their links to Western diplomats and businessmen. In a domestic context, religious historians focused on the ways particular American denominations endorsed or ignored racial prejudice as part of their overall response to social issues. The largest evangelical Protestant denominations -- Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian -- inspired historical volumes that chronicle the statements church

⁶ There is one published scholarly biography of Amanda Berry Smith and one unpublished dissertation on the life of Martha Foster Crawford. Most other scholarly work on Martha Crawford focuses on her husband or the work she did with her husband. Amanda Smith is featured within historical studies of African American missionaries and African American female ministers. Likewise, information about Maria Fearing appears in histories of African American missionaries or the Southern Presbyterian mission movement, but the only lengthy accounts of her life are a children's book of Alabama women's history and a book chapter by a younger fellow missionary.

⁷ For example, see Paul A. Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).; Kenneth J. King, "Africa and the Southern States of the U.S.A.: Notes on J.H. Oldham and American Negro Education for Africans," *Journal of African History* 10, no. 4 (1969): 659-677; Lysle E. Meyer, "T.J Bowen and Central Africa: A Nineteenth Century Missionary Delusion," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 2 (1982): 247-260; R. Pierce Beaver, *Church, State, and the American Indians; Two and a Half Centuries of Partnership in Missions Between Protestant Churches and Government* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House: 1966).

leaders made about race relations from the nineteenth century up to the mid-twentieth century.⁸ These denominational histories rely on convention records and church journals to explain why evangelical pastors promoted the rights of slaveholders, church segregation, white superiority, and related issues.

This project applies a multicultural perspective to racial issues in American religious history and incorporates the voices of women involved in the Protestant mission movement. Nearly all of the previous research on how American Christians dealt with race in the nineteenth century analyzes interactions between whites and blacks exclusively. This model can work for tracing how the church responded to slavery and emancipation in the United States, but it bypasses many interracial relationships that also influenced Christians' views on the black-white color line.

Critical race theory teaches that black-white historical perspectives "conceal the checkerboard of racial progress and retrenchment," and this argument fits missions history well.⁹ The major evangelical denominations made occasional pronouncements

⁸ For a general study of southern churches and race relations, see H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But...Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1972). For Southern Baptists, see John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: a History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972); Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967); Foy Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); John W. Storey, "The Negro in Southern Baptist Thought, 1865-1900" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1968); E. Luther Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgment of History*, rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002). For Southern Presbyterians, see Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro; a History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966); E. Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973).; Joel L. Alvis, Jr., *Religion and Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946-1983* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994). For the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church, see Katherine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches* (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1991); Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as it Developed Among Blacks in America* (Garden City, New York: Anchor-Press/Doubleday, 1976); Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Ralph E. Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1956).

⁹ Richard and Jean Stephanic Delgado, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 71.

claiming interest in the welfare of black Americans, but the daily work of deciding how people of different races should work together, live together, and share authority happened between inside mission stations in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. Church pastors' published declarations of friendship for their black parishioners reveal less about race relations than the statements of white and black missionary women who spent years trying to reform African and Chinese converts to middle-class American standards. Missionaries also vocalized their comparisons of multiple racial groups more often than most other Americans in the late nineteenth century. Their observations help us understand times when Americans changed their racial views by comparing one non-white race with another.¹⁰ For example, white political and religious leaders in the United States compared Chinese immigration to African slavery during debates over the Chinese Exclusion Act.

The three women featured in this project incorporated American racial views into the ways they discussed their mission work. These women also experienced the effects of racial prejudice personally. For instance, two became interested in missions while growing up in Alabama before emancipation. Maria Fearing, a former slave, eventually used her missionary status to criticize African slavery with the support of southern white leaders. Martha Crawford, on the other hand, modeled a personal transformation from treating her Chinese neighbors as racial inferiors toward living with them as personal friends. Amanda Smith's career was a source of tension between African Methodists who cherished black solidarity and white Northern Methodists who believed black

¹⁰ Luther W. Spoehr, "Sambo and the Heathen Chinese: Californians' Racial Stereotypes in the Late 1870s," in *Race and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Ages of Territorial and Market Expansion*, ed. Michael L. Krenn (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 149-150.

organizations were inadequate. All of these women established successful ministry careers by living, eating, working, traveling, and worshipping with people of other races when such things were either forbidden or shunned in their home states. Their careers, though defined by Christian goals, also depended the racial views of the men who led their churches, the women and men who financially supported these women, and the fellow missionaries who helped decide what work they must do on the mission field.

As I examine each woman's career, I ask why she chose to work among people of a different race. For answers, I analyze how she explained her work in her own journals, letters, articles, or autobiography. I especially rely on the journals, letters, and published work left by Martha Crawford and Amanda Smith, partly because they knew their ministries defied many of the usual expectations for Baptist or Methodist women. Through these sources, we can also see how each woman perceived the people she considered her coworkers or potential converts. A missionary's value judgments about people in another country sprang from her own background and religious affiliation.¹¹ So in the course of telling the story of Maria Fearing's ministry, I will also explain why the Southern Presbyterian Church started sending black missionaries to the Belgian Congo and eventually supported their protest against the racist violence inflicted by King Leopold of Belgium. Likewise, I will mention how white Southern Baptists interacted with black and Chinese Christians within the United States while describing how Martha Crawford conducted her ministry in China. And Amanda Smith's

¹¹ Susan Thorne and Peggy Pascoe use a similar cultural history approach in their studies of female missionaries in England and the United States respectively. Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*.

commitment to preaching among white audiences came in part from the ways African Methodist churches protested racism. In the course of learning about these three women, we also learn how racial stereotypes influenced male church leaders and reinforced Victorian morality. In general, the examples in this study show ways that American Protestants with clearly stated high expectations for their intercultural relationships embraced some aspects of racial prejudice while rejecting others.

The Woman's 'Civilizing' Missionary Impulse

Most of the examples contained in this study are related to four denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal Church [AME], the Methodist Episcopal Church [Northern Methodist], the Southern Baptist Convention [SBC], and the Presbyterian Church in the United States [PCUS]. These denominations can also be referred to as "evangelical" since each one emphasized every person's need for a personal commitment to Christian faith. The essence of evangelism was informing people of their need to commit to a lifestyle modeled after Jesus Christ. The missions movement provided a means of taking the Christian message overseas. The American version of the "missionary impulse" began in 1812, when the Congregational Church sent two male ministers and their wives to teach Christianity in Hawaii.¹² The first team of American missionaries was charged with establishing churches and providing an example of Christian belief and lifestyle.¹³ Other Protestant denominations followed this model as they sent out missionaries to various parts of the United States and the world

¹² I am quoting the phrase "missionary impulse" as used in Grant Wacker, "The Waning of the Missionary Impulse: The Case of Pearl Buck," in *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History*, eds. Daniel Bays and Grant Wacker (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

¹³ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 2-3.

throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁴ In the mid-nineteenth century, the typical missionary was a white male who lived among a population of people very different from himself and start a community of Christians there. He received his financial support from a network of churches and from friends and family members based on regular letters that described his progress. Churches generally preferred to support married men because their wives could offer emotional support and possibly communicate with non-Christian women who would otherwise remain out of the missionaries' reach. But, until the latter half of the nineteenth century, American church organizations rarely recognized women as full-fledged missionaries. Their assistance on the mission field was interpreted as part of marital duty.¹⁵

This project follows the style of recent missions research that places more emphasis on relationships between missionaries and the people in their adopted nation than on relationships between missionaries and government authorities. It explains what nineteenth century missionaries meant by their intentions to civilize the people they often called "heathen" based on female missionaries' opinions about what the people in their adopted communities needed. This project also delves into the ways a missionary's lifestyle in the United States could compel her to believe she would effectively spread Christianity and civilization abroad.

American women missionaries relied on the idea of "civilizing" a foreign nation as a means to justify their work. During the years from 1870 to 1920, it was especially common for American missionaries to describe themselves taking "Christianity and

¹⁴ America was considered as a mission field by the Catholic Church for most of its existence, so American Catholic missionaries did not go overseas until 1918. Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 318.

¹⁵ Hoyle, "Nineteenth-Century Single Women and Motivation for Mission," 58-65.

civilization" overseas.¹⁶ "Civilization" was a loaded term with unique meanings for different groups. Gail Bederman describes the word as part of a discourse that alternatively "legitimize[d] conservation and change, male dominance and militant feminism, white racism and African American resistance."¹⁷ White males in America in the 1870s and 1880s commonly considered themselves civilized because of their patriarchal status, their property, their Victorian habits, or their professional education.

Likewise, white and black American women proved their civility by emphasizing their ability to teach morality and domestic skills to those with a less Victorian upbringing.¹⁸ The word featured in dichotomies like "civilization" versus "savagery."¹⁹ Mission work often embodied this artificial dichotomy through letters and photographs that contrasted Christian workers with the "heathen" they encountered in mission fields. To introduce people overseas through sources that emphasized their supposed lack of moral, physical, and economic attributes confirmed suspicions that America had a monopoly on civilized living.

Different groups of missionaries brought their own unique skills to the task of civilizing other countries. This project focuses on the skills women missionaries typically claimed as their own: teaching children, training other women to live as Christians, and modeling domestic skills. This mission approach was called "woman's work for woman."

¹⁶ For example, a missions supporter named Jennie Fowler Willing wrote in the Congregationalist journal *The Heathen Woman's Friend* that "When we look at the domestic, civil, and religious systems of Pagandom, we sicken at their rottenness. We feel greatly moved to give them the blessings of Christian civilization." Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 133.

¹⁷ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 23.

¹⁸ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 70.

¹⁹ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 25.

Essentially, the largest American Protestant denominations would not hire single women as official missionaries until late in the nineteenth century. Until then, missionaries' wives could not claim to be ministers, but they could claim to serve the gender-specific needs of women and girls in other countries. American women in various churches responded by starting the first female nationwide organizations and publications, all of which centered on the image of a foreign, non-Christian woman trapped in ignorance. "Woman's work" encompassed an unofficial ministry by emphasizing a mix of spiritual and domestic education. The movement flourished through the pens and financial donations of Protestant women in the 1870s.²⁰ Presbyterian and Congregational women started mission societies to hire single women who could teach Christianity overseas, and Methodist and Baptist women followed suit. These groups produced magazines like *The Heathen Woman's Friend* and *The Missionary Helper* stocked with reports of issues facing women overseas, missionaries' efforts, and poems on the plight of their unsaved foreign 'sisters.'

Martha Foster Crawford set an early example of "woman's work" from a Southern Baptist perspective. Her long-term interest in travel and ministry did not matter to the Church so much as her decision to marry an acquaintance who had applied to the Baptist China mission. Marriage qualified her to act as T.P. Crawford's counterpart among married Chinese women, visiting them in their homes and teaching classes to local girls. Like other missionary wives, she also considered her home as a potential ministry tool, so she maintained it in a way meant to display her religious and cultural values. A clean, orderly home was of utmost symbolic importance to American

²⁰ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 128-130.

missionaries, especially those serving in the early nineteenth century, because it denoted their Victorian morality.²¹ Missionaries periodically criticized the homes of non-Christians overseas as dirty and unstructured while putting emphasis on their ability to maintain an American lifestyle overseas.²² For instance, Martha Crawford kept American furnishings in her house, including a portrait of Jefferson Davis, and wore traditional hoop skirts throughout her first years of ministry in China.²³ Crawford's appearance and housekeeping helped accomplish her goals as a missionary's wife.

Racism and the Foreign Missionary Impulse

The goal of taking Christian "civilization" overseas guided the work that most women missionaries chose to do. It also masked the ways some foreign missionaries drew on racist practices they observed at home as a model for how to treat the residents of their adopted nations. The most appropriate definition for "racism" in this sense comes from H. Shelton Smith's study of Southern Protestant leaders' views about black people from 1780 to 1910, *In His Image, But . . .* Smith argued that racism is any rebuttal of the common Christian belief that all people are made in the image of God.²⁴ Most of the Protestant leaders in Smith's study perverted the "imago Dei" doctrine by believing in some type of racial hierarchy. In the most extreme cases, proponents of racial hierarchies argued that God created the races separately and for distinct purposes.²⁵ By

²¹ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 66-68.

²² Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 135-136.

²³ Carol Ann Vaughn, "Missionary Returns," 244, 247.

²⁴ H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), viii.

²⁵ Smith, *In His Image, But*, 156-160.

this theory, black and white Americans could belong to different species and thus be biologically incapable of coexistence on an equal basis. Most clergy, especially evangelical clergy in the southern states, rejected this view because it implied some people were less susceptible to Christian salvation than others.

None of the missionaries in this study accepted claims that people could be subhuman or incapable of salvation. The act of supporting missions or becoming a missionary implied that one believed all races were equally worthy of a chance to embrace Christianity. The racism featured in this project showed in the ways American Christian ministers decided how people of other races and nationalities became capable of claiming to be Christians. In the course of analyzing the importance of racial diversity and racial prejudice to mission work between the 1870s and 1930, it will be helpful to trace the ways people defined these terms in the context of the Jim Crow era.

In the 1870s and 1880s, "race" was generally used to describe physical differences between groups of people as shown through biological features: skin, hair, or bone structure. It also denoted broad national groupings that changed over time.²⁶ There are several histories of how the racial identities of certain groups changed in different political and social contexts.²⁷ The changing categories within the United

²⁶ Spoehr, "Sambo and the Heathen Chinese," 151. Spoehr called the two major types of racial thought "racial naturalism" and "racial nationalism."

²⁷ For example, see: David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Spoehr, "Sambo and the Heathen Chinese;" Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848-82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

States census also provide references to shifting racial identities, even among those generally considered “white.”²⁸

Knowing the nationalist implications of race in the late nineteenth century helps us understand the perspective of black American missionaries who felt responsible for ministering to Africans. The sympathy black Americans claimed as they tried to “uplift the race” in Africa derived not just from general similarities in skin color but also from a conviction that black people throughout the world were of the same racial background.²⁹ Many white Americans shared that conviction and used it to justify supporting black missionaries to Africa even when they assumed blacks were unfit to serve elsewhere.³⁰

American foreign missions necessarily involved discussion about race relations. Most missionaries from the United States were whites of European ancestry, and most went to countries composed of people with a darker skin tone and different language. Strategies of successful mission work included Christian theology as well as shifting ideas of how people of different racial and national backgrounds should live and work together. Mission strategies also included occasional criticism of existing relationships between people of different races. The term “racism” did not show up often in mission records between 1870 and 1930, especially those of Baptists, Methodists, and

²⁸ Nell Irvin Painter, “Was Marie White? The Trajectory of a Question in the United States,” *Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 1 (Feb. 2008): 28-30.

²⁹ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 72; Gayraud S. Wilmore, “Black Americans in Mission: Setting the Record Straight,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10 (July 1986): 99; C.J. Powell, “The Mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the Darker Races of the World,” *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939*, Stephen W. Angell and Anthony B. Pinn, ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 202-203.

³⁰ Susan Wilds McArver, “‘The Salvation of Souls’ and the ‘Salvation of the Republic of Liberia:’ Denominational Conflict and Racial Diversity in Antebellum Presbyterian Foreign Missions,” in *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 136; Smith, *In His Image, But...Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910*, 269-270.

Presbyterians. “Racism” was rarely used to describe personal views or actions until after the 1930s, mostly in response to the German Nazis.³¹ But “color prejudice,” abuse, and lack of empathy concerned Christian mission leaders. In general, American missionaries opposed policies that could place barriers between foreign people and the social and educational opportunities that may lead to Christian conversion.

The Southern Presbyterian missionaries provided an example of this principle when they started an international campaign against King Leopold’s violent governance in the Belgian Congo. The team of white and black missionaries, most from Alabama, protested the perpetuation of debt slavery and murder partly out of concern for the lives of their Congolese neighbors but explicitly because the abuse was driving away entire villages of potential converts. In cases like these, missionaries criticized prejudice as a hazard to spiritual matters. This study chronicles ways that missionaries in China, West Africa, and the United States identified prejudice, tried to ameliorate it, and sometimes perpetuated it.

However, many of the events and attitudes that we would currently describe as racist or prejudiced did not trigger the missionaries’ spiritual radar. There were several instances when missionaries and their sponsoring churches overlooked race prejudice that they never chose to acknowledge. Most of the white Southern Presbyterian missionaries who protested King Leopold’s Congo government also requested that no additional black missionaries come to their station. Likewise, several of Amanda Smith’s white Methodist supporters welcomed her to all-white gatherings while keeping her out of certain events where they thought other white attendees would find a black woman’s

³¹ Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 2003).

presence offensive. There were also many times that white Methodists overlooked Smith's encounters with segregated churches. Black ministers were sometimes considered temporary supports or occasional colleagues, but they rarely received recognition as necessary team members while working within white denominations.

Though Americans' opinions about the meaning of racial prejudice differed, black American missionaries often expected to find a more equitable style of race relations in the mission field. As early as 1843, James Priest told his white fellow missionaries in Liberia that:

in America we do not look for equality, from Christians or anybody else; but here it would have a bad effect on the natives, & injure a colored man[']s influence, should there be any made.³²

Priests' white co-workers accused him of "unreasonable arrogance" for wanting equal treatment as a missionary, but another black missionary in Liberia also protested that white missionaries who enforced segregation in mission stations brought "the children of a brother missionary down to the degradation [sic] of the heathen. . ."³³ Black missionaries saw segregation as a sign of disrespect, and they continued to seek more respect from other missionaries and church members as a witness to their potential converts.

Segregation within American Protestant denominations was the norm throughout the United States in the late nineteenth century. All of the major denominations split into white and black groups by 1900. Most white Southern Baptists and white Southern Presbyterians espoused what historian H. Shelton Smith called a "divinely implanted

³² McArver, "'The Salvation of Souls' and the 'Salvation of the Republic of Liberia,'" 147.

³³ McArver, "'The Salvation of Souls' and the 'Salvation of the Republic of Liberia,'" 134. The missionary mentioned was W. Thomas Wilson.

instinct" for racial separatism.³⁴ From their perspectives, the exodus of black Christians to all-black churches during Reconstruction started as a natural impulse.

Maintaining a structure of segregated congregations was more than a pragmatic decision for these denominations; it was a means to avoid sinning against the divine plan for humanity.³⁵ A Southern Methodist newspaper editor praised his segregated denomination by writing that, "it pays due respect to those mysterious antipathies which seem to be the indications of Heaven with regard to the two races."³⁶ White church leaders in these segregated southern denominations enforced rules to keep the races apart whenever natural "antipathies" did not. For instance, the Virginia Baptist Association refused to accept a church with black and Indian members for fear of promoting "amalgamation" between Americans of all groups. Suspected sexual "amalgamation" was a common motive for lynch mobs, so it is likely the word held similar emotional power when used in the context of integrated churches or schools. The Virginia Baptists felt obligated to maintain racial boundaries because, in their words, "Who can contemplate the mongrelization of our noble Anglo-Saxon race without emotions of profoundest horror?"³⁷

The Southern Presbyterians did not officially segregate their denomination until 1898 because they believed black church members needed to learn from white ministers. Still, neither of these southern denominations questioned assumptions that white and black Christians should not interact on equal standing. The few venues where

³⁴ Smith, *In His Image, But*, 279-280.

³⁵ Smith, *In His Image, But*, 265.

³⁶ Smith, *In His Image, But*, 232.

³⁷ Smith, *In His Image, But*, 229.

Southern Baptists and Presbyterians of different races interacted were structured so that white leaders remained in control of the situation. A similar management principle applied to the American Presbyterian Congo Mission where white male ministers replaced William Sheppard as the administrator. The words that the Rev. John Girardeau, spokesman for the P.C.U.S. Committee on Colored Evangelization, wrote in 1867 typified race relations in his denomination from Reconstruction into the twentieth century. White Southern Presbyterians treated their black counterparts as if "[w]e may give them [black church members] what rights we think they can bear."³⁸

The African Methodist Episcopal Church provided a venue where black Americans could worship God without accepting a patriarchal system in a white-led denomination. The A.M.E. Church considered its racial separatism as a sign of both "natural instinct" and "race pride." The Rev. C.J. Powell declared in the *A.M.E. Church Review*, "The interests of the darker races of the world and the African Methodist Episcopal Church demand our deepest concern, our most extended thought and our highest allegiance." Promoting racial integration in the denomination would only plunge its members "in a vague universalism" without the guidance of "definite religious endeavors along lines marked out by approved racial organizations and alliances."³⁹ Bishop Levi Coppin, a missionary to South Africa, hoped that African Methodists would let "[t]he natural love of race" inspire more interest in African missions. African

³⁸ Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro; a History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 148.

³⁹ Powell, "The Mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the Darker Races of the World," 205-206.

Methodists' desire to work on behalf of other black people provided motivation for them to start "uplifting the world."⁴⁰

Black and white members of the Methodist Episcopal Church criticized racial separatism in the A.M.E. Church, though their own denomination considered racially separate churches an expedient policy in the late nineteenth century. Amanda Smith's Methodist biographer argued that "[Smith's] race pride was flattered" among African Methodists, but the all-black church was detrimental for her spiritual life.⁴¹ Black Methodists who joined the M.E. Church preferred what one black clergyman called "a communion that was seriously seeking to build a brotherhood among all men."⁴² They were no less interested than African Methodists in meeting the social and religious needs of other black Americans, and they knew that racially segregated churches and district conferences were the norm in the Methodist Episcopal Church by the 1870s. Northern Methodists simply put more symbolic value in holding occasional racially integrated worship services. What Southern Baptists considered "amalgamation," Northern Methodists considered a sign of spiritual blessing.

Presbyterian segregationist Robert Lewis Dabney advised people to avoid "ecclesiastical amalgamation" as a possible source of spiritual corruption.⁴³ This term

⁴⁰ Levi Coppin, "The Negro's Part in the Redemption of Africa," *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939*, eds. Stephen W. Angell and Anthony B. Pinn (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 219.

⁴¹ Marshall W. Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith, The Famous Negro Missionary Evangelist* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1887), 21.

⁴² Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as it Developed Among Blacks in America* (Garden City, New York: Anchor-Press/Doubleday, 1976), 270-271. Quote from a 1967 article written by Bishop Willis J. King, a black bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

⁴³ Smith, *In His Image, But*, 266.

was meant to discourage integration within churches, but it overlooked the ways that people of different races were already interacting on a regular basis through church activities throughout the Jim Crow era. The following chapters describe specific ways that black and white Americans traversed the color line through Protestant mission work. Through that work, their beliefs about race relations and prejudice changed, sometimes toward an interest in diversity but often in defense of further segregation.

Racial Uplift in Women's Mission Work

The ways that black American women felt duty-bound to help others deeply informed how they described racial issues between 1870 and 1920. They hoped to be useful in serving God through the practical concerns of female mission work, but they also believed their mission work could serve pressing needs in the black community. Some male and female black leaders called their work 'racial uplift' for the hope that they could alleviate the restrictions facing blacks in the United States.⁴⁴ Outside of churches, most employers barred black men and women from management and higher-level positions. The available jobs for women tended to involve manual labor as live-in domestic servants, laundry workers, or cooks. Those with the means to earn an education found that only graduate programs at all-black universities would consider them. When black female ministers did travel abroad or gain success, it seemed miraculous because so many obstacles made their level of achievement unlikely.

Two of the women in this study -- Amanda Smith and Maria Fearing -- worked for decades as domestic laborers before seeking donations to travel as missionaries. Doing

⁴⁴ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996)., 2; Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xix.

so required sacrificing their homes, steady income, and time with their families. Other studies of Black female ministers and missionaries detail the difficulties these women had fulfilling a spiritual calling in the midst of poverty and racial segregation. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's study of black Baptist clubwomen notes how they used church activism to "counter social and political forces arrayed against them."⁴⁵ In her study of black professional women in the 1880s and 1890s, Stephanie J. Shaw described how the training women received at colleges like Spelman inspired them "to expect more equitable treatment for their communities and responsible mainstream positions for themselves." Teachers trained them in the most advanced techniques of childcare, health, and home economics, hoping that students would make the most of the limited options available under Jim Crow laws.⁴⁶ Black female ministers were like these professional women in that they worked for an education and a sense of personal calling with few realistic signs that they would achieve their goals. Yet these women believed that the risk was justified for the sake of serving other black people in the United States and abroad.⁴⁷

The uplift impulse drew from the same philanthropic movement that motivated black professional women and those black leaders considered part of the "talented tenth." These individuals sought exceptional opportunities and training so that they

⁴⁵ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 56.

⁴⁶ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 55, 103.

⁴⁷ Sylvia M. Jacobs, "Give a Thought to Africa: Black Women Missionaries in Southern Africa," in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History"* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1995), 103-123; Sylvia Jacobs, "'Their Special Mission': Afro-American Women as Missionaries to the Congo, 1894-1937," *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 155-176.

could help poorer black Americans achieve similar success. They worked through women's clubs, institutes and universities, advocacy groups, and literature. W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term "talented tenth" on the premise that there would always be a minority of the black American population that attained recognition among white Americans and bore responsibility for protesting racism and segregation. Historian Kevin Gaines expanded Du Bois's argument by writing that the "talented tenth" could only maintain their access to white social circles by keeping up appearances that they were drastically different than the poor, less educated masses they claimed to represent. So these leaders pursued elite lifestyles and activities that sometimes outpaced their incomes, all the while criticizing most black Americans for living inappropriately.⁴⁸

The black female missionaries in this study were on the fringes of these theories about black leaders in the Jim Crow era. Though missionaries held one of the few positions that was widely respected regardless of race, they adopted lives of intentional deprivation – living without regular access to communications, plumbing, or other modern amenities. They also earned little money, relying on private donations for most if not all of their expenses. Before becoming professional missionaries, Amanda Smith and Maria Fearing had little in common with the elite. Neither one earned a college degree or even advanced past grade school. Both provided live-in domestic work for white families, though that occupation was shunned by upper-class women who considered it similar to slave labor. But these women had the advantage of relatively high social status compared to other former housekeepers. Fearing saved enough

⁴⁸ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 3-4.

money as a teacher to buy a home and sell it for transportation to Congo, and Smith wrote many articles in Methodist newspapers before publishing her autobiography.

The main question for these women is how the status of teaching and mission work influenced their relationships with fellow black church members, coworkers, and potential converts on the mission field. How did Smith and Fearing relate their work among white Americans and West Africans to advocacy for black people in the United States? Did observers in the United States consider them good examples for younger black Americans, or did each woman's financial difficulties tarnish her image? These perceptions determined whether black missionaries expanded the mission of racial uplift.

Results of Mission Work: Conversion and Heathenism

Racial uplift and prejudice mattered to missionaries for the way these issues influenced other people's conversion. Missionaries found their most meaningful, and sometimes frustrating, work when they inspired someone to accept Christianity. How could a missionary tell when someone in her adopted community converted? The person's physical appearance would not change instantly, nor would her lifestyle. So the answer to defining a genuine Christian conversion varied by the standards of different denominations and missionaries. Of the four church groups represented here, the American Methodists were most likely to interpret conversion as a quick process traceable to a specific time. The evidence would come from people's testimonies describing their salvation, and it would also involve a commitment to further changes as they integrated into church activities.⁴⁹ The Baptist and Presbyterian missionaries more often emphasized adherence to church activities and doctrine as a sign of Christian

⁴⁹ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 55-58.

commitment. The status of someone's spirit was determined by whether they stopped working on Sundays, memorized the core beliefs of the church, and completed a period of observation. In the mission field, concepts of conversion ranged from a personal experience to a shared experience more like an internship. The end result would be that people who knew little about Christianity would become passionate about sharing the faith in their native countries.

The examples in this study center on the second model of conversion: the emphasis on commitment and lifestyle transformation. These three women missionaries and their colleagues put a lot of effort into creating a new environment and new activities for the people they encountered in China, Congo, America, and England. The feminine dimension of housekeeping and childcare provided the necessary backdrop to the spiritual instruction provided in mission churches by male pastors. And most importantly, the tasks of housekeeping and childcare required discipline; schedules had to be regimented, meals had to be planned, and many new habits had to be formed before a potential convert could be judged to keep "a Christian home."

Constant emphasis on change implied that the traditional lifestyles of West African and Chinese women could not meet the expectations of Christian missionaries. This was a point many missionaries dwelled on in their reports and letters home. The term "heathenism" drifted among the pages of missionary records as a common descriptor for people overseas. Generically, explorers and religious leaders had used the term since the fifteenth century to describe cultures that did not adhere to Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. But "heathenism" also suggested inferiority and lack of civilization. Heathen people did not worship the God of Christianity, so Western

Christians assumed that heathen had an inadequate sense of morality. Heathen people did not establish the same kinds of homes, cities, or governments that existed in Europe or America, so their institutions seemed unfit by missionaries' standards. The "heathen" label usually coincided with some visible marker, which made it possible to consider an entire group as 'heathen' regardless of their individual beliefs. The groups labeled "heathen" tended to reside in Asia, western and southern Africa, parts of the western United States, and South America.

This correlation between appearance and spirituality posed a problem for long-term ministry. The religious beliefs of a "heathen" person could change, but some of her physical traits were permanent. So how would a converted "heathen" show evidence of the invisible change in her spiritual life? Which parts of her persona should change and which were unrelated to her religious life? When making decisions about the standards for converting "heathen" people groups, missionaries' preconceptions about non-Christians and about ethnic differences fed off one another. Martha Crawford once described "heathenism" as a set of negative characteristics passed down through blood to Chinese Christians. And, despite claims to common African ancestry, black missionaries kept themselves symbolically separate from 'heathen' residents of Congo. In China, class differences played a large role; missionaries tended to depict wealthy families as hindrances to the Christian faith because they maintained traditions like polygamy and foot binding. A similar dynamic played out in West Africa when missionaries sought access to the lowest and most downtrodden group in society: slave children. In these circumstances, race and poverty became de facto tools to help

missionaries decide which non-Christian people were more "heathen" than others and which groups would most likely convert.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter one provides a close look at race relations within the American denominations that Martha Crawford, Amanda Smith, and Maria Fearing joined. All of the denominations mentioned in this study had a 'home missions' program that sent aid across racial and cultural lines. This chapter explains how each denomination adopted a unique policy of racial separatism regarding black Americans between 1865 and 1920.

Chapter two details how Martha Crawford became one of the first Southern Baptist women recognized for her ministry overseas. In the 1870s, she traveled with local Chinese converts to teach Bible lessons to other women. To seem like an effective leader in the emerging field of female mission work, Crawford played on common racial stereotypes to make the Christian women of Shandong seem incapable of persisting in the faith without her guidance.

Chapter three introduces a black female minister who also remade herself as an unlikely leader. Amanda Berry Smith was born into slavery, but in the 1870s she toured New England and the United Kingdom as an evangelist at Methodist churches and camp meetings. Smith argued before white audiences that God could remove racial prejudice, and she asked observers to follow her example. Using Smith's autobiography as a guide to her speaking tours, this chapter analyzes why Smith addressed prejudice through her ministry and how white and black audiences reacted to her message.

Chapter four analyzes Maria Fearing's ministry with formerly enslaved girls in Congo from 1894 to 1915. The chapter frames Fearing's mission work as part of her

advancement in social status from slavery in Alabama to full-time mission work. After working her way through school to become a teacher and homeowner in Alabama, Fearing helped liberate slaves and teach Congolese girls in her mission home. Her white colleagues in the Southern Presbyterian Church marveled at Fearing's ministry, but for different reasons than her own. Southern Presbyterian leaders considered mission work to Africa an essential part of resolving American race relations. Despite Southern Presbyterians' temporary efforts to promote an integrated mission station and criticize discrimination against Congolese people, racial prejudice continued to influence the American Presbyterian Congo Mission.

The study concludes with an overview of these women's common motivations for choosing mission careers and how missions changed their lifestyles. Through each woman's ministry, we see how American missionaries used their cultural ideas to initiate interracial cooperation in another country. We also see how American Protestants negotiated their spiritual calling to establish a global, multiracial Christendom at a time when race restrictions within America attained greater social and religious significance.

Chapter 1

“Next to Nothing Has Been Done for the Colored People:” Domestic Mission Work and Racial Issues, 1865-1920

In September of 1872, a black Methodist preacher named Amanda Smith considered leaving the Midwest to attend a church conference in Knoxville, Tennessee. It should have been easy for someone in her position to make that decision; she had attended such conferences for the past three years and gained recognition as a popular, influential speaker. But the location of this conference invited a host of complications. Her white colleagues from the Northern Methodist denomination worried she might “not be treated properly” by white southerners or that the congregation would be offended by her involvement in the meetings. Meanwhile, Smith thought to herself: “You know the Kuklux are down there, and they might kill you.”¹

A range of racial fears affected Amanda Smith’s decision. First, she feared white terrorist groups known for targeting black Americans with unprovoked violent acts. She was not afraid to die for the sake of Christian martyrdom, but she did not want to “be butchered by wicked men for their own gratification, without any reference to [God’s] glory . . .”² The white ministers who cooperated with Amanda Smith looked at broader consequences, such as the chance that white Methodists in Tennessee would avoid

¹ Amanda Berry Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord’s Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith the Colored Evangelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 205-207.

² Smith, *An Autobiography*, 207.

their church services rather than listen to a black female speaker. The possibility of offending southern Methodists seemed like too great a risk.

The concerns of these Methodists offer a sign of just how entangled race relations among American Christians became during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era. By starting schools, missions, and relief agencies, Protestant denominations got involved in the lives of emancipated slaves. Meanwhile, these organizations also led outreach to non-Christian people throughout the United States and other countries. The two movements were sometimes sequestered in separate departments of church work – Home/Domestic Missions versus Foreign Missions – but they were always related. When white ministers argued that their faith compelled them to support freedmen's education in the South, their arguments also influenced education programs in Africa. Standards for how Christian converts in China could prepare for church leadership had bearing on the ways black Americans entered ministry. These similarities and other issues in American Protestant mission work help us identify race-related church policies and trace how those policies changed over time.

This chapter focuses on how four Protestant denominations reached out to black Americans in the midst of discriminatory laws, racial segregation, and racial violence between 1865 and 1920. Leaders of the African Methodist, Methodist Episcopal, Southern Baptist, and Southern Presbyterian Churches were alike in this time period in that they claimed a special responsibility to black Americans mixed with concern that more should be done. A white Methodist minister who despaired about his denomination's mission work during Reconstruction protested that “next to nothing has

been done for the colored people and . . . very little for the whites."³ His complaint was echoed by representatives of other denominations; it reflected the ministry strategies used at the time and the prevalent choice to work with racial groups separately.

Church ministry strategies are evident in leaders' statements in assembly reports, in publications, and from a range of missionaries' experiences in the United States and abroad. Each of these denominations applied a form of racial separatism in order to fulfill its missions goals. The pattern of segregated churches did not develop by a linear, intuitive process; it developed for specific reasons that changed over time. Controversy over the reasons for separatism fueled anxiety over missions to black Americans and provided motivation for overseas mission work, especially to Africa.

The goals of Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist missionaries often included racist assumptions in keeping with the prevailing assumptions of their society. There were, however, nuances in church policies about race because of the diversity of the American population. White missionaries espoused different ministry goals among Native Americans and European immigrants than they applied among black Americans. Black and white churches endorsed racial separatism at different times for reasons as varied as celebrating freedom or strengthening white leaders' authority. In general, racial differences came to represent physical markers of which people enjoyed the benefits of Christian civilization and which people seemed in need. But changes in how missionaries approached racial groups over time are sometimes lost in generalities.

For an example how racial controversies played out among American Christians, we can return to the story of Amanda Smith. Smith, the preacher who feared going to

³ Ralph E. Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1956), 44.

Knoxville, frequently attended Methodist Episcopal services throughout her career as an independent evangelist and missionary. She spent most of her life in and around New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, where the M.E. Church had a long history. The Methodist Episcopal Church started as a reform movement within the Church of England tradition in the eighteenth century. The denomination separated from the American Episcopal Church and formed officially in 1784. It attracted a racially diverse membership in the United States, especially because of its anti-slavery stance and missions to Native Americans in the 1820s and 1830s. Early Methodists encouraged black and Native American attendees at their churches and public gatherings.

Still, the diversity of the denomination varied widely by region. When the Methodist Episcopal Church split over the slavery issue in 1844, the membership of the northern churches remained mostly white. Only white male pastors were appointed as bishops or pastors in the Northern Methodist denomination, though some men on the other side of the color line, such as Richard Allen and William Apess, received recognition as deacons, preachers, and class leaders. The M.E. Church appointed more black ministers to help with its missions among former slaves during Reconstruction, but restrictions on nonwhite leadership in the denomination changed little until the 1930s.

Confusion over the status of black Methodist leaders fueled situations like the one Amanda Smith faced in 1872. Black ministers found acceptance on an informal basis within the M.E. Church but only until their activism clashed with white Methodists' priorities. Because Smith was a woman, she never gained eligibility for church office, nor could she become an official Methodist missionary. She stayed active based on her speaking skills and her tenuous link to a group of white ministers who supported her

work. In the case of the Tennessee church conference, Amanda Smith went despite her white colleagues' disapproval and experienced no unusual incidents. The white representatives of the northern and southern Methodist branches cooperated with no overt complaints over her presence.⁴ Still, Smith knew that her colleagues in the Northern Methodist Church rarely acknowledged the racial prejudice against her.

Amanda Smith and most other black Methodists retained church membership in a related denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This denomination started in 1816 as a refuge for black Methodists who felt overlooked and mistreated within Methodist churches. It was the first American denomination with all-black membership and all-black leadership. African Methodists showed pride in their forerunner status, especially A.M.E. missionary James Lynch, who declared that "the formation of the A.M.E. Church was the first attempt of the colored people in this country to vindicate the manhood of the race."⁵ In this context, vindication came from providing a Methodist organization where black men could become pastors and attain the highest offices. African Methodist leaders considered it a religious duty to also speak against slavery, racist violence, discriminatory laws, and other social pressures that inhibited black Americans. Social activism disadvantaged A.M.E. ministers when they tried to start churches in the southern states; the denomination and its publications were outlawed in most parts of the South after the 1830s slave revolts until the 1860s.

Leaders of the A.M.E. Church could relate to Amanda Smith's fear of the Ku Klux Klan because they faced violent retribution in their early history. Their churches were

⁴ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 207-211; National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, "Eighteenth National Camp Meeting: Knoxville, Tennessee," *The Advocate of Christian Holiness* 3, no. 11 (November 1873): 113.

