Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and American Empire, 1812-1930
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"African American Women Missionaries in Africa, 1880-1930: The Confluence of Race, Culture, Identity, and Nationalism"

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African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries viewed the European partition and subsequent colonization of the continent of Africa and expressed their opinion of the events in various mediums. Because of the similar circumstances of European domination and exploitation of Africans on the continent and the legalization of "Jim Crow" in the United States with the Supreme Court decision of 1896 which supported the principle of "separate but equal," most educated and middle-class blacks at this time talked about the necessity for some kind of unity or Pan-Africanism among African peoples and the need for African Americans to maintain the African nexus.[1]

A small segment of the African American community, in the period that Rayford W. Logan referred to as the "nadir," addressed themselves to the "scramble" for Africa and the effects of the establishment of European colonial rule there. This articulate group included journalists, religious and secular leaders, diplomats and politicians, travelers and visitors, and missionaries. Unsurprisingly, black American missionaries stationed on the continent were particularly outspoken since they were able to observe more directly and intimately European activities there.[2]

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[1]Sylvia M. Jacobs, *The African Nexus: Black American Perspectives on the European Partitioning of Africa, 1880-1920* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

[2]Ibid.; Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro, from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier, 1972).

After the evangelical revival in America in the late eighteenth century and the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century, there was renewed interest in foreign missionary work. Beginning in the first decades of the nineteenth century, a number of American church boards began supporting mission work in Asia, the South Pacific, and Africa. The nineteenth century was the greatest era of Christian expansion since the early days of Christianity. A number of missionary societies were formed and missionaries were sent throughout the world, following Jesus' command to his disciples: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).[3]

White American churches gave serious consideration to using African Americans as missionaries in Africa. These bodies were anxious to send blacks because of the high mortality rates among white missionaries on the continent; in fact, some regions of Africa were known as "the white man's grave." Thus began many successive attempts to appoint blacks to missionary work in their ancestral homeland.[4]

White church leaders believed that black Americans, because of their African heritage, could withstand the climate of Africa better than whites, and thus began to perpetuate the myth that African Americans were better suited than whites as missionaries in Africa. Eventually, enough survived to support the idea that blacks had an immunity to the African fevers and were more adaptive than whites for African mission work. A high proportion of missionaries sent to

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[3]Sylvia M. Jacobs, ed., *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1982); Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1980).

[4]Jacobs, ed., *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa.*

Liberia by white boards were black. Almost all white American pioneer missionaries were accompanied by black assistants. In many parts of Africa, blacks sent from white mission boards pioneered a mission station by themselves.[5]

From the early nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries, five major white American Protestant denominations sent African American missionaries to Africa: Congregationalist, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian. Smaller denominations, such as the Seventh-day Adventist and the United Brethren in Christ, also sent black missionaries to Africa. Black boards with missionaries in Africa included the individual Baptist state conventions, American Baptist Missionary Convention, Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, National Baptist Convention, Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.[6]

My research over almost twenty-five years has focused on African American missionaries who served in Africa from 1820 to 1970. Over fifty percent of all these missionaries served in Liberia, and another twenty-five percent served in three other West African countries: Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Because language was such a crucial determinant to placement, nineteen of the twenty-five colonies or countries where African Americans served were English-speaking or under British colonial rule. There were four French-speaking colonies (three in French West Africa and the Congo Free State/Belgian Congo)and two Portuguese-speaking colonies where black American missionaries were stationed. None was assigned to German, Italian, or Spanish-speaking colonies.

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

Before 1800, there was almost no involvement by Protestant women in world missions, except for the few wives who accompanied their missionary husbands. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, married male missionaries who were assigned to mission work usually were accompanied by their wives, who shared in mission duties. Church officials of American mission boards eventually became convinced that wives were indispensable to the success of mission work. Nonetheless, wives received no official recognition as missionaries and no financial compensation. The husband was the appointed missionary and the wife, who was seen as secondary and subordinate, was designated "assistant missionary." It was not until the 1960s that married women missionaries received an actual salary, although a male missionary's salary was increased by about thirty percent when he married. Most important, in the final analysis, married women missionaries were first of all wives, mothers, and homemakers.[7]

Even single women, who were appointed missionaries in their own right, were assigned the title "assistant missionaries." The work performed by single women was devalued and they were paid less than single or married male missionaries. Missionary men often objected to the full participation of women in mission work. After all, full "missionary" status belonged only to ordained ministers and women at this time were excluded from the ordained ministry. Therefore, the salary of a single woman missionary was ten to fifty percent less than a single male missionary.[8]

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[7]Sylvia M. Jacobs, "African Missionary Movement,"in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia,* edited by Darlene Clark Hine (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1993), 14-16; Joyce M. Bowers, "Roles of Married Women Missionaries: A Case Study," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 1984), 4-8; Susan B. De Vries, "Wives: Homemakers or Mission Employees?,"*Evangelical Missions Quarterly: The Journal for Understanding Missions*, Volume 22, Number 4 (October 1986): 402-410.

[8]Ibid.