⁵ Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 55.

burned, their members were threatened, and pastors sometimes had to flee for their lives. During Reconstruction, the African Methodist denomination provided the institutional framework to lessen the impact of violence. It provided funds to support ministers traveling to the southern states, worked with white Methodist churches to erect church buildings and schools, and sponsored black politicians who advocated social and economic reform. Still, all of these efforts were tempered by ongoing financial crises and problems with the dormant missions program. The A.M.E. Church also tended to isolate activists like Amanda Smith who remained faithful to the denomination yet did not restrict their work to the male-led A.M.E. church structure. Though Smith became the first African Methodist female missionary to Africa, she had to do it without official sanction or financial support. Controversies over female leadership continued to influence the A.M.E. Church well past the 1920s as it grew into one of the largest and most influential black organizations.

The Southern Baptist Convention also faced its share of controversies about women leaders and racial issues. The Southern Baptists came together in 1845 after northern Baptist leaders refused to recognize slaveholders as legitimate missionaries. By creating their own national convention, members of the Southern Baptist Convention could appoint and financially support missionaries without debating the morality of human bondage. Among the first missionaries to benefit from this pro-slavery policy was Martha Foster Crawford, who served in China between 1852 and 1909. Though her immediate family sold its slaves during her youth, her uncles and cousins owned over a hundred and fifty slaves on plantations in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama.⁶

⁶ Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, Slave Schedules, 1850*, microfilm, prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census

After emancipation, the S.B.C. favored a detached, paternalistic policy toward former slaves; Baptist leaders expressed concern about their spiritual welfare while doing little to change the status quo. A similar policy validated the long-standing ban on female leadership in the S.B.C. even though women like Martha Crawford had unofficially managed mission stations for decades by 1920.⁷ When it came to activism by white women or black Americans of either gender, Southern Baptists tended to allow individuals leeway if their actions had no potential to change discriminatory church rules. In Crawford's case, she lived so far away that her roles as a preacher, supervisor, and traveling evangelist were known by few people in the United States. Despite the letters and articles she wrote about her ministry, Martha Crawford received recognition solely as a missionary's wife. During Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, Southern Baptist churches treated black Americans as if they were also destined for a subordinate position by relegating them to separate churches under white mentors.

The S.B.C. transitioned to "all-white" membership status soon after the Civil War. Its designation as "white" was figurative because Southern Baptist missionaries continued to recruit new non-white members in China, South America, and other parts of the world. Still, the S.B.C. could be considered white because it treated black Baptists as an anomalous group after emancipation.

The same could be said of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. The denomination started in 1861 as a governing board for Presbyterians who supported the

(Washington, D.C., [196-]), microfilm reel 6; Carol Ann Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men: a Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Journey from Alabama to Shandong, 1930-1909" (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1998), 111-113.

⁷ David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003), 7-8, 13-18.

Confederacy and expected American slavery to continue. Many former slave owners composed the denomination's membership base, and they introduced slaves to the Presbyterian Church before emancipation. Most of the former slaves left the P.C.U.S. in the 1860s, including a young woman from Alabama named Maria Fearing. The denomination sponsored a separate organization for remaining black Presbyterians after 1898, long after almost all of the black members had moved on to other congregations. White Presbyterians responded to the segregation of their Church with shows of patronage mixed with enough apathy to make such efforts ineffective.

The exceptions to racial segregation within the P.C.U.S. between 1865 and 1920 often had more to do with black Presbyterians' initiative than with the efforts of white members. A group of black missionaries, including Maria Fearing, worked with white colleagues to start Presbyterian churches in Congo between 1891 and 1915. Fearing had left the denomination after emancipation, but she returned for the opportunity to do African mission work. The Congo mission became the first racially integrated Presbyterian mission station and the largest Southern Presbyterian church anywhere in the early 1900s.⁸ Because of the work of these missionaries, the P.C.U.S. was transformed into a "white" denomination with many black members.

It seems counterintuitive that a Presbyterian denomination in the midst of racial segregation would offer unprecedented ministry opportunities for black missionaries while an integrated Methodist denomination showed ambivalence toward black male and female leaders. Protestant mission work within and outside the United States

⁸ Robert Benedetto, ed., introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa: A Documentary Account of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission and the Human Rights Struggle in the Congo, 1890-1918* (New York E.J. Brill, 1996).

provided a means to observe such contradictory actions in the context of their time period. Missions sometimes helped churches to show their commitment to racial equality, and sometimes they offered another perspective of the ways unequal race relations persisted in American churches. Examining domestic and foreign missions together provides a fuller understanding of how denominations confronted racial issues.

Historical studies of race relations, mission work, and American Protestant Christianity in the nineteenth century often focus on either the legacy of slavery or religious compliance in global imperialism. Church historians provide details of how each denomination envisioned its domestic mission work among former slaves.⁹ Cultural historians consider these church groups in conjunction with contemporary economic and political trends, arguing that they enforced white supremacy and reflected American cooperation with colonial governments.¹⁰

Studies of manifest destiny and Christian education are more likely to trace how mission work in America and overseas influenced several racial groups. For instance,

⁹ These church histories include: Stephen W. Angell and Anthony B. Pinn, *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000); Alexander Ramsay Batchelor, *Jacob's Ladder: Negro work of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Atlanta: Board of Church Extension, Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1953); E. Luther Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgment of History: The Taint of an Original Sin* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1995); Keith Harper, *The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity, 1890-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996); Victor I. Masters, *Baptist Missions in the South* (Atlanta: Publicity Department of the Home Mission Board, 1915); Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro; a History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966); Harry V. Richardson, *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as it Developed Among Blacks in America* (Garden City, New York: Anchor-Press/Doubleday, 1976); Foy Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

¹⁰ These cultural histories include: H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But...Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1972); Paul Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats; the American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958); Kenneth J. King, "Africa and the Southern States of the U.S.A.: Notes on J.H. Oldham and American Negro Education for Africans," *Journal of African History* 10, no. 4 (1969): 659-677; Lysle E. Meyer, "T.J. Bowen and Central Africa: A Nineteenth Century Missionary Delusion," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 2 (1982): 247-260; and Ronald C. White, Jr., "Social Christianity and the Negro in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1972).

Reginald Horsman's *Race and Manifest Destiny* considers early nineteenth-century mission work as one of the factors that helped popularize white superiority while dehumanizing black and brown inhabitants of the United States.¹¹ He argues that Protestant missionaries expressed racism by valuing white Americans' Victorian ideals above any other culture. More recent studies extend this argument into comparisons between missionaries' sense of cultural superiority and their views on gender, race, and class. For instance, Peggy Pascoe and Louise Michele Newman suggest ways that American white women redefined their social roles through mission work for women considered needier than them, such as Chinese immigrants and poor unwed mothers.¹² Studies of educational missions in the South after the Civil War suggest that black and white female teachers used a typically white American middle class lifestyle as the norm by which to judge their students' success.¹³ In general, these cultural studies suggest that nineteenth-century Protestant mission work endorsed racism by linking Christian conversion to American civilization.

It is tempting to depict church activities within the social context of Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era as just another means of racial subjugation. Frederick Merk's *Manifest Destiny and Mission in America* and Katherine L. Dvorak's *African-American Exodus* call attention to the unique religious traits of church-related

¹¹ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

¹² Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: the Search For Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: the Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹³ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

activities in the midst of surrounding cultural and political controversies.¹⁴ Dvorak specifically argues against previous studies that devalue black Christians' agency in starting separate churches; doing so incorporates assumptions of racial inferiority and ignorance into our understanding of postbellum religious history.

As she wrote, "Segregation at the Lord's Table existed long before Jim Crow's lunch counter," but segregation did not always seem like a challenge to black communities.¹⁵ Racial separatism could seem like a positive development for the purpose of targeting church members' resources, enhancing recruitment efforts, strengthening institutional identity, or addressing fears of social change. Each of these four denominations chose a unique approach to race relations.

African Methodist Episcopal Church: Independent/ Institutional

The African Methodist Episcopal Church started on the basis of representing black Methodists in Philadelphia after they grew disgruntled with the white members of St. George's Methodist Church. A.M.E. historians trace the denomination back to a mass exodus from St. George's after white deacons forced a black member to wait until all the white Methodists finished praying at the altar. After the initial protest, the group decided that all black Methodists needed a means of worshipping without fear of harassment. Under the leadership of their pastor and newly appointed Bishop Richard Allen, they expanded the original goal to protecting the welfare of every person in the

¹⁴ Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History, a Reinterpretation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963); Katherine L. Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus: The Segregation of the Southern Churches* (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1991).

¹⁵ Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus*, 4.

African Diaspora. The mission work that the A.M.E. Church supported before 1920 focused on black people in the United States or abroad.

African Methodists considered themselves as part of an independent church that built its institutional identity on issues facing black Americans. Part of the legacy of protest in the A.M.E. Church was an ongoing sense of urgency among its ministers. A.M.E. pastors and missionaries tended to disagree about the best ways to meet constituents' needs and support their denomination, especially in matters of female activism and racial discrimination. The common ground among these African Methodists seemed to foster diversity. Though the denomination identified with people of African descent, it did not reject members of other races. The guiding principle of A.M.E. recruitment pointed to work that criticized racial prejudice and ameliorated its effects on the black population. And the denomination accepted a wide variety of ideas for achieving these goals through missions.

African Methodist mission goals grew in harmony with the size and influence of the congregation. Up until the 1870s, the denomination had no official missions program because almost all of its resources went into keeping local churches afloat.¹⁶ The earliest A.M.E. historian, Bishop Daniel Payne, attributed the lack of mission work to the ministers' lack of preparation and to anti-education laws in southern states. As he put it,

The education of the colored population of the states in which the majority of the members of the African Methodist Church were located was strictly forbidden. The laws framed by the various state legislatures were so stringent, and the penalties so severe, that we at this present day can only look back at them and shudder.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 42-43.

¹⁷ Daniel Alexander Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1891, Documenting the American South (University Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001), 53-54.

In other words, Payne wished that more A.M.E. ministers in the 1810s and 1820s had been able to pursue education for themselves and others, but he also recognized that legal pressures "endangered the very existence of the Church itself."¹⁸ During Reconstruction, African Methodists rushed to establish new churches and schools in previously forbidden territory.

A.M.E. home missionaries had the three-fold purpose of introducing Methodist Christianity, providing resources to meet the needs of black Americans, and building the reputation of this proudly black organization. That African Methodist ministers worked hard to fulfill these goals with only an informal church missions program and irregular financial support spoke to their communal resolve. Because there was no governing board directing the work of A.M.E. missionaries during the 1860s and 1870s, pastors and teachers volunteered to leave their homes in northern states and design new projects in the South in cooperation with local black Methodists.¹⁹

The Methodist Episcopal Church had already spread through this region and attracted thousands of black members a generation earlier. Instead of evangelism, A.M.E. missionaries focused on gathering those who already claimed to be black Methodists into A.M.E. churches. Bishop Daniel Payne reopened the African Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina in 1865; it had been forced to close in the wake of Denmark Vessey revolt plot in 1822.²⁰ Other missionaries acquired buildings for A.M.E. churches, often in areas where the Union army seized church property during the war.

¹⁸ Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 53-54.

¹⁹ Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 43.

²⁰ Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 31.

They had the most success when acquiring church buildings in conjunction with either the Northern or Southern branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Southern Methodist churches sometimes sent their black membership to new local A.M.E. churches to stymie Northern Methodist recruitment.²¹ And Northern Methodists cooperated with A.M.E. missionaries on a temporary basis while they competed with their southern counterparts; African Methodists gained permission to assemble new members into buildings purchased with Northern Methodist funds. Throughout this interdenominational bickering, African Methodist missionaries tried to gain ownership of buildings and land, knowing that ownership denoted permanence and freedom to use churches for educational and political functions.

When the Church started southern recruitment, it made a unique contribution to the controversy over segregated congregations. African Methodists established separate black churches to provide safe space for unique messages of empowerment, black solidarity, and racial equality. These goals met local demand for a new religious vision of the post-Emancipation era. All-black churches provided a symbol of religious change to match the change in former slaves' political status.²² By 1890, there were several black denominations in America that offered various types of worship traditions and community service. A.M.E. missionaries stood out by offering black southerners an older organization in which they could "live like freemen" and obtain leadership on the

²¹ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 133; Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus*, 64.

²² Dvorak, *An African-American Exodus*, 119; Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 130; Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, xvii.

basis of their merit without looking to white authority figures.²³ The denomination gained over 350,000 members by 1880.

A.M.E. church leaders also emphasized education and publicity as solutions to widespread economic and social needs. The denomination sought missionaries who could "teach school as well as preach the gospel."²⁴ Most church buildings doubled as primary schools, even though black and white missionaries faced violence for teaching black youth during Reconstruction. African Methodist women were celebrated for starting girls' schools in the South.²⁵ A.M.E. ministers also led some colleges between 1863 and 1880, which provided rare venues for black students to seek the type of classical, non-industrial education reserved for white males.

The general consensus among A.M.E. ministers was that the denomination's work, especially its missions projects, should help it serve as a liberating force within the black race in the United States and overseas. The A.M.E. Church matched its educational goals with work that allowed black southerners to use their skills. On an individual basis, missionaries sought voting rights for men and women and government aid for helping small farmers buy land. Local churches hosted lectures for special events like the anniversary of Emancipation Day, and the speakers spread theories about how the black race contributed to world history.²⁶ On a broader level, the African Methodist Church sponsored such events to publicize the intelligence and capabilities of black communities in the South. Individual missionaries started newspapers in South

²³ Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 45, 57.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 62.

²⁶ Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 56.

Carolina and other states. The denomination started two periodicals, including the *A.M.E. Church Review*, which publicized essays about segregation, civil rights, African emigration, and other pressing racial issues. Within that journal, ministers and other professionals like Ida B. Wells Barnett, W.E.B. Du Bois, and T. Thomas Fortune offered advice to families who considered emigrating from southern states to western farmland or to Liberia. After World War I, the journal included suggestions on how the church should support the wave of black migrants to northern cities. The *Review* also offered a venue for debates about what kind of reputation the Church should establish.

All of the above-mentioned A.M.E. projects included an element of political protest. By helping black people get an education, build independent churches, and acquire land, the Church implied that it was both possible and commendable to live a richer life than racial discrimination allowed in the South. The Rev. C.J. Powell of Pittsburgh elaborated on the benefits of A.M.E. home missions:

[African Methodism] has been, and is now, the black man's connecting link with the religious world. And to the same religious influence this country owes much of its present measure of amicable relationship existing between the races. Its most important work, however, has been, and must continue to be, the bringing of the general life of the race under the influence of Christian principles.²⁷

A.M.E. missions included social concerns like education, migration, and ownership within the overall goal of achieving "Christian principles."

Because of that wide perspective, Rev. Powell believed his black denomination also earned the respect of white Americans. By his logic, if the denomination focused on expanding its mission work and serving the black race, people outside the race would

²⁷ C.J. Powell, "The Mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the Darker Races of the World," *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939*, eds. Stephen W. Angell and Anthony B. Pinn (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 205.

acknowledge its members' equal status and ability. A.M.E. ministers expressed a wide range of opinions about whether American race prejudice could ever be eliminated, and some argued that black people would receive better treatment in another country. Still, the A.M.E. Church remained an independent, but not completely separate, black Methodist denomination. It was committed to the affairs of black people, yet open in principle to people of all races.

Methodist Episcopal Church: Integrated/Pragmatic

Common religious doctrine and a common belief in eventual interracial cooperation forged some similarities between the African Methodist Church and the Methodist Episcopal denomination. Nevertheless, home mission work between 1865 and 1920 put the two denominations in direct competition.

At the beginning of the Reconstruction period, the Methodist Episcopal Church used missions as a means toward a racial integration plan that some called "ecclesiastical amalgamation."²⁸ As one white Northern Methodist missionary to South Carolina reflected in 1865, "It is a beautiful theory, and eminently Christian, that white and colored, former masters and slaves, be seated indiscriminately in the same church, and side by side kneel at the same communion table."²⁹ Northern Methodists gained a reputation for espousing abolitionism, but the Methodist vision went beyond ending distinctions between master and slave. Northern Methodist missionaries also lived in Western territories and reservations, encouraging Native Americans to join the Church as ministers and laymen. Ideally, Northern Methodist bishops hoped to see their church

²⁸ Smith, *In His Image, But...Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910*, 266.

²⁹ Originally quoted in Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 109.

extend southward as a multiracial, integrated movement. Subtle forms of racial segregation within the denomination made this hope unattainable as the Northern Methodists drifted toward compromise with Jim Crow race relations.

Officially, the Methodist Episcopal Church never adopted a policy of racial segregation until it united with the southern branch in 1939. However, the denomination maintained an unofficial policy of starting separate churches for black Methodists in northern states and keeping those churches affiliated with local white Methodist churches through district conferences. These separate churches did not constitute a black denomination. That would have been anathema to white church leaders who considered the African Methodist Episcopal Church a wayward separatist movement.

Instead, the black M.E. churches in northern states remained part of mostly white district conferences from the 1820s into the twentieth century. Under this system, black Methodists received independent space with continuing access to the broader Methodist Episcopal Church infrastructure. They retained membership in a denomination with a large, well-organized missions program, a national network of schools and colleges, and adequate funds to support these programs. Black church members also faced setbacks within the integrated M.E. Church; their more numerous white colleagues only addressed requests for black pastors at a lethargic pace.³⁰

Because the black Methodists had petitioned for more black leadership in vain for forty years, they proved instrumental to their denomination's home missions policy in the South and overseas. White Methodist bishops finally ordained black pastors on a regular basis in the 1860s to aid in outreach to freed slaves, and hundreds of aspiring

³⁰ Reginald Hildebrand, "Methodist Episcopal Policy on the Ordination of Black Ministers, 1784-1864," *Methodist History* 20, no. 3 (April 1982): 128, 132, 140.

ministers accepted the offer. Black Methodists also compensated for the lack of leadership opportunities at home by serving in ministry in West Africa. Similar restrictions on black ministers applied overseas until the 1880s; the black missionaries were appointed as “assistants” and often relegated to domestic service work.³¹ Methodist Episcopal bishops reconsidered foreign missions in the 1880s and decided to appoint a black male “missionary bishop” to supervise the churches in Africa. Still, no black Methodists accepted the position until the turn of the century, possibly because the title conferred no authority in the United States. The denomination appointed two black women –Susan Collins and Martha Drummer – as missionaries to Angola in 1898 and 1906 on condition that they taught children and left “administrative responsibilities” to the white bishop.³² Leadership in home and foreign missions provided additional options to black Methodist ministers within racial limits.

Despite discrimination against black ministers, Northern Methodists claimed to offer a denomination in which racial identity was of no consequence and worshippers of different races could cooperate freely. Historian Reginald Hildebrand called this Methodist position “anticaste radicalism,” a version of racial equality akin to “color blind” ideology. For the first eleven years after the Civil War, Methodist missionaries sponsored integrated churches and district conferences in the South. Meanwhile, they argued that racially separate churches, including the A.M.E. denomination, paid undue regard to “caste distinctions” and perpetuated racist traditions. This recruitment approach appealed to black Methodists but found little success with white citizens

³¹ Jacobs, “Give a Thought to Africa,” 109-110.

³² Jacobs, “Give a Thought to Africa,” 110-111.

because sharing church space without separate seating "evoked fears of church-sponsored social equality."³³ White southerners' explanations of the term "social equality" ranged from people of different races eating together to interracial marriage or political instability. Northern Methodists seemed predisposed to promote such activities with their traditional "love feast" meals at prayer meetings and abolitionist rhetoric.

Northern Methodist missionaries worked toward social change with a pragmatic approach that would minimize obvious racial distinctions in the shortest possible time. M.E. ministers tended to emphasize noticeable results for freed people in the South over inconspicuous efforts with long-term results. The Methodist Episcopal Church established black churches freely but retained the title to church buildings. This meant that black pastors and parishioners had no chance of gaining the type of ownership rights that A.M.E. ministers valued. When it came to education, Northern Methodists only pursued wide-scale primary education as long as the Freedman's Bureau supported their efforts. From 1866 to 1881, the denomination's Freedmen's Aid Society focused its limited resources on establishing colleges that would train potential black leaders. These colleges were designed for young black males who wanted to become educators and Methodist pastors. The missionaries hoped to influence the entire black population by empowering a smaller group of representatives.

The corresponding secretary of the Freedman's Aid Society described his work in these lofty terms in 1876:

³³ Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring*, 111.

Without education there is no hope for them [former slaves] or this nation. We must increase our liberality, if we would save a race for Christ and usefulness, as well as secure the stability and perpetuity of this Government.³⁴

The Society produced tangible results, including 58 primary schools by 1868. By 1879, it had sixteen colleges or universities with sixty thousand alumni who taught over two hundred thousand students.³⁵ These institutions also included basic education classes to compensate for the small number of black public schools in the South.³⁶ These educational benefits may have trickled down to the general public faster if Northern Methodist missionaries' focus on advanced training for ministers had not excluded black women teachers. The M.E. Church also could have provided for further generations of students by passing ownership of church and school buildings to black congregations.

Northern Methodists' emphasis on short-term changes showed in the way they valued racial and cultural diversity in their worship services. Methodist church services included preaching, Sunday school classes, occasional revival services, "love feasts," and rural retreats called "camp meetings." Integrated love feasts and camp meetings incited controversy because participants ate and socialized together, raising the threat of impending "social equality." But the threat was minimized by the temporary nature of these events. For instance, a group of Mohawk, Scandinavian, and "American" [white] Methodists met for a combined week-long camp meeting in Wisconsin in 1877, and the ministers were delighted to hear the audience sing the same tune together in their own languages. A Methodist newspaper based in Boston reported that, during the singing,

³⁴ National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, "The Church at Home," *The Advocate of Christian Holiness* 7, no. 3 (March 1876): 88.

³⁵ James S. Thomas, "Methodism's Splendid Mission: The Black Colleges," *Methodist History* 22, no. 3 (April 1984): 141-142; Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 165, 175.

³⁶ Thomas, "Methodism's Splendid Mission," 146.

One of our ministers could not endure the joy no longer, and stepping forward grasped the hand of the Indian preacher in a warm clasp, while again rang out the thrilling strain, "Oh! depth of mercy!"

The author concluded that "The religion of Christ is a uniting power, and makes all who possess it brothers, whatever the language or color."³⁷

The ministers valued this "uniting power" for the moments of interracial cooperation achieved during church services. We can note that these moments were temporary by design; the Methodist leaders did not incorporate such interracial gatherings into a routine schedule. This camp meeting also represented white Methodists' relations with Native American converts. A Mohawk man had been appointed pastor over a congregation of his countrymen, and he preached in their language during the camp meeting. The white ministers did not give this pastor any opportunities to preach in English to the non-native audience. So, like the black ministers, the Native American pastors faced limitations on what type of people they could serve and what type of mission field would accept them. The difference was that native pastors could gain official appointment to serve as missionaries to their own communities while black northern pastors were directed to West Africa or the South.

When we compare the ways white Northern Methodist pastors and missionaries planned their outreach to different groups, a pattern of differential treatment belies their "anti-caste" rhetoric. Missionaries changed their racially integrated ministry style to make the denomination seem more palatable to white southerners during Reconstruction. A Northern Methodist reporter called the 1872 camp meeting in Knoxville, Tennessee a success because "[p]rejudice was largely overcome,

³⁷ Helen M. Hayward, "Camp-Meeting at Doty's Island, Wis.," *The Advocate of Christian Holiness* 8, no. 9 (September 1877): 209.

sectarianism and sectionalism yielding greatly, and the banner of holiness lifted higher."³⁸ The reporter seemed more concerned with monitoring religious prejudice and lingering anti-Yankee hatred than with noting racial bias, even though this was the same conference that made Amanda Smith fear the Ku Klux Klan.

So few white southerners attended the integrated Northern Methodist congregations that, in 1876, the denomination split its southern churches into separate white and black district conferences and appointed black pastors on condition that they only served parishioners of their own race.³⁹ This official segregation meshed with the informal church segregation already practiced in most white Northern Methodist churches, where, if black visitors were not turned away, they were typically offered seats in a gallery or back pew.

By 1939, it was so rare for Methodist churches to hold integrated services on a regular basis that a shift in racial policy seemed feasible. To help reunite Northern and Southern Methodism, the M.E. Church incorporated the black Methodist churches into a 'central district,' essentially a conglomeration of all black members under one governing board. The policy change troubled black ministers, but the results were the same overall. Black leaders held so little authority in the mostly white denomination and so few white Methodists had joined the predominantly black churches that Northern Methodism was segregated in practice before it segregated in principle.

³⁸ National Association, "Eighteenth National Camp Meeting: Knoxville, Tennessee," 113.

³⁹ Hartzell, "Methodism and the Negro in the United States," 314.

Southern Baptist Convention: Separatist/Exclusionary

The style of home missions practiced by Southern Baptists and Southern Presbyterians can be called "separatist" because both denominations advocated racial segregation as a means of protecting white Americans in the former Confederacy. Missionaries from these organizations often interacted with people of other races in ways that prioritized white leadership in a patriarchal system. Black Americans were generally excluded from these churches as a sign of conformity to this patriarchal order.

The Southern Baptist Convention organized the Home Mission Board to help its members grow in "wealth and talent" that could be applied to "the Lord's work."⁴⁰ The Home Mission Board sent missionaries to start Baptist churches throughout the southern states, Indian territories, California, and eventually to Cuba. Throughout this process, Southern Baptist missions supported a strong sense of racial identity. Despite the racial diversity of the people in the mission field, the S.B.C. Home Mission Board represented the denomination as an all-white group. Between 1880 and 1920, and for several years thereafter, Baptist missions representatives discussed their denomination in terms of Anglo-Saxon civilization in the South. A milestone in SBC missions came in 1887, when Southern Baptist ministers' domination of all mission work among "the white people of the South" provided proof that "[t]he territory had been reclaimed."⁴¹

Native Americans, immigrants, and "the colored population" remained beyond the boundaries of the 'reclaimed' hypothetical space. Unlike the mission work for white Baptists, concerns for the economic welfare of black Baptists fell by the wayside in

⁴⁰ J.B. Lawrence, *History of the Home Mission Board* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 27.

⁴¹ Lawrence, *History of the Home Mission Board*, 65.

exchange for a goal to provide segregated classes in basic Baptist doctrine. The Home Mission Board pledged "to take all prudent measures, for the religious instruction of our colored population . . ."⁴² The reasons had less to do with the needs of black Americans than with the assumptions of the Southern Baptists. First, the denomination felt that black people in the southern states needed extra help understanding Christianity. Also, the missionaries assumed that black Baptists would rather start new all-black Baptist churches than attend Southern Baptist churches. The S.B.C. mission goals were tailored to keep racial segregation in line with the denomination's plans. The missionaries gave black Baptists free rein to leave white churches but expected them to take the lessons of the white churches with them.

Southern Baptist pastor and journalist J.B. Gambrell was one of the few white ministers to comment on how black Baptists fared after 1865. He represented the denomination at the 1888 planning sessions for the National Baptist Convention, a collaboration of black Baptist churches throughout the country. Gambrell also made occasional appeals for friendship, "fundamental justice," and "universal brotherhood" among Christians regardless of race in his Texas newspaper and in short pamphlets.⁴³

Yet, by far, the most prevalent racial views among white Southern Baptist leaders between 1880 and 1920 put faith in segregation, racist laws, and "necessary" Ku Klux

⁴² Lawrence, *History of the Home Mission Board*, 29.

⁴³ Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations*, 84-85, 93, 95. For an example of Gambrell's suggestions for how white Southern Baptists should help black Baptists in the early twentieth century, see J.B. Gambrell, "A View of the Negro Question," Southern Pamphlet Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Baltimore, n.d.

Klan intervention to "[preserve] public order."⁴⁴ With these social factors in place, the Home Mission Board reported about black Americans in 1891:

We venture the assertion that [the race problem] can and will be found of easy solution. Nothing is plainer to any one who knows this race than its perfect willingness to accept a subordinate place, provided there be confidence that in that position of subordination it will receive justice and kindness.⁴⁵

The goal of placing black Baptists' religious welfare under the paternal care of the Southern Baptist Convention remained more of an idea than a reality throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The only available count suggests that about forty Baptist missionaries worked among the 'colored population' for 'several' years leading up to 1915.⁴⁶ Other than this group, outreach to black Baptists relied on individual initiative. Some S.B.C. pastors led segregated services or Sunday Schools, some white landowners offered space to build all-black churches, and, starting in 1918, two white ministers led theology classes for black preachers in Georgia.⁴⁷ Perhaps the most significant effort that the Southern Baptists made in this area of mission work was to build trans-regional coalitions with missionaries from New York. In the late nineteenth century, "Negro mission work" was one of the few areas of SBC ministry in which the denomination willingly cooperated with northern groups. In general, Southern Baptists guarded their territory jealously in competition with northern Baptists.

⁴⁴ Victor I. Masters, *Baptist Missions in the South* (Atlanta: Publicity Department of the Home Mission Board, 1915), 151; Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations*, 18, 22, 63-66.

⁴⁵ Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations*, 27. For examples of how the Ku Klux Klan abused black and white church members, see Dvorak, *An African American Exodus*, 144-146.

⁴⁶ Masters, *Baptist Missions in the South*, 182.

⁴⁷ Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations*, 54-55, 82.

But then, the cooperation between Northern and Southern Baptists made sense considering that the SBC did not expect to gain from this part of its work. When Southern Baptist missionaries worked with Native Americans, they reported the numbers of conversions and new churches started in Indian Territory. H.M.B. records also reported on financial gain in these areas as a sign that Native Americans were gaining social and economic prosperity. According to an 1893 report, "[the residents of Indian Territory] are to-day prepared, if they so desired, to take their place in this Union of States."⁴⁸ Likewise, the Home Mission Board initiated work among European immigrants in hope of reforming them into Southern Baptists and into representative "Americans." When a Cuban pastor offered to work with the denomination, the S.B.C. bought a church building in Cuba as a first step. S.B.C. missionaries also established American-style Baptist churches in China from the 1850s through the 1920s with the intent to pass responsibility to local ministers. In other words, missionaries worked with Native Americans, European immigrants, Cubans, and the Chinese on the assumption that these groups would eventually contribute members and finances.

The Southern Baptist Convention excluded black Americans in the simplest sense; they had no claim to the denomination, no official missions goals, and no standing in denominational policy. The significance of black Baptists' exclusion shows best in comparison with Southern Baptist ministry among other groups. For instance, members of the S.B.C. churches in China had little control over their ministers. Chinese church members voted on church committees and some became elders and pastors. Yet the white missionaries who supervised the churches reported to the denomination,

⁴⁸ Lawrence, *History of the Home Mission Board*, 73.

not to the local church members.⁴⁹ Chinese Baptists did not have full independence and democratic leadership, which was one of the most treasured ideals of Baptist doctrine. The excluded Black Baptists did not have to accept such limits; instead, they were refused the benefits of membership in a large, pre-established denomination.

Southern Baptist policy toward white women dictated provisions against female public speaking or leadership, thereby keeping them dependent. But Martha Crawford and her colleagues in China inflated their female helper status to justify preaching where the male missionaries could not go. Like these white women, black Baptist men and women with resolve and ingenuity became religious leaders; they found their means in an arena separate from the S.B.C. The color line proved as effective a barrier in Southern Baptist policy as the distance between America and China.

Presbyterian Church in the United States: Separatist/Paternalistic

If asked to compare themselves with the Southern Baptists in the late nineteenth century, Southern Presbyterian leaders would have pointed to their relatively higher educational and social status. Presbyterian churches in the South had a reputation for attracting plantation owners, educated leaders, and former slaveholders. The denomination also had less financial troubles than Southern Baptists, so it sponsored a larger network of domestic missionaries.

Still, the financial and social differences between these two denominations did not create drastic differences in their racial policies. By the 1920s, the P.C.U.S. home

⁴⁹ Lottie Moon, one of the younger S.B.C. missionaries stationed with Martha Crawford, complained to the secretary of the Foreign Mission Board when it seemed that Chinese church members might ask her to move out of the church compound where she lived. She wrote on 28 Sept. 1876, "I only wish it to be distinctly understood that I will neither go or stay on the decision of any Chinaman or body of Chinamen." Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 28 September 1876, *Send the Light: Lottie Moon's Letters and Other Writings*, ed. Keith Harper (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 2002), 162.

missions program rested on goals of "Naturalization, Americanization and Christianization" for a constituency including Native Americans in Oklahoma, Mexicans in Texas, Chinese immigrants in New Orleans, Jewish people in Maryland, and black people in the southern states.⁵⁰ The committee for home missions reserved its financial resources for supporting pastors in these areas and funding new churches or school buildings. Final responsibility for designing and implementing mission projects rested with the regional church associations [called presbyteries] that reached out to "the needy and destitute people," otherwise called "Pioneers, Foreigners, Mountaineers, and Negroes, " in their communities.⁵¹

Compared to their work among other groups, Southern Presbyterians accomplished little mission work among black Americans. Like the Southern Baptist Convention, the Presbyterian Church in the United States made several official overtures about supporting the southern black community. It even organized a "committee on colored evangelization" that made reports at annual assemblies from 1866 through 1910. In the early years, the committee was headed by five men who also led the Presbyterian home and foreign missions groups, including a former missionary to West Africa named John Leighton Wilson. The colored evangelization committee made most of the appeals for home missions to black southerners, which were usually variations on its first statement presented in 1866:

[T]his Assembly believes the present condition of the colored race in this country to be one of alarming spiritual jeopardy, and that it is binding on us, as Christians, to do all that lies in our power to save them from the calamities by

⁵⁰ S.L. Morris, *The Romance of Home Missions: Home Mission Study* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1924), 97, 104-121.

⁵¹ Morris, *The Romance of Home Missions*, 16.

which they are threatened, and to confer on them the rich blessings of the gospel.⁵²

The committee recommended that local Presbyterian churches set aside time and financial support for special freedmen's classes, and it recommended ministerial training for black men who could serve the dwindling number of black Presbyterians.⁵³ Yet these goals were rarely enacted in the 1860s or any decade before 1950 because of lack of interest or financial support. Except for providing the initial funds for a black men's seminary in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1877 and paying meager salaries for graduates who led black Presbyterian churches, the Presbyterians of the South assumed that individual initiative would be enough to spread their influence among black Americans.⁵⁴ But without widespread support for black Presbyterian preachers and black churches, this mission work remained miniscule in the 1920s.

Home missions were a controversial topic for the Presbyterian Church in the United States long before the end of the Civil War. When southern church leaders split from the national group of Old School Presbyterians in 1861 to support secession, one prominent southern theologian "asserted that such a break with the North might even aid mission work for Negroes, since it would free it from the suspicion of abolitionism."⁵⁵

⁵² *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 2, no. 1 (1866): 35. This committee was alternatively called the Committee on the Religious Instruction of the Freed People.

⁵³ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 2, no. 1 (1866): 46; *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 2, no. 2 (1867): 145; *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 2, no. 4 (1869): 389.

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 9, no. 4 (1896): 443, 631.

⁵⁵ Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro; a History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 140.

This church leader expected that the mission work would be popular as long as it had no potential for emancipation.

Denominational history suggests that Southern Presbyterians continued to envision missions as a means to direct black southerners' aspirations. When the P.C.U.S. met after the Confederate defeat, home mission work seemed like a possible solution to the uncertainties of Reconstruction. At the General Assembly, leaders suggested that all local Presbyterian churches shared an

obligation to seek [former slaves'] moral and spiritual welfare, by all means which it is competent to the church to employ, [because of] their helpless condition and their greater exposure to temptation, and leading to vice, irreligion and ruin, both temporal and eternal . . .⁵⁶

This informal mission work was adopted by local churches as they saw fit, and it meshed with the ultimate goal of sheltering black southerners under white Southern Presbyterian leaders "as of old."⁵⁷

By 1898, the Church abandoned the traditional approach for regional action. Its white leaders announced that all black members were free to withdraw and hosted a planning convention for a new all-black Presbyterian denomination. Presbyterian churches in South Carolina suggested a separate denomination for black Presbyterians as early as 1869 and had already asked their black members to leave by 1874, but it took longer for their denomination to follow suit.⁵⁸ The segregated "Afro-American

⁵⁶ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 1, no. 1 (1865): 369.

⁵⁷ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 2, no. 1 (1866): 35-36. I include the full quote to represent Presbyterian leaders' views about black members leaving the denomination: "it is highly inexpedient that there should be an ecclesiastical separation of the white and colored races; that such a measure would threaten evil to both races, and especially to the colored, and that therefore it is desirable that every warrantable effort be made affectionately to dissuade the freed people from severing their connexion with our churches, and to retain them with us as of old."

⁵⁸ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 3, no. 4 (1874): 589-597.

Presbyterian Synod" was a step removed from the earlier policy of keeping black church members under white leaders' paternal care. But white Southern Presbyterians still influenced their black colleagues by encouraging them to remain separate from integrated northern churches. The P.C.U.S. readmitted the black synod in 1917 because it had not grown in twenty years, but black ministers continued to face segregation at annual Presbyterian assemblies into the 1950s.⁵⁹

Southern Presbyterian leaders gave some specific reasons for their lack of official home missions policies regarding black church members. First, the highest ranking church officers felt unauthorized to enforce one denomination-wide outreach policy. Instead of specific guidelines, two white ministers— including former missionary John Leighton Wilson – reiterated in 1873 that “our colored population [has] its peculiar claims upon our Church . . . and [we see] the inadequacy of our present efforts to meet these imperious demands.”⁶⁰ Other ministers blamed the evident lack of home missions work on their perception that “in great measure, they [the colored people] remain aloof from us.”⁶¹ Most of the black members had left the Southern Presbyterian churches in the 1860s for neighboring congregations sponsored by northern Presbyterians or independent black denominations. By the 1890s, only a few hundred black Presbyterians remained in the denomination, and some refused to join the all-black synod because they suspected it would not survive on a self-sustaining basis.⁶²

⁵⁹ Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro*, 150-152.

⁶⁰ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 3, no. 3 (1873): 350.

⁶¹ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 3, no. 1 (1871): 41.

⁶² *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 10, no. 3 (1899): 458.

White Southern Presbyterians lacked a home missions policy for black Americans for reasons beyond domestic affairs. Drawing on his African missions experience, John Leighton Wilson believed that the fates of Africans and black Americans were linked. As the secretary of P.C.U.S. foreign missions, he advocated teams of black Presbyterian ministers in West Africa. He declared at the General Assembly in 1881 that

In being surrounded with the representatives of this people whom we can easily train to be helpers in the work, we have greater advantages than almost any other Christian church for carrying on the missionary work in Africa.⁶³

Wilson's suggestion resonated with white Southern Presbyterians, who tended to be among the wealthier class and included former slaveholders. Wilson hinted that white southerners could train former slaves easily, even if they were free and even if "the work" involved ministry rather than farm labor. And once that training was complete, black Southern Presbyterians would organize Presbyterian churches within black communities in West Africa or the American South that white ministers could not reach. The segregated P.C.U.S. seminary, later known as Stillman Institute, started as a recruiting center for black male missionaries.

In 1899, the committee on colored evangelization still hoped to accomplish "the entering of a mission field, the erection of churches and manses, establishing and maintaining schools, the support of evangelists and pastors, the selection and training of a ministry – in short, every detail connected with the elevation of a race."⁶⁴ But the way those plans were implemented belied these intentions. The most persistent mode

⁶³ Benedetto, introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers*, 53.

⁶⁴ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 10, no. 3 (1899): 458.

of race relations within the Southern Presbyterian Church was apathy. In general, white Presbyterians would not invest enough financial or social resources to make the initiatives designed for black Presbyterians successful.⁶⁵ Most Southern Presbyterian churches claimed to be too burdened with repairs and lack of funds after the war to show sufficient interest in educating local black Christians.⁶⁶ Stillman seminary suffered inadequate funding too long to either produce an adequate number of graduates or many potential missionaries.⁶⁷ The number of black Presbyterians in the South remained tiny compared to the membership of Black Baptists or Methodists, and their churches never saw significant growth. The Afro-American Presbyterian Synod formed in 1898 reported 1,352 members in 1901 and only fifty more sixteen years later.⁶⁸

Unlike the white Southern Baptists who saw the color line splitting their denomination as a natural development, white Southern Presbyterian leaders were more likely to encourage black church members to stay. Most of this encouragement came from the podiums of general assemblies rather than local pastors, but it set a unique tone for future mission work. For example, during an 1867 General Assembly, the committee in charge of "colored evangelization" argued against South Carolina and Mississippi pastors who wanted to mimic the segregated churches in their communities.

As late as 1924, a Presbyterian historian made this complaint about potential mission subjects in the United States: "The difficulty of assimilating them into our

⁶⁵ Edward Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 3, 1890-1972 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973), 81-85, 285.

⁶⁶ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 9, no. 1 (1893): 29.

⁶⁷ Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 3, 81-85.

⁶⁸ Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro*, 151.

national life and giving them Protestant Christianity grows out of their tendency to segregate themselves in our congested cities as colonists."⁶⁹ Yet the Church's views on race had changed by the 1920s. This writer focused on segregation among European immigrants in urban areas as a problem, but he applauded the segregated PCUS denomination in the same historical study. Apparently, white Southern Presbyterian leaders thought segregation among different white communities was problematic because it impeded assimilation into white American Christian civilization.

Like most white southerners, Southern Presbyterians adopted different standards for black Americans. White Southern Presbyterian leaders showed pride in the black and white missionaries working together in Congo from the 1890s through the 1940s, but black pastors had to eat and sleep in separate areas at annual general assemblies. The turn toward segregation happened during the years when "colored evangelization" grew most difficult. Rather than suggest a new recruitment strategy, the denomination abdicated to a new all-black Church what it once called a crucial responsibility.

Conclusion

In general, both the Southern Baptist and Southern Presbyterian denominations approached home missions with a sense of paternalism. Baptists emphasized that their mission subjects learn church doctrine, economic independence, and American values, but they excluded black Americans for fear that they could ever succeed. White Southern Presbyterians were more reluctant to advocate church segregation, but they showed similar doubts in black religious leadership. The segregated seminary and the integrated Congo mission provided some recognition for black leaders, but always

⁶⁹ Morris, *Romance of Home Missions*, 97.

within the bounds of white pastoral supervision. Southern Baptist and Presbyterian leaders were so focused on white leadership that both denominations funneled most of their race relations efforts either into occasional complaints that white members had not done enough or into simple faith that white superiority was in everyone's best interests.

Northern Methodists showed more interest in interracial cooperation on the level of principle. White ministers in the M.E. Church thought that peaceful displays of cooperation across racial and cultural bounds enhanced their worship experience, and they advocated integrated churches in the South to make such displays possible. But, when it came to appointing requests for black leaders or facing the threat of losing white southerners, Northern Methodist Church leaders limited interracial cooperation to certain occasions. The denomination showed enough flexibility to accomplish many of its mission goals with black Americans in the South, but its ambiguous racial policies did not provide substantive guarantees that black Methodists' leadership opportunities would increase throughout the Jim Crow era. By 1920, black leadership in the Methodist Episcopal Church once again became an exception rather than a rule.

The A.M.E. Church retained a message that racial identity should not preclude anyone from leadership opportunities in Christian circles or other parts of society. Its home missions plans provided the most support for men and women at various educational levels in southern black communities, and the A.M.E. message gained black members' support more than the other denominations studied here. Yet the first black denomination lacked the funds and infrastructure to have much more than an individual-led home missions movement, which limited its influence and forced the denomination to negotiate with other Methodist groups. Its status as a self-identified

black organization made it less likely that A.M.E. leaders would connect with leaders from other minority groups. A.M.E. male ministers also failed to agree on the role of female leaders during this time, even though women volunteered in the missions effort.

The following chapters show how women missionaries learned to navigate expectations within these four church organizations in order to establish a career in ministry. Gender limitations within the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Southern Baptist Convention did not keep all women out of ministry. Instead, the rules inspired Amanda Smith, Martha Foster Crawford, and other female leaders to present themselves as unofficial, yet effective, missionaries whose racial identity helped motivate their work. At a time when the Northern Methodist Church rarely provided opportunities for black men or women, Amanda Smith's preaching ministry earned a large support base from within its ranks. Finally, the Southern Presbyterian Church hired Maria Fearing and other black Presbyterian missionaries to integrate the Congo Mission under white supervision. Yet Fearing's teaching methods drew on her distinct black cultural background rather than the direction of white leaders. The ways that these four denominations addressed black Americans during the Jim Crow era influenced how women missionaries grappled with their own racial identity and with racial issues in China, England, and West Africa.

Chapter 2

Disgruntled Shepherds and “Feeble Lambs:” Martha Foster Crawford’s Leadership of Chinese Baptist Women, 1868-1891

An argument had festered between three female members of Martha Crawford’s mission church, and she could do nothing to stop it. In her own words, “I had rebuked, entreated, taught, prayed, borne, all apparently to no purpose.”¹ Two of the women, Mrs. Lieu and Mrs. Wong, conspired to act out their anger against Crawford’s maid, refusing to visit her or speak to her at all. Crawford could scarcely convince the women to stop fighting long enough to meet and reconcile. She had only stopped their accusations and excuses by telling them to “Forgive each other even as you pray God to forgive you.” Now she stood in an empty schoolroom with her head bowed, waiting for one of the three Chinese women gathered around her to start asking God for forgiveness. She waited until the silence became unbearable and lifted her head to catch the cold stare of her coworker, Mrs. Lieu. Disregarding Mrs. Crawford’s prayer request, Mrs. Lieu kept her head up and said defiantly, “You pray” [Crawford included this emphasis in the original text]. The prayer circle had deteriorated into a battle of wills.

But Crawford did not fight back. Instead, she prayed aloud “an earnest plea for the divine blessing upon this effort” and privately asked God to “remake

¹ Martha Foster Crawford diary, 28 March 1869, in Martha Foster Crawford Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

and purify [Mrs. Lieu], and give me wisdom to guide and correct her."² In this quiet way, Martha Crawford acted out her spiritual convictions while reasserting her authority over the Chinese women in her church. Rather than returning the insult, she symbolically gathered her converts into her care like a good shepherd, a mother, or an older sister. At least that is how she saw it. And, when one of her missionary companions died the following year, Martha Crawford wondered to herself how the female converts would fare with one less leader. She wrote, "What now will become of these feeble lambs?"³

Crawford's mission work involved a careful balancing act between contradictory roles; she was simultaneously the spiritual sister and the mother, the servant and the leader, the hero and the victim. Like her fellow nineteenth-century female missionaries, Crawford wanted to help foreign women become Christians, but she was convinced that they could only do so when they submitted to her authority and learned the doctrine from her. She also feared that her leadership efforts would fall victim to selfishness, arguments, and challenges generated by the "heathen" background of Chinese Christian women. Crawford's example shows just how important ideas of female empowerment and cultural inferiority were to American mission work in the late 1800s, especially when the positive presentation of women missionaries depended on the denigration of their most promising converts.

² Crawford diary, 3 June 1869, Crawford Papers.

³ Crawford diary, 5 February 1868.

For most of her career, Martha Foster Crawford could not qualify as an official missionary. She was born into a large white Baptist family in 1833, four decades before her denomination started appointing women missionaries on a regular basis.⁴ As a toddler, she moved with her family to a rural Alabama settlement named after the Foster clan.⁵ Despite the wealth of her nearby relatives, Martha Foster's parents were relatively poor. She worked as a teacher in her teens and earned enough money to attend a women's academy. Yet she felt an undeniable sense that God called her to overseas missions.

Partly because the Southern Baptist Convention denied her written appeals to join its mission work, Foster agreed to marry Tarleton Perry Crawford, an acquaintance who had signed up for missions to Shanghai in 1852. Though Alabama recognized her as the state's first foreign missionary, the Southern Baptist general assembly refused to hear her public address as it did with male ministers.⁶ Martha's struggles to make other Baptists acknowledge her as both a woman missionary and a missionary's wife continued throughout her life.⁷

⁴ The Southern Baptist Convention hired its first single female missionary in 1849, but the experiment was short-lived. Harriet Baker left China after three years because of health problems and conflicts with other missionaries. The Convention opted not to send more single women until 1872, when Edmonia Moon offered to raise her own financial support. David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 2003), 87.

⁵ The town of Fosters Settlement, Alabama no longer exists, but some of the farms and houses remain. It is part of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. Carol Ann Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men: a Southern Baptist Woman's missionary journey from Alabama to Shandong, 1930-1909" (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1998).

⁶ Carol Ann Vaughn, "Missionary Returns and Cultural Conversions in Alabama and Shandong: The Latter Years of Madam Gao," in *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 246.

⁷ Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men," 147-148. The unusual events surrounding the Crawfords' decision to marry are also discussed in Wayne Flynt and Gerald Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Irwin T., Jr. Hyatt, Jr., *Our Ordered Lives Confess: Three Nineteenth-Century Missionaries in East Shantung* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

Once in China, Martha Foster Crawford earned a reputation for treating ministry work as her personal calling. She devoted the rest of her life (almost sixty years) to teaching Christianity, literacy, and basic school subjects to local women and children. The Crawfords served together in Shanghai for twelve years before relocating to Shandong Province in northern China. While teaching a boys' school there, Crawford and a team of local converts traveled daily to tell Bible lessons to women in the city of Tungchow and in surrounding villages. Fellow missionaries in China – male and female -- deferred to her judgment, and one argued to Baptist leaders that "Mrs. Crawford is a woman, I need not say, of excellent judgment & great tack."⁸ This commendation came from Lottie Moon, a younger woman who became the most well-known and respected foreign missionary in Southern Baptist history. She considered Martha Crawford such an excellent mentor that "there could be no higher praise for a missionary" than being compared to her.⁹

Still, no matter how well Crawford fulfilled her responsibilities, she could not legitimately claim a leadership role in Baptist mission work. Her outreach to local women depended on the intervention of the Chinese Christian women who taught and traveled with her. Even though Foster Crawford considered herself in charge of these Chinese women, her husband held official control over how the mission station in northern China operated and what Chinese converts could

⁸ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 17 July 1885, *Send the Light: Lottie Moon's Letters and Other Writings*, ed. Keith Harper (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 2002), 111-114.

⁹ Lottie Moon to R.J. Willingham, 8 June 1910, *Send the Light*, 364.

do.¹⁰ In turn, a board of male representatives controlled how American donations would be spent on Southern Baptist missions overseas. Money for missions and other church endeavors came from congregations that included men and women of different races, but only white males qualified as church pastors and elders. So while Crawford watched over a small team of Chinese women, levels of white American men watched over her.

As a foreign missionary's wife, Martha Crawford worked within a patriarchal system engrained in the Southern Baptist Convention [S.B.C.]. Several religious historians have written on the social attitudes of Southern Baptists, tracing the emphasis on male leadership and racial hierarchy in the denomination. Some of these studies emphasized that the S.B.C. endorsed slavery from its inception in 1845 and practiced church segregation from 1865 until well into the twentieth century.¹¹ Others focused on the ways white women struggled for recognition in the S.B.C. despite its gender-based restrictions on public speaking, holding church offices, or starting organizations.¹² It is rare for a

¹⁰ For a photograph of the Crawfords shortly before they sailed to China for the first time, see Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 2.

¹¹ John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: a History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), xviii, 20; Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 213-214; Foy Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); John W. Storey, "The Negro in Southern Baptist Thought, 1865-1900" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1968); E. Luther Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgment of History*, rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 11-15, 20-21. Copeland is a former Southern Baptist missionary.

¹² Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*; R.D. Sullivan, "Woman with a Mission: Remembering Lotte Moon and the Woman's Missionary Union" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002); Alma Hunt, *History of the Woman's Missionary Union*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Convention Press, 1976); Catherine B. Allen, *A Century to Celebrate: History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Birmingham, AL: Woman's Missionary Union, 1987).

history of Southern Baptists to address how female activism influenced race relations or, more specifically, how female Southern Baptist missionaries interacted with people of other races.¹³

This chapter analyzes the career of Martha Crawford and the ways she was influenced by Southern Baptists' attitudes regarding race and gender issues. It makes sense to study these issues together because Crawford's Baptist colleagues understood them that way during her lifetime. J.R. Graves, one of the most influential S.B.C. pastors in the mid-nineteenth century, argued against abolitionists by claiming that slavery was as natural as marriage. He believed God gave men authority so that the servants and the wife would be "restrained, elevated and Christianized."¹⁴ We can also learn what most Southern Baptists expected from race relations and women's work from focusing on a woman who seemed exceptional to her observers. Martha Crawford never fit the model of Southern Baptist womanhood described by the Rev. Graves. She considered herself "Christianized" enough for overseas missions before getting married, and she felt empowered to "restrain" and "elevate" Chinese women and children. Crawford tried throughout her career to answer criticism that she assumed male responsibilities. In response to the criticism, she expressed frustration with

¹³ Irwin T. Hyatt's *Our Ordered Lives Confess* includes a chapter detailing how Martha Crawford and other Chinese missionaries organized their mission work to local women and why they changed their strategies by the 1890s. Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*; Keith Harper also noted a transition in Lottie Moon's attitudes regarding Chinese people in his introduction to an edited volume of her letters. Keith Harper, ed., introduction to *Send the Light: Lottie Moon's Letters and Other Writings* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 13.

Christian women from northern China. Concern about gender roles converged with American racial prejudice as Crawford supervised female converts.

"All these long years of toil and going from house to house." Female Mission Work and Martha Crawford's Frustrations

In 1888, a group of "white and wealthy" Southern Baptist women from various states formed their denomination's first national women's organization.¹⁵ The Woman's Missionary Union soon became the largest source of financial support in the Southern Baptist Convention, though its success did not ease suspicions that the women violated church regulations. The Woman's Missionary Union started decades later than women's fundraising groups in other denominations, but it still took a lot of preparation before its leaders could argue that the group fulfilled a legitimate spiritual purpose. Much of that preparation started with Martha Crawford's ministry in China.

Baptist supporters of woman's work traced their cause to Martha Crawford's protégé, Lottie Moon. Moon remains one of the most recognizable names in Baptist history because she combined her forty years of ministry in the Crawford's mission station with public advocacy for female fundraising and activism. Lottie Moon served as a missionary from 1874 until her death in 1912. In those years, most Protestant women missionaries focused on a range of domestic activities commonly classified as "woman's work for woman:" maintaining a clean Victorian-style home, caring for their families, and teaching

¹⁵ Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 121.

scripture to local women and children in their spare time.¹⁶ Supporters of female missions argued that American churches could only accomplish successful evangelism overseas if they hired more women to fulfill these activities.¹⁷

Moon, on the other hand, preferred the style of traveling evangelism practiced by Martha Crawford. Lottie Moon showed no patience for timid colleagues, school teaching, or any other pursuit that distracted from her calling to spread the gospel among Chinese women. As she wrote in a public letter to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, "I confess it would please my ambition to build up a big school, but I long to go out & talk to the thousands of women around me. I *hate* sham."¹⁸

Moon and other advocates of female missions felt driven to fulfill a distinctly feminine role on behalf of foreign missions. To borrow an image from a Presbyterian mission supporter, if American Christian women did not act, they felt that God would hold that failure against them; "the blood of souls" condemned to Hell would remain figuratively streaked on their "skirts."¹⁹ Lottie

¹⁶ Susan Hill Lindley, *"You Have Slept Out of Your Place:" A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 72; Leslie A. Flemming, introduction in *Women's Work for Women* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1989), 1; Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Flemming, introduction to *Women's Work for Women*, 11-12; Marjorie King, "Exporting Femininity, not Feminism: Nineteenth-Century U.S. Missionary Women's Efforts to Emancipate Chinese Women," in *Women's Work for Women*, ed. Leslie A. Flemming, 118-120. For more specific examples of how American women used cultural expectations to justify mission activism, see Jane Hunter, *Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Patricia S. Hill, *The World Their Household* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985). Barbara Welter, "She Hath Done What She Could," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (Winter 1978).

¹⁸ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 24 September 1883, *Send the Light*, 102-103.

¹⁹ Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Untitled Article, *Woman's Work for Woman* 1, no. 2 (April 1871): 19.

Moon urged the S.B.C. Mission Board to hire more single women as traveling evangelists in China and other countries, which gave the Woman's Missionary Union impetus to continue its fundraising campaigns.²⁰ As a result, women's activism in Southern Baptist missions expanded from two female missionaries sent to China in 1874 to 152 female missionaries serving overseas in 1913.²¹

What made Martha Foster Crawford instrumental in the midst of this rising passion for female mission work were her efforts to make women missionaries legitimate. She taught Moon and every American woman who lived at the Tungchow mission station in the latter half of the nineteenth century how to preach to local women. She organized their ministry excursions throughout the city and the surrounding villages. Crawford also led the mission station sometimes during her husband's absence. And she publicized all of this work in letters, articles, and L.S. Foster's biography of T.P. Crawford based on detailed journal records that she kept during the first thirty years of her career. Lottie Moon could train women she called "timid & inexperienced" because she had learned the craft under Crawford's tutelage. Moon told the S.B.C. mission board in 1888 that "I should have felt very helpless, at first, without the assistance of experienced missionaries . . ."²² Martha Crawford was one of these "experienced missionaries" that Moon looked up to, regardless of Baptist policy that designated

²⁰ Lottie Moon, Letter to H.A. Tupper, 23 August 1888, *Send the Light*, 130; Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 10 October 1891, *Send the Light*, 143; Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 29 July 1890, *Send the Light*, 166; Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 105, 112; Sullivan, "Woman With a Mission."

²¹ Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 114. The Southern Baptist women missionaries in 1913 worked in China, Africa, Mexico, Brazil, Japan, Italy, and Argentina.

²² Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 23 August 1888, *Send the Light*, 130.

her as simply Pastor Crawford's wife. Martha Crawford's defense of female preaching and leadership in missions enabled Moon and other younger Baptist women to seek equal opportunities as ministers.

Crawford expressed the type of urgency that led American Presbyterian mission supporters to write that "the blood of souls is on our skirts." But while other women assumed that sending missionaries to non-Christian women overseas would fulfill their responsibility, Martha Crawford knew the issue was far more complicated. Crawford worked at a frenetic pace in China, as if she saw a constant "blood" stain on her clothes from the slow pace of her ministry efforts. She expressed her greatest concern in a journal entry on March 20, 1868: "Among all the women I have visited not one has become a Christian. In all these long years of toil and going from house to house, not one woman has been saved from these."²³

²³ Crawford diary, 20 March 1868, Crawford Papers. For a photograph of Martha Crawford and two Bible women traveling, see L.S. Foster, *Fifty Years in China: An Eventful Memoir of Tarleton Perry Crawford, D.D.* (Nashville: Bayless-Pullen Co., 1909), 209.



Figure 2.1 Map of Martha Crawford's Frequent Destinations in China:
 1= P'ingtu (Xiaopingdao) 2=Tungchow (Tengchow),Shantung Province
 3= Laichowfu (Laichow) and surrounding area 4=Shanghai
 5= Tai'an

Map courtesy of the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

The toil she mentioned was house visitation in the city of Tungchow and nearby villages (in Shandong Province of northern China). On one of her most disappointing days, Crawford described it as “[t]o ride over these rugged mountain tracks to sleep in miserable dirty, stifling Chinese houses with a brick for a pillow -to sit by the day on their . . . kongs and strain the throat teaching them the truths of the gospel.”²⁴ At this point, the Crawfords had lived in Tungchow for about four years. They left an established Baptist church and beloved Chinese Christian converts behind in Shanghai to establish a new church among people with different dialects and less familiarity with American culture. Mr. Crawford bought a walled compound with a two-story house and

²⁴ Crawford diary, 3 November 1868. “Kongs” are brick beds commonly found in Chinese homes during the nineteenth century. They were connected to the fireplace and provided the only source of heat in the bedrooms.

several additional rooms for a school and regular church meetings. Martha had dedicated those years to teaching a boys' school and visiting local homes daily with the aid of an older Christian woman named Mrs. Lieu.

There were almost thirty million residents in Tungchow and the surrounding areas, but relatively few would invite Crawford into their walled homes to teach Christianity.²⁵ She saw so much potential to bring thousands of new believers into the church but had to settle for the few people who paid occasional visits to the mission for medicine or entertainment. The silence must have been frustrating.

But there was the added frustration of finding out that women and men in China had personalities that sometimes altered the missionaries' plans. As we saw in the introductory paragraph, the local Christian women who cooperated with Martha Crawford sometimes brought their personal conflicts into church with them. These women participated in Crawford's traveling evangelism as "Bible women." They visited houses with the American female missionaries and taught other Chinese women about Baptist Christianity. Mrs. Lieu, the woman who challenged Crawford during an argument in March of 1869, continued to stir up contention throughout their tenure together. As a Bible woman, Lieu extended Crawford's sphere of influence by introducing her to other local women but fought jealously against those who seemed to receive more of the missionary's time.

²⁵ Crawford diary, 18 January 1869; Crawford, "Shantung Province. Our North-China Mission Field," [date unknown] Crawford Papers, 1. One source compared the Shantung Province [now spelled as "Shandong"] to the state of Georgia in terms of geographic size. H.A. Tupper, *The Foreign Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Richmond, Va.: Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1880), 200-201.

Those Chinese women who did accept Martha Crawford's visits often either misunderstood her Shanghai accent or focused on unavoidable distractions, such as the paleness of her skin or her unusual clothes. As Crawford wrote later in her career, "Some listen with interest – yet alas! It is simply the interest of strangeness. The truth has not yet taken hold of any of their hearts."²⁶

Crowds routinely followed them in their travels, but not to listen to preaching; instead, people tried to figure out the foreigners' lifestyles. During one of Martha Crawford's visits to a home outside Tungchow, Lottie Moon noted that

At length we sat down to our meal and the scene was doubtless as novel to the Chinese as to ourselves. They crowded so close as almost to touch us and were interested in all we did. The knives and forks seemed to awaken especial attention.²⁷

Such constant, minute scrutiny took a toll on the missionaries, especially when it came with pejorative nicknames like "foreign devil." It contributed to intense weariness that prevented Moon from writing more letters home.²⁸

Martha Crawford feared her ministry work would fail because of Chinese opposition to Westerners. In January 1869, she wrote two gloomy reports. First, she wrote:

These people hate us so intensely! Rumors for many months have been current that foreigners are about to be exterminated and I doubt not that these people would willingly tear out our hearts if they dared! Not all of them -- but the rulers of public sentiment.²⁹

²⁶ Crawford diary, 23 February 1876. Crawford describes the crowd of women who listen to her when she travels with other white missionaries.

²⁷ Lottie Moon, "A Trip to the Country," 1874, *Send the Light*, 174.

²⁸ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 22 May 1880, *Send the Light*, 94.

²⁹ Crawford diary, 7 January 1869, Crawford Papers.

Crawford blamed the “anti-foreign party in the government” for pitting local Chinese officials against European and American residents. The following week, Crawford admitted that

we are more thoroughly hated than ever. People never call us by any name but kwei toy (devils) and even call our native evangelists ‘yellow devils’ -- so that the shame of the cross is heavy. Only one here + there has the boldness to have it -- especially just now when the rumors are so current that the native soldiers at Yentai (Chefoo) are getting ready to exterminate us. The wish I know is in the hearts of many . . .³⁰

Only once during Crawford’s career did violent threats against Europeans and Americans get so severe that the missionaries evacuated the area. They fled the mission station in 1870 for a few months after hearing that an angry mob killed Catholic missionaries in the Tientsin Massacre.³¹ Martha credited the leaders of France, England, and the United States for using diplomacy to quiet the protests against Christians in her region.³² Nevertheless, her colleague Lottie Moon argued in 1884 that “[t]he greatest difficulty is to get admission to the homes of the people. Though there is now no active hostility to foreigners in the city, there still continues the old, deep-rooted aversion to anything like social intercourse with us.”³³ Even as late as 1885, Crawford could still only hope that “familiarity will soon take away much of the odium of the religion of Jesus.” Crawford

³⁰ Crawford diary, 18 January 1869.

³¹ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 20. The Tientsin Massacre started because of rumors that French Catholic nuns had kidnapped and hurt children in the city of Tientsin (now call Tianjin). It ended with twenty one deaths and an official apology to the French government. J. K. Fairbank, “Patterns Behind the Tientsin Massacre,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20, no. 3/4 (Dec. 1957): 480-511.

³² Crawford diary, 7 January 1869, Crawford Papers; Fairbank, “Patterns Behind The Tientsin Massacre,” 480.

³³ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 11 February 1884, *Send the Light*, 104-105.

continued this statement in her descriptive pamphlet about the region by writing, “We are living down their prejudices, and rapidly becoming a factor in Chinese religious, political and social life.”³⁴ She and her colleagues also shared the burden of overcoming “prejudices” among Chinese Christians, who made missionaries feel unwelcome in one of the local Baptist churches. When Lottie Moon described the North Street church, where a Chinese man called Pastor Woo led a congregation of local converts, she said “The anti-foreign spirit is there, & only the grace of God can eradicate it.”³⁵

Martha Crawford waited many years to gain acceptance among many of the women living in the Shandong Province. She and her husband never inspired as many conversions as they hoped for, but Martha retained a reputation as an effective missionary on the strength of her methods.³⁶ In general, Martha Crawford based her ministry on interaction within homes, and she treated her home as a tool “not only for our convenience, but especially for the good of the church at present . . .”³⁷ To put it simply, Martha Crawford was willing to live wherever she would be most accessible to the local populace, especially to local women. She lived out that commitment in two phases of her mission career. From 1854 to 1886, she concentrated on meeting the Bible women’s acquaintances near her American-style mission station in a large city (first

³⁴ Crawford, “Shantung Province. Our North-China Mission Field,” Crawford Papers, 7.

³⁵ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 19 September 1876, *Send the Light*, 163.

³⁶ Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 98.

³⁷ Martha Foster Crawford to Mrs. Hartwell, undated (summer 1864), Hartwell Family Papers, Divinity Library Special Collections, Yale University Library.

Shanghai, then Tungchow) and paying occasional visits to those who could not get there. When people came from surrounding villages seeking Western medicine and other resources, she opened the house to sick visitors and overnight guests.³⁸ From 1886 until her death in 1909, she preferred to spend most of her time renting Chinese-style rooms in rural areas where no missionaries had visited before. Crawford set such a precedent for Baptist female mission work that, by the time of her death, gender roles within her denomination changed. The question of “woman’s work” shifted from whether China needed women missionaries to whether enough women would go.

“From the Condition of a Thing to the Dignity of a Sister:” Racial Stereotypes and the Role of Chinese Women in American Missions

As we have seen, Martha Crawford had to deal with the ways Chinese people perceived her in order to accomplish mission work. Throughout the years from 1864 through the 1870s, she traveled to local villages and city homes in Tungchow knowing that she would probably get called a “foreign devil” somewhere along her route. She mainly just visited the homes of Chinese acquaintances because she could be refused entrance elsewhere. Crawford persevered with her plans despite looming threats of violence. To her, these “prejudices,” especially the “old, deep-rooted aversion to anything like social

³⁸ L.S. Foster, *Fifty Years in China: An Eventful Memoir of Tarleton Perry Crawford, D.D.* (Nashville: Bayless-Pullen Co., 1909), 148-149; Lottie Moon to R.J. Willingham, 22 September 1904, *Send the Light*, 328.

intercourse with [foreigners]” posed problems because they left Chinese people predisposed to ignore her religious message.³⁹

The widespread prejudice against Americans that Shandong Province residents showed in the late nineteenth century did not exist in a vacuum. Those Chinese people who feared or hated American missionaries did so partly because of the tense political climate and partly because of their unfamiliarity with a distant nation. Through treaties with China, the United States restricted Chinese immigrants’ access to jobs and legal protection while giving Americans permission to settle in areas of inland China that were previously off-limits. Some Chinese citizens tried to understand these changes by endorsing rumors and bias against American newcomers.

In this sense, they had much in common with the American women who supported overseas missions. Martha Crawford and other church women drew much of their commitment to woman’s mission work from negative stereotypes about Asian culture. Finding out that many Chinese people hated them only strengthened American missionaries’ resolve to criticize Chinese culture and reform the Christian converts.

In an 1869 issue of *The Heathen Woman’s Friend*, a representative of the Methodist women’s mission society argued that “Christian civilization does little for a nation until it has lifted woman from the condition of a thing to the dignity of

³⁹ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 11 February 1884, *Send the Light*, 104-105.

a sister and a wife.”⁴⁰ This statement contained all the prejudice of the “foreign devil” epithet without the obvious venom. It assumed that American civilization was Christian and that foreign women were in a lower, inferior position until they felt its influence. The dichotomy between “thing” and “sister” dehumanized women in the parts of the world targeted for mission work in the late nineteenth century (primarily East Asia, India, eastern Europe, and West Africa) while anointing American Christian women with the power to make these women whole. What turned these foreign women into “things?” According to mission supporters in the United States, they lacked the resources and social standing of an American woman with a family. In other words, women overseas suffered because they lacked what American women claimed to understand best: a stable, moral domestic life. Female missionaries stationed in different Chinese cities in the 1870s through 1910 complained that Chinese women always kept filthy and uncomfortable homes and seldom took proper care of their children.⁴¹ The missionaries felt compelled to give their “sisters” overseas a chance to learn Christianity and Western housekeeping skills.

Martha Crawford embraced the stereotype about Chinese culture discouraging healthy domestic life as part of her mission strategy. Once Crawford started doing door-to-door evangelism in the mid-1860s, she complained about “miserable dirty, stifling Chinese houses” and the “horrid odors” of the people

⁴⁰ Lindley, *“You Have Stept Out of Your Place,”* 79.

⁴¹ The three missionaries mentioned are Mrs. Nannie Britton, Ms. Lottie Moon, and Ms. Sophie Lanneau who worked in southern and northern China at various times between 1874 and 1908. I specifically refer to comments they made during their first year of missionary service. For one example, see Sophie Lanneau to Parents, 12 March 1908, Sophie Lanneau Papers, North Carolina Baptist Historical Collection, Wake Forest University Library.

who lived in them.⁴² She briefly considered starting a boarding school in 1868 because, in her words, “Some of the other boys seem to wish to be Christians, but where they live at home surrounded by so many evil influences nothing short of a miracle can convert them.”⁴³

She deplored the gender segregation that made local women reluctant to attend church with men.⁴⁴ And everyday Crawford violated local expectations for how women should behave. Part of the reason why crowds gathered around Crawford and her colleagues during their travels was because it was so unusual to see a woman speaking to groups of strangers. The fact that she was a white American only heightened the curiosity. By her own estimation, Martha Crawford was “living in the lives of men” by working as a traveling minister; she knew such activities would be frowned upon by Southern Baptists in the United States.⁴⁵ But she knew that she chose that kind of work when she found it necessary while many Chinese women could not do likewise.

Perhaps that is why Crawford cooperated with Chinese Christian women who also lived unconventional lives. Between 1867 and 1876, she received help from five Bible women: Mrs. Lieu intermittently from 1868 to 1875, Mrs. Ling in 1869, Mrs. Lan and Mrs. Kwo in 1872, and Mrs. Mung between 1876 and 1881. Her journal records indicate that at least three of these women were widows during

⁴² Crawford diary, 3 November 1868, Crawford Papers; Vaughn, “Living in the Lives of Men,” 102.

⁴³ Crawford diary, 3 November 1868.

⁴⁴ M.F. Crawford, “Missionary Women,” *Alabama Baptist*, 27 Aug. 1891, 1. Article originally cited in Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 95; Vaughn, “Living in the Lives of Men,” 263-264.

⁴⁵ Vaughn, “Living in the Lives of Men.”

the time they worked together, and all were relatively poor. Poor women were less likely to harbor the distrust of foreigners shown by upper-class residents of Shantung Province.⁴⁶ In fact, most of these women had an economic reason to treat American missionaries with enthusiasm. Mrs. Ling, Mrs. Lan and Mrs. Kwo worked as housekeepers in the Crawfords' mission station. They volunteered to travel with Martha Crawford in addition to their paid responsibilities. Mrs. Lieu, the woman who worked with Crawford for the longest period of time, was not paid by the missionaries. Instead, she coordinated Crawford's traveling evangelism with her own traveling sales work; she introduced Crawford to her customers and probably gained more customers in the process. None of these women let concern over the stigmatized American "devils" or accepted women's roles hinder their involvement with the missionaries.

Traveling and conversing with Chinese women daily placed Martha Crawford in a position that put common racial stereotypes to the test. Like most American women who supported mission work, she considered herself on a higher cultural and religious level than the Chinese people she knew. As she put it, "The Chinese must have it seems a native they can look up to as kind of second pastor. We are so far superior to them they dare not try to imitate us . . ."⁴⁷ Crawford did believe that Chinese church members had advanced beyond the general population, but she thought that "[t]hey have grown up

⁴⁶ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 11 February 1884, *Send the Light*, 104-105.

⁴⁷ Crawford diary, 3 November 1868, Crawford Papers.

heathen, with the vices of generations of idolatry streaming in their bosoms.”⁴⁸

She hoped more local women would convert, but she did not expect them to reach her level. Rather, she saw the local converts as parts of her problematic surroundings. When Crawford’s father wrote a letter questioning her “humble devotedness” to missions, she wrote back that “we had wept our souls dry over the abominations of heathenism,” and she missed “the intercourse + worship with the pious of our own race and advancement . . .”⁴⁹ To Crawford, the company of Chinese Christians offered no substitute for support from fellow white Christians.

Crawford’s anxiety over the Chinese populace echoed the racial prejudice of some of her missionary colleagues. Martha Crawford was not unique when she described the spiritual state of Chinese Christians by comparing them to “the heathen” in the general Chinese population. Phrases like “these poor heathen” and “heathen nation” peppered the letters of missionaries from various American churches. Late nineteenth-century missionaries incorporated photography and public slide shows of potential converts into their fundraising reports in the United States. These images enhanced Americans’ arguments that “heathen” looked and behaved a certain way. Historian Najia Aarim-Heriot argued that, in some parts of the United States, “reports from Americans in China had resulted in shaping the image of the Chinese as the essentialized depraved pagan.”⁵⁰

Photographs could contribute to these negative opinions; when the image

⁴⁸ Crawford diary, 7 January 1869.

⁴⁹ Crawford diary, 29 January 1870.

⁵⁰ Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848-82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 60.

contrasted Chinese fashion with that of American missionaries, it made the people of China look strange and non-Christian to Western observers.⁵¹

Most missionaries maintained that visual dichotomy by clinging to American cultural baggage such as their home furnishings, their western clothing, and their conviction that Chinese culture did not measure up to their standards. For example, the Crawfords commissioned a portrait of Jefferson Davis for their mission station and kept it long after the Civil War ended.⁵² Few American missionaries working before 1920 wanted to look like they forgot their patriotism or adapted to Chinese culture.

American politicians showed similar distrust of Chinese culture during the late nineteenth century. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act passed based on suspicions that Chinese people could never transform into ideal Americans. T.P. Crawford and other Protestant missionaries advocated “coolie labor,” or temporary migration of poor workers from China to the United States, as a means of evangelism and acculturation.⁵³ William Speer, a Southern Presbyterian missionary who transferred from China to work with Chinese immigrants in California, compared “coolie labor” to African slavery as an economic and religious benefit to “the two dark continents of heathenism.” He believed that God sent “three millions of the ignorant sable sons and daughters of the one to be schooled here, and in due time to be returned to their torrid

⁵¹ For examples of missionaries’ photographs from China, see Hunter, *Gospel of Gentility*. For some of Martha Crawford’s photographs, see L.S. Foster, *Fifty Years in China: An Eventful Memoir of Tarleton Perry Crawford, D.D.* (Nashville: Bayless-Pullen Co., 1909).

⁵² Vaughn, “Missionary Returns,” 244, 247.

⁵³ Crawford diary, 12 October, 1867, 8 November 1869, Crawford Papers.

clime” to help introduce Christianity to African nations.⁵⁴ Likewise, he believed that temporary work for low wages in a Christian nation helped Chinese workers. So T.P. Crawford and other American clergy helped men travel from China to California and the Southeast, and the clergy opposed Chinese exclusion laws.⁵⁵

The political consensus decided that Chinese people were too much like black Americans because both groups originated in “heathen” nations and faced accusations of uncivilized living.⁵⁶ California congressmen agreed that laws barring black people from legal representation applied to the Chinese because “the term *black* should be construed as the opposite of white or Caucasian.”⁵⁷ By 1879, national Republican leaders discussed Chinese immigration as another “race trouble” that could eventually require military intervention like the “negro race trouble” did during the Civil War.⁵⁸ Observers debated whether Chinese people were more intelligent or energetic than black Americans, showing their lack of consensus on stereotypical portrayals of China.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Congress passed the Exclusion Act based on assumptions that Chinese people would always contribute to American racial problems by failing to assimilate with white

⁵⁴ Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety*, 41.

⁵⁵ Foster, *Fifty Years in China*, 181; Luther W. Spoehr, “Sambo and the Heathen Chinese: Californians’ Racial Stereotypes in the Late 1870s,” in *Race and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Ages of Territorial and Market Expansion*, ed. Michael L. Krenn (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 157.

⁵⁶ Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety*, 48-49.

⁵⁷ Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety*, 44.

⁵⁸ Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety*, 200.

⁵⁹ Spoehr, “Sambo and the Heathen Chinese,” 158-159, 163, 167.

people in the United States.⁶⁰ American law labeled Chinese people as inferior and placed them on the other side of the color line.

Martha Crawford relied on her Christian faith and American habits to distinguish between her and the “heathen” populace of northern China. Yet Crawford also knew from daily experience that her Chinese colleagues were not “things” or her obvious inferiors. They were individuals with families, relationships, and flaws like herself. By traveling with Crawford and the other missionaries, they provided an invaluable service that they could not do without. Once when a Bible woman could not work, Crawford “sank” into a life-threatening illness “under the accumulated load.”⁶¹ The inconveniences involved in visits were already tiresome and the rewards few and faint. In Crawford’s words, “To go on this singlehanded seems such slow work.”⁶² Traveling alone or only with other American women would have also been less productive. Besides the unavoidable novelty of her appearance and habits, even Crawford admitted that she did not speak the regional dialects well. So, from the listeners’ perspective, Martha Crawford and the other missionaries probably seemed like novices compared to the Bible women.⁶³ Both sets of women shared a deep commitment to Christian ministry work; it sustained them through others’ hatred, weary travels, and long hours speaking in public. Commitment to the faith even

⁶⁰ Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety*, 7.

⁶¹ Crawford diary, 5 October 1868, Crawford Papers.

⁶² Crawford diary, 3 November 1868.

⁶³ Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*, 61-62.

compelled one elderly Bible woman to walk miles through a snowstorm just to walk more miles sharing the gospel.⁶⁴

Martha Crawford saw how much she had in common with the Chinese Christian women who volunteered as her Bible women. And she got nervous when she realized their similarities. As she told her American audience, the Bible women were supposed to be "her feeble lambs" and her "converted heathen."⁶⁵ From the perspective of her assumed cultural superiority, it did not make sense for one of the largest parts of her ministry to serve as an arena where Chinese women could match or excel her effectiveness. So, for all the dedication and effort that Martha Crawford poured into her traveling evangelism, it turned out to be one of the most contentious parts of her life. She continued to need Chinese women to volunteer as Bible women, but she masked that need behind ongoing complaints over how the women performed their work. Then, as their self-proclaimed manager, Crawford claimed responsibility for their behavior.

"To Save Her by Dismissing Her:" Disciplining the Bible Women

So far, we have traced Martha Foster Crawford's missionary career through the early 1870s to describe her type of ministry work and why she needed Chinese colleagues to help her accomplish that work well. This section concentrates on the relationships Crawford maintained with the Bible women through the 1870s into the 1880s. She had several ongoing conflicts with the Chinese Christian women, partly because she kept assuming undue authority

⁶⁴ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 28 Dec. 1874, *Send the Light*, 160.

⁶⁵ Crawford diary, 3 November 1868, Crawford Papers.

over them. We can understand those conflicts better in comparison with her relationships with her husband, Chinese house servants, and fellow female missionaries. With such a determined, goal-oriented personality, Martha Crawford had her share of conflicts with those around her – Chinese and American alike. But her relationships with Bible women were unique because this was the part of her ministry career that created a unique contribution to the cause of "woman's work for woman." And it was also the part of her work with the fewest results over the course of her career. In a way, it was advantageous for Martha Crawford to record her conflicts with Bible women as well as her mediation attempts; publicizing the conflicts put her supporters' focus on the Chinese women's flaws rather than on the effectiveness of Crawford's ministry.

As a summary of the relationships Martha Crawford had with the Tungchow Bible women, we can note that she dismissed three of the five women she identified as volunteers between 1867 and 1881. Crawford's relationship with Mrs. Lieu was the most volatile; she dismissed Lieu three times, criticized her behavior before a church wide meeting, and eventually watched her be expelled from the Baptist denomination.⁶⁶ Mrs. Lan and Mrs. Kwo were reprimanded for arguing, which led to Lan losing her job as a mission station servant and leaving the church as well.⁶⁷ Crawford had no conflicts with Mrs. Ling, who served a different role because she was not a Christian, but Ling still left the post for family

⁶⁶ Crawford diary, 1 April 1869, 3 June 1869, 29 January 1870, 12 November 1870, 16 January 1872, Crawford Papers.

⁶⁷ Crawford diary, 28 January 1876.

reasons.⁶⁸ And the last Bible woman, Mrs. Mung, escaped the pattern of contention, possibly because she lived outside the city. She had few interactions with the missionaries besides attending church and allowing them to teach Bible lessons in her home.

Crawford needed to cooperate with Chinese Christian women in ministry, but she also felt that she needed to be the arbiter of those relationships. Take the example of Martha Crawford's association with Mrs. Lieu. The two women shared a relatively long personal and professional connection. Lieu was a member of the Monument Street Baptist Church that Tarleton P. Crawford led, and her son attended Martha Crawford's school.⁶⁹ Unlike many of the poorer locals, Lieu also lived near enough to the city of Tungchow to participate in many activities in and around the mission station. Lieu could help Crawford avoid the difficulties of living in a walled city.⁷⁰ Instead of walking uninvited into the gates of strangers' walled houses, Crawford's Bible woman directed her to neighbors, friends, and women who supported Lieu's private work as a traveling saleswoman.⁷¹ The time spent traveling and teaching together influenced both women; Martha Crawford expressed gratitude for the additional help, and Mrs. Lieu considered her close relationship with Crawford something unique among other Chinese women.⁷²

⁶⁸ Crawford diary, 13 September 1869, 18 November 1869.

⁶⁹ Crawford diary, 12 November 1870, 16 January 1872.

⁷⁰ Tupper, *Foreign Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 200-201, 232.

⁷¹ Crawford diary, 16 January 1872, Crawford Papers.

⁷² Crawford diary, 3 June 1869.

Still, on April 1, 1869, Crawford wrote, "Sorely as I need her help in visiting among the women - often as I thanked God for her I saw she was ruined if I continued her in the place, if indeed it isn't too late to save her by dismissing her."⁷³ Lieu had been Crawford's helper for at least seven months. She had proved helpful by learning to read the missionaries' phonetic Chinese translations, visiting women who came to the church, and teaching women during her spare time from mission duties. Nevertheless, Crawford noted a jealous, argumentative streak in her character that led her to gossip, treat Crawford rudely, and try to force others to follow her directions. Crawford decided that the undeserved prestige of working with a missionary had "spoiled" Lieu, which increasingly contributed to her spiritual "ruin."⁷⁴

To Martha Crawford, spiritual "ruin" in one convert posed the largest threat to the spiritual wellbeing of all Chinese converts. Practically, it entailed inability to abide by the rules of the local church, to respect authority, and to treat other people in the community respectfully as well. But, in a larger sense, a "ruined" convert had permanently thwarted missionaries' attempts to rescue her from heathenism; they could only help by isolating that person before she influenced the rest of the church. In Crawford's case, Mrs. Lieu offered the fullest example of Bible women's potential deterioration and the strongest proof of the constant need for the supervision of female missionaries.

⁷³ Crawford diary, 1 April 1869.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Over the course of seven years, Crawford presented detailed evidence of Mrs. Lieu's spiritual ruin. First, she started acting as if Crawford should not talk to other Chinese women. Since Crawford spent a considerable amount of time with her live-in Chinese maid, Mrs. Lieu soon became jealous of her and started convincing other Christian women not to associate with her.⁷⁵ This behavior led to Crawford's attempt to ameliorate the situation by praying with the women on March 28, 1869. But five days later, Crawford's personal prayer time and her husband's advice convinced her to fire Lieu, eventually rehiring her when her behavior seemed more submissive. Further arguments proved that Lieu refused to respect church rules. After Martha Crawford exhausted her ideas to "try another plan of managing her," the Crawfords brought Mrs. Lieu before the members of the local church for "judgment" and eventually expelled her from the Baptist church in 1876.⁷⁶

Martha Crawford was not excited to enact this process; she missed having a fellow worker, and she regretted Lieu's fall from grace after so many years of instruction. Still, she felt entitled and obligated to discipline her Bible women whenever they strayed from the straight and narrow. She thought of herself as the leader of the flock she occasionally called "feeble lambs," using the skills she had gained as a longtime Christian and an American to train and reprove them much like a shepherd uses his staff.⁷⁷ Her analogy referred to Jesus, who

⁷⁵ Crawford diary, 28 March 1869, 3 June 1869.

⁷⁶ Crawford diary, 3 June 1869, 12 November 1870, 28 January 1876.

⁷⁷ Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men," 220, 263-264; Crawford diary, 9 June 1870, Crawford Papers.

described himself as the “Good Shepherd” of his followers.⁷⁸ By referring to the Bible women as “lambs,” Crawford acknowledged them as Christians and depicted herself in a spiritually superior position as their “pastor” or shepherd.

It was no small thing for Martha Crawford to imagine herself with pastoral responsibilities. The idea of a female pastor flew in the face of Southern Baptist doctrine. The denomination had only accepted single female missionaries in 1872 based on arguments that they could provide the only means of ministry with Chinese women. But within the United States, Southern Baptists designated all ministries as a male endeavor, unless a woman volunteered to teach children. Even Southern Baptist women's efforts to establish a Woman's Missionary Union raised doubts because it gave them a venue for public leadership. Martha Crawford could not use Baptist authority to enforce rules of behavior for Chinese women while her denomination forbade female leadership positions.

Crawford's relationship with her husband helped make her tenuous position as a leader possible. Traditional Baptist church policy dictated that the leadership of a pastor could be overthrown by a democratic vote within the congregation. But, in practice, both Crawfords assumed strict leadership status and the power of swift judgment. The Rev. Tarleton Perry Crawford has been called a “disciplinarian” at best and a “hypocrite” at worst.⁷⁹ Chinese church members resented his eagerness to discipline errant converts by calling special church meetings. Often, the spiritual reasons provided for this public shaming

⁷⁸ John 10:14-15. The Bible. King James Version. “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

⁷⁹ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 22.

ritual masked personal animosity rising from Crawford's tendency to invest in church members' businesses. Sometimes, they simply originated with a conviction that a certain deacon acted too confidently, as if he were indispensable to the missionaries. These reasons merged in the case of Deacon Wong Wha Yuan, who co-owned a store with Crawford and disagreed on how to manage it; on the strength of Martha Crawford's vote, he was expelled in 1868 for allowing a partner to run the store on the Sabbath day of rest.⁸⁰ Through such measures, T.P. Crawford either excluded or drove away all of the original Chinese leaders in his Tungchow church.⁸¹

That T.P. Crawford encouraged his wife to vote in major church decisions was a marvel, considering that she could not exercise this privilege in the United States.⁸² Yet, with few exceptions, T.P. continued to honor his wife's individuality in mission work. Martha and the other American women could always vote on the church board and in missionary meetings, even though such equality was unheard of at other Baptist mission stations. Martha called herself a full-fledged "missionary lady" rather than a "missionary's wife."⁸³ And Pastor Crawford allowed his wife to continue taking month-long excursions into the countryside to evangelize with Bible women, even after they adopted two children. Such flexibility for a missionary's wife was virtually unknown in Martha Crawford's lifetime. Most married women dedicated their time to tending the mission station

⁸⁰ Crawford diary, 5 October 1868, Crawford Papers.

⁸¹ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 19.

⁸² Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men;" Sullivan, "Woman With a Mission," 76-78.

⁸³ M.F. Crawford, "Missionary Women," *Alabama Baptist*, 27 Aug. 1891, 1.

and raising their children. Yet Crawford traveled widely, preached to crowds of local residents, trained Bible women, taught school, presented a lecture on "woman's work" to other missionaries in 1877, wrote reports about her work, and helped recruit the first Baptist single female missionaries. Her husband showed so much confidence in her abilities that he left her in charge of the Monument Street Baptist church during his absence in 1885 and let her showcase her language skills by preaching some of the Sunday sermons. With the blessing of her husband, Martha Crawford assumed unique responsibilities overseas without facing censure from her denomination.

Like other American female missionaries, Martha Crawford explained her tendency to defy tradition by the overwhelming need to spread the gospel and support "feeble" Chinese Christians. This reasoning portrayed the Bible women and other converts as more than just needy trainees in the faith; they were also symbols that justified American females' activism. In Crawford's journal entries, Mrs. Lieu the Bible woman also functioned as an example of the greatest hardship of missionary life. She described her toughest trials with Chinese converts this way:

when these feeble lambs to whom we have through sorrow, labor, tears, agony given birth – it is when their stupidity – fleshliness, want of conscience, combined with headiness, inexpressible obstinacy and ebullitions of uncontrolled passion – it is when these manifest themselves in every possible form that we feel we must evidence hardness, or fly the field.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Crawford diary, 3 November 1868, Crawford Papers. The emphasis in the quote was her original addition. This journal entry was part of a personal response to her father's earlier letter observing that she had an unusually harsh attitude about missionary life.

One can imagine why Crawford felt justified in taking on more than the usual load of ministerial authority considering she lived in constant fear of crumbling beneath a load of sins heaped on by her “church of converted heathen.”⁸⁵ From her perspective, if she and her fellow missionaries did not find some way to counter the mistakes of wayward local Christians, no one would.

A review of Crawford’s relationships with Chinese Christians reveals the power of her dichotomy between the “feeble lambs” and the missionaries who led them. Her journal entries on the subject followed a pattern that began with a Chinese woman’s immaturity, then listed consequences, such as a strain in the relationship and a decrease in the effectiveness of Crawford’s teaching ministry. We have already traced her recollections of Mrs. Lieu, but Martha Crawford also dismissed two other Bible women, Mrs. Lan and Mrs. Kwo, for arguing with each other. The bickering between the two women disturbed the system of cooperation that Crawford hoped to maintain in her traveling ministry. She hoped that they would work together to teach Bible lessons to the other Chinese women who visited the church. Instead, Crawford chose to release both women from service as Bible women and as house servants within the mission so that they would no longer disturb the peace. She eventually rehired Kwo and found another mission willing to hire Mrs. Lan, even though Crawford wrote “she is so high tempered I did not want her again.”⁸⁶ Crawford’s record of this encounter followed the general pattern of her journal entries about conflicts with Bible

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Crawford diary, 28 January 1876.

women. It ended with either the Chinese woman's repentance to God and Crawford or with Crawford seeking spiritual strength to stop using the Bible woman. Either way, the journal focused on the Chinese Christian's particular shortcomings and Crawford's ability to forgive and persevere despite them.

Martha Crawford's need to emphasize tension also explained why her journal describes conflicts with Chinese Christian women with more detail and condemnation than her conflicts with Chinese servants or other female missionaries. For example, Crawford's relationship with Mrs. Lieu was similar to her relationship with a younger American missionary named Edmonia (Eddie) Moon. Eddie Moon joined the North China mission in 1872 as the second single woman ever appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention. Like a Bible woman, she traveled to local houses with Crawford speaking Chinese to women and inviting them to become Christians. Moon also brought a divisive attitude to the mission work. While Mrs. Lieu quarreled with the other church women, Eddie Moon quarreled with everyone except her older sister Lottie. Illness and irritability became Eddie Moon's trademarks soon after her arrival in Tengchow, and she acted out her tension by constantly telling the house servants and the young students to be quiet or stomping on the floor of her second story bedroom until everyone downstairs complied with her wishes.⁸⁷

It only took a few months for Martha Crawford to judge that Moon was "unfit" to be a missionary since she was ill, anxious, and unhappy. Martha Crawford approved of strict methods, but she also had her limits for the

⁸⁷ Crawford diary, 28 January 1876.

harshness of that treatment. She observed that “Eddie is so exacting and crass to the Chinese that they do not like her, and she is sometimes so rude to her foreign friends they cannot love her as they would like.”⁸⁸ She decided that Eddie Moon lacked the cultural sensitivity necessary to be an effective minister to Chinese women.⁸⁹ But instead of reprimanding her before the church members for bad behavior or excluding her from the Baptist fellowship, Crawford simply approved Lottie Moon’s decision to take Eddie back to the United States.⁹⁰ While poor behavior and a contrary attitude could indicate that a Chinese person was no longer worthy of being called a Christian, a white Southern Baptist with similar problems received lenient treatment and did not lose church fellowship.⁹¹

Crawford was stern when she managed her Chinese house servants, but even they did not face the type of spiritual retribution reserved for Bible women. Crawford usually employed one or two female servants as well as at least one male servant, a cook, and a gatekeeper while living in Tengchow. Her husband redesigned the house in the early 1870s with two rooms for male and female servant quarters, and the servants’ families also lived there if their children attended Martha Crawford’s boys’ boarding school. Martha Crawford managed these resident house servants in the style commonly used with slaves and domestics in Alabama, calling them “boy” or “servant woman” and expecting

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Vaughn, “Living in the Lives of Men,” 298.

⁹⁰ Lottie Moon soon returned to Tengchow and established a reputation as the most beloved Southern Baptist missionary based on her lifelong devotion to teaching and protecting poor residents of northern China. See Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 93-136.

⁹¹ Tupper, *Foreign Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 215-217, 221.

flawless obedience.⁹² Crawford most likely modeled her interactions with Chinese servants after observation of her relatives interacting with slaves on their plantations in Fosters Settlement, Alabama.⁹³ She considered the servants' spiritual growth as part of her moral obligation and thought of them as "only grown-up children."⁹⁴ She expected them to attend church and used at least four of her female servants, including Mrs. Lan, Mrs. Kwo, and Mrs. Mung, as Bible women.⁹⁵ But Crawford rarely fired her servant women, and she usually made provisions to ensure their continued employment with other missionaries.

Martha Crawford believed that both Bible women and servants could be "ruined" if not handled correctly, but a house servant's ruin did not pose a permanent threat or preclude her from future mission work. In the case of a maid who seemed too short tempered, Crawford simply allowed her to quit voluntarily without forcing her to leave the church.⁹⁶ Though she did likewise with Mrs. Lan, the maid she considered "high-tempered," she tried to help both women by finding other missionary homes to hire them.⁹⁷ Crawford would have rehired them

⁹² Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men," 22, 138-139. Quote written by Vaughn.

⁹³ Martha Foster Crawford's parents sold their slaves during her childhood, but her relatives in Tuscaloosa County owned over 150 slaves in 1850. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, Slave Schedules, 1850*, prepared by the Geography Division in cooperation with the Housing Division, Bureau of the Census (Washington, D.C., [196-]), microfilm reel 6; Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men," 138-139.

⁹⁴ Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men," 138-139.

⁹⁵ Crawford rarely identified her house servants unless they served as Bible women. She followed Southern tradition by referring to servants in the possessive form. Vaughn, "Living in the Lives of Men," 111-113.

⁹⁶ This unnamed servant woman left the church anyway as a slight to the missionaries. Martha Crawford seemingly only regretted the loss of her Christian son, who would lose the benefit of Christian fellowship. Crawford diary, 29 January 1870, Crawford Papers.

⁹⁷ Crawford diary, 29 January 1870; Crawford diary, 28 January 1876.

if not for her fear that such indulgence would “ruin” them by implying that she approved of their wayward behavior.⁹⁸

By such methods, Crawford respected her servants’ needs and privacy. She condemned fellow missionaries like Eddie Moon for yelling at servants and treating them poorly. Also, she never mentioned reprimanding her servants in public as she did with wayward Bible women. She refused to keep some of her maids, but, in at least three cases, rehired them or helped them find another position. A disobedient Chinese maid did not risk the type of spiritual “ruin” applied to Mrs. Lieu, especially if the maid did not profess Christian faith. In those circumstances, Crawford tended to send the maid away to another mission station after a few years for the sake of her own sentiments.⁹⁹ She felt that time spent living in the mission should be devoted to those interested in Christianity.

Martha and T.P. Crawford found it easier to limit conflict when they did not interact directly with Chinese Christian leaders. But even this factor did not foreshadow greater independence and autonomy for Chinese converts. For instance, Martha contrasted the Tengchow church’s disappointing cast of characters with Wong Ping San, her husband’s first Chinese convert and the pastor of the church they established in Shanghai. She credited him with “tender conscience, love for souls, patience, and general reliability of being a leader” as well as “self control.”¹⁰⁰ In previous journal entries, Crawford described him

⁹⁸ Crawford diary, 29 January 1870.

⁹⁹ Crawford diary, 16 December 1867.

¹⁰⁰ Crawford diary, 13 November 1868.

faithfully following her and her husband's directions as a co-teacher in the Shanghai school and, later, as a minister-in-training. The ease with which T.P. Crawford transferred the pastorate to him made it seem as if Wong was the perfect convert, but that image obscures the fact that both Crawfords appreciated him for the ways he mirrored their own interests. Martha Crawford deemed Wong's leadership successful mainly because he ran the church according to the American Southern Baptist methods she preferred rather than adapting to the Chinese environment. Also, the distance between the two churches ensured that there was less opportunity for conflict and competition if Wong did use more initiative than Crawford expected.

There was one more group of Chinese adults that Martha Crawford interacted with regularly: the men and women who watched her preaching excursions in Tungchow and the surrounding villages. These were the people who gathered as the missionaries arrived in their drawn carriages and sometimes called them "foreign devils." Crawford did not know the faces in these intrusive crowds, but she did not hesitate to identify them in her journal as hateful and possibly violent. Her primary way of relating to these crowds was to try preaching to the women in the audience while ignoring the observers' criticism.

By the mid-1870s, most of the violent threats and hatred that Crawford described in 1869 had subsided. But that did not make her house visitations much easier. For one thing, the people of Shantung Province were still trying to figure out the women missionaries' motives. The traditions that made a traveling Chinese woman seem unusual applied with double strength to Crawford and her

colleagues. Chinese audiences wondered why Martha Crawford did not devote her time to her home and avoid social interaction with men. Some Chinese men thought “Martha was gender neutral or perhaps superior to foreign men” because teaching was “the most honored vocation in Chinese society” and culturally “anathema” for Chinese women.¹⁰¹ These men assumed that Crawford only preached because American men were too weak to stop her. And Crawford agreed that it was unusual for a female American Southern Baptist to evangelize to both men and women simultaneously.¹⁰²

Yet she continued to violate Chinese gender roles and ask Chinese women to do likewise. Though she knew that gender segregation was observed at local functions, Martha Crawford encouraged women to attend the Monument Street Baptist Church. Attendance remained low in the 1870s, but it improved from the few women who showed up irregularly in the 1860s. She preferred to work with Bible women who showed enough confidence to explain the Christian message without her intervention. Later in her career, Crawford published a pamphlet criticizing social norms that limited women's education and freedom, especially foot binding and arranged marriages.¹⁰³ And, in a direct criticism of American culture, Martha Crawford referenced Chinese gender discrimination as a case against limitations on white Southern Baptist women.

¹⁰¹ Vaughn, “Living in the Lives of Men,” 219.

¹⁰² Vaughn, “Living in the Lives of Men,” 219; Foster, *Fifty Years in China*, 207-208.

¹⁰³ Crawford, “Shantung Province. Our North-China Mission Field,” Crawford Papers, 1-8.

It is counterintuitive that Martha Crawford spent so much time in her journals complaining about her Chinese Bible women. She could have devoted as much time to celebrating their common religious values, their common ministry styles, and their common strength against discrimination and criticism. She could have shown more leniency when these women disappointed her.

Crawford singled out the Bible women to face more stringent standards because she believed Bible women had more to gain from her strict methods. As the self-proclaimed manager of these female volunteers, Martha Crawford treated her traveling ministry like an informal reform school for Chinese Christian women. In every situation, their work acted as a regimented schedule designed to discipline the women and mold their personalities.¹⁰⁴ For example, the weekly schedule Crawford created in May 1876 required two Bible women to practice door-to-door evangelism three times a week – twice in the company of a female missionary and once with each other.¹⁰⁵ Crawford assumed that the schedule would provide enough training for Bible women in the form of observation that they would not deviate from that pattern when the Bible women traveled alone later in the week. And the schedule catered to the missionaries' priorities of visiting as many local women as possible, rather than the more personal approach of making repeat visits to certain friends or relatives.

¹⁰⁴ This analysis of Martha Crawford's methods as a form of discipline draws on Michel Foucault's description of reform ideals in prisons and schools in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Thanks to Dr. James Hevia for his feedback on this idea.

¹⁰⁵ Crawford diary, 12 February 1876, Crawford Papers.

Crawford's house visitations served the practical goal of spreading the gospel while serving the personal goal of conforming these Chinese women in her image. After all, the more they worked with her, the more unusual these women seemed to other Tungchow residents. The more time they dedicated to learning the missionaries' unusual doctrine, the more they risked alienation from friends and relatives who did not understand it. The more they traveled with Crawford and other white American women, the more they understood about the foreign culture. One could say that Martha Crawford's Bible woman team substituted for the boys' boarding school she never established because, like a school, her traveling ministry isolated women from the "many evil influences" she attributed to a typical Chinese house. Ideally, the Bible women would see each local house as a site for potential conversion, not just as the home of friends or family. Crawford's scheduling and disciplinary efforts were designed to change Chinese women's priorities towards her objectives.

*"It is not our business to foreignize, but to Christianize:"
Martha Crawford's Friendship Strategy and Chinese Christian Women's
Responses to Baptist Mission Work*

For all the planning, disciplining, and worrying that Martha Crawford did to make her traveling ministry successful, it never inspired as many conversions as she expected. At the end of their lives, only a few hundred Chinese people credited T.P. and Martha Crawford for their conversion and baptism.¹⁰⁶ The Monument Street Baptist Church remained small when Martha left in 1881 to spend two years in the United States. The Crawfords eventually left the church

¹⁰⁶ Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 98.

and the Southern Baptist Convention to run their own Baptist mission dedicated to evangelism in the countryside of northern China. I doubt that Martha Crawford ever considered her ministry efforts a true failure. But the lack of widespread response did inspire her to change her methods later in life.

Martha Crawford took a long-delayed furlough from 1881 to 1883. When she returned from America, she stopped teaching her boys' school. Instead, she focused her attention on traveling evangelism and church work. She did so in compliance with T.P. Crawford's growing interest in what he called "gospel mission" – essentially, a group of American missionaries spreading Christianity without schools, hospitals, or the management of a church-wide organization.¹⁰⁷

T.P. Crawford envisioned his "gospel mission" as a team of white American Baptists preaching throughout northern China while subsisting on inexpensive local resources. He emphasized cheaper options for practical reasons and because he had come to believe that "it is not our business to foreignize, but to Christianize, the people among whom we dwell."¹⁰⁸ His inspiration came from the China Inland Mission, an English ministry that expected missionaries to wear Chinese clothing and hairstyles like a long braided ponytail.¹⁰⁹ Both Crawfords adopted what they considered a Chinese lifestyle; they stopped eating American food and changed their wardrobe. In September 1893, the Crawfords moved out of their American-style mission station and

¹⁰⁷ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 38-39.

¹⁰⁸ Foster, *Fifty Years in China*, 302.

¹⁰⁹ Vaughn, "Missionary Returns and Cultural Conversions in Alabama and Shandong," 243.

rented a house in Tai'an, a town southwest of Tengchow. Though Martha had started her career in China wearing hoop skirts, she ended it wearing the type of robes traditional to Shantung Province.¹¹⁰ She even maintained her Chinese fashion while visiting the United States during a furlough in the early 1900s.

Martha Crawford also ignored many of the American norms for Southern Baptist women during the later years of her life. In 1885, Crawford moderated meetings among the five missionaries at her station, decided who would pastor the local Baptist church, and took responsibility for the entire Baptist ministry in one large region of northern China.¹¹¹ Into her old age, Crawford still preached an occasional Sunday sermon and traveled alone to preach a week's worth of services outside the city. After 1886, she spent most of her days living apart from her husband as she preached in remote villages. Sometimes she traveled with Bible women, and sometimes she traveled alone to visit Lottie Moon and other single missionaries.

The length of Crawford's ministry trips extended from one to three months, and her ministry style changed with the longer durations. Because she had adopted a Chinese lifestyle, Martha Crawford lived in the same rented rooms with her Bible women during her excursions in the late 1880s and 1890s. She also relied on building relationships with local women not just by communicating doctrine, but also "through informal chats on subjects of universal female

¹¹⁰ Vaughn, "Missionary Returns and Cultural Conversions in Alabama and Shandong," 247, 254.

¹¹¹ Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 17 July 1885, *Send the Light*, 111-114; Lottie Moon to R.J. Willingham, 9 March 1896, *Send the Light*, 273.

interest."¹¹² The older Martha visited women with the intent of getting to know them and hoped that they would convert eventually through the influence of her friendship. According to historian Irwin T. Hyatt, her hopes were often shattered. A fellow missionary, C.W. Pruitt, described how Crawford used to sit down, hold a Chinese woman's hand, and talk about Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, the other woman probably thought Martha was a sweet friend.¹¹³ Crawford always preferred that a conversion accompany the friendship. She maintained good relationships with some of the local Christian women she met and continued traveling in search of more converts long after she felt too ill to work.¹¹⁴

The geographic distance between China and the American South contributed to Martha Crawford's freedom to challenge gender norms; few Southern Baptists knew the details of her work. Still, by August of 1891, Crawford felt compelled to explain how a female missionary worked as a full-time traveling evangelist without seeming to "forget her sex and perform the labors appropriate only to men." She published an article in her home state's Baptist newspaper arguing that "foreign missionary ladies" always played a supportive role to the male missionaries by assisting in church work and travel. When traveling, the ladies spoke to a separate group of Chinese women in a public venue or in a host's home. The relatively rare instances when they spoke to men came because of the peculiar circumstances of working in China. Female missionaries

¹¹² Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 74. Quote written by Hyatt.

¹¹³ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 87-88.

¹¹⁴ Lottie Moon to R.J. Willingham, 7 April 1900, *Send the Light*, 292; Lottie Moon, "A Growing Work," 25 May 1888, *Send the Light*, 230-232.

had to share duties for serving male church members because they always made up most of the staff of the Tung Chow mission, and Chinese men occasionally asked to attend services reserved for women. So when the female missionaries occasionally wrote home about their " 'itinerating' and 'preaching' " – terms reserved only for male pastors and ministers in SBC circles – the apparent violation of "prevalent ideas of feminine propriety" could be blamed on the pressing circumstances and on Chinese men's interference.¹¹⁵

The cultural disempowerment of Christian women within the United States led Martha Crawford and other missionaries to seek leadership opportunities by enlisting followers within a different cultural setting. Their uneasy relationships with these followers, characterized by paranoia that Bible women challenged the missionary's authority, were more compelling considering that these women were simultaneously reluctant to allow Chinese women to express their personalities. Consequently, most American women never knew in what ways Chinese women actually hoped to gain from ministry training and how that training affected their lives. This ignorance prevented female missionaries and the women's missionary movement from understanding the impact of class issues, religious traditions, and Chinese gender roles on the Chinese converts who became Bible women.

Chinese women were obviously more than the homogenous heathen mass or the obedient army of converts that American women envisioned in the nineteenth century. Using Chinese-language sources, historian Kwok Pui-lan proved that these women cannot be understood except in the context of social

¹¹⁵ M.F. Crawford, "Missionary Women," *Alabama Baptist*, 27 Aug. 1891, 1. All quotes in this paragraph come from this article.

events and gender restrictions occurring during the late nineteenth century. For instance, the Chinese Christians who chose to become Bible women did not represent every social class. They came from the lower class, as evidenced by the fact that they were physically capable of walking from house to house throughout the village.¹¹⁶ If they had grown up in upper-class families or if their parents had expected them to marry into a higher class, the women's mothers would have bound their feet when they were girls, making their feet very short and painful to walk on.¹¹⁷

Besides being lower-class, Chinese Bible women were also more likely to have performed significant roles in local religious rituals before converting to Christianity.¹¹⁸ Tengchow in particular contained several temples where Buddhists and devotees of local sects gathered to worship annually.¹¹⁹ Kwok mentions a few women who seemingly viewed their employment as Bible women as an extension of their former role as leader of a small religious sect.¹²⁰ Though they had pledged loyalty to a new god, they worshipped in similar ways and used the door-to-door visiting opportunities as a way to gather the same group of

¹¹⁶ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 80-81, 91.

¹¹⁷ The foot-binding process involved breaking a girl's feet before she became twelve years old, wrapping them tightly with a piece of cloth until the toes were close to the heel, and wrapping the feet over the course of about ten years until they took a shape about three inches in length. Most girls in this condition had to be carried everywhere because of the pain, and women with bound feet were rarely capable of walking far from their own homes. Girl's feet were bound in anticipation of future marriages because small feet were considered particularly attractive. Kwok Pui-lan, *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860-1927* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 110.

¹¹⁸ Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Tupper, *Foreign Missions of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 200-201.

¹²⁰ Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity*, 10-11.

believers. This prior experience could prove vital for a potential Bible woman because she already faced the social stigma against women who traveled alone or dared to enter the traditionally male profession of teaching.

Considering that Chinese Bible women were generally poor and accustomed to religious devotion, what benefits could they hope to gain from working with American female missionaries? Bible women gained access to educational opportunities they had never had before. Before the arrival of Western missionaries, Chinese education was reserved for boys and young men and it centered on classics, namely the writings of Confucius. Missionary schools offered young girls training in basic subjects and English, but Bible women and church members were the only adults with access to this type of education.¹²¹

Though Baptist missionaries only intended to teach Chinese Christians enough English to enable them to understand the Bible, some Bible women used that knowledge to help them attain other opportunities, such as attending college in the United States or even becoming a missionary in their own right. Chinese women working with other denominations besides the Southern Baptist Convention were more likely to have these types of experiences, especially in the first few decades of the twentieth century. A Bible woman working with Congregationalist missionaries was able to continue her own mission work in New Zealand. The missionaries also helped two Bible women establish their own church, leaving them to serve as co-pastors of the Chinese congregation.¹²²

¹²¹ Hunter, *Gospel of Gentility*, 15-19.

¹²² Mary Marchese, Conversation with author, High Point, N.C., 17 October 2003.

Chinese Bible women also received less noticeable benefits from their work. They received Bible training that helped them develop their personal faith, and they could obtain similar training for family members by enrolling them in mission schools. By taking additional positions as house servants, Bible women could move their family into the mission compound and acquire American conveniences (such as indoor latrines) that lower-class Chinese families could not otherwise afford.¹²³ In times of distress, such as the Taiping Rebellion in the 1860s and the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, Christian converts found medical care, food, and safety within the walls of missionary homes, most of which were large enough to house several families, schoolchildren, and servants.

Bible women also gained familiarity and, occasionally, lifelong friendship with American Christian women. Though Martha Crawford never claimed friendship with a Bible woman, she did form relationships with a few wealthy Chinese women and accepted one, Mrs. Wang, as an informal adopted daughter.¹²⁴ Crawford seemed more disappointed than younger missionaries with building interracial friendship just for the companionship.¹²⁵ Southern Baptist missionary Willie Kelley, for instance, lived in a house with her favorite Bible

¹²³ Paul A. Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats: The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 34-35, 50. Chinese Christians who lived within the missionary compound also showed remarkable loyalty to the missionaries, sometimes staying to protect the Americans from hostile armies at the expense of their own lives.

¹²⁴ Foster, *Fifty Years in China*, 200-201.

¹²⁵ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 87-88.

women in Shanghai during her forty-year career.¹²⁶ And Lottie Moon achieved her fame by living as the only American in Pingtu, baking cookies for Chinese friends, and giving her own food to poor converts at the risk of starvation.

It is questionable whether these relationships overcame assumptions of American superiority, but some Chinese converts expressed genuine gratitude for the 'sisters' and 'mothers' God had sent them from overseas. At least two women in northern China told other missionaries that they considered Martha Crawford as their symbolic parent, so much so that one adopted "Martha" as her English name.¹²⁷ When a Chinese woman told Mrs. Julia Mateer, a Baptist missionary working in China with Martha Crawford, that "[t]he Lord sent you to me instead of a mother," she expressed her own sentiment and alluded to the comfort of building a spiritual community.¹²⁸ A Chinese convert to Christianity could face shame and alienation from her family, so the abstract concept of a Christian family brought tangible benefits.

Still, the most significant benefit for Chinese Bible women generated from greater opportunities for social interaction with other Chinese women. When missionaries asked Bible women to find potential converts, they usually led them to the houses of relatives and friends.¹²⁹ The arguments that proved so tiresome to Martha Crawford were not necessarily products of spiritual immaturity in a

¹²⁶ Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*, 89, 353. Another example is a Methodist missionary named Jennie Hughes and her lifelong relationship with Dr. Shih Mei-yu (Mary Stone). Hunter, *Gospel of Gentility*, 74-75.

¹²⁷ Lottie Moon to R.J. Willingham, 1 May 1907, *Send the Light*, 349.

¹²⁸ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 81.

¹²⁹ Crawford diary, 1 January 1868, 12 February 1876, Crawford Papers.

convert; they could have easily arisen from conflicts and jealousies rooted in years of acquaintance and brought into the converts' new church environment.

Arguments between family members rarely ended in permanent isolation as Crawford's arguments with Bible women did. Chinese Christians commonly tried to interest their family members in mission activities as well. Most converts kept Chinese tradition by placing loyalty to their family above loyalty to the faith, meaning that the entire clan would leave the mission church rather than endure insults to the family honor.¹³⁰ T.P. Crawford lost several church members this way; likewise, Martha Crawford's mediation techniques failed because she did not realize that some parts of converts' lives were beyond her control.¹³¹ By opposing ancient traditions such as familial loyalty, the Crawfords overlooked a crucial part of life in their adopted nation. Historian Paul Varg argued that American missionaries generally hurt their cause by "quite frankly [making] war on the whole Chinese value system" and inviting accusations of "cultural" and "racial superiority."¹³² A missionary's prayers and advice had little to do with old antagonisms when she did not care to find out the context. So if the aforementioned argument between Martha Crawford's three female converts started with family disputes, it is not hard to see why Mrs. Lieu protested to Crawford's interference.

¹³⁰ Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 35.

¹³¹ Hyatt, *Our Ordered Lives Confess*, 33, 36-37, 40.

¹³² Varg, *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, 35.

American missions continued to bring Chinese women together in newly established Christian universities and hospitals after 1900, when direct evangelism and Bible woman work diminished. These educated Chinese females continued the pattern that their Bible woman predecessors had established of working together and discussing topics that the missionaries neither sanctioned nor understood. By providing American styles of education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, missionaries inadvertently gave Chinese women tools to reconsider their role in Chinese society and the value of Western leadership. Western-educated Chinese women were more likely to join in the May Fourth nationalist movement by supporting Chinese "individualism and the emancipation of women."¹³³ By 1913, when the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union celebrated its international growth and its maternal role to foreign Christian women, Chinese Christian women were cutting the spiritual apron strings and asserting their own authority. Most American Southern Baptist women did not notice; they remained too enthralled with their self-proclaimed authority to lead heathen women.

Conclusion

In the work of female Southern Baptist missionaries, submissiveness meant two things. It meant a distinctively female trait that precluded Baptist women from becoming pastors or leaders and encouraged them to acquire homemaking skills instead. But it also denoted a certain type of weakness that

¹³³ Weili Ye, " 'Nu Liuxuesheng': The Story of American-Educated Chinese Women, 1880s to 1920s," *Modern China*, Vol. 20, no. 3 (July 1994), 341.

some missionaries ascribed to their foreign converts, weakness that enabled Baptist women to act as if they were their pastors and lead fundraising organizations in the interest of helping them. These two interpretations were enacted by Martha Crawford as she worked with Chinese Christian women in the 1860s and 1870s; her own success as a Baptist missionary dedicated to “woman’s work” depended on her ability to train and discipline women into reliable assistants. She fulfilled her sense of individual purpose by criticizing and reforming the individualism of Bible women. Like most White Baptist women of her time, she did not know about these women’s backgrounds. She also chose not to know them in the interest of focusing on her evangelistic goals.

It would seem that two women like Martha Crawford and Mrs. Lieu would feel more united after accepting the same God, living in the same city, doing the same work together, meeting the same women, attending the same church, and finding unusual ways to defy the strict gender constraints of two cultures. But Crawford saw these similarities as reasons to emphasize the difference between them by treating Lieu and other converts as inferiors. Crawford maintained a racial dichotomy in her Chinese mission work that helped her establish personal influence and challenge gender restrictions at home in the United States. Likewise, the Baptist Woman’s Missionary Union grew based on assumptions that American women met Chinese women’s needs. The ways Southern Baptist women dealt with race in foreign mission work tended to reconstruct the paternal frameworks that existed in their denomination back in the United States. Thus they alleviated one restrictive situation by contributing to another.

Chapter 3

The "Colored Washerwoman" With "A Very New Thing:" Amanda Berry Smith and the Search for Racial Reconciliation in a Segregated Era, 1869-1880

In September of 1879, a tall, plainly dressed black American woman named Mrs. Amanda Smith accepted an invitation to preach during a week's worth of services at a Methodist church in Perth, Scotland. As she wrote later in her autobiography, she thought: "This was a very new thing; to be in a Scotch kirk; a woman, and a black woman; who ever heard of such a thing?"¹ But this honor was just part of a series of unusual opportunities in Smith's life. At a time when most black women in America had to parlay their experience as slaves into domestic service jobs to make ends meet, this former slave toured New England, the United Kingdom, and Liberia as a preacher. Moreover, Amanda Smith preached often to integrated audiences, despite the fact that her denomination had been segregated for about a hundred years. Smith felt that her ministry among diverse groups of Methodists confirmed God's ability to overcome the consequences of segregation and racism. That conviction led her to declare, "I do love white folks, whether they love me or not, and I want them all saved."²

This chapter focuses on Amanda Smith's career as an independent evangelist between 1869 and 1880. How did a woman with little formal education

¹ Amanda Berry Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith the Colored Evangelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 280.

² Adam Wallace, ed. *A Modern Pentecost: Embracing a Record of the Sixteenth National Camp-Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness held at Landisville, PA., July 23rd to August 1st, 1873*. (Philadelphia: Methodist Home Journal Publishing House, 1873), 91.

or personal savings travel so extensively? Why did she split her ministry time between the black churches of her own congregation and white Methodist gatherings where she was considered an oddity? Close reading of Smith's autobiography, her articles, and observers' accounts suggests that she advocated Christian conversion as means to lose racial prejudice through divine intervention. The financial support of white philanthropists and fellow black Methodists during her speaking engagements helped Amanda Smith remake herself into a popular figure symbolic of achievement, piety, and controversy. This chapter provides the first in-depth study of Smith's popularity among black and white Methodists in specific relation to her racial views.

We will trace Amanda Smith's transformation from a "washerwoman" to a full-time evangelist from her young adult life through her decision to enter ministry and travel overseas. Amanda Smith's mission work differed from that of Martha Crawford or Maria Fearing because she was never sponsored by a particular denomination. She considered herself an independent missionary called to work among people groups different than her own, including white Americans and white Britons. Following Smith's career path reveals why her opportunities and racial views turned into mixed blessings. The more she preached, the more that white and black Methodists argued over what role an empowered black female minister should play in society.

Amanda Smith's Background

Despite her unusual achievements, much of Amanda Smith's life seemed quite ordinary for her time. Born in 1837, Amanda Berry Smith devoted her

childhood and young adulthood to domestic work for white families in Delaware and Pennsylvania.³ She was born into slavery, but her father, Samuel Berry, purchased her freedom before she could remember the experience. When her parents relocated from their former masters, Amanda and her siblings eventually quit school to find work. By 1856, Amanda accepted Christianity and attended a Methodist church. But the white minister's racial bias and her rigorous work schedule kept her from attending services regularly. She found positions as a live-in maid in her teen age years, so she had to live apart from her family after she married her first husband, Calvin Devine, and bore her first children.

It was a difficult life to have no permanent home and little time to care for her children through their illnesses. Four of them died in infancy because Amanda had neither the financial means nor adequate lodging to provide for them. Calvin Devine joined the Union army and disappeared during the Civil War, leaving Amanda in desperate straits to care for herself and her daughter. On top of all this, she gave some of her small income to redeem her sister from an employer who labeled her a runaway slave and refused to let her leave. Amanda later married an African Methodist Episcopal deacon named James Smith, moved to Philadelphia, and became active in church women's social clubs. Smith's church activities punctuated an otherwise wearisome eighteen years of hard labor as a maid and laundry woman for wealthier white families. Her faith

³ For a promotional photograph of Amanda Smith, see Adrienne M. Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith: From Washerwoman to Evangelist* (Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Press, 1998), ii. After 1868, Amanda Smith preferred to wear Quaker-style clothing and bonnets that fit her budget and her desire for simplicity.

sustained her through serious illnesses, separation from her husband, and the deaths of all but one of her children.

Financial and physical trials were common for black American women in the late nineteenth century. Darlene Clark Hine, Tera Hunter, and Heather Williams described how black women adjusted to life after slavery by making the most of limited opportunities for employment and education.⁴ Most women without independent wealth had to work in the homes of white families for the sake of their own households. They bore the brunt of negotiating how this paid manual labor would differ from conditions under slavery. Black women also tried to make the best of the overcrowded, unsanitary neighborhoods where segregation laws forced them to live. Often, they had to care for young children while providing for older ones who had been removed from home by apprenticeship laws. On top of their work and family obligations, women led efforts to teach and finance local schools while gaining an education for themselves. With no regulation of their wages or housing conditions, few black women escaped from persistent poverty in the late nineteenth century. The threat of illness only made their situation worse; infections spread quickly through overcrowded black neighborhoods, yet few doctors would serve them.

Amanda Smith's church activities also fit the pattern of community involvement among black American women of her time. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham chronicled how black Baptist women established female

⁴ Darlene Clark Hine, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

organizations and led campaigns to improve their communities.⁵ Jualynne Dodson's *Engendering Church* explains how African Methodist Episcopal [A.M.E.] women followed similar goals through missions groups.⁶ In general, black churches inspired hundreds of 'race women' – black American women committed to helping their race advance beyond the inferior status that racist laws and common prejudice tried to dictate. Michele Mitchell asserts that "a 'race woman' or 'race man' was usually a self-made or high-achieving person who contributed to a local community and labored on behalf of the larger collective."⁷ A 'race woman' could be poor, as Smith was, but she devoted her time and talent to increasing opportunities for her colleagues and the next generation. These race women advocated education, female autonomy, and domesticity in the Jim Crow era, often within a black church or a church-affiliated organization.⁸

⁵ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: the Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁶ For examples of this approach, see William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Jualynne Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power, and the AME Church* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Press, 2002); Judylyn S. Ryan, "Spirituality and/as Ideology in Black Women's Literature: The Preaching of Maria W. Stewart and Baby Suggs, Holy," *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 267-287. This pattern also applies to research on White female leaders, as shown in Barbara Welter, "She Hath Done What She Could," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (Winter 1978): 624-638; Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: a Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996); David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003).

⁷ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xix.

⁸ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996); Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

As far as her goals were concerned, Amanda Smith fits into the overall historiography of Christian race women in the United States. As biographer Adrienne Israel wrote,

Far from being an anomaly, Smith was in step with the progressive currents of her time and was one of a small, but significant, group of African-American women whose work as reformers helped bridge the growing chasm between black and white races at the end of the nineteenth century.⁹

The two available book-length studies of Smith's life depict her as a socially active woman who tried to mediate relations between Americans on both sides of the color line.¹⁰ But, in another sense, Smith lived as an unusual figure stuck between groups where she failed to blend in fully with either one. Consequently, some scholars consider her less a representative race woman than a socially isolated female preacher.¹¹ A study of black women preachers' autobiographies highlighted the common theme "of the too-womanish black woman dwelling 'like a speckled bird' . . . among various communities, black and white, in a long, difficult, and often frustrated search for belonging."¹² Preacher women tended to work with several groups without being accepted as a perfect fit in either one.

⁹ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 5.

¹⁰ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*; Kelly Willis Mendiola, "The Hand of a Woman: Four Holiness-Pentecostal Evangelists and American Culture, 1840-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2002).

¹¹ Elizabeth Elkin Grammer, *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Susie Cunningham Stanley, *Holy Boldness: Women Preachers' Autobiographies and the Sanctified Self* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002).

¹² Richard J. Douglass-Chin, *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: The Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Evangelists* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 13.

Amanda Smith tried to "bridge the growing chasm between black and white races," but she formed a bridge with a shaky foundation on either side. Her individual activism as a traveling preacher sometimes isolated her from the black community.¹³ White Christians tended to see Smith as a spectacle rather than a legitimate part of their group. Smith proved herself too independent to be a typical race woman, but she remained too vocal against segregation and racial prejudice to be a typical preacher woman, either.

Competing views of Amanda Smith's ministry stand at the heart of this study on the content and social context of her traveling evangelism. Historians are not the only ones with conflicting views of Smith. Her contemporaries disagreed on what Smith's message meant for fellow Methodists on either side of the color line. Black leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal church emphasized Smith's responsibilities as a race woman by expecting her to support denominational women's organizations. On the other hand, white Northern Methodists emphasized Smith's individualism, especially her willingness to speak in white Christian gatherings when few other blacks attended. Black members of the Northern Methodist Church looked to Amanda Smith's ministry for a middle ground between these options – a model of how to serve in a racially integrated denomination while remaining in all-black churches. Amanda Smith tried to reach audiences on both sides for the sake of evangelism, fundraising, and inspiring

¹³ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*; Jualynne Dodson, introduction to *An Autobiography*, by Amanda Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Jualynne Dodson, "Nineteenth-Century A.M.E. Preaching Women: Cutting Edge of Women's Inclusion in Church Polity" in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, vol. 1, eds. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981).

younger female leaders. Understanding these dissenting views helps us understand why Smith linked race relations to Christianity and how two of the largest American Protestant denominations dealt with race issues.

Amanda Smith's Traveling Ministry

When Amanda Smith attended a white Methodist Church, she was a married teenager working full-time for a white family. Under those circumstances, integrating a white church was less a choice than a capitulation to circumstances; she simply did not have time or transportation to attend church elsewhere. But the church leaders insisted that she follow the traditions of segregation by sitting in a separate area and not speaking in the service or Bible classes. It's not surprising that she chose to join the African Methodist Episcopal Church later in life. Amanda and her second husband each found a niche for service and leadership opportunities through the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest black denomination in the United States.

A.M.E. congregations also helped Smith start her traveling ministry in 1869. Black pastors in and around Philadelphia invited her to lead a church service. At the time, it was unusual – but not unheard of – for a woman to preach. This denomination did not recognize women as pastors or any other type of church leader until almost the turn of the century. Nevertheless, some A.M.E. women had started traveling evangelism ministries as early as the 1780s. Black Methodists showed their willingness to go beyond church rules when they listened to Amanda Smith the preacher.

Amanda Smith most often preached on matters of transformation, such as God's ability to give someone a better lifestyle. She emphasized Christian conversion and sanctification, the two main spiritual themes of Holiness theology. Smith learned this theology in Methodist and Quaker gatherings, though it was relatively unpopular doctrine in the 1870s. Holiness Methodists taught that, when a person converted to Christianity, she believed in Jesus Christ as her savior. But when she received the gift of sanctification, she received the ability to live a holy, near-perfect life.

Smith argued that God gave her the gift of sanctification at a certain point in her life, and that gift had enabled her to enter ministry despite her gender, limited education, and impoverished background.¹⁴ In an article written during her second decade of full-time preaching, she described her spiritual transformation back in 1856. Smith still worked as a domestic servant then, and her job responsibilities shaped her conversion experience. As she recalled:

I got all my work as forward as I could, and then went down into the cellar and began to pray, 'O Lord, convert my soul.' The suggestion followed, 'That's just what you've said many times before. It's no use.' I began again, 'O Lord, please convert my soul. If you'll only do it, I'll love and obey you all my life: O Lord, if not, I've come down here [to the cellar] to die. Salvation or death! . . . Well, I did die; but came back to life again very quick. I said, 'O Lord, I *will* BELIEVE.' The darkness that had filled my heart so long, all passed as before the noon-day sun.¹⁵

Amanda Smith had to complete her housework early so that she could afford time to pray. Even with time and a solitary hiding place, she wrestled with

¹⁴ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 74-81.

¹⁵ Amanda Smith, "The Witness Stand: The Experience of Mrs. Amanda Smith," *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 12, no. 6 (June 1880): 132-133.

'suggestions' fueled by her doubts about whether she knew the proper means of prayer. Smith's successful conversion proved that her lack of schooling and her servitude posed no barriers to divine intervention. Her desperation about converting signaled a life-long passion to devote everything to Christian ministry.

After becoming a Christian, Amanda Smith's next step was to preach to friends. Once again, her menial employment ordered her steps because she told no one about her conversion until the white family she worked for allowed her to go into town. Smith gave her first testimonies to other black people, even though she had to contain her excitement for two weeks. As she put it, "I wanted to tell some one, and I thought, 'Must I wait a fortnight before I tell out my joy?' How many times I had prayed for hours in that kitchen after they [her employers] had all gone to bed!"¹⁶ Smith's full-time preaching started fourteen years later, yet from 1856, Smith's determination to preach was linked to her interaction with black communities.

Smith preached in all-black churches throughout her life. She taught that others could receive sanctification to address a wide range of problems in their lives. She delighted in inspiring Christians who had not yet sought what she called "the blessing" to seek a further spiritual change in their lives. To Smith, sanctification brought "perfect peace" and "a pure heart."¹⁷

¹⁶ Smith, "The Witness Stand," 132-133; National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, "Thirty-Third National Camp-Meeting: Chester Heights, PA," *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 8, no. 9 (Sept. 1877): 213.

¹⁷ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 84.

Peace and purity were more than abstract concepts to Amanda Smith. Smith received sanctification during a Methodist church service in 1868, when she was in the midst of a difficult part of her life. She and her husband, James Smith, lived apart while he drove carriages for a white family in another part of New York. James had never supported Amanda's search for a higher spiritual life, and she resented his minimal church involvement. They only communicated through occasional visits and checks he sent to cover her rent. Amanda Smith cleaned and ironed local families' laundry to support her daughter, Mazie, and her infant son in their damp basement apartment. The poor living conditions worsened her son's bronchitis, but she rarely had enough time or resources to nurse him through the illness. Things got worse the following year; both her baby and her husband died, and Amanda could hardly afford to bury them.¹⁸ So, on the morning in 1868 that Amanda Smith experienced sanctification, she needed "perfect peace" to calm her fears about her son's welfare and "a pure heart" to ease her tension with her estranged husband. No wonder she built her life's work on this moment when "[a] joy and power welled up in my heart to overflowing."¹⁹

Amanda Smith preached her first sermon in November 1869 on the topic of the Holy Spirit. She preached at an African Methodist church in Salem, New Jersey with the permission of a local pastor, Brother Cooper. This was long before the denomination officially countenanced female ministers, but Smith's local pastor gave her a letter of introduction to help justify her work. Brother

¹⁸ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 121-125; Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 50-51.

¹⁹ Smith, "The Witness Stand," *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 12, no. 6 (June 1880): 133.

Cooper doubted that Smith could lead a church service successfully. But the congregation responded with enthusiasm and increased interest in conversion.²⁰ Before long, Smith established a pattern of drawing over-capacity crowds to her sermons. White visitors also started attending her services in large numbers as news of her ministry spread. She built a reputation as a traveling evangelist who inspired large groups in her audience to commit to Christianity.



Figure 3.1 Eight of Amanda Smith's Destinations in the United States:
 1=Lyndonville, VT 2= Kennebunk, MN 3=Boston, MA 4=Round Lake, NY
 5= Sea Cliff, NY 6= Salem, NJ 7=Oakington, MD 8=Knoxville, TN
 Map courtesy of Nationalatlas.gov.

The more she ministered among white Christians, the more Amanda Smith emphasized that sanctification removed racial fears from her life. Her own experience of sanctification changed her interpretation of the biblical passage that "there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all

²⁰ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 155-163; Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 53-54. For a drawn illustration of Amanda Smith's preaching style, see Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 118.

one in Christ Jesus." In her words, "now the Holy Ghost had made it clear to me. And as I looked at white people that I had always seemed to be afraid of, now they looked so small. The great mountain had become a mole-hill."²¹ Smith argued that anyone else could, and should, have a similar experience through sanctification. When she wrote that "We need to be saved deep to make us thorough, all around, out and out, come up to the standard Christians, and not bring the standard down to us . . .," she explicitly referred to the racism that made her life as a black evangelist so difficult.²² As literary theorist Richard Douglass-Chin put it, "For Smith then, 'sanctifying grace' can be best understood as a relieving of the condition of anxiety that accompanies blackness."²³ Smith believed that Christians living up to God's standard would not enforce racial discrimination. However, she also admitted that "Some people don't get enough of the blessing to take prejudice out of them, even after they are sanctified."²⁴

Though Amanda Smith visited all-white churches occasionally, she most often interacted with white audiences when she started attending camp meetings in the 1870s. The camp meeting had been used by Methodists since 1800 as a way to draw large crowds and encourage conversions.²⁵ The experience entailed

²¹ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 80. Quote from Galatians 3:28. The Bible. King James Version.

²² Smith, *An Autobiography*, 117.

²³ Douglass-Chin, *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues*, 149.

²⁴ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 226.

²⁵ William Courtland Johnson, "'To Dance in the Ring of All Creation': Camp Meeting Revivalism and the Color Line, 1799-1825" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside, 1997), 130-131.

inviting congregants to rent tents in a rural area for about ten days and focus on prayer, Bible study, and hearing sermons.

Despite historical accounts of uncontrolled, loud worship services at American Methodist meetings since the Second Great Awakening, the Methodist camp meetings of the 1870s settled into a more sedate pattern focused on serving Christians rather than inspiring dramatic conversions.²⁶ The meeting agendas had been standardized through Methodist organizations, and most attendees were frequent visitors who saw the meeting as part of their spiritual regimen.²⁷ Holiness camp meetings provided safe space for church members to discuss and experience sanctification. Other camp meetings in idyllic settings like Martha's Vineyard offered attendees a family vacation away from the crowded and fast-paced city life, the financial pressures of their jobs, and forced proximity to European immigrants.²⁸ The camp meeting visitors of the late nineteenth century sought simple and orderly living in the midst of industrial urban society.²⁹

Amanda Smith entered the Methodist camp meetings in July 1870 as a part of the ordered, vacation-like setting. She and her daughter Mazie worked as maids in a white family's tent in exchange for their transportation and living expenses at the Oakington, Maryland meeting.³⁰ During her first few visits to

²⁶ For information on early Methodist camp meetings, see Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

²⁷ Charles Lippy, "The Camp Meeting in Transition: The Character and Legacy of the Late Nineteenth Century," *Methodist History* 34, no. 1 (October 1995): 10.

²⁸ Lippy, "The Camp Meeting in Transition," 3, 7-8, 10.

²⁹ Lippy, "The Camp Meeting in Transition," 8-9.

³⁰ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 148; Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 51-53.

camp meetings, Smith missed several services because of work obligations. She could only participate by speaking during 'testimony time' at certain services.³¹ On these occasions, she would join other impromptu speakers by explaining how she became a Christian, how she received sanctification, and what those changes meant for her life.³² Later in her career, she led services at the segregated meetings for black attendees. At one of these late-night meetings, she emphasized the importance of calm and orderly worship.

We can get a synopsis of how Amanda Smith linked Christian faith and race issues from a transcript of her testimony at the 1873 Holiness meeting in Landisville, Pennsylvania. Smith led a service along with four white pastors. She started her speech with a short song about faith, then quoted a Bible verse about the apostle Paul saying that, as "the least of all saints" he was called to "preach among the gentiles." Then she made a striking parallel between the apostle and herself; she followed the scripture quotation with the statement "I used to be afraid of white people."³³ Smith felt that she followed Paul's example as she ministered to a different ethnic group – in her case, white Americans. Like Paul, she had to receive divine authority to minister outside her racial community.

Smith framed her testimony with emphasis on the change in her racial outlook. After claiming that she no longer feared white Americans, she described

³¹ Mendiola, "The Hand of a Woman," 187.

³² Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 52; National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, "Fifth National Camp Meeting at Oakington," *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 1, no. 3 (Sept. 1870): 40; National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, Oaks Corner Camp Meeting, *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 3, no.2 (Aug. 1872): 28; National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, Sea-Cliff Camp Meeting, *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 3, no.2 (Sept. 1872): 59-60.

³³ Wallace, *A Modern Pentecost*, 203-204.

her conversion in 1856 and how she received the gift of sanctification at an all-white Methodist Church in 1868. After hearing the pastor describe how God can inspire sudden change in people, she experienced more than spiritual transformation. She said, "immediately the Holy Spirit filled my soul, so that I lost my fear of white folks, and I shouted, Glory to God!" For Smith, the power of God in her life was directly linked to her new views on race. But she attributed her previous 'fear' to her own failings, not to those of her white listeners. Note how she described fear as a form of racial prejudice:

I used to wish God had not made me black, and think – if he had only made me white; but this pride and prejudice was now taken away, and I was glad that God made me as I was. This utmost salvation goes to the very bottom, and covers all cases and all circumstances.³⁴

In short, Smith believed that her Christianity affected every part of her life, from her spiritual welfare to the way she perceived her racial identity. And she wanted her listeners to know that radical transformation was also possible for them.

Why did Amanda Smith feel that discussing fear and prejudice were appropriate ways to exemplify God's power in her life? First of all, the topic of race provided an obvious way to focus attention on herself. Smith was the only black person speaking on this occasion and, most likely, one of only a few non-whites participating in the meetings. By 1873, when Amanda Smith became a frequent camp meeting attendee, Methodist camp meetings had become events geared predominantly to white Christians.³⁵ Since the 1820s, many white Methodist leaders, particularly those in the South, compelled black attendees to

³⁴ Wallace, *A Modern Pentecost*, 203-204. All quotes in this paragraph come from this source.

³⁵ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 53.

sit behind the pulpit or wait for designated meeting times.³⁶ The cost of travel and tent rentals also kept black attendance low; nearly all black visitors, including Amanda Smith, had to work as wait staff in order to remain at a camp meeting.³⁷

Some of the camp meetings also provided a separate "colored people's meeting" for those who worked during the day. Amanda Smith led one of these services at the 1873 camp meeting where she declared her transformed racial views. A white observer recalled that "[w]hite spectators and participants" came out to observe the "soul-stirring" singing and "lively and impressible nature of this class" while Smith told the "happy band of colored people" about Christ.³⁸ These meetings provided an opportunity for white Christians to feed their curiosity about black-led worship services without getting involved.³⁹ In this segregated atmosphere, it seemed natural for Smith to include race in her self-reflections.

Widespread segregation and discrimination kept race issues foremost in Amanda Smith's thoughts during her camp meeting visits and throughout her life. It took boldness to discuss racial fear at a time when discrimination and violence posed constant threats for black Americans. Ku Klux Klan raids, lynchings, disenfranchisement, and mistreatment by white employers were well known threats in the 1870s. Smith also encountered several cases of discrimination in her life. For example, she faced the white employer who held her sister as a

³⁶ Johnson, "To Dance in the Ring of All Creation," 156-172.

³⁷ Wallace, *A Modern Pentecost*, 203; Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 52.

³⁸ Wallace, *A Modern Pentecost*, 203-204.

³⁹ "A Negro Camp Meeting," date unknown, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

slave illegally; white attendants who refused her access to buses, restaurants, or hotels while she traveled; suspicions of racial violence during a camp meeting in Tennessee; and white Christians who expelled her from church services.⁴⁰ Like Ida B. Wells and other black female leaders in the late nineteenth century, she was removed forcibly from her train seat and sent to the men's smoking car.⁴¹

Such insults hurt so much that she recalled them vividly in later testimonies and in her 1893 autobiography. She usually interpreted these experiences as ministry opportunities. She prayed until "the cigars would go out" in the smoking car or "paced up and down [and] preached Jesus" when she "was ordered out of the ladies' room" in Nashville.⁴² Still, the blatant double standards upset her enough to write this sarcastic description:

I could pay the price – yes, that is all right; I know how to behave – yes, that is all right . . . I am known as a Christian lady – yes, that is all right; I will occupy but one chair; I will touch no person's plate or fork – yes, that is all right; but you are black!⁴³

And, after being ejected from a Holiness prayer meeting, she recalled, "I cried, almost to convulsions. I was nearly dead."⁴⁴

Smith anticipated spiritual value in persevering through these setbacks.

As she wrote in 1893:

⁴⁰ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 50-53, 117-118, 195-196, 207; National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, Sea-Cliff Camp Meeting, *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 3, no.2 (Sept. 1872): 59-60. Smith was denied entry to hotels or restaurants in Austin, Philadelphia, New York, and "most anywhere else except in grand old historic Boston . . ." Smith, *An Autobiography*, 118.

⁴¹ National Association, Sea-Cliff Camp Meeting, 59-60; Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 58.

⁴² National Association, Sea-Cliff Camp Meeting, 59-60.

⁴³ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 118.

⁴⁴ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 195.

[t]o say that being black did not make it inconvenient for us often, would not be true; but belonging to royal stock, as we do, we propose braving this inconvenience for the present, and pass on into the great big future where all these little things will be lost because of their absolute smallness!⁴⁵

She described her brown skin tone as a "royal" gift bestowed by God, so she believed that divine blessings awaited in the future for her race. Speaking and writing about race gave Amanda Smith a way to express faith that, despite ongoing racism, circumstances would get better. With God's help, Smith lost "pride and prejudice" and "fear," regardless of how white Americans continued to treat her. She implied that changing others' attitudes was not the highest Christian priority. The most important changes started with oneself.

Amanda Smith's Camp Meeting Audience

Amanda Smith's gospel message included the possibility of a quick solution to race issues. While her message was unique, it fit well into the context of the Methodist doctrine espoused at her camp meetings. The camp meetings Smith attended were usually sponsored by a group of Methodist ministers called the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness. This group published monthly newsletters that included theological arguments and testimonials about people giving up bad habits because God removed that inclination from their lives. The specific habits that Christians lost after accepting the Holiness doctrine of "sanctification" ranged from alcohol consumption to hatred of certain groups of people. But the reaction to learning about Holiness was always the same; the

⁴⁵ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 118.

changed person felt joyful, told others about the difference in her life, and did something to prove that the change was real.

The Holiness ministers initiated a campaign in 1871 to end "sectionalism" among white Methodists on either side of the Mason-Dixie line. The reports from these meetings between Northern and Southern Methodists provide excellent examples of the process. For instance, the group made a favorable impression on local church members at a church meeting in St. Louis, Missouri in April 1871. The Holiness newspaper described the successful ending this way: "The regular leader of the meeting told us that plenty of this love in the heart would take all the North and South out of us, and make us sweetly one in Christ Jesus; and to this sentiment the meeting heartily responded."⁴⁶ The group of ministers found a similar warm reception at an 1874 camp meeting when representatives from several Methodist organizations "shook hands as though they had always been friends; especially was this observable between the ministers of the M.E. Church [North], and the M.E. Church South."⁴⁷ The goals of Holiness doctrine were not just limited to outward signs of cordiality. One of the ministers argued that

What the North and South need to unite them, is not to assemble, shake hands and smile on each other, trying to *act* fraternity while they say nothing about it; but to meet and humble themselves before God, and pray in faith for heart purity.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, St. Louis Camp Meeting, *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 1, no. 11 (May 1871): 176.

⁴⁷ National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, Fraternal Camp Meeting, *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 5, no. 2 (Aug. 1874): 44.

⁴⁸ National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, "Fraternal Camp Meeting-Round Lake," *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 6, no. 3 (Sept. 1875): 70.

This argument affirmed the basic principle of the Holiness movement: that sincere prayer could lead to instant dramatic change.

White Methodists sometimes responded to Amanda Smith with enthusiasm drawn from belief in their potential to change. Smith attended an 1871 Holiness convention in Newark, New Jersey, where her singing impressed the president of the local Young Men's Christian Association. According to a later report, he said:

As a former slaveholder, I have seen the time, when, if a colored woman had arisen in church to speak, I would have instantly left the house. Tonight I am not only willing to stay, but I have learned lessons of heavenly wisdom from this woman's sable lips; and, as she sung 'Clinging to the cross' I felt that I was enabled to cling to the cross of Christ as never before.⁴⁹

He attributed the shift in his racial standards to the spiritual power of Amanda Smith's music. Likewise, a woman at a Martha's Vineyard camp meeting who complained about hearing Smith sing a 'negro ditty' later found value in the experience. Though she left the service during the song, its lyrics eventually inspired her to recommit to faith and adopt a less patronizing view of Smith.⁵⁰

At a camp meeting in Kennebunk, Maine, Smith met a man called Jacob C. who disliked hearing her sing, speak, or pray during each service. But Smith's singing was the first thing he heard after feeling spiritually convicted to stop using tobacco. As Smith described it, suddenly "every bit of race

⁴⁹ The Rev. A. McLean, The Newark Convention, *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 1, no. 7 (Jan. 1871): 113.

⁵⁰ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 223.

prejudice was gone, and the love of God was in his heart, and he thought I was just beautiful!"⁵¹

What was the significance of these newly acquired racial views? In two of the cases just described, it was not just a temporary change. Amanda Smith wrote that Jacob C. told her a year after his religious experience that "the past year had been the best year of his life."⁵² And Smith found out about the woman at Martha's Vineyard by hearing her tell the story at a church in Providence, Rhode Island well after the camp meeting ended. But these two scenarios were also rare occurrences at camp meetings. There were many other white Christians who showed interest in Smith without professing any change in their personal lives. Some offered to pay for her room and board while she traveled; others just observed her career with a mix of surprise and amusement. For the white pastor who reported on the 1873 camp meeting, Smith melted into the nameless crowd that he considered "a happy band of colored people."⁵³ The white Methodist ministers in charge of the Holiness association showed occasional interest in Smith's work but made it clear that she was not an official member of their organization.⁵⁴ Then there were untold numbers of visitors who never gave Amanda Smith any indication of how they perceived her.

⁵¹ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 184-185.

⁵² Smith, *An Autobiography*, 185.

⁵³ Wallace, *A Modern Pentecost*, 203-204.

⁵⁴ National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, Criticism of a Journalist's Description of Amanda Smith's Role in the Association, *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 3, no. 10 (November 1872): 119.

Larger groups of white Christians most often perceived Amanda Smith as a source of entertainment, at least on first encounter. For example, Smith gave an impromptu speech for a crowd of four hundred white attendees during her second trip to a camp meeting.⁵⁵ She had not planned to do anything public; she was only crossing the campground to relax in the tent of a white friend, "Mrs. L." Besides, as she wrote in her autobiography, "I had not been accustomed to take part in the meetings, especially when white people were present, and there was a timidity and shyness that much embarrassed me . . ." But, when a gathering crowd followed her to the tent and asked her to sing, Smith did not refuse. A Methodist lay leader asked Smith to also include her testimony after singing one or two songs. She credited God with giving her the strength and authority to speak on that occasion.⁵⁶

But she had to admit getting tired of all the constant attention. At a later camp meeting in Kennebunk, Maine, Smith spent an entire day fleeing a crowd of curious white visitors.⁵⁷ We should imagine the encounter from her perspective. By this time, Amanda Smith had been attending and speaking at national Holiness meetings for years. Her reputation as one of the few black female traveling evangelists had spread through the A.M.E. and Northern Methodist press across the country and even to missionaries in India.⁵⁸ Though Smith had

⁵⁵ This was a national holiness camp meeting in Sing Sing, New York, most likely in 1871. Smith, *An Autobiography*, 168.

⁵⁶ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 174-175.

⁵⁷ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 183-184.

⁵⁸ National Association for the Promotion of Holiness, "From the Orient," *Advocate of Christian Holiness* 12, no. 2 (Feb. 1880): 46.

started going to camp meetings intent on learning from seminars and services led by ministers from around the country, apparently many white attendees expected her to do something spectacular. So Smith wrote:

There had been a great crowd all day, and everywhere I would go a crowd would follow me. If I went into a tent they would surround it and stay until I came out, then they would follow me. Sometimes I would slip into a tent away from them. Then I would see them peep in, and if they saw me they would say, 'Oh! here is the colored woman. Look!' Then the rush!

One white friend sympathized with Smith, saying that "the people do not seem to have any manners." Another told her to accept the intrusiveness as a fact of Christian life; she laughed and asked if Smith knew the Bible verse "You are to be a gazing stock."⁵⁹ And, even though Smith felt "so bad and uncomfortable" that she was hiding under a bed to avoid the crowd, she accepted the advice to be strong.⁶⁰

The white Christians at this camp meeting clearly expected Amanda Smith to entertain them, either with a song, a speech, or just her presence. In this case, her skin color served as her identity. People followed her because they noticed her brown skin and assumed that she was the black evangelist they had heard about. Their unrelenting pursuit left Smith with two options: to miss out on her ministry opportunities by running and hiding, or to bend to their curiosity. Smith's friends also spoke as if she should resolve herself to the will of the crowd. Her other option was to limit her participation to the "colored people's meeting" where white spectators were less intrusive.

⁵⁹ This Bible verse is a shortened version of Hebrews 10:33. King James Version.

⁶⁰ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 183-184.

But Smith created her own option. The next morning, she stood before the whole camp meeting audience and shouted, "I have got the victory! Everybody come and look at me! Praise the Lord!" And she felt "free as a bird."⁶¹ Smith compromised in the sense that she allowed the white audience to stare at her, knowing that they did so because of her race. But, when she put herself on display in the morning meeting, she called attention to her spiritual qualities. She was able to honor God despite how she felt, and that ability gave her a sense of freedom. It also was a sign of nonconformity for Amanda Smith to face the white crowds on her own terms.

But it would be misleading to only mention how Smith negotiated her public image among white Christians in Methodist gatherings. The preaching and singing she did at these camp meetings also helped establish her reputation among black Methodists.

"She Belongs to Us:" Modeling the Christian Race Woman

On March 4, 1875, Benjamin Tanner, the editor of the African Methodist Episcopal newspaper and a future bishop, charged Amanda Smith with ruining that denomination's mission work. The fledgling Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society, given the task of raising donations through chapters throughout the country, remained unorganized almost a year after its founding. It needed reliable leaders at the national level. Worried that the group and its fundraising potential would fail, Tanner wrote an article asking, "Where is Amanda Smith? She

⁶¹ Ibid.

belongs to us, and we ought to set her to work.”⁶² His apparent frustration at Smith’s ministry outside the AME Church stemmed from his concern for racial solidarity and group action within the A.M.E. church. Tanner implied that African Methodists expected Amanda Smith to use her visibility as a model for other black Methodist women to become ‘race women.’

At the time that Tanner wrote his article, the African Methodist denomination had only recognized women leaders for about eight years. And this was only in the position of a ‘stewardess,’ meaning a woman with certain service responsibilities within a local church. It is surprising that Tanner, who eventually became an A.M.E. bishop, would reach out to a female preacher who contradicted one of the key gender roles of the denomination. A few A.M.E. women had been preaching without official approval since the eighteenth century; why would this leader recognize one in 1875?

Tanner’s article implied four reasons to focus on Smith. First, Tanner accepted Amanda Smith’s public role and expected her to continue it. The question was not whether she would work in ministry but which set of Christians “ought to set her to work.” Second, Tanner believed that Smith dedicated her services where they were not needed. He wrote, “Tell me nothing about the work she is doing among our white brethren. They don’t need her. They are rich in spiritual gifts and spiritual work.” No matter what Amanda Smith had achieved while integrating Holiness camp meetings, it seemed unnecessary because of the difference in resources between the two organizations. Without Smith, camp

⁶² Benjamin Tanner, “The Mite Society,” *Christian Recorder* 13, no. 9 (4 March 1875): 4. Originally cited in Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 60.

meetings would continue with an adequate number of ministers and sufficient donations. But it seemed that the African Methodist women's organizations might disappear all together; Tanner considered the A.M.E. ministries to be "poor, languishing and dying."⁶³ This meant that the denomination would not be able to support Smith with travel funds in the ways that white Methodists had helped her since she started her ministry.

Nevertheless, the African Methodist Church was "home" for Amanda Smith. She was a lifelong member of the oldest Christian organization for black Methodists, which linked her to the organization's black nationalist goals. As a final reason, Benjamin Tanner emphasized that Smith would be wrong to let her financial well-being influence her ministry decisions. He asked near the end of his article, "What if she do not fare so well. Christ did not fare so well . . . Let her not prefer the riches of Egypt. Her own Sisters need her; and the good old Methodist rule is, not only to do good, but to do it to those who need it most."⁶⁴ In other words, Tanner expected Amanda Smith to sacrifice some of the financial benefits of her ministry for the institutional welfare of her denomination.

To understand the logic that inspired such a critical letter, we should review the history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a protest movement against racial discrimination in the Methodist Episcopal Church. The 1916 Centennial Encyclopedia of A.M.E. activities described the church founders' work as "the earliest organized movement by the man of color, to vindicate his

⁶³ Tanner, "The Mite Society," 4.

⁶⁴ Tanner, "The Mite Society," 4.

right to the title of man.”⁶⁵ This description meant that the denomination provided black Americans with leadership opportunities and legal recognition that they were denied elsewhere. But the statement also summarized the ways African Methodists advanced the reputation of black women. By 1916, the denomination had two female-led missions organizations, female deacons, and several female preachers. These leaders were enveloped into the all-encompassing campaign to earn symbolic manhood for the A.M.E. Church and, by extension, the race. So A.M.E. women had to be committed to work that would benefit the men of the group, not just the women or one female leader in particular.

Benjamin Tanner's article emphasized the theme of racial protest by placing Smith in the middle of a competition between Methodists on either side of the color line. He obliged Smith to choose one side. The guiding principles of the A.M.E. Church left no room for Smith's individualistic perspective on racial prejudice and personal change. The A.M.E. existed precisely because a group of black Methodists had not been treated like individuals. Because they were oppressed as a group, African Methodists rejected that oppression as a group and worked to give their denomination equal status as its white counterpart. To be a good minister by A.M.E. standards, Amanda Smith need to prioritize the interests of a needy group over her own interests, which could mean reviving a women's missions group at the expense of individual conversions at camp meetings. Anything else implied a subtle ruse to hide self-interest.

⁶⁵ Bishop L.J. Coppin, 1916, introduction to *Centennial Encyclopaedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, Documenting the American South (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001), 4.

Tanner's challenge in 1875 was not the first time someone questioned Amanda Smith's motives as a socially active black woman. Her husband, James Smith, introduced her to elite black organizations through the Heroines of Jericho - New York branch, the female auxiliary group of the Prince Hall Masons. These organizations funded community programs and signaled her family's ascension in "the aspiring lower middle class." So James disagreed when Amanda quit the lodge and stopped paying her membership fees in 1868. What she considered a step toward "holy living" in keeping with her newly acquired sanctification, he considered an unnecessary rejection of black community involvement.⁶⁶

Amanda Smith also faced criticism from some of the female members of her local A.M.E. church. She considered the women in her church small group, those she called her "band sisters," as her dearest friends and neighbors. But sometimes these women expressed doubts about her faith in Holiness doctrine, especially since it was criticized in their church.⁶⁷ Smith suspected that others in the black community dismissed her as "kind of a 'white folks' nigger'" because she cooperated in a white philanthropist's failed attempt to purchase a house for her.⁶⁸ Smith also contended with the female leaders of her church. In her autobiography, she recalled meeting three "old leading sisters" while walking home from a white Methodist church in Philadelphia. She thought "they looked very dignified" as the women stopped her and asked why she missed service at

⁶⁶ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 36, 50.

⁶⁷ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 49-50; Smith, *An Autobiography*, 85, 108, 135-139.

⁶⁸ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 63. The quote is from a letter Smith wrote to the Holiness newspaper, the *Christian Standard*, on 18 August 1877.

her A.M.E. church. She wrote later that "I would sooner have met anybody else than them. I was afraid of them. Well, I don't know why, but they were rather the ones who made you feel that wisdom dwelt with them."⁶⁹ On her own merit, Smith felt she was no match for these church women because she lacked their dignity and wisdom.

Amanda did establish her own ministry as an independent preacher and missionary, but her leadership made her seem more like a threat than a 'race woman' in African Methodist circles. Smith attended the 1872 A.M.E. General Conference in Nashville, Tennessee with the intent of advocating Holiness theology, only to face suspicions that she wanted female ordination.⁷⁰ She overheard several versions of these accusations: "Who is she?"/ "Preacher woman."/ "What does she want here?"/ "I mean to fight that thing."⁷¹ No one submitted a resolution on female preachers at that conference, so the fears surrounding Smith's attendance were unfounded.

Amanda Smith wrote later that she never wanted official recognition as a preacher "for I had received my ordination from [God]," but she did want to be a pastor's wife.⁷² Though James Smith reneged on his plans to go into A.M.E. ministry, the widowed Mrs. Smith became an independent traveling evangelist the year after his death. Since Smith could not afford a stable home and formal education for her daughter in the various cities she visited, she raised donations

⁶⁹ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 79.

⁷⁰ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 55.

⁷¹ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 199-200.

⁷² Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 55.

to send Mazie to Christian boarding schools in Ohio.⁷³ Smith's sense of calling led her to preach without her nuclear family, but that decision put her at odds with the African Methodists' ideals of male leadership over a family hierarchy.

The wives of A.M.E. bishops served as acceptable church women and counter-examples to Amanda Smith's evangelism work. These women represented the pinnacle of female achievement in their denomination because they organized one of the first A.M.E. women's organizations, the Woman's Parent Mite Society. They rallied African Methodist women throughout the country to raise donations for foreign missions projects. Since the older, male-led A.M.E. missions organization failed to raise adequate funds to send a missionary couple to Haiti, the Mite Society leaders helped solve a financial crisis while raising recognition of female ability.⁷⁴ The bishops' wives also filled a female leadership void by providing options for African Methodist women to assume titles within a local mission group. Most importantly, these leaders were accepted among African Methodists based their public activism on their role as wives to the bishops of the Church; their authority over other AME women derived from their marital status rather than their personal merit.

No records suggest that A.M.E. bishops' wives criticized Amanda Smith the way that Benjamin Tanner did. In fact, Smith considered four of the bishops as personal friends, so the women most likely knew one another.⁷⁵ Nevertheless,

⁷³ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 59.

⁷⁴ Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 101-102; James Handy, "Our Haitian Mission," *Christian Recorder* 12, no. 19 (14 May 1874): 1. Microfilm.

⁷⁵ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 199. Smith listed Bishops Campbell, Wayman, Brown, and Quinn as her friends. Mrs. Wayman and Mrs. Quinn were among the first leaders of the Mite Society.

the Mite Society leaders claimed personal traits almost opposite to those of a single preacher woman. In the Mite Society constitution, published on May 14, 1874, the authors depicted African Methodist women as submissive, humble, and committed to group work. Its guidelines expressed society members' submission would in verbal and financial terms. They would only participate in regular meetings "under the charges of their husbands," with permission from pastors, and with no control over how their donations would be spent.⁷⁶ The constitution gave the bishops and male mission leaders authority for all decisions about allocation and appointment of missionaries.⁷⁷ In choosing so much accountability, the Mite Society women distanced themselves from Amanda Smith, who did most of her ministry on an individual basis.

The Mite Society constitution also emphasized male authority and Victorian gender roles, placing fundraising within the women's sphere without requesting authority to control the money. The bishops' wives asked AME women to pool their resources so that their "mites," or pennies, would "do wondrous things" as donations.⁷⁸ This strategy allowed poorer women to contribute, particularly the formerly enslaved southern women who composed a major part of the AME membership.⁷⁹ The Mite Society also chose not to designate funds to support female missionaries like the older women's missions organizations in

⁷⁶ Mary Quinn et. al, "An Open Letter," *Christian Recorder* 12, no. 19 (14 May 1874): 1. Microfilm.

⁷⁷ Bishop J.P. Campbell, Letter to Parent Home and Foreign Missionary Society, *Christian Recorder* 13, no. 49 (7 January 1875): 1. Microfilm.

⁷⁸ Quinn, "An Open Letter," 1.

⁷⁹ Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 102.

other denominations did.⁸⁰ Instead, the group's purpose was to buttress the failing male-led A.M.E. missions organization and thus save the reputation of their church from "humiliation."⁸¹ The society constitution linked the A.M.E. mission cause to the Haitian revolution led by Toussaint L'Ouverture; by raising money to hire a missionary to that nation, the AME women continued "the emancipation of our race" on a spiritual level.⁸²

However, it would be misleading to describe the Mite Society as an emblem of female Christian submission. Though Benjamin Tanner characterized women as complacent and "the weaker half of humanity" in his initial letter advocating a Mite Society, the bishops' wives showed initiative and business savvy in the constitution and subsequent letters to the A.M.E. *Christian Recorder*.⁸³ Expanding on Tanner's instructions to hold meetings and ask women with adequate skills to present information, the Mite Society leaders planned for multiple branches, each with elected officers and an executive committee and a permanent organizational structure.⁸⁴ They gave each local leader the responsibilities and authority of officers in the male AME mission society and expected each society to participate in their community by sponsoring "festivals"

⁸⁰ Missions fundraising primarily for women was often called "Woman's Work for Woman." For more information on this approach, see Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996).

⁸¹ James Handy, Letter to the Editor, *Christian Recorder* 12, no. 17 (30 April 1874): 6. Microfilm.

⁸² Quinn, "An Open Letter," 1.

⁸³ B. T. Tanner, "Our Letter," *Christian Recorder* 12, no. 8 (26 February 1874): 4. Microfilm.

⁸⁴ Tanner, "Our Letter," 4; Quinn, "An Open Letter," 1.

and other major events.⁸⁵ One of the bishops' wives, Harriet Wayman, argued against assumptions that A.M.E. women were less active than their male counterparts. Instead, she blamed the lack of female activism on male AME pastors throughout the country for their reluctance to let female members meet in churches or publicize their meetings.⁸⁶

Female leaders in the African Methodist Church described themselves in the mid-1870s as committed to supporting their churches, willing to raise money for overseas mission work, and willing to work cooperatively with male leaders. Compared to them, Amanda Smith did not fit the ideal type of A.M.E. woman leader. She had been a member of a woman's small group through her A.M.E. congregations in Philadelphia and New York for several years. She wrote in her autobiography that she was glad the A.M.E. had started women's missions work by the 1890s.⁸⁷ And she maintained a network of friends who financed her travels in America and eventually overseas. But other African Methodists questioned her interracial ministry affiliations and her unsanctioned preaching. Smith did not have the institutional protection or status that Mite Society women received.

It was the issue of status that kept Amanda Smith separated from A.M.E. leadership circles. For African Methodists in the late nineteenth century, status and authority came from rising through the ranks of church hierarchy and showing commitment to the interests of the overall group. The same could be

⁸⁵ Quinn, "An Open Letter," 1.

⁸⁶ Hattie Wayman, "The Work of Women," *Christian Recorder* 12, no. 20 (21 May 1874): 4. Microfilm.

⁸⁷ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 169.

said of 'race men' and 'race women' in general in this time period. Organizations like the National Council of Negro Women led the cause of political and social reform for black Americans. Their work thrived on a sense of responsibility to black communities, and in many ways they acted out that responsibility according to class differences. Black colleges trained teachers who could serve poorer black children in rural areas. Black reformers expected class mobility to follow on the heels of improved education and altered habits. According to one historical study of black reformers in the Jim Crow era, "club women and race men [promoted] certain modes of behavior and [instructed] their brothers and sisters on how to attain a range of ideals" such as "sexual purity, child rearing, habits of cleanliness and . . . self-improvement."⁸⁸ A person with these qualities, especially a black woman, earned recognition as someone with higher class values – someone who embodied racial uplift.⁸⁹

Compare this outlook with that of Amanda Smith and other black women preachers. Smith did not consider herself "dignified" like the "leading sisters" in her church, nor did she express any expectation that she would reach that status. She remained enmeshed in the "search for belonging" that seemed to describe most women preachers' lives.⁹⁰ Like her fellow preachers, Smith wrote an autobiography emphasizing moral lessons of motherhood and purity, but without any claim to a higher class status. Smith was poor throughout her life, as were

⁸⁸ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 84-85. Part of this quote originally came from Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁸⁹ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 149.

⁹⁰ Douglass-Chin, *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues*, 13.

most female preachers relying on others' financial support. Finally, Amanda Smith was among the few late nineteenth-century preacher women who critiqued racism explicitly in her book. Still, her interest in increased opportunities for black Americans did not translate into a message of racial uplift because it did not address the welfare of black organizations or depend on their support. Smith's autobiography followed the tradition of proving a female evangelist's individual efforts to improve society rather than her status as a "race woman" in the midst of a larger reform movement. To her African Methodist critics, no matter how much her rhetoric criticized racial prejudice, if Amanda Smith did not devote her efforts to a race organization, then her work did not seem substantial.

"Their Successful Effort at Woman Building:" Modeling the Supervised Leader

In 1878, Amanda Smith left the United States for almost a decade to preach and travel in Europe, India, and Liberia. She dedicated a year to preaching and attending conferences in England and Scotland. A white friend from one of her camp meeting encounters paid for her to sail first-class to Keswick (a town in the district of Cumbria, England), then other white friends provided room and board as she spoke in churches throughout the United Kingdom. Sometimes her friends were overzealous in their attempts to help. Smith heard about a Christian conference planned for August 1878 in Broadlands and planned to attend. But, as she recalled in her autobiography, the white Americans accompanying her in her travels discouraged her. She wrote,

They said the teaching at that Conference was so deep, and they were afraid I would be confused, and it would not be good for me. And then,

besides, for someone like me to be entertained where there was so much elegance and style, it might make me proud and turn my head.⁹¹

When Smith insisted on going to the Broadlands conference, they planned another speaking engagement in her name during the same week. Smith made her Broadlands travel arrangements only to notice her friends' advertisement billing her as "the Converted Slave from America."⁹² She knew she could not change the plans once her friends set them for her.

This episode from Smith's international travels illustrated the main difficulties she encountered when working with Northern Methodists. Often, white Methodists capitalized on her unique position as a black female preacher by making her seem even more unusual. Within the Methodist Episcopal community, church leaders reified her as a symbol of achievement. Her Methodist biographer called her one of the four best black women alive and even exalted her over white women for the quality of her faith. Another Methodist writer argued that Smith's racial views were so important that reading her life story would "tend to break down the prejudice of race."⁹³ This enthusiasm led many to assume that Smith handled the difficulties of her life easily and stopped noticing racial prejudice. She was left with the burden of explaining her continued bouts with racism and her loyalty to African Methodists against the competing interests of her white supporters.

⁹¹ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 263.

⁹² Smith, *An Autobiography*, 263-264.

⁹³ Marshall W. Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith, The Famous Negro Missionary Evangelist* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1887), 11.

This section describes how the mostly white Methodist Episcopal Church benefited from Amanda Smith's ministry and what roles white Methodists wanted Smith to fill. The examples come from Smith's descriptions of her independent mission work in the United Kingdom and from the Reverend Marshall W. Taylor's 1887 biography of her. The white supporters who made Smith's international travel possible also contributed to several racially charged incidents that she navigated while overseas. Taylor's biography minimizes those events to provide a glimpse of how Smith's life story could represent success for black Methodists in church work and social life. The biography was written by a black Methodist pastor as a source of inspiration to black and white Methodists. This evidence indicates that Smith's Northern Methodist colleagues celebrated her views on racial prejudice rather than criticizing or ignoring them. Meanwhile, her colleagues also endorsed church segregation and interpreted Smith's story as way to support segregation among American Christians.

How could Amanda Smith's message be reconciled with promoting segregation? On the face of it, her travels in England had everything to do with racial integration. Smith stayed in Britain for a year, building her reputation as a powerful speaker and singer. Since she relied on the financial support of white and black Methodists, she accepted invitations to speak at large Methodist services throughout the country. Occasionally, she spoke for other denominations, such as Quaker or Presbyterian. Smith also attended two of the most well-known Christian conferences in the United Kingdom. In each case, she was one of the first, if not the only, black American to attend. She drew a lot of

special recognition. Smith visited the homes of Christian elites, including an English lord, and dined as an honored guest. She recorded these occasions in her autobiography with pride and amazement; they offered great contrasts to the disrespectful treatment she received so many times in America.



Figure 3.2 Map Featuring Seven of Amanda Smith's Destinations in the United Kingdom: 1= Keswick 2=Edinburgh, Scotland 3=Glasgow, Scotland 4=Darlington 5=London 6= Eastbourne 7=Broadlands
Map courtesy of the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

True, it was extremely rare for a black American woman with no personal wealth to travel around the world as a popular speaker. But the thing to notice about Smith's international experience was that her white supporters interpreted her ministry as an oddity rather than a sign of social change. Recall how her friends promoted her speaking engagement by calling her "the Converted Slave from America." They counted on interest in Smith's background and racial identity to entice the audience. Their assumption paid off when a crowd of hundreds stood outside the first service so intent on catching the first glimpse of

Amanda Smith that they got violent. She wrote later that "they almost pulled the clothes off of me. It took four policemen to get me into the carriage . . ." ⁹⁴ She thought the crowd acted that way because "[the meeting hall] was right in a Roman Catholic settlement, and I was quite a novelty, being a woman, and a black woman, at that." It was the novelty of Smith's race and gender and the knowledge that they would not see another black female speaker again soon that drove the crowd on. Church segregation helped to keep that novelty alive.

The circumstances that made Amanda Smith seem like such an unusual figure in the American Methodist Church started long before she began her ministry, as exemplified in the black denominations that split from this organization in the early nineteenth century. By the 1860s, Northern Methodist churches were notorious for either segregating black attendees or refusing to admit them. One of Smith's aunts even warned her when she visited Boston in 1878, "We never go to the white people's church here. I would laugh if they put you out." ⁹⁵ Theoretically, all Methodist Episcopal churches remained open to any visitor regardless of race, but networks of separate black and white Methodist churches were commonplace throughout the country by the early 1870s. These black Methodist churches usually had black male pastors who were supervised by white bishops. Black Methodists also attended white Methodist churches occasionally, as Amanda Smith did with a few of her neighbors. Yet, like Smith and her neighbors, most black Methodists chose to maintain membership with

⁹⁴ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 264.

⁹⁵ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 248.

the African Methodist Episcopal Church, where they faced less chance of discriminatory treatment from white pastors or laypeople.

Northern Methodists decried this situation, arguing that black Methodists received inadequate spiritual teaching unless they remained accountable to white leaders. A Methodist-sponsored biography of Amanda Smith from 1887 interpreted her life as a proof of this principle. In *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith, The Famous Negro Missionary Evangelist*, the Reverend Marshall Taylor depicted her as a great black role model – possibly the greatest of her time.⁹⁶ The short biography was intended originally to be a series of articles in a Methodist periodical called the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, but Taylor thought it best to publish the work and donate the proceeds to Smith.⁹⁷ It was published while she was working as an independent missionary in Liberia, and it gave a condensed description of her childhood, conversion, and venture into ministry. Much of it was written in interview format, including some stories and phrases that Smith later included in her autobiography. Taylor concluded that the Methodist Episcopal Church had given Amanda Smith the resources to become a successful evangelist. He congratulated Smith while drawing attention to her Methodist supporters and "their successful effort at woman building."⁹⁸

The Rev. Marshall Taylor lived as an example of the type of black leadership he saw in Smith. At the time he published Smith's biography, Taylor

⁹⁶ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 57.

⁹⁷ Marshall Taylor served as the editor of this Methodist newspaper, and he was the first black person to hold this type of position in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

⁹⁸ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 4.

had worked as a minister with the Methodist Episcopal Church for about twenty years. He held several offices with one of the black district conferences of that denomination and led black Methodist churches in four states.⁹⁹ Taylor also edited and published a compilation of traditional songs for black Christians in 1883. It included almost two hundred "revival hymns" and "plantation songs" that he hoped would aid black Americans as they moved into a new cultural epoch in the 1880s: "a period of change, of schools and book-learning."¹⁰⁰

In Taylor's interpretation, Amanda Smith's story also pointed toward the social progress of the black race in America. But her importance did not lie in her level of education, which was relatively low. Marshall Taylor made no secret of the fact that Amanda Smith received little academic training in her life; instead, he celebrated Smith's faith and humility in comparison to most leaders. To prove his point, Taylor compared Smith to the other women he considered most important among black Americans: Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, and Frances Harper. Smith stood out among the group because her fame did not derive from literary skill or politics. Due to her relative lack of intelligence and "daring," Taylor believed that Smith was an excellent example of God's grace. He wrote that "[a]mong men of our race and times, none equal Mrs. Smith as exemplifiers of the power of grace to save, expand, and use man as an instrumentality of salvation to the human race."¹⁰¹ This compliment seemed lofty,

⁹⁹ Irene V. Jackson-Brown, "Afro-American Song in the Nineteenth Century: A Neglected Source," *The Black Perspective in Music* 4 (Spring 1978): 23.

¹⁰⁰ Jackson-Brown, "Afro-American Song in the Nineteenth Century," 25-26, 28.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 57-58.

but it implied a major qualification; Smith seemed to embody grace because she appeared so inadequate for ministry on her own.

Once again, education and status determined the differences between Amanda Smith and other black Methodist leaders. Though Taylor attended urban schools and rose through the ranks of Northern Methodist leadership positions, Smith only eked about one year of education out of the rural segregated school near her family's home in Pennsylvania. Though Taylor became a newspaper editor and a pastor, Smith became a respected leader among Northern Methodists on an informal basis without any official titles. Neither could Smith claim a long personal history with the Methodist Episcopal Church since she had joined the A.M.E. denomination decades before. Though they were both black Methodists in ministry, Taylor and Smith did not share many commonalities.

It seems that Taylor did not want to draw parallels between himself and Amanda Smith. Rather, he built her life into the cultural timeline he established in his earlier book about spiritual songs. Marshall Taylor compared Smith to the revival songs she sang at camp meetings and church services. He thought that both the evangelist and her songs were examples of emotional treasures that needed to be recognized by future generations.¹⁰² On the other hand, Taylor implicitly identified with what he called the age "of schools and book-learning." That is why the biography emphasized Smith's 'merit' as a product of divine grace and assistance from white Methodists.¹⁰³ To borrow the bridge metaphor

¹⁰² Jackson-Brown, "Afro-American Song in the Nineteenth Century," 25.

¹⁰³ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 4-5.

used in Smith's 1998 biography, she reconciled what Taylor saw as two sides of black Americans in the nineteenth century. Amanda Smith served as an example of an unlettered, unskilled black American who found surprising success through outside intervention. Taylor hoped her story would inspire more educated black readers to seek similar assistance within the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Overall, Taylor's biography argued that the type of racial segregation employed in Methodist Episcopal Church policy provided an acceptable venue for ministry. To fit Amanda Smith's life into his argument, he emphasized her links to the denomination and de-emphasized her concerns about racial prejudice. For instance, Taylor traced her spiritual lineage back to the white Methodist church she attended as a young adult, rather than the Pennsylvania A.M.E. church where she first sought membership. He believed that Smith "obtained the true Gospel light" within the white church, despite discriminatory treatment from a church class teacher.¹⁰⁴ Her teacher accepted Smith into a Sunday School class, only to make her wait until all the white students were taught first.¹⁰⁵ That discrimination forced Smith to either violate her work schedule as a live-in maid or miss the church class altogether.

In contrast, Amanda Smith's A.M.E. congregation in Columbia, Pennsylvania provided a shallow setting where "[h]er race pride was flattered, her sense was humored; but in sober truth, her stock of grace was well-nigh

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 22, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 20-21.

exhausted.”¹⁰⁶ Taylor believed that this A.M.E. church did Smith more of a disservice by offering “race pride” than the Methodist church did by allowing racial prejudice. The A.M.E. church failed to provide adequate doctrine to educate her as a Christian, and the quality of the church doctrine outweighed the risk of racial discrimination.

As a black pastor in Ohio, Marshall Taylor, did not imply that racism within his denomination was trivial. Rev. Marshall Taylor felt the impact of the denomination’s color line personally by serving within a segregated church district and holding leadership offices reserved for only black ministers. He even wrote in the introduction to his *Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies* that the book could aid in ending racism. He believed “these melodies have many a mighty task to perform, in lifting up bowed hearts to Jesus and overturning the prejudices against color, which are so ruinously widespread.”¹⁰⁷ But it is apparent that identifying racist patterns was not his ministry's priority. Taylor preferred to make the best of the restrictive organization he worked with by focusing on the segregated black districts and churches as “superior opportunities for the cultivation of Negro piety, talent, and usefulness.”¹⁰⁸ In his opinion, the quality of Christian teaching was better in Northern Methodist churches than in African Methodist Episcopal churches. That theological consideration outweighed Smith's exposure to discriminatory treatment or the

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 21, 22.

¹⁰⁷ Mendiola, “The Hand of a Woman,” 249. Quote originally from Taylor, *A Collection of Revival Hymns and Plantation Melodies* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1882).

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 21.

social benefits of her A.M.E. affiliation, such as the friendships she forged in her women's group and the black pastors who helped start her ministry.

Taylor showed his priorities by not drawing attention to most of Smith's encounters with prejudice. For example, when Smith discussed her 1878 trip to England in the first class of a cruise ship, Taylor recorded her explanation that all the other passengers were White and he included her quote: "At first some of the passengers felt badly, and inquired why I did not take a cheaper rate."¹⁰⁹ Taylor interpreted this as a sign that her fellow passengers showed legitimate concern for her financial welfare, knowing that first-class fare was too expensive for most black women. Judging by Smith's retelling of the event in her autobiography, she most likely meant that the other passengers felt racially offended when they "felt badly." She described most of them as overly curious at her presence and unwilling to talk to her until almost the end of the voyage.¹¹⁰ Given room for interpretation, Taylor chose to assume that the white passengers on this ship had good intentions and no racial animosity.

Taylor made the same assumption about most white people involved in Smith's life. One of the avowed purposes of the biography was to praise the "many generous-hearted people of the white race and of all Christian creeds, who instructed, advised, and aided [Smith] in search for freedom, temporal, and spiritual."¹¹¹ Taylor emphasized the role of God's grace in shaping Smith's life,

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 32-33.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 250-254.

¹¹¹ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 4.

but he argued that these donors deserved credit for establishing her ministry. One of Amanda Smith's white supporters mentioned her ongoing experiences of racial discrimination from white Methodists in his introduction to the biography. Yet overall, he argued that the unjust treatment could be overlooked because "such as she can well take such slights with all Christian meekness, and by the purity of their lives and their labors for God and humanity compel recognition of their worth."¹¹² For him, Smith's ability to accept discrimination quietly showed that she could fit into the status quo of the Northern Methodist denomination and earn interracial respect.

In the sense of valuing theological accuracy, Marshall Taylor, the black Methodist minister, was in step with the white leaders of his denomination. Northern Methodist leaders worried about the growing African Methodist Episcopal Church and its defense of black autonomy.¹¹³ In the early part of the nineteenth century, white leaders had tried to reduce black Christians' influence on the denomination by segregating camp meetings and criticizing enthusiastic dances or shouts. By the 1880s, segregation had become a matter of course within the M.E. Church and interracial outreach seemed like more of a pressing issue. So Taylor served as a 'fraternal delegate' to the A.M.E. general conference in 1880, assuring that denomination that the Northern Methodists'

¹¹² Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 11-12.

¹¹³ Taylor, *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith*, 22, 25; Johnson, "To Dance in the Ring of All Creation," 136-137. Johnson says that leaders of the M.E. Philadelphia Conference objected to efforts in the 1820s to restrict Black worshippers for fear it would "revive old, and injurious prejudices" related to Richard Allen's protest and the establishment of the AME Church there. Smith was active in A.M.E. and M.E. churches in Philadelphia throughout the 1870s.

recognition and support.¹¹⁴ Fraternal delegates were black Methodists who relayed news between the two denominations and expressed “sincere respect and affection” for the A.M.E. without seeking reconciliation.¹¹⁵ These annual delegations sustained a façade of interracial cooperation among Methodists while glossing over the ways Northern Methodists enforced segregation and the ways African Methodists struggled from inadequate resources.

The Amanda Smith described in Marshall Taylor’s book sounded like a black preacher who fit the way black Methodists were expected to participate in the Northern Methodist Church; he depicted her as submissive to white leaders’ supervision and unfulfilled by independent black churches. But his interpretation of Smith’s life did not fit the circumstances. Amanda Smith always kept her own goals in mind while cooperating with white Methodists. For example, Smith’s first invitation to England came from an English woman who thought she could use a restful vacation. And she did need the time to recuperate; working too many hours on her feet as a laundry woman had left Smith’s health permanently damaged. But Smith decided to seek funding for an extended trip and dedicate that time to preaching.¹¹⁶ She accepted invitations to churches and Christian conferences, even when she traveled against the advice of her white colleagues. Smith did not avoid the kinds of events that her white friends considered wrong for her because of their depth, “elegance and style.” Instead, she summoned the

¹¹⁴ James A. Handy, *Scraps of African Methodist Episcopal History*, Documenting the American South (University Library: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000), 263.

¹¹⁵ Handy, *Scraps of African Methodist Episcopal History*, 285-287.

¹¹⁶ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 241-250.

courage to speak from pulpits, incorporate Scottish psalm-singing traditions into church services, and violate Scottish restrictions against female preaching.

Smith sounded most self-reliant when she faced Christian men in Scotland who disapproved of female church leadership. When a church in Perth, Scotland asked her to speak but assumed that she preferred to address only women, Smith replied "I don't mind speaking before men at all. At some of our camp meetings in America I have talked to two and three thousand – men and women, boys and girls, young and old."¹¹⁷ Notice that Amanda Smith referenced her own experience, not what a church leader told her she could do.

While Amanda Smith was preaching in Britain, she felt free of some of the baggage of American racial prejudice. At her first speaking engagement, an outdoor convention in Keswick, she felt like "[n]o one acted as though I was a black woman. I don't suppose they would have treated Mrs. President of the United States with more Christian courtesy and cordiality than they did me."¹¹⁸ Even when Scottish men objected to her work, she believed they did so "because I was a woman; not that I was a black woman, but a woman."¹¹⁹ A white gentleman took Smith by the arm and escorted her to a formal dinner for the first time in her life during her stay in England. This was quite a difference for a woman more accustomed to serving meals and cleaning dishes, especially since she knew others "who would have been ashamed to let it be known that I was in

¹¹⁷ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 277.

¹¹⁸ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 257.

¹¹⁹ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 281.

their dining room."¹²⁰ Of course, there were occasions when British people attended services out of curiosity to see a black woman preach, and Smith accepted this fact. She just looked forward to a time when the audience would cooperate with her and focus on her message rather than her race.¹²¹

In the American context, white Northern Methodists who supported Amanda Smith drew attention to her racial identity and relied on her to resolve further discrimination problems in their denomination. For instance, the introduction to her biography stated that reading the story of Amanda Smith's life "will tend to break down the prejudice of race, and hasten the glad day when a man or woman shall be judged not by the color of their skin, but by the quality of mind and heart."¹²² It was a remarkable statement against racism for his time, but it was expressed in a context where much evidence of racial prejudice remained. The onus of dealing with prejudice fell on the shoulders of Smith and other black Christians who would persevere through the pressure. Amanda Smith tried her best to show white Methodists the pain of racial discrimination and the means they could take to ameliorate the problem. Nevertheless, paternalistic racism continued to influence the way the Northern Methodist Church operated. And black members of the denomination remained relatively silent, compliant partners with few leaders to voice their concerns about informal segregation and discriminatory treatment.

¹²⁰ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 274-275.

¹²¹ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 267.

¹²² J. Krehbiehl, introduction to *The Life, Travels, Labors, and Helpers of Mrs. Amanda Smith, The Famous Negro Missionary Evangelist*, by Marshall W. Taylor (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1887), 11. The introduction was written by a German Methodist.

Conclusion

In her autobiography, Amanda Smith summarized her views on interracial cooperation this way:

I knew how sensitive many white people are about a colored person, so I always kept back. I don't think that anybody can ever say that Amanda Smith pushed herself in where she was not wanted. I was something like the groundhog; when he sees his shadow he goes in; I always could see my shadow far enough ahead to keep out of the way.¹²³

Smith suggested that she deferred to the racial prejudice of some of her white acquaintances, not forcing them to accept integration. And since she was the first black woman to enter many previously segregated church events, she could tell if other black Americans would be welcome, too. This analogy was part of Amanda Smith's ideal of voluntary, individual change transforming race relations. She hoped that other Christians, black and white, would share her experience of sanctification and express that spiritual change through blatant lifestyle changes. Among white audiences, she emphasized that the lifestyle changes could come through God removing a person's prejudiced attitudes.

Smith sacrificed almost everything – her income, her home, her health, and time with her family – to spread her Holiness message in America and throughout the world. She spent over a decade apart from her daughter because of her overseas travels, and Mazie was married by the time she returned from Liberia. Amanda had dreamed of seeing Mazie become a missionary to Africa

¹²³ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 197.

one day. Instead, Smith kept preaching, touring, and raising money to build an orphanage and industrial school for black youth in Harvey, Ohio. She hoped her ministry and autobiography inspired younger black women "who have talent, and who have had better opportunities than I have ever had."¹²⁴ Among the many people who felt her influence, Amanda Smith inspired Ida B. Wells Barnett.¹²⁵

This study of Smith's life and ministry through 1879 shows that her "shadow" did in fact indicate how American Methodists on both sides of the color line felt about racial integration. African Methodists perceived Smith's ministry as a sign that working with white Methodists would not address the pressing needs of their denomination, especially when it came to fundraising for mission work. White Northern Methodists celebrated Smith's ministry as a sign that black leaders could prosper without threatening informal segregation in their local churches or formal segregation in their national organization. And black members of the Northern Methodist Church looked to Smith as a sign that remaining in a mostly white denomination was worthwhile, despite the racial limitations.

Amanda Smith's ministry goals remained in an undefined space between these positions. To fulfill her goals of promoting Holiness doctrine and decrying racial prejudice, she found it necessary to preach among white Christians, sometimes to the chagrin of white audience members. She also swallowed her annoyance at white colleagues and strangers who made a spectacle of her race. Smith knew that curiosity about her as a rare black woman preacher helped to

¹²⁴ Smith, *An Autobiography*, 506.

¹²⁵ Israel, *Amanda Berry Smith*, 141-142.

make her traveling ministry possible, so she accepted it. She felt obliged, like many black leaders of her time, to use that visibility to identify cases of racial discrimination and offer a possible solution. But, unlike most black leaders, she did most of her work without the official support of a black organization.

Smith's outspokenness about godly living endeared her to several White individuals and garnered financial contributions, but it did not change the predominant social order that marginalized black Methodists within camp meetings and the M.E. denomination in general. Most white Methodists, in keeping with the vacation-like format of camp meetings, saw racial integration as an experiment best tried on a temporary basis. White Methodists allowed black Christians to participate in services, rather than excluding them. Still, very few black preachers led camp meeting services, segregated services occurred in the evenings, and the largest percentage of black attendees remained servants of white families. Likewise, the Northern Methodist Church endorsed Amanda Smith's ministry without making large-scale changes in its racial policies. Instead, most white Methodists took her willingness to minister within white congregations as a sign that race relations during the 1870s were adequate.

Amanda Smith's goals spelled out the long-term impact of racism for American Methodist groups. Her argument that racial prejudice was a form of sin made compliance with discrimination spiritually questionable. It questioned the benefit of a denomination without racial diversity because such a setting provided few opportunities to test a person's racial views. The need to confront racial prejudice also conferred a type of personal responsibility that would not be met

through the fund-raising roles that A.M.E. female leaders were expected to adopt. At its core, Amanda Smith's message questioned whether the racial pride of the A.M.E. Church would be enough to conquer racism. Likewise, her message implied Northern Methodists could not be comfortable about race relations within their group unless they tested their attitudes through sustained interaction with black Americans.

In the 1870s, Amanda Smith the evangelist rose from the ranks of laundry women to make a permanent impact on two major Methodist denominations. Talking about race relations helped popularize her gospel message because both denominations had a stake in racial issues. The A.M.E. Church advocated black racial solidarity in hope of creating improvements in education, finances, and social status. On the other hand, white Northern Methodists placed education and spiritual leadership for black Christians under the control of white leaders, assuming that white paternalism would make the lingering consequences of segregation less painful. These different perspectives affected how Smith was received in each group – as a tool for promoting racial solidarity or as a symbol of black submission to white Christians' authority. Her experience in the 1870s proved that both white and black American Christians dealt with race relations to help their churches succeed. Even when a denomination avoided segregation, it did not avoid controversy.

Chapter 4

A Freed Woman Who Rescued Slaves: Maria Fearing and the Racial Integration of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission, 1894 to 1915

Amidst the records of the Presbyterian Historical Society, there is an 1890s era photograph of a group of Presbyterian missionaries in the Belgian Congo playing croquet.¹ Three of them are women in white blouses and wide-brimmed hats. All are African American. Two of the women – Lilian Thomas and Lucy Gantt Sheppard of Alabama -- bend over their mallets while Sheppard's husband, the Rev. William H. Sheppard, looks down to contemplate his next play. Of the four, Maria Fearing looks up and watches her colleagues, awaiting her turn with the trace of a smile on her face. Game playing is not the scene one would initially expect from a set of missionaries who sailed to Congo intent on converting Africans to Christianity. At least on this day, they were not leading Bible studies, learning a language, or evangelizing in local villages. They were simply enjoying each other's company.

Though recreation was not part of the literal job description for missionaries, it symbolized the ways mission work transformed the lives of those who played croquet that day. By becoming ministers overseas, missionaries

¹ Photograph attributed to the Presbyterian Historical Society by the National Geographic Society. It was posted on the website as part of a story on Pagan Kennedy's biography of William Sheppard. The photographer is not listed but is most likely one of two fellow missionaries serving in Congo between 1894 and 1900: the Reverend W.P. Hawkins and Dr. D.W. Snyder. http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/02/0227_livingstone4.html. Accessed February 27, 2007.

attained freedom to act in ways their social status, racial identity, and traditions might have restricted if they stayed at home. This was especially true in the life of Maria Fearing. She had worked the first thirty years of her life as an enslaved nanny and a live-in domestic servant for white families in Alabama. The tasks of raising babies and performing chores left little time or opportunity for her to consider her own interests. But now that she performed full-time ministry in another country, she earned the kind of free time she never had in the United States. And she enjoyed that free time through a game associated with country clubs rather than servant quarters. Fearing's new career placed her literally and figuratively far from typical life for a poor black American woman born into slavery.

Fearing's ability to play croquet in Congo represented just one of the intriguing ways that her life defied stereotypes. Raised as a house slave in Gainesville, Alabama, Fearing became a professional minister on the other side of the world. Though she owned little more than a small house that she bought with her teaching and janitorial wages, she held status as a relatively wealthy foreigner in Congo.

Maria Fearing also worked in the first racially integrated Presbyterian mission station, where some of the rules of Jim Crow racism did not seem to apply. Fearing was an American woman with dark skin, but from the perspective of Congolese people, she and the other black missionaries were more akin to white people. As one white missionary in Congo wrote the week of Fearing's arrival in Congo, "So far they do not show any difference, but treat them [the black missionaries] exactly as they treat us, and look on them as 'nfuma' – i.e.

superior people, chiefs."² Local admirers even gave her colleague, William Sheppard, a nickname that meant "the black white man."³ Meanwhile, Presbyterian missionaries of both races ate together, preached together, cooperated in regular meetings, and lived as neighbors.

How should we understand a foreign mission endeavor so transformative that it turned a former slave into a "superior" and a racially segregated church into the only Protestant organization sponsoring an integrated African ministry? The American Presbyterian Congo Mission made such contradictions possible partly because its staff, including black missionaries like Maria Fearing, mixed their concern for racial issues with dedication to the spiritual welfare of their adopted community. Because the debt slavery system endangered the welfare of most Congolese people, the Presbyterian missionaries eventually incorporated criticism of slavery and other government-supported atrocities into their ministry. The slavery issue combined with the missionaries' own racial diversity to make color prejudice a frequent topic of discussion in the Congolese mission field.

Using Maria Fearing's life and work from the 1880s through 1915 as the focus, this chapter traces the history of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission. During Fearing's career, the mission station became the adopted home of several black American missionaries, their white colleagues, and Fearing's family of adopted Congolese girls. Maria Fearing's progress toward mission work

² Rev. D.W. Snyder, "Letters From the Field," *The Missionary* (Nashville), 28 (June 1895): 264. Reprinted from his diary entry, October 25, 1894.

³ Pagan Kennedy, *Black Livingstone: a True Tale of Adventure in the Nineteenth-Century Congo* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 43.

and her interest in training Congolese girls were described in her letters and published articles to mission supporters, as well as in her colleagues' articles for the Presbyterian mission journal. Background information on race relations within the Southern Presbyterian denomination sets the stage for understanding the unique status of Maria Fearing and the other black Presbyterian missionaries.

The drastic changes in Fearing's life occurred simultaneously with significant changes in how her Presbyterian denomination enforced restrictions on its black ministers. After describing those restrictions and the ways other historians addressed them, we will look in detail at the years between Fearing's departure for Congo in 1894 and her forced retirement in 1915. Fearing's life was transformed by new levels of personal authority, interaction with colleagues, and higher class status. Those new levels were represented by shifts in her public identity, and I reflect them with three variations of her name in the following section titles. The interaction between Fearing and other Southern Presbyterians in Congo gives us clear examples of Americans defying the racial norms of their culture in proclaimed loyalty to spiritual duty. Yet sometimes, even this defiance encompassed traditions that justified segregation in general.

Christian missionaries in Congo discussed race relations frequently, though they rarely used that explicit term. Instead, race featured in the background as ministers figured out how their mission should introduce Christian beliefs. A white pastor or priest naturally stood out as he walked around a village of dark-skinned Baluba people, so he often tried to make his appearance part of his message. The Southern Presbyterian pastors generally chose sharp suits

and white hats that sent a nonverbal message that God made Christians different and more sensitive to nudity than the Congolese people.⁴ Missionaries sometimes protested the way the Belgian government treated the local people because the Americans believed that government abuse hindered the ministerial influence. The Southern Presbyterian missionaries especially condemned King Leopold's policy of debt slavery that forced random men and women into harvesting rubber and left the rest of the locals with a well-earned suspicion of white officials. These reasons, as well as fears about the tropical climate, led the Southern Presbyterian Church to hire black American missionaries in hope that they could communicate with the local people and adjust to a new African home quicker than their white counterparts.

Though the Southern Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church in the United States/ P.C.U.S) specifically established its mission station in the Belgian Congo as a witness to Congolese people, it also presented a specific message to American audiences. The mission represented a place where Americans of different races could live and work together as colleagues even while segregation prevailed in their homeland. It gave a segregated Protestant denomination the impulse to argue for international human rights and to denounce slavery. A small mission station with an average of six missionaries from its founding in 1891 until

⁴ One missionary's wife used her baby's appearance as a symbol of her Christian lifestyle; local visitors eager to see the white baby would always find her in a clean, lacy white gown. When Baluba women stained the gown repeatedly with traces of their red hair dye, the mother would simply take the stains as inevitable contrast between the hygiene of Africans and her hygiene standards. Gertrude Wood Snyder, "A Little Life for Africa," *Kasai Herald* 1, no. 2 (1 July 1901): 14-15. Congo Mission Records, box 74, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, NC.

1904 could have such symbolic significance because it was rare for black and white Presbyterian ministers to work together.

From the 1890s through the 1940s, ministers of different races were barred from serving in the same Presbyterian churches within the United States but celebrated for collaborating regularly overseas. Such was the logic of Jim Crow restrictions. Within the Southern Presbyterian denomination, ministers from various states enforced policies that kept black ministers apart from white church members and isolated black Presbyterians in separate groups. The separation could be as close as a small Sunday School class designed for black members that met after the usual church service. Or it could be as far as sending black ministers across the Atlantic. No matter the distance, the common denominator was that, after 1898, no black man could gain official permission to have authority over white Southern Presbyterians or serve in a white church.⁵

In his thorough study of race relations within the Southern Presbyterian denomination, Andrew Murray argued that the organization did little to recruit or maintain black membership for its first hundred years aside from several unfulfilled promises of financial support.⁶ Church historian Ernest Trice Thompson agreed with that assessment in his 1973 book, *Presbyterians in the South*. His report on annual conferences and pastoral records indicated that white Presbyterian ministers' attitudes toward blacks varied from apathy to

⁵ Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro; a History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 131-160.

⁶ Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro*.

disgust but rarely translated into practical outreach.⁷ Both historians focused on white church leaders rather than black ministers and laymen working within the Southern Presbyterian Church.

Accordingly, most of the scholarly work on black missionaries in Congo was published outside of denominational history texts. Historian Sylvia Jacobs researched the black Presbyterian missionaries as examples of black American women in foreign ministry. Their work in boarding schools and women's clubs added to the author's overall argument that the missionary women claimed a sense of racial unity with African women but also enforced American-style cultural expectations.⁸ Stanley Shaloff's older study of the Congo missionaries interpreted them as positive influences on the corrupt Belgian government officials controlling Congo in the late nineteenth century.⁹ And scholar Robert Benedetto provided more details on the significance of politics, race relations, and gender roles among the Congo missionaries in the introduction to his edited

⁷ E. Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 3 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973).

⁸ Sylvia Jacobs, "Their Special Mission:" Afro-American Women as Missionaries to the Congo, 1894-1937," *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. by Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), 155-176. Jacobs focused on other black female missionaries in the following chapters: Sylvia Jacobs, "Give a Thought to Africa: Black Women Missionaries in Southern Africa," *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Sylvia Jacobs, "'Say Africa When You Pray:' The Activities of Early Black Baptist Women Missionaries Among Liberian Women and Children," *Sage* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 16-21; Sylvia Jacobs, "Three Afro-American Women: Missionaries in Africa, 1882-1904," in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

⁹ Stanley Shaloff, *Reform in King Leopold's Congo* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1970).

volume of mission correspondence.¹⁰ Specifically, Benedetto argued that the integrated mission station still included elements of segregated American culture.

This chapter combines the history of the Congo mission station and Southern Presbyterian history to provide a more comprehensive portrayal of black ministers' roles within the denomination. Because previous historical studies showed how little recognition black Presbyterians received throughout the Jim Crow era, full-time missionary work in West Africa implied a special social and religious status. We can analyze this new professional status best through Maria Fearing, a former slave who eventually based her ministry on redeeming girls from the Congolese slave trade. She experienced all of the setbacks that white church leaders usually listed as disqualifications for black ministers: slavery, poverty, and lack of education. Yet, as a single woman, she earned a leadership position in a male-led denomination. Fearing's exceptional achievements help us understand what black ministers attained in the Southern Presbyterian Church and what white ministers expected from their activism.

It would be too simplistic to use the memory of the black Presbyterian missionaries as evidence that this southern denomination did not harbor prejudice in the 1890s and early 1900s. As Robert Benedetto pointed out, there were enough examples of racial discrimination within the American Presbyterian Congo Mission to make its historical status as an integrated station questionable

¹⁰ Robert Benedetto, ed., *Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa: A Documentary Account of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission and the Human Rights Struggle in the Congo, 1890-1918*. (New York E.J. Brill, 1996).

if not misleading.¹¹ Instead, we should consider how the tense race relations within this denomination eventually justified the hiring of the first black Southern Presbyterian missionaries and how these pioneers, especially Maria Fearing, reshaped race relations through their work. For instance, Fearing's hard work enabled her to transform from a servant into a Christian leader respected by a multiracial audience, yet the prevalence of slavery abroad and segregation in America made her example difficult to follow.

"Aunt Maria Winston:" Seeking Leadership in the Wake of Slavery, 1863-1894

Maria Fearing first encountered Presbyterians in the form of William and Amanda Winston, the people who claimed ownership of her parents, Jesse and Mary Fearing. The Fearing family kept the last name of a previous owner.¹² William Winston separated Maria from her parents shortly after her birth in 1838, ostensibly for the sake of protecting the frail baby from difficult agricultural work.¹³ She grew up as "Aunt Maria Winston," the nanny who raised six of the eight Winston children. The only known photograph of Maria Fearing before she turned thirty years old was a daguerreotype of her holding baby Ada Winston; another

¹¹ Benedetto, *Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa*, 31-34.

¹² Althea Brown Edmiston, "Maria Fearing: A Mother to African Girls," *Glorious Living: Informal Sketches of Seven Women Missionaries of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.*, ed. Hallie Paxson Winsborough (Atlanta, Ga.: Committee on Women's Work, Presbyterian Church, U.S., 1937), 291.

¹³ The exact date of Maria Fearing's birth is uncertain, but her mission colleagues and most historical accounts list her birth year as 1838.

Winston daughter remembered that the image was her mother's keepsake.¹⁴

According to Nellie and Janie Winston, the last surviving Winston children, young Maria heard her first stories of Africa and missions thanks to Amanda Winston's commitment to teaching Bible verses and hymns.¹⁵ Likewise, they observed that she gained her love of church activities by holding babies in the back row during Gainesville Presbyterian Church services.¹⁶

In hindsight, we cannot know how much of these statements rested on nostalgia for the Winston families' influence. But we can tell that Maria Fearing shouldered the burden of becoming someone other than a babysitter and church observer. She left the Winston plantation as soon as she heard about emancipation, adopted her parents' surname, and relocated to the city of Gainesville to work as a live-in domestic servant.¹⁷ About ten years later, when she found out that an American Missionary Association college in Talladega, Alabama offered classes for adults seeking literacy, she quit her job, invested her savings in transportation to the school, and worked her way through ninth grade.

¹⁴ Nellie Winston Peterson/ Mrs. F.M. Peterson, "An Old Woman Reminisces." Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, NC [date unknown], 1. There was not a copy of this photograph available in the Presbyterian Historical Society archive.

¹⁵ Winston Peterson, "An Old Woman Reminisces," 1.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 3, 85.

¹⁷ Robert D. Bedinger, "Maria Fearing: 1838-1937," 19 July 1937, Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, NC; Edmiston, "Maria Fearing: A Mother to African Girls," 293-294; Patricia Sammon, *Maria Fearing: A Woman Whose Dream Crossed an Ocean* (Huntsville: Writers Consortium Books, 1989), 39-52. This short biography is the only published book that focuses on Maria Fearing. It is written as a popular children's book on Alabama history rather than as a scholarly source. However, it is based on Althea Brown Edmiston's 1902 interviews with Maria Fearing in Congo and on background information and memories from Fearing's grandniece, Lucille Perkins Nesbitt.

Though Fearing had grown up being referred to as "aunt" or "mammy" by the Winston clan, she refused to fit "the mammy stereotype" that white observers tried to apply to her. Throughout her life, Fearing showed determination to change her circumstances, starting with her decision to leave the Winston household. In the process, she also left the Presbyterian congregation that the Winstons had forced her to attend. The Southern Presbyterian Church played no further role in her life until 1894, after she had finished school, started teaching, and saved enough money to buy a small house in Anniston, Alabama.

While working at Talladega College as the assistant housing matron, Fearing heard a presentation by William Sheppard, who had just returned after three years of establishing the American Presbyterian Congo Mission. The talk inspired her to apply for service immediately, despite others' objections that she was too old and weak for the travel. At the time, Fearing was fifty-six years old with a short stature and weighed little more than ninety pounds.¹⁸ Friends and coworkers noted a youthful, determined spark in her eyes, yet her appearance did not mask the fact that she had worked hard for decades. The P.C.U.S. Foreign Mission Committee denied her application based on her age, relative lack of education, and a persistent lack of funds. But Fearing responded by selling her home and presenting the money as her payment for a one-way ticket to the Congo mission station. As a sign of her commitment, she did not request a return ticket. Her fellow travelers, Lucy Gantt Sheppard and Lilian Thomas, received appointments as Presbyterian missionaries, but Fearing went abroad as

¹⁸ Bedinger, "Maria Fearing," 1.

an independent minister relying on donations. With pledges from a women's group at Talladega College, Maria Fearing prepared to become a permanent missionary to Africa.

Once Fearing chose full-time mission work, a series of important changes started in her lifestyle. For the first time, Fearing left the state of Alabama. Of course, an inland region of Central Africa with few other Western settlers and a prevalence of tropical diseases did not make an ideal travel destination.¹⁹

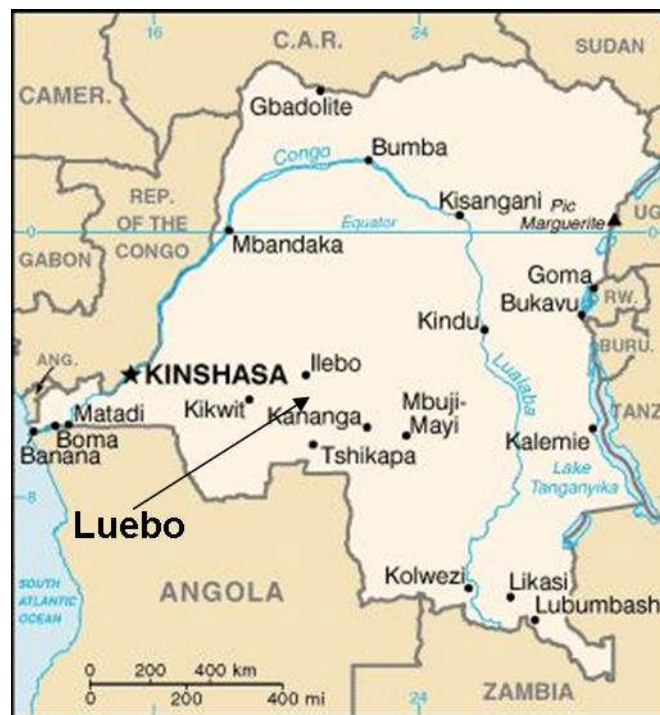


Figure 4.1: The Location of Maria Fearing's Mission Station Within a Modern Map of Congo. Map courtesy of the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

Yet it was a place where Maria Fearing felt compelled to work, and she was one of the few black American women of her time who could follow her convictions over such a long distance. One biographical account says that mission board

¹⁹ Map of the Luebo Region of the Congo Free State provided by the Presbyterian Historical Society. Reprinted from the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. website. Online. <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/congo/missions.htm>. Accessed 28 February 2007.

leaders warned Fearing that she could die of a tropical disease soon after reaching Congo.²⁰ Her decision to sell her house could be a sign that she recognized the risks yet felt that mission work was worth the sacrifice. Giving up her house also meant relinquishing her first property and her main source of independence. For a person who spent most days and nights of her first twenty seven years in the company of her master's family and then spent another five years as a live-in maid, the value of a private home cannot be overestimated.

"Mamu" Fearing: Foster Care and Slavery, 1894-1909

Maria Fearing exchanged her home in Alabama for a mud-walled hut on the mission field that she eventually shared with another black female missionary and about forty Congolese girls.²¹ African mission work was worth so much risk and sacrifice to Fearing partly because she saw practical needs there that she could fill. She took overseas the motherly role she played in the Winston home and as assistant matron at Talladega, and applied her domestic skills to child slaves. Within a year of her arrival at the Congo mission station, Fearing started using her savings to purchase Congolese girls enslaved during local conflicts.

By 1894, it had become common for a certain group of mercenaries, called "Zappo Zapps," to attack villages throughout rural Congo and sell captives to the highest bidders. These young captives often ended up isolated from their villages and forced to work rubber plantations run by the Belgian colonial

²⁰ Sammon, *Maria Fearing*, 62-65.

²¹ For a photograph of Maria Fearing (center, left) and Ms. Lilian Thomas (center, right) with several residents of the Pantops Home for Girls, see the Presbyterian Church USA website. The photograph is part of the Presbyterian Historical Society Congo Mission Records. <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/congo/missions.htm> Accessed 28 February 2007.

government.²² The trading system between the nomadic Zappo Zaps and the Belgians sustained a full-fledged domestic slave market. The Belgians needed labor for the dangerous and tedious rubber harvesting process, and Zappo Zaps needed financial support from the government because they did not have their own land. So the two groups helped each other. The mercenaries would raid Congolese villages and sell hostages to the government while the government destabilized villages by requiring exorbitant taxes or several male rubber workers. Presbyterian missionaries watched this cycle unfold many times in the region where they settled. William Sheppard's hopes of starting a mission inside the nearby Bakuba kingdom dwindled when the Zappo Zaps decimated it in 1908, killing hundreds and taking other Bakuba hostage.²³

A group of migrant people called the Baluba settled around the Presbyterian mission in the 1890s seeking the Americans' protection from Belgian officials' labor requirements.²⁴ Sheppard and a white missionary named William Morrison documented how the colonial government sponsored murder and torture of Congolese people; their criticism of King Leopold of Belgium forced them into a well-publicized libel trial in 1909. After Maria Fearing left Congo in 1915, the slave raiding and government oppression continued despite political reform in the region. The Belgians forced the Bakuba king to provide so many

²² George D. Adamson, "A Diary Kept in Congo Land," *The Missionary* (Nashville) 28 (June 1895): 266-267. Written 28 July 1894.

²³ William M. Morrison, "Statement to His Majesty's Government on Conditions in the Congo," 4 May 1903, *Presbyterian Reformers*, 154.

²⁴ Benedetto, Introduction, *Presbyterian Reformers*, 42-45.

taxes and laborers annually that the local people were afraid to stay unless the Presbyterian missionaries appealed to the government on their behalf.²⁵

A black missionary named A.L. Edmiston described the situation in 1916:

Well, this has been a sad old day. The people are still getting up soldiers for the King. Some of the clans have no men to give. The members of that clan must pay from 30 to 50 thousand cowries if not they must give women and children. I saw one woman with her little child in her arms being carried away as a soldier. They don't call them soldiers but box men. How on earth are women and children going to carry boxes[?]²⁶

Edmiston and the other Presbyterian missionaries hated watching their church members and potential converts lose family members in the debt slavery system. Still, the missionaries balanced their sympathy for the local people with their need to cooperate with the colonial government. After all, the Belgians did exercise control over the land that missionaries needed to start their churches and schools. Also, the Presbyterians felt compelled by Christian doctrine to honor higher authorities and teach converts to do likewise despite the officials' abusive demands.²⁷ But the Presbyterian ministers resisted the favoritism that Catholic priests received from King Leopold's government. It seemed that the priests and nuns kept their Congo missions growing by waiting for the government to send more captives. In contrast, Presbyterian missionaries did not keep silent about abusive Belgian officials in exchange for access to emancipated slave children.

²⁵ William Morrison and other Congo missionaries took photographs of local villagers who had been tortured by Belgian officials for not paying enough tribute or harvesting enough rubber. They circulated these images to raise awareness of the problem. For examples from the Presbyterian Historical Society, see the Presbyterian Church USA website.

²⁶ A.L. Edmiston, *Diaries: 1916-1941*. 14 August 1916. Talladega College Library Archives. Microfilm. This diary was written as an official public record for the American Presbyterian Congo Mission.

²⁷ Edmiston, *Diaries*, 20 February 1916. Edmiston preached a sermon on this day based on Romans 13 telling the local people that "giving of soldiers was not a bad thing to do."

But neither did the Presbyterian missionaries turn enslaved children away. State officials provided many slaves to the missionaries as gifts; others were purchased from passing Zappo Zapp traders. Four months before Fearing's arrival, the mission station sheltered forty four children, including the "house children" retained for manual labor.²⁸ The missionaries kept these children and a group of local adults as live-in workers in exchange for room and board.²⁹ In theory, the emancipated laborers on the mission station helped the missionaries with their traveling evangelism, but differences in social status between local people groups made it difficult to attract any converts besides slaves. By 1893, Baluba and Bakete people faced the greatest risk of enslavement in the area, and other groups showed less patience for Presbyterian preaching.³⁰ This meant that the American Presbyterian Congo Mission was, in the words of white missionary D.W. Snyder, "composed of ransomed people." The missionaries were so burdened in supporting its occupants that they nearly "had to refuse those who came to us, unless we were prepared to free and care for half of the natives of this district."³¹

²⁸ D.W. Snyder, "Letters From the Field: Africa," *The Missionary* (Nashville) 27 (November 1894): 483-484. Letter written 3 June 1894.

²⁹ Maggie Waugh Adamson, "Woman's Work on the Congo," *The Missionary* (Nashville) 27 (March 1894): 101-102. Letter written in October 1893.

³⁰ D.W. Snyder, "Letters From the Field: Africa," *The Missionary* (Nashville) 27 (June 1894): 234. Letter written October 17, 1893; "Six Months Among the Bakete," *The Missionary* (Nashville) 27 (June 1894): 240-242. Based on George Adamson's diaries from June 1893 to January 1894.

³¹ D.W. Snyder, "Letters From the Field: Africa," *The Missionary* (Nashville) 27 (November 1894): 483. Letter written 3 June 1894.

Maria Fearing came into this situation as an answer to D.W. Snyder's prayers for support. She and Lilian Thomas, a friend and graduate of Talladega College, cared for the "house children" at the mission station when Snyder's wife, Heginbotham, fell ill and after her death in 1896. After D.W. Snyder went back to America to grieve, Fearing, Thomas, the Sheppards, and a black minister named Henry Philip Hawkins were left occupying the mission station. William Sheppard managed its affairs until another white male minister arrived later that year.

Maria Fearing started caring for local girls almost as soon as she arrived in Congo. Lucy Sheppard wrote about how the first girl was adopted into Fearing's home in 1894. She described "when little Ntumba came trudging up the path toward the station between two stalwart Zappo Zapps, [and] the Missionaries decided to redeem her, as the price was very small."³² Ntumba may have been one of the girls Fearing mentioned when she wrote in a mission letter that "Lilian [Thomas] and I have four little native girls to train" and "I have one special girl that the doctor [Dr. Snyder] gave me for my own. I am trying to teach her to sew and do housework of which she knows nothing."

In this letter, Fearing asked her readers back in Talladega to remember her adopted Congolese girl. She wrote, "Pray for her co[n]version. Kapinga is her name."³³ Teaching Kapinga and the other girls about her faith in Christ was of utmost importance to Fearing. Like the other missionaries, she hoped to teach

³² Mrs. W.H. Sheppard, "The Girls' Homes," *Kassai Herald* 8, no. 1 (1 Jan. 1908): 17, William Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society,.

³³ Maria Fearing to Talladega College Mission Band, March 1895, *Talladegan*, Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Congolese people to read a translated version of the Bible, sing Christian hymns, and memorize Presbyterian doctrine.³⁴ To that purpose, Fearing studied the local languages, eventually speaking a creolized version that combined Baluba with English. She also served as a traveling evangelist to neighboring villages, wrote two articles for the mission newsletter, and sent updates to her financial supporters at Talladega College. But Fearing's unique contribution to the mission was training Congolese girls to adopt a Christian lifestyle through domestic skills.

Fearing worked to change people's ideas of proper dress and family lifestyles. Her house soon became known throughout the region of the mission station as a place where young women would learn to sew clothing and blankets, cook meals with local vegetables and fruits, maintain a kitchen, clean the house and yard, wash and iron dresses, and keep new habits of sanitation.³⁵ Fearing chose a simple dress pattern that the girls learned to sew and wore daily as a substitute for their more revealing traditional clothing.

Each girl attended the mission church and daily classes with Fearing, Lilian Thomas, or Lucy Sheppard. The children's lessons consisted of literacy, domestic skills, and the same "fundamental principles of Christianity" that adults needed to join the mission church; they memorized the translated Westminster Shorter Catechism and learned Presbyterian hymns in the Baluba language.³⁶ Some came to class from their homes in the village of Luebo, but most lived

³⁴ "Admittance to Church Membership", *Kasai Herald* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 1904): 3, Congo Mission Records, Presbyterian Historical Society.

³⁵ Edmiston, "Maria Fearing: A Mother to African Girls," 304-308.

³⁶ "Admittance to Church Membership" *Kasai Herald* 4, no.1 (January 1904), Congo Mission Records, 3.

together in Congolese-style houses built behind the house that Fearing and Thomas shared.³⁷ When they got older, many of the girls continued working at the mission in a service role, sought employment at another mission, or chose to marry another Congolese Christian. Over the course of her twenty-year career, thirty to one hundred residents were in her care at any given time.³⁸

Maria Fearing received accolades for her ministry. The girls preferred to call Fearing "Mamu," the Baluba word for "mother," or "Mama wa Mputu" [meaning 'mother from far away']. The denomination eventually recognized her work by hiring Maria Fearing as an official missionary and renaming the foster home as the "Pantops Home for Girls" after an elite Presbyterian school in Virginia.³⁹ One fellow missionary wrote a news feature in the mission newsletter honoring it as an extremely valuable part of the ministry.⁴⁰

Fearing inherited the girls' home and its domestic focus from two white female missionaries, but she and Lilian Thomas expanded its work. As Heginbotham Snyder and Maggie Adamson did before Fearing's arrival, Fearing and Thomas needed helpers for the mundane tasks of cooking and cleaning around the mission. Having this work done by others made it possible for the missionary women to fulfill ministry duties like evangelizing in neighboring

³⁷ Edmiston, "Maria Fearing," 304.

³⁸ Sylvia Jacobs, "Their Special Mission," 157-158.

³⁹ Edmiston, "Maria Fearing," 308. The Pantops Academy in Virginia taught elite secondary education to Presbyterian teenagers from the United States and abroad. The school probably hosted missionary children, which prompted missionaries to give its name to an orphanage in Congo.

⁴⁰ "Local Mission News," *Kassai Herald* 5, no. 4 (Oct. 1905): 46.

villages. But the black women did not make Christian training secondary to domestic training like their predecessors.

All of the girls in Fearing's Pantops Home received an education in the mission school as part of their daily routine. Before Fearing's arrival, girls working for the mission only received lessons as their work load allowed and during weekly meetings designed to attract local villagers. But part of the credit for the growth of Fearing's boarding school lies with the local parents because many sent their daughters to stay with Fearing and Lilian Thomas after not offering to do so with the white missionaries. Under the management of Snyder and Adamson, the mission did not attract enough students from nearby villages to warrant a boarding school. Maria Fearing's race and her way of running the orphanage may have swayed her Congolese neighbors in her favor. By 1903, the school enrolled 237 students and employed some Christian teachers from the local area. Fearing and Thomas improvised to make adequate supplies when they had "no books, charts, black-boards or anything to teach with." One of the white missionaries helped by publishing a Baluba language reader.⁴¹

By focusing on the practicalities of housekeeping, Fearing passed on to the Pantops girls many of the skills she had performed in her younger years as a slave and domestic servant. Mission work provided a means of applying those experiences to what she considered to be a necessary religious purpose. Also, Fearing's efforts to teach new dress codes and cleaning skills gave her a literal, visual means of measuring the elusive spiritual conversions she hoped to inspire.

⁴¹ Lilian Thomas, "Our Schools," *Kasai Herald* 3, no. 2 (1 April 1903), Congo Mission Records, 19-20.

In a letter written to her supporters at Talladega during her second year of service, she criticized the domestic habits she observed in the villages around the Congo mission station:

Their homes are not what we call homes. They live in very small houses made of mud and sticks, with a very small door; no window, no chimney, nor fire place . . . Their blankets are straw mats. They have no quilts. But we are teaching the girls in the home to make quilts. Some of them (the girls) are learning to sew quite nicely, which they like very much indeed. For it is the custom out here, for the men and the boys to do the sewing and light work, and the girls and women work in the peanut and chumby fields, carry heavy burdens and do other laborious things, while the men nurse the baby, smoke, sew, and such things. This people have nothing elevating nor uplifting to appeal to. They have no home training, know nothing of a parent's love nor of anything good, but all bad.⁴²

Maria Fearing's criticisms of Congolese culture focused on gender roles and domesticity. She believed that women in the surrounding villages had grown accustomed to doing physical work like farming, which prevented them from nurturing their children at home. Her solution as a teacher and foster mother was to create new expectations for local girls.

Fearing was among many female teachers and missionaries who expected students to change some of their physical attributes as part of their Christian education. She assumed that Congolese adults were too set in their ways and that the children needed to be taught instead. The preferable alternative was for girls to learn new habits apart from their traditional environment. Through separation, the girls in the Pantops Home would fulfill

⁴² Maria Fearing to Mrs. Andrews, 8 October 1896, *Talladega College Record*, March 1897, Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society.

Fearing's conviction that "[t]he only hope of this people is in the children." This reasoning gave her reasons justifying her ministry in Congo.⁴³

"Miss Maria Fearing:" The Cultural Context of an Official Missionary, 1896-1910

Maria Fearing's emphasis on domesticity built on the work of other missionaries, teachers, and church leaders. Her ministry used strategies from more than one Christian organization but still fit within the Southern Presbyterian framework. Her reliance on "home training" as a means to Christian living had more in common with female mission supporters and black American racial uplift than with Presbyterian theology. The female mission movement depended on the "woman's work for woman" theory, a popular principle that teaching non-Christian women Western lifestyles helped them convert to Christianity.

Fearing put a distinctive stamp on her work by relying on the housekeeping skills she knew so well rather than on the educational attributes that most missionaries used to identify a Presbyterian convert. Southern Presbyterians endorsed higher education as a means to success for black Presbyterian leaders, but Maria Fearing focused on her own standards. Still, even without conforming to the denomination's expectations, she received recognition from white Southern Presbyterians as "Miss Maria Fearing," an official Presbyterian minister.

Maria Fearing's work as a teacher and foster mother in Congo gave her a degree of control unprecedented in her life. By teaching local girls to sew, clean,

⁴³ Ibid.

and cook, she assumed authority in their lives on the basis of skills she had previously used in servitude. The Pantops Home operated like an institute based on distinct forms of domesticity, and Fearing's decades of performing manual labor made ideal teaching credentials. Maria Fearing's interest in wielding control showed in the way she emphasized her claim over Kapinga and the other girls she adopted upon arrival in Congo. She wrote to her supporters that Dr. Snyder gave her Kapinga "for my own" – as in for her own use. And she described the other girls she trained as "our own girls to help us," though one was only five months old at the time. In cooperation with her friend Lilian Thomas, Fearing expected to have final say over how these girls grew up and spent their time. They would be her helpers in terms of completing housework and in justifying her role in the mission. The baby could not do chores, but she grew up under Fearing's care and provided an example of Fearing's ability to train Congolese youth in the admonition of God. Since the girls stayed for an unspecified time span, Fearing's influence on their lives had potential to continue indefinitely.

The mission did not force children to remain in the Pantops Home. In 1914, the missionaries adopted rules that allowed children to leave at any time, and they specified that "[a]ll must be done to make the children and parents satisfied."⁴⁴ The ability to leave meant that the girls were not slaves to the Presbyterian mission in the literal sense, but they, especially the homeless orphans, were clearly under the missionaries' control. Even the missionaries debated how far that control extended. For instance, in 1907, a young lady from

⁴⁴ "Rules for Luebo Homes," 1914, Minutes of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission, Congo Mission Records, Presbyterian Historical Society.

the Pantops Home named Kahinga made it clear that she “expects some time to marry [should] be allowed in the Home.”⁴⁵ But permission to court a lover was not a given at the Presbyterian mission station; since Fearing and Thomas were on leave in Alabama at this time, the rest of the missionaries discussed the matter in an official meeting without writing down their decision.

Playing such a long-term, defining role in someone's life is a feat generally attributed to loving parents and close relatives. But the feelings of fulfillment and purpose that come with parenthood must have been multiplied in the soul of a single, elderly woman who forged many close relationships in a country where she had no husband, biological children, or family members.

As Maria Fearing could testify, having her own sphere of control was a treasured goal for an unmarried woman and former slave. Some of her missionary colleagues also shared her concern for authority for reasons specifically related to their racial identity. The minister who recruited Fearing to the mission field, William H. Sheppard, offered a dramatic example of black missionaries' ambitions when he applied to become a Southern Presbyterian missionary in the 1880s. Born to free black parents who were relatively wealthy and educated at Hampton Institute and a Southern Presbyterian seminary, Sheppard seemed ideal for leading a new mission station in Africa.⁴⁶ However,

⁴⁵ Bertha Morrison, 30 Sept. 1907, Minutes of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission. “Kapinga” and “Kahinga” were common names in this area, so this girl may be unconnected to the Kapinga mentioned earlier.

⁴⁶ Walter Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877-1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 23, 86; For full biographies of William Henry Sheppard, see Pagan Kennedy, *Black Livingstone*, and William Phipps, *William Sheppard: America's Black Livingstone* (Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 2002).

the denomination's hesitancy to send a black man abroad without white supervision postponed his dream for four years.

The wait would have been indefinite had not a younger recent graduate of the white P.C.U.S. seminary applied to accompany Sheppard to Congo.⁴⁷ The mission officially started in 1892 when Sheppard and Samuel Lapsley arrived in the Belgian Congo. They chose to settle along the banks of the Luebo River in the southwestern region of the modern Democratic Republic of the Congo, a place where no other Europeans or Americans had lived before. Sheppard and Lapsley were hired as equals on the mission field, meaning they received the same title and the same pay.⁴⁸ They lived together as they met villagers, learned local languages, and raised interest in starting a church. Officially, Sheppard earned a remarkable measure of authority since it was the first time the Southern Presbyterian Church had hired a Black person as a full missionary. But unofficially, members of the mission board and other missionaries assumed that Lapsley would act as Sheppard's manager.⁴⁹ After Lapsley died unexpectedly during the first year of service, the denomination hired two White ministers and their wives in search of a permanent replacement for him. The mission eventually supported forty five missionaries between 1892 and 1916, ten of whom were black Americans.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa*, 23.

⁴⁸ Benedetto, introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers in Central Africa*, 32-33.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ A full list of P.C.U.S. missionaries was provided in the Missionary Directory of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly Mission Board in 1987. One of the black missionaries, the Reverend A.A. Rochester, was born in Jamaica and raised in

Issues of authority in the mission field affected race relations in the Presbyterian Church years before William Sheppard's arrival. Though the Southern Presbyterians split from the original denomination, its leaders felt the impact of Edward Wilmot Blyden, the black nationalist intellectual who served as a missionary in Liberia from 1851 until his resignation in 1886. White Presbyterians affiliated with the American Colonization Society recommended Blyden as a candidate for permanent emigration and ministry, but they had not expected him to deviate from his Presbyterian education. Blyden's growing focus on advocating pride in African ancestry and starting independent churches with distinct African theology shocked his Presbyterian sponsors.⁵¹

So it was not a surprise that the Southern Presbyterian mission board bowed to specific fears and general biases by trying to keep its Congo mission under the consistent management of a white male minister. The P.C.U.S. had placed limits on black pastors long before starting an African mission. In 1874, the Southern Presbyterian "committee on colored evangelization" adopted a strategy to endorse new separate black churches while keeping them under white ministerial instruction until black Presbyterians had enough "competent ministers of their own to lead them in the right way."⁵² Some white Presbyterian ministers preached in all-black churches because they assumed that most black

Alabama. A group of Presbyterian churches in Alabama still calls itself the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley because "the name represents the inclusiveness of all God's people -- black and white, male and female -- working together for the furtherance of God's Kingdom."

⁵¹ Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa*, 12-13.

⁵² *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* 3, no. 4 (1874), 589.

preachers either had insufficient religious training or were prone to wander without religious guidance.

Like their northern counterparts, Southern Presbyterians emphasized their commitment to an educated clergy governed by representatives of church members. The secret to successful churches in the southern context lay in maintaining a balance that emphasized education over self-governance. In 1874, the denomination founded a segregated seminary in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, later known as Stillman Institute, where white Presbyterian ministers prepared black male students from various Protestant denominations to become pastors or African missionaries. William Sheppard graduated from Stillman before applying for mission work. A Stillman graduate received official recognition as a black Southern Presbyterian minister, but he still had to abide by race-based restrictions. From 1898 until 1917, the denomination urged black ministers to serve the "Afro-American Presbyterian Synod," even though constant financial problems soon caused the segregated denomination's demise.⁵³

The American mission movement also raised questions of authority beyond racial boundaries. Like Maria Fearing, most American women living in the late nineteenth century had limited options for claiming a sphere of control in a Christian context. The Presbyterian Church and all other major denominations barred women from preaching, leading a church, or serving as officers in local congregations. These rules meant that Protestant women interested in church

⁵³ Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro; a History*, 150-152.

leadership had to focus on teaching school, leading music, or leading women's groups. Black women faced more limitations because they were usually segregated into under-funded churches; these women were less likely to receive financial compensation for church services like teaching but also more likely to be too busy with full-time jobs to maintain their own groups.

A few black American women achieved recognition in the nineteenth century as preachers, but most of their black female contemporaries found their leadership opportunities through civilizing missions. When American "civilizing" missions started expanding overseas in the 1880s, the term meant reshaping the family and domestic habits of a distinct group of people into a style more in line with Victorian values. Martha Crawford and her white female colleagues sounded like typical missionaries of their time when they criticized the cultures they encountered in China as "heathen" and "dirty."⁵⁴ Maria Fearing followed suit by maintaining a critical view of the Congo mission field throughout her twenty years there. She bemoaned "these poor heathen" she encountered, the "strange" habits she noticed in neighboring villages, and lifestyles that she believed left "nothing elevating nor uplifting to appeal to."⁵⁵ Some of her fellow female missionaries described the people of Luebo in similar fashion, relying on the term "heathen" to denote religious and cultural differences. The American women living at the Congo Mission focused on providing local children with Western-

⁵⁴ Keith Harper, introduction to *Send the Light* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002); Lottie Moon to H.A. Tupper, 1 Nov. 1873, *Send the Light*, 5-7.

⁵⁵ Maria Fearing to Talladega College Mission Band, March 1895, *Talladegan*, Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society; Maria Fearing to Mrs. Andrews, 8 October 1896, *Talladega College Record*, March 1897, Maria Fearing Biographical File; Maria Fearing, "Visiting," *Kasai Herald* 1, no. 2 (July 1901), Congo Mission Records, 21.

style clothing, hygiene lessons, and cooking lessons to supplement their religious education. Female missionaries in other countries used similar methods in their efforts to transplant "Christian civilization" as they understood it.

Civilizing missions also took place within the United States through the work of domestic missionaries, boarding school directors, and teachers. The methods Fearing used in her overseas ministry shared many similarities with the pedagogy at her alma mater, Talladega College. It was common in Fearing's time for educators trained at all-black universities and American Missionary Association schools to conflate basic literacy education with classes on hygiene and home economics. The ideal alumna of a mission school or university would have not only the ability to read and write but also the high moral values of her institution and community.⁵⁶

Fearing reported to her Talladega supporters that she felt obligated to ameliorate "the dreadfulness of the state of these people."⁵⁷ Likewise, black teachers within the United States tried to inspire immediate lifestyle changes for their students and the black community at large. In the 1870s, when Fearing arrived at Talladega College, most of the students started teaching right after learning to read.⁵⁸ By spreading literacy, they made it possible for more black youth and adults to gain access to what a group of black politicians called "the

⁵⁶ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42-43.

⁵⁷ Maria Fearing to Mrs. Andrews, 8 October 1896. *Talladega College Record*, March 1897, Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society.

⁵⁸ Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 177-78.

three great agents of civilized society – the school, the pulpit, the press . . ."⁵⁹

More generally, teachers and alumni from black colleges like Talladega imparted a sense of self-control and discipline among students.⁶⁰ These qualities defined their concept of "civilization" because students would stay focused on learning, excelling, and passing their skills onto other black Americans. Maria Fearing phrased the goal of her training in more specific terms that did not reference race; she simply praised her adopted girls for showing a "missionary spirit."⁶¹

Maria Fearing gained authority as a missionary, as well as respect from her white Southern Presbyterian colleagues. The best illustration of this concept comes from a group photograph of the Congo missionaries at the Luebo mission station in 1909.⁶² It was taken while Fearing and Lilian Thomas were on a two-year furlough in the United States. Almost all of the participants in the photograph were Americans from southern states, and many were from Alabama.

Back in their home towns, it would have been more likely to see the white couples sitting together with the black people lined up behind them in some type of servant uniform. Jim Crow laws would have prevented these black ministers from having a job at the same level as a white person. And the black married couples would most likely not be working together because, to make ends meet, the wife would probably have worked for one white family while the husband

⁵⁹ Williams, *Self-Taught*, 76.

⁶⁰ Williams, *Self-Taught*, 161-62.

⁶¹ Maria Fearing, "The Children's Page," *Kasai Herald* 4, no. 3 (July 1904), Congo Mission Records, Presbyterian Historical Society, 32.

⁶² For a reproduction of this photograph, see Benedetto, introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers*, plate 14.

worked for another. The fact that these missionaries could pose together indicates that their commitment to sharing the message of Christ with Congolese people gave them a sense of mutual respect – to the point that they posed next to one another as colleagues despite segregation rules back in the United States.

Denominational historians such as Ernest Trice Thompson described the influx of white and black missionaries as a sign of the unique interracial environment at the mission.⁶³ Missionaries of both races and genders often met together in committee meetings and at meal times.⁶⁴ Sometimes, ministers of different races shared the same room during their travels in the Congolese countryside. They would have been shunned for that kind of familiarity if they remained in the Jim Crow South. Moreover, white Southern Presbyterians within the United States changed their racial traditions. The monthly journals published by the Executive Committee of Foreign Missions referred to the black missionaries by their titles of "Reverend," "Mrs.," and "Miss," eschewing the tradition of calling any black people by their first names regardless of their ages.⁶⁵ The denomination also chose not to pay different salaries to overseas missionaries based on race.⁶⁶ Equal pay scales were a rarity in the American South in the 1890s.

⁶³ Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, vol. 3, 124.

⁶⁴ Benedetto, introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers*, 34-35.

⁶⁵ HR Lamberth to Lucius DeYampert, 24 December 1911, Lucius DeYampert Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, NC.; Robert D. Bedinger to Lucius A. DeYampert, 3 March 1916, Lucius DeYampert Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society.

⁶⁶ Benedetto, introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers*, 34.

Yet the continual appointment of new white male missionaries to handle the administrative affairs of the Congo mission proved that the denomination intended to maintain a racial hierarchy overseas. Scholar Robert Benedetto cited a quote from a Foreign Mission Board member in 1898 explaining that political relations with the Belgian Congo and “difficult business arrangements” require “a certain proportion of white men connected with the Mission.” The white men shared responsibility for getting each new mission station started while new “coloured men” would “reinforce the work” that they had done.⁶⁷ Samuel Verner, a white Congo missionary from 1895 to 1899, summarized this position in a Southern Presbyterian magazine by writing, “[T]he work at home and on the field [was] to be under the direct supervision and assistance of capable and sympathetic white men until success is fully assured.”⁶⁸

Though it was unplanned for the Congo mission to have an all-black staff in its early years, the Southern Presbyterian denomination preferred not to interpret that development as unintentional. Praise for the mission station and its relatively egalitarian staff relationships abounded. In the wake of Samuel Lapsley's death, a friend recalled that Lapsley's decision to work overseas with a black man “spoke to his character and purpose.”⁶⁹ A white minister named William Morrison arrived at the Luebo Station in 1896,

⁶⁷ Benedetto, introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers*, 33. Quoted from Samuel H. Chester, “Foreign Mission Committee Notes,” *The Missionary* (Nashville) 31 (Nov. 1898): 490.

⁶⁸ Benedetto, introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers*, 32. Quoted from Samuel Verner, “The Evangelization of Africa by the American Negro,” *The Missionary* (March 1897), 114-116.

⁶⁹ James W. Lapsley, ed. *Life and Letters of Samuel Norwell Lapsley, Missionary to the Congo Valley, West Africa, 1866-1892* (Richmond, VA: Whittet and Shepperson Printers, 1893), 17. The quote is from a childhood friend of Lapsley named Dr. Halsey.

possibly as Lapsley's unofficial managerial replacement. He believed that the dramatic increase in church attendance at the mission represented God's approval of the way black and white missionaries interacted at the station. Morrison insisted that their ministry succeeded because "[w]e were all Southern people, we had been brought up together, we belonged to the same church, we had similar church traditions, in short we thoroughly understood each other."⁷⁰

Considering how many of the black missionaries attended Congregational colleges, Morrison overestimated the religious commonalities among the Congo mission staff. As historian Stanley Shaloff noted, religious similarities did not unite black and white Presbyterians in America during the Jim Crow era.⁷¹ But Morrison captured the confidence that P.C.U.S. officials showed in the redemptive qualities of Southern identity. Northern organizations joined in this praise of southern Christendom. In 1910, the American Missionary Association published an article honoring Althea Brown Edmiston of Mississippi for eight years of ministry in Congo, and the article praised the Southern Presbyterian Church for "using so successfully the Negro for the evangelization of Africa." The association marveled at Samuel Lapsley's memoir of his travels with Sheppard. To this group, the memoir showed that:

[i]n their consecration to Christ, all the conventional racial questions ceased. This high-bred Southerner and young Negro minister became

⁷⁰ William Morrison, "Responsibility and Privilege of the Southern Presbyterian Church in Africa" *Kasai Herald* 4, no. 1 (Feb. 1903): 5, Congo Mission Records, Presbyterian Historical Society.

⁷¹ Shaloff, *Reform in King Leopold's Congo*, 48.

friends in deed . . . all sense of color difference had absolutely banished in their common purpose. They were as one.⁷²

The black missionaries in Congo most likely did not see their mission station as a place where racial identity no longer mattered. They were less vocal about their perspectives on the integrated mission station, but we can surmise some of their views from their actions during their careers. For example, William Sheppard often praised the memory of his fallen colleague, Samuel Lapsley, and collaborated regularly with William Morrison, D.W. Snyder, and other white missionaries at the Luebo station. But Sheppard devoted most of his ministry efforts to a smaller mission station near the Bakuba kingdom. Though the Presbyterian denomination relied on white male managers of the Congo mission endeavor, Sheppard remained the manager of that station and its all-black staff for several years.

Maria Fearing exercised similar independence by running the Pantops Home with Lilian Thomas and managing it alone after Thomas married Lucius DeYampert, a fellow black missionary. Fearing did not seek managerial assistance from the white missionaries for this project, but she frequently offered assistance to them as a midwife, nurse, cook, or undertaker when necessary.⁷³ Maria Fearing's ability to go by the title of "Miss Fearing" among her white colleagues while earning the same level of

⁷² Untitled Article, *The American Missionary*, undated [1910], African Missions Collection, Talladega College Archives; Lapsley, *Life and Letters of Samuel Norwell Lapsley*.

⁷³ Edmiston, "Maria Fearing," 309.

pay and performing the same tasks around the station represented how much her life changed since the end of slavery.

Maria Fearing, American: Citizenship, Status, and Racial Uplift, 1903-1915

The existence of a government-supported slave trade within Congo put Maria Fearing in the unusual position of being a former slave in the midst of a different slave society. However, she was a former slave in a relatively high social status that gave her influence with the Belgian government and with the Congolese people. By 1919, the Presbyterian Church in Congo had become the largest church in the Southern Presbyterian denomination with around twenty thousand members. It was larger than any Southern Presbyterian congregations within the United States. The Congolese Presbyterian Church grew dramatically because former slaves and persecuted families throughout the region believed that they could find spiritual and physical salvation there.⁷⁴ And the mission's popularity can be partly attributed to Maria Fearing because her Pantops Home served as one of the signs that the Presbyterian missionaries took the goal of preventing slavery seriously. Other missionaries often commended Fearing for her frugal, thorough management, especially during crises.⁷⁵ Even when Belgian soldiers invaded the home in 1903 looking for an escaped prisoner, Fearing and Thomas withstood the intimidation and testified against the intruders.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Benedetto, introduction to *Presbyterian Reformers*, 44-45.

⁷⁵ "Local Mission News," *Kasai Herald* 5, no.1 (Jan. 1905): 11, Congo Mission Records, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, NC.

⁷⁶ William M. Morrison, "Statement to His Majesty's Government on Conditions in the Congo," 4 May 1903. *Presbyterian Reformers*, ed. Benedetto, 150.

It is debatable whether the soldiers who burst into the Pantops Home literally sought a prisoner or simply intended to intimidate the two black female missionaries. From the Belgian perspective, these women may have seemed like the most vulnerable staff in the mission. Fearing looked similar in hair style, skin color, and stature to the neighboring Congolese people whom the Belgian soldiers often conscripted as laborers.

From an American perspective, it was all the more surprising that the Southern Presbyterian denomination tried to protect the rights of Fearing, Thomas, and Sheppard in their criticism of King Leopold. The black missionaries' involvement in the libel trial also contradicted the status applied to black Southern Presbyterian ministers within the United States. Between 1865 and 1898, the denomination prevented black ministers from leading white parishioners or training for ministry without white supervision; after 1898, black ministers were expected to serve within a newly established segregated denomination. Southern Presbyterian rules mimicked contemporary American legal precedents that forbade black people from testifying against white defendants in court and justified "separate but equal" segregation.⁷⁷

Yet, only nine years later, the Reverend William Sheppard and his white colleague made allies among a racially diverse group of international leaders and, by the force of public opinion, led King Leopold of Belgium to relinquish control over Congo in 1908. Despite their origins in a country where black people were

⁷⁷ The Plessy v. Ferguson case made racial segregation legal in the United States on the assumption that it could be "separate but equal."

still protesting for the rights to control their own labor, resist racist violence, and receive recognition as equals, black Presbyterian missionaries serving in Congo between 1892 and 1915 had rights as American citizens that the Belgian government needed to respect according to international treaty.⁷⁸

Maria Fearing's status as a missionary enabled her to join in the legal case against King Leopold, but it must be emphasized that she rarely addressed legal and political issues in her written statements during the course of her career. The only available records of Fearing describing the human rights abuses in the Belgian Congo for her Alabama supporters placed the onus on the Congolese people rather than the government. She wrote in 1896:

Many children have come to us and begged to stay but their parents are too wicked and joined to their idols to let them stay. The slave trade is simply dreadful. Parents sell their own children for little or nothing. Yet they will not let them come and stay in a Christian home.⁷⁹

Considering the way Belgian soldiers kidnapped and abused Congolese people, one can picture the desperation that may have led these parents to send their children away. But what matters in this context is that Maria Fearing considered a Christian home the solution to these problems. Fearing placed herself in the tradition of American female missionaries promoting an elevated standard of home and family life even though – unlike most female missionaries of the time – slavery and poverty forced her to live half of her life without her own home or frequent access to her relatives.

⁷⁸ William M. Morrison, "Treatment of the Native People by the Government of the Congo Independent State" (address to Boston Peace Congress in Oct. 1904), *Presbyterian Reformers*, ed. Benedetto, 207.

⁷⁹ Maria Fearing to Mrs. Andrews, 8 October 1896, *Talladega Record*, March 1897, Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society.

The parallels between slavery in Congo, American slavery, and the way the Presbyterian mission acquired children did not elicit a public response from Fearing. If she found it problematic to have a girl given to her upon arrival or to receive “a present of sixteen children” from the Congo Free State a year later, she did not say so.⁸⁰

Instead, Fearing focused on the appearance of the children as problematic. She wrote, “When these girls came to us they were naked, with the exception of a piece of cloth pinned around their waists. They know nothing of purity.”⁸¹ Likewise, the group of sixteen children given as “a present” by government officials had inadequate clothing until the Talladega mission band sent a package of supplies. In her thank you letter, Fearing wished that “you all could only see the ten boys stepping around in the nice new shirts, your hearts would also rejoice with ours.”⁸² Just the introduction of American shirts signaled a change in a positive direction for the youth.

Fearing's style of ministry through material goods symbolized the way mission work elevated her class status. Fearing did not make a high salary as a Presbyterian missionary, but her wages could fund more charitable work overseas. While teaching in Alabama, she saved enough of her salary to fund one female student's tuition at Talladega College. In Congo, she practiced

⁸⁰ Maria Fearing to Talladega College Mission Band, *Talladegan*, March 1895, Maria Fearing Biographical File; Maria Fearing to Mrs. Andrews, 8 October 1896, *Talladega College Record*, March 1897, Maria Fearing Biological File.

⁸¹ Maria Fearing to Talladega College Mission Band, *Talladegan*, March 1895, Maria Fearing Biological File.

⁸² Maria Fearing to Mrs. Andrews, 8 October 1896, *Talladega College Record*, March 1897, Maria Fearing Biological File.

philanthropy on a grand scale by adopting many young women and providing food and clothing for all the students. Her ability to give multiplied when the P.C.U.S. started paying her wages in 1896 and incorporated the Pantops Home as an official mission project. Though she had relatively little money throughout her life, Fearing did her best to give to those with less opportunity.

In proclaiming her Pantops Home for Girls as part of the process of ensuring Congolese children's spiritual and material welfare, Maria Fearing labeled herself an agent of uplift among the Congolese people. She closed a letter to her Talladega supporters with the appeal, "Are there no more who want to come to Africa and help to lift up these our dear heathen brethren?" She added a similar request to her 1901 article in the mission newsletter.⁸³ Fearing meant that the mission needed more workers to model another way of living and prove that the traditional ways were inadequate. She and Lilian Thomas 'uplifted' the Congolese girls by teaching them how to read one of the local languages, study the Bible, sew quilts, and keep a standard of personal hygiene more akin to what their mentors practiced in Alabama.

Though her uplift project took place in an international context far removed from the United States, it shared some commonalities with the uplift plans of upper-class African Americans that also took place in the 1890s and early 1900s. In the American context, black intellectuals, ministers, and educators formed an elite group expected to cultivate solutions for the advancement of the rest of the

⁸³ Maria Fearing to Mrs. Andrews, 8 October 1896, *Talladega College Record*, March 1897; also see Maria Fearing, "Visiting," *Kasai Herald* 1, no. 2 (July 1901), 21, Congo Mission Records, Presbyterian Historical Society.

black race.⁸⁴ Uplift activities included night classes at black colleges that taught literacy and housekeeping and institutes like Tuskegee devoted to training black students for industrial occupations. Women's organizations like the National Baptist Women's Convention and the National Association of Colored Women created space for a relatively small group of female leaders while mobilizing them to teach other women how to stop problems of crime, disease, promiscuity, alcoholism, unemployment, and poverty within their families.⁸⁵

As self-conscious examples, black "talented tenth" leaders like Booker T. Washington argued that blacks would eventually overcome the racial hierarchy imposed by Jim Crow laws. They thought that most black Americans could prove that they deserved equal rights by working hard and gaining economic independence like middle-class whites.⁸⁶ Black club women chose the motto "Lifting as We Climb" because, in the words of historian Deborah Gray White, "The duty of the middle-class clubwoman was to provide not just social services for the poor but services that in one way or another educated blacks, particularly black women, on the means and benefits of achieving the moral life."⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996), 2; Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa*, 96-101.

⁸⁵ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women In Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 69-72; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 172-177.

⁸⁶ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 21.

⁸⁷ White, *Too Heavy A Load*, 70.

However, as historian Kevin Gaines pointed out so well in his book *Uplifting the Race*, the "talented tenth" also felt compelled to highlight their social advancement through pejorative comparisons with lower-class black Americans.⁸⁸ They touted their social clubs, advanced degrees, and expensive lifestyles because, in reality, many of the "upper-class" black Americans had just as little money and political influence as the people they tried to reform.⁸⁹ The "talented tenth" tried to maintain appearances by claiming to advance beyond the constraints of anti-black prejudice in America and arguing that certain moral inadequacies kept black laborers in a constant struggle for survival.

The Reverend William Sheppard was considered a "talented tenth" leader. During his American speaking tour in 1905, a Virginia newspaper called him better than Booker T. Washington because "[i]n the centre, almost, of the continent of Africa, the home of the negro, he and his fellow missionaries have accomplished a work of untold benefit to his race."⁹⁰ Likewise, several other black missionaries claimed the burden of racial uplift as they drew on their well-educated, usually upper-class backgrounds to establish African universities, churches, and temperance societies.⁹¹

But it defied the norm for Maria Fearing to claim the mantle of "talented tenth." She could not claim a higher education or a leadership title like Sheppard.

⁸⁸ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 2, 16-17.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "WH Sheppard, FRGS: Missionary Spoke to Large Audiences Yesterday" 30 Jan 1905, *The Daily News & Advance of Lynchburg*, VA, William Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society.

⁹¹ Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa*, 96-101.

She could not trace her family to the Alabama elite, produce a resume of her social club positions, or 'uplift' the girls in the Pantops Home beyond the frugal and eminently practical lifestyle she maintained. Fearing traced her claims to authority on an irresistible spiritual calling, just as Amanda Smith did in the 1870s and 1880s. Both women relied on the conviction that God had compelled and enabled them to serve, and neither one owned material signs of social status. Fearing used the racial uplift concept to her own purpose by linking her status less to material possessions than to her spiritual fortitude. Unlike Amanda Smith, Maria Fearing convinced a major denomination of her merit as a missionary, so that she gained more respect and institutional protection. Still, even with the support of the Southern Presbyterian Church, Fearing believed she was a leader equipped to uplift Congolese people because God intended her to be. She believed that, in her own words, "If a person is not fully consecrated to the Lord heart, soul and body, Africa is not the place for them."⁹²

Maria Fearing enjoyed greater status as a professional minister, an authority figure, and a person with few financial resources while working in Congo than she would have received at home in Alabama. Her sense of calling to mission work gave her authority to apply to the Southern Presbyterian Church as a potential missionary and prove her worth for the position. The mission calling gave her the drive to adopt former slaves and other Congolese girls and teach them American-style housekeeping skills. Most strikingly, spiritual calling presented Maria Fearing with control over her activities and recognition from

⁹² Maria Fearing to Talladega College Mission Band, *Talladegan*, March 1895, Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society.

black and white supporters in the United States. Supporters of either race referred to her as “Miss Maria Fearing” or “Mama wa Mputu” rather than as Maria Winston, the former nanny of the Winston plantation.⁹³ Congo served as the venue for Fearing to assume a new professional identity that would have remained out of reach in her own nation.

But these improvements in her life were not enough to make a career at the American Presbyterian Congo Mission ideal. Maria Fearing’s career ended unexpectedly in 1915 when the P.C.U.S. foreign mission board refused to send Fearing or other black missionaries back overseas. The mission board interpreted complaints from some of the white missionaries in Congo as sufficient reason to prevent Maria Fearing, Lilian Thomas DeYampert, and Lucius DeYampert from ending their year-long furlough in Selma, Alabama. The board left no record of the specific complaints, but William Morrison wrote a member of the P.C.U.S. mission board in 1918 requesting that Lilian DeYampert and her husband return as soon as possible. Though he did not send a request on Fearing’s behalf, he denied any interest among the remaining missionaries to force their early retirement.⁹⁴ The DeYamperts also announced their plans to return to Congo and renewed their passports while Fearing wrote the mission

⁹³ Lucy Gantt Sheppard to Mrs. Gadden, 19 October 1895, William Sheppard Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society; H.R. Lamberth to Lucius DeYampert, 24 December 1911, Lucius DeYampert Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society; Robert D. Bedinger to Lucius A. DeYampert, 3 March 1916, Lucius DeYampert Papers; Janie Overton Winston Mitchell, “Maria Fearing: Missionary to Africa for Twenty-Five Years,” Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society; “From Alabama to the Congo: Maria Fearing,” African American Registry, online, accessed 9 October 2006, http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/1769/From_Alabama_to_the_Congo_Maria_Fearing.

⁹⁴ William M. Morrison to Mr. Edwin F. Willis, 5 January 1918, Congo Mission Records, Presbyterian Historical Society. Provided to the author by Dr. Robert Benedetto.

board about her medical status. She was eighty years old but still eager to report, "I am having a little [medical] treatment so as to be already [sic] for the Congo." As she did so often in previous years, she covered the medical bills with her savings.⁹⁵ The board left no record of response. Except for a Jamaican woman hired in 1923, the P.C.U.S. denomination hired no new black missionaries until 1958.⁹⁶ Fearing lived with the DeYamperts and her relatives in Alabama until her death in 1936. Since she never used the money she saved for a return ticket to West Africa, Fearing willed her savings to the Congolese orphans.

The denomination never gave an official reason for this policy of exclusion, but it fit the overall trend in mostly white American Protestant denominations by the 1920s. As legal and social restrictions on black individuals within the United States increased, white church leaders showed more willingness to enforce and accept restrictions on blacks serving in western and southern Africa.⁹⁷ The new mission policy also fit the interests of Belgian Congo officials by removing black missionaries whose free legal status could remind Congolese people of the oppression they faced. The British government claimed similar reasons for removing black Americans from South Africa in the 1910s.⁹⁸ In both countries,

⁹⁵ Maria Fearing to Egbert W. Smith, 29 January 1917, Maria Fearing Biographical File, Presbyterian Historical Society.

⁹⁶ Three of the black American missionaries who worked with Maria Fearing continued to serve in Congo after 1915: Althea Brown Edmiston, A.L. Edmiston, and A.A. Rochester. The P.C.U.S. hired Edna May Taylor from Jamaica in 1923. But the denomination did not hire any additional black missionaries for Congo until the 1950s.

⁹⁷ Jacobs, *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement*, 20-22.

⁹⁸ Sylvia Jacobs, "Give a Thought to Africa: Black Women Missionaries in Southern Africa," in *'We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine et. al. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1995), 116-118.

colonial officials induced African people to labor under dangerous conditions, often under conditions of torture and slavery. To keep those economies flourishing, the colonialists could not allow black solidarity movements like Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association to spread to their regions of influence. White American churches eased that threat by pulling black Christian leaders out of the mission field.

Conclusion

Maria Fearing's missions career incorporated issues of race relations, femininity, and social mobility. First, Maria Fearing traveled throughout her life to take advantage of better educational and occupational opportunities. By doing so, she fit within a tradition of black Americans who sought achievements in order to help others in worse circumstances succeed. Fearing's example was especially remarkable because working in Congo gave her financial means and status that she could not claim as a former domestic servant in Alabama.

Also, the authority that Maria Fearing exerted in her work compelled dramatic changes from Congolese people and influenced the Belgian government. Like the other black missionaries in Congo, Fearing could attain a relatively high degree of control and respect as long as she remained in a foreign context. By volunteering for the Congo Mission, Fearing placed herself within a powerful symbol for the Southern Presbyterian Church: its only integrated mission field. Church leaders honored these black missionaries because projects like the Pantops Home recruited a large number of converts and drew positive

attention from non-Presbyterian observers worldwide. Consequently, the segregated P.C.U.S. seminary that trained other black ministers for missions in West Africa seemed positive by association, even though it relied on the kind of unequal status that Presbyterians claimed to avoid in Congo.

Rather than deliberating how well the integrated Congo Mission displayed racial equality, we can learn from Maria Fearing's technique of focusing on how well the mission increased her chances to define her own ministry. When we privilege the perspective of an often overlooked person like Fearing, we see that the American Presbyterian Congo Mission and its denomination provided more than just a tenuous record of white Southerners relating to black people in the United States and Congo. Actually, the story of this mission station is not just about white people, as it is so often told. It is a story about former slaves and former slaveholders interacting within an organization in ways that embrace the color line – yet also create space for a person like Fearing to live out contradictions of race and class stereotypes. It is also a story of how a person who grew up under slavery exercised control over former slaves in a different culture. These Southern Presbyterians with different perspectives held so tightly to racial traditions that their traditions stretched to offer new possibilities.

Conclusion

If one could ask Martha Foster Crawford, Amanda Berry Smith, and Maria Fearing what they had in common with one another, almost certainly each one would point to her sense of spiritual calling. They were born in different parts of America and their travels never coincided, but each woman shared a drive to push herself toward greater accomplishments. Fearing yearned to teach more Congolese girls, even when she was elderly and sick. Amanda Smith faced racial discrimination and poverty in her efforts to inspire conversion and renewed commitment among her fellow Methodists. Martha Crawford died in northern China after her search for Christian converts led her through fifty seven years of travel, frustration, and harassment. Whatever suffering their ministry work entailed, these women endured it for the cause of spreading Christianity.

Their perpetual feeling of responsibility made it important for these women to stay involved in race relations. Crawford, Fearing, and Smith believed that they had to build meaningful relationships with people in their mission fields in order to introduce new religious principles. Racial prejudice posed a barrier to those relationships, so each woman addressed racial prejudice or cultural bias in her own way. Martha Crawford and Maria Fearing focused on the prejudice of Chinese and Congolese people who ridiculed or ignored their mission work. For instance, after the first thirty years of her career Martha Crawford write, "We are

living down their prejudices, and rapidly becoming a factor in Chinese religious, political and social life.”¹ Twenty years after Crawford’s breakthrough in China, Maria Fearing helped her fellow black and white missionaries testify against King Leopold of Belgium’s abusive government in Congo. But, more often, Fearing expressed concern that local children suffered because their parents chose not to support the mission school. Amanda Smith wrote about prejudice more than either of the other women. Smith criticized the religious bias that many Americans held against Methodist Holiness doctrine, as well as the racial bias that led many people to ignore her.

What made Amanda Smith unique among this set of female missionaries was how often she also mentioned her own racial prejudice. She took it as a sign of spiritual progress when, thanks to her sanctification experience, she no longer feared interacting with white people. Smith believed that this change enabled her to fulfill the kind of ministry that God expected of her. Amanda Smith also interpreted her new racial ideology as a positive influence on the people around her. Other black Methodists learned through her experience that they would not be rejected in all white churches. Some of Smith’s white observers testified that gaining sanctification changed their racial views. Smith did not always mention race relations while she preached, but she did consider the topic of race as something integral to Christian living.

¹ Martha Crawford, “Shantung Province. Our North-China Mission Field,” 7, Martha Foster Crawford Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Smith, Fearing, and Crawford worked within a Eurocentric foreign mission movement, yet each woman's ministry involved more than Western culture. Each woman was born American and instilled American ideas of proper behavior into her work. In that sense, they fit into the context of most nineteenth century mission endeavors from the United States; these women interpreted ministry as the means for Americans to influence the world.

We can also see how the economic and political interests of other nations also shaped mission work. Martha Crawford may have phrased her criticisms of Chinese culture differently if not for the local people's violent protests against white foreigners and Chinese government officials who cooperated with the United States. Maria Fearing's school would have been less successful if not for the colonial government's desire to dominate the global rubber trade. Moreover, these three women relied on interracial relationships in a way that foreshadowed later trends in the global mission movement. Within a movement that showed signs of globalization in the early twentieth century, Crawford, Fearing, and Smith considered cross-cultural and interracial networks necessary.² By the 1920s, many missions supporters switched their emphasis from Western ministries to the technological and cultural innovations that various nations could share.

² Dana L. Robert, "The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement Between the World Wars," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 2 (2002): 50-66. This trend was most prominent among mainline Protestant denominations, but a trend toward international cooperation was also evident in the work of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary union in the 1920s. For more information, see Alma Hunt, *History of the Woman's Missionary Union*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Convention Press, 1976).

The three women in this study completed their work before the height of the globalization period, and they often used their interracial networks as tools to teach American cultural expectations. Yet occasionally they interpreted these networks as proof that their American cultural views should change. In T.P. Crawford's words, some missionaries made a distinction between efforts to "foreignize" and efforts to "Christianize" potential converts.³ It is notable that each of these women invested so much time and effort into negotiating race relations in America and overseas during an era when segregation and the Chinese Exclusion Act were overwhelmingly accepted as normal, positive trends.

For missionaries who built their ministry on interracial evangelism and integrated teams, racial separatism could bring negative consequences. Most American Christians at the time were less invested in race relations. In the 1860s through 1920, the Protestant denominations that Crawford, Fearing, and Smith represented dealt with racial issues in terms of "race pride" or "race instinct." Both ideas accepted some type of racial separatism as a beneficial development, but ministers in these denominations held vastly different beliefs about why certain races should stay apart and what types of cooperation were acceptable.

Because there was so much contention over how American churches dealt with race relations, missionaries faced extra pressure to adopt the right methods. Crawford, Fearing, and Smith received scrutiny from ministers and mission supporters. Other members of their denominations wondered if Amanda Smith and Martha Crawford overstepped the traditional bounds for female

³ L.S. Foster, *Fifty Years in China: An Eventful Memoir of Tarleton Perry Crawford, D.D.* (Nashville: Bayless-Pullen Co., 1909), 302.

activism by preaching and traveling. To justify her ministry, Crawford implied that Chinese people needed every available white Christian, male or female, to try to correct their "heathen" natures. Her argument fit the way other white Southern Baptists of her time touted white leadership as a solution to the "race problem."⁴ Over time, Crawford grew more accepting of Chinese culture. On the other hand, Amanda Smith argued throughout her preaching career that racial prejudice could be a hindrance to Christian worship.

Maria Fearing's racial identity rather than her statements about race provided the deciding factor for her employment as a missionary. Southern Presbyterian leaders commended Maria Fearing's work as a teacher and foster mother, but the P.C.U.S. Foreign Mission Board assumed that the Congo mission station could succeed without Fearing or most of the other black missionaries after 1915. Her career fell victim to her denomination's race policy.

Besides the implications of decisions that church leaders made in the United States, each missionary also dealt with constant scrutiny from the people she worked among. Crawford complained about Chinese villagers crowding around her during her travels, watching her eat and sleep. Smith hid under a bed to avoid a roaming horde of camp meeting attendees eager to see a preaching "colored woman." Fearing and Crawford opened their homes to local Christians and school children, turning their private spaces into ministry tools.

It might be easier to understand how these women made themselves constantly available to the people in their mission fields if they had taken frequent

⁴Foy Valentine, *A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 27.

respites with their families. But neither Crawford, Fearing, nor Smith enjoyed a traditional family life during her career. Fearing remained unmarried and childless throughout her life. Smith never remarried after her second husband died, and the only one of her children who reached adulthood lived apart from her throughout her ministry. Amanda Smith sacrificed her desire to be close to her daughter Mazie for the higher goal of financing the girl's boarding school education with ministry donations.

Unlike the other two women, Martha Crawford was married during her career, but her time with T.P. Crawford was secondary to her interest in the Southern Baptist China mission. Martha spent a significant part of her time traveling with other women; in the later part of her career, she was away from her husband for at least a few months out of every year. The Crawfords took furloughs to America separately, and she returned to China after he died. Though the Crawfords adopted two children, Martha only lived with them a short time before enrolling them in a boarding school for missionary kids. Martha Crawford's contribution to "woman's work for woman" started because she was willing to concentrate on Chinese women's families rather than prioritizing her own family.

One of the most interesting aspects of the lifestyles that Crawford, Smith, and Fearing lived was that each woman gained more attention and opportunities than an average woman of her financial standing would have attained in the late nineteenth century. Smith and Fearing were both poor throughout their lives. Maria Fearing remained enslaved longer than Amanda Smith, but both of them worked as domestic servants for a living wage. Neither one received a full

education as a child, which was why Smith ensured that her daughter stayed in school. Fearing invested her craving for education into nine years of primary school at Talladega College and a teaching career in Alabama and Congo. Martha Crawford also worked as a grade school teacher in Alabama because her family could not afford to pay for her education, but she married into wealth thanks to T.P. Crawford's business ventures in China. Being married to a businessman helped her finances and her ministry goals because she had more time to devote to traveling evangelism while he handled other endeavors.

It is a relative term to say that these women gained opportunities through mission work. They worked hard constantly, often in destinations they did not choose on their own. Each woman sacrificed valuable time with her extended family and friends. They had less choice over their living conditions, their coworkers, and their schedules than they might have had if they had received ministry positions in the United States. But considering that Crawford, Fearing, and Smith grew up in poverty with few marketable skills, it was a marvel that they left their home states at all. For a former servant like Fearing, having a steady income for work that involved leadership and ingenuity was a rare feat. For Smith, working full-time as an independent preacher among wealthy white Methodist supporters and English nobility was a stunning accomplishment. The fact that these women built a reputation for ministry despite opposition from their denominations and restrictions against female leaders set them apart.

As a consequence of years of hard work and observation, all three of these women suffered illness. By the time Smith became a minister, she already

had poor health from working day and night cleaning laundry; speaking at too many church services in a short time reduced her to bed rest. Crawford battled recurring bouts of weariness and pain that forced her to seek medical help in Japan and return to America between 1881 and 1883. And Maria Fearing's colleagues forced her to take a furlough in 1907 because she had worked since 1894 without a break or a medical check-up. Her fellow missionaries reported that, by the time of her departure in 1915, Fearing had lost almost all of her teeth yet she did not leave the mission station earlier to see a dentist. So many other missionaries died during their first few years in China and Africa that some carried their caskets with them. These women beat the odds. Crawford and Smith lived into their seventies; Fearing died before her ninety-ninth birthday.

Near the end of their careers, each of these female missionaries could look back on what she considered successes and shortcomings in her work. Most of Martha Crawford's original set of Bible women had left the mission by the 1880s, but a new set of younger American women traveled throughout northern China helping Martha Crawford preach Christianity to local women. Christian converts never counted as more than a small fraction of the population in Shantung Province, but Crawford helped inspire at least "a few hundred" conversions.⁵ She also gained friendships with more Chinese women later in life.

Maria Fearing never completed her goals for her boarding school in Congo because the Southern Presbyterian denomination would not allow her or her friend Lilian Thomas DeYampert to return. Still, she helped attract children

⁵ David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 2003), 98.

from local villages to the mission and make the mission school successful. The orphanage she established during her twenty-year career continued to grow after 1915, and a similar school started at another Presbyterian mission station in the region. She was one of the most reliable people involved in the short-lived attempt at racial integration in the Congo mission station. Fearing kept the school operating during crises caused by local slave trading, she served as midwife and nurse for missionaries, and she joined in testimony against King Leopold's government. Fearing's black and white co-workers remembered her fondly after her death, and she was honored as one of the most notable Southern Presbyterian female missionaries of the late nineteenth century.

Amanda Smith's ministry brought her more travel opportunities and more recognition than she expected. She expressed gratitude for her supporters in the African Methodist and African Methodist churches. Still, Smith did not deny that she had faced difficult opposition from her fellow Methodists, sometimes for being a woman preacher, other times for being a black American. Smith believed she had to withstand racial discrimination in order to take advantage of further ministry opportunities. The Jim Crow restrictions that got her kicked out of hotels, restaurants, and trains in the 1870s were more widespread when she died in 1915. Smith continued working amongst white Methodists despite knowing that she might get ejected from a church service or forced to sit in a balcony. She chose to focus on those individuals who went against the norm by supporting her ministry despite widespread prejudice against black people, female preachers, and those who advocated Holiness doctrine.

Concerns about race relations and Christian missions in the United States continued long after these women missionaries finished their work. A.T. Steele, a correspondent of the *New York Herald Tribune* made this statement about American mission work on the African continent in 1953:

The simple truth is that the biggest problem of Africa today is the problem of human relations. It seems incredible that the white man, despite all the technical skill, administrative talent and capital, still is unable to produce a formula for enduring harmony between the black and white races.⁶

Steele believed that American mission work would improve when there was less contention between people of different races. Modern scholars make similar arguments about how race relations affect church affairs in general. Since the 1980s, sociologists and theologians have published many "racial reconciliation" studies designed to help American churches disavow racism and create a more racially integrated atmosphere. This historical study cannot offer "a formula" for American race relations. But it is useful to see how American missionaries and their supporters forged their own strategies for confronting race issues between 1865 and 1920.

We gain a unique view of how American churches influenced race relations through the perspective of three women who faced racial controversy as part of their regular work routine. Their careers as missionaries highlighted the ways racial stereotypes shaped ministry in the United States and abroad. Each of these missionary women also found reasons to alter or abandon the traditional race relations of her home church

⁶ George Edmund Haynes, "Americans Look at Africa," *Journal of Negro Education* 27 (Winter 1958): 95.

for the sake of making her ministry more effective. The varied experiences Martha Crawford, Maria Fearing, and Amanda Smith, suggest that there was no simple "formula" to address all the racial controversies they witnessed. Church services that attracted a temporarily integrated audience did not address the widespread problems of racial discrimination within Protestant denominations and the society in general. Likewise, patriarchal systems that placed white leaders over all other church members failed to meet the needs of everyone in the denomination. Ministers' efforts to provide for former black slaves were commendable, but the state of race relations in these denominations also depended on Native American, Chinese, and African church members, including those in overseas missions.

Trying to enact one way to address all of these contingencies would have been as overwhelming for these three missionary women as it was for the *Herald-Tribune* editor who craved "a formula." Instead of waiting for racial tension to cease, these women proceeded by trial and error against opposition from potential converts, co-workers, and the churches that sponsored them. Because Crawford, Fearing, and Smith defied expectations, they highlighted the limitations and possibilities that Americans faced during the Jim Crow era. These women also provided an early example of how twentieth-century Americans applied and occasionally criticized white American cultural superiority in a global context.

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