Consequently, both single and married women missionaries only could attain the status of "assistant missionaries." Nevertheless, despite this restriction, foreign mission work offered nineteenth and early twentieth centuries American women new career options beyond the constraints of a "woman's proper sphere." Additionally, unlike "missionary wives," single women missionaries had some latitude in this profession because they did not have to juggle wifely duties, domestic responsibilities, and child rearing alongside mission work.[9]

Women missionaries, single or married, black or white, usually assisted in transforming the lives of women and children into an American model, since social philosophy and ideology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasized that women missionaries be engaged in "women's work for women, wife to wife, sister to sister." Woman missionaries taught or were principals in day, industrial, or Sunday schools; supervised or worked in nurseries, orphanages, or boarding schools; made house-to-house visitations; did evangelistic work; conducted Bible classes; prepared vernacular literature; and dispensed medical care to women and children as nurses or physicians. Most important, women missionaries were transferring American culture, values, and identities to women in another society.[10]

Active evangelization and reform involvement on the home front among poor southern

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[9] Joanna B. Gillespie, "Mary Briscoe Baldwin (1811-1877), Single Woman Missionary and 'Very Much My Own Mistress,' "*Anglican and Episcopal History*, Volume LVII, Number 1 (March 1988), 63-92; Ann White, "Counting the Cost of Faith: America's Early Female Missionaries,"*Church History*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (March 1988), 19-30; Mary Eikenberry, "Women as Missionaries," *Brethren Life and Thought*, Volume XXX, Number One (Winter 1985), 47-49.

[10]Sylvia M. Jacobs, "Afro-American Women Missionaries Confront the African Way of Life,"in *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley, and Andrea Benton Rushing (Washington, D. C.: Howard University Press,1987),121-132; Frederick J. Heuser, Jr., "Women's Work for Women: Belle Sherwood Hawkes and the East Persia Presbyterian Mission,"*American Presbyterians: Journal of Presbyterian History*, Volume 65, Number 1 (Spring 1987), 7-18.

blacks and whites, Native Americans, Hispanics, and European and Asian immigrants was a powerful stimulant for women to expand into foreign mission work. Denied ordination, voting privileges, authority in the church, and participation in denominational general mission boards, American women diverted their attention and energies to other church activities.[11]

In the first half of the nineteenth century, women's support of domestic and foreign missions was limited mostly to correspondence, fund-raising, education, and prayer. However, expanded status and roles for women in the church came after the formation of church groups for women only, especially the home and foreign mission societies and the deaconesses orders. After 1840, black and white American women began to support foreign missions, although it was not until after the Civil War that the movement gained momentum. These women, many of them former abolitionists and experienced activists who had assumed new roles and responsibilities while their men were fighting the war, found a new focus for their energies.[12]

Support and administrative personnel in the newly-organized women missionary societies were all female and mostly volunteers. The organizations were highly successful and fully supported and staffed by women. Women were given a great deal of administrative latitude. The women missionary societies started teacher training institutions, hospitals, and medical training programs for women in foreign fields. They also ran diverse ministries among

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[11]Barbara Welter, "She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women's Missionary Careers in Nineteenth-Century America,"*American Quarterly*, Volume XXX, Number 5 (Winter 1978), 624-638.

[12]Ibid.; Delores C. Carpenter, "Black Women in Religious Institutions: A Historical Summary from Slavery to the 1960s," *The Journal of Religious Thought*, Volume 46, No. 2 (Winter-Spring 1989-1990),7-27; Ruth Tucker, "Female Mission Strategists: A Historical and Contemporary Perspective,"*Missiology*, Volume XV, Number 1 (January 1987), 73-89.

women and children.[13]

By the end of the nineteenth century, there was an extensive network among women missionary leaders who developed programs to carry out more effectively the work on the field. After organizing themselves, women took on a more active role in church work. By 1910, there were over forty American women-sending agencies and almost 2,000 women missionaries worldwide, mostly single women, doing work which focused on women and children. American Christian church women collected thousands of dollars from the "mite boxes" to support home and foreign programs and to pay the salaries of single female workers in home and foreign fields.[14]

American mission thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasized direct evangelism and "civilizing" activities to convert peoples throughout the world to Christianity. Women missionaries hoped to transfer Western gender-linked roles and functions to women and girls. Women missionaries could teach female converts the Bible and, in so doing, would prepare these women to be "proper" wives for the new male convert pastors.[15]

After 1910, church departments governed by men began to pressure the leaders of the

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[13]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*, edited by Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1995), 103-123.

[14]Pierce R. Beaver, *All Loves Excelling: American Women in World Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968) and his *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980); Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985).

[15]Welter, 624-638; Carpenter, 7-27; Tucker, 73-89.

women's missionary societies to consolidate with the denominational mission boards. The male-dominated church boards argued that women's foreign missionary societies, particularly, drained off limited church funds. Eventually, women gave in and merged but stipulated that they be able to retain leadership in their societies.[16]

However, within twenty years, forty-eight women's societies closed. At first, women retained some administrative positions, but slowly they were replaced by men. By the 1950s, very few women held leadership positions in the missionary societies. Women's missionary societies shrunk in size and effectiveness and often were absorbed into a denominations' general women's organizations. The one exception was the Methodist Church which kept the women's division in foreign missions.[17]

By the 1600s, Christianity only could be found in Africa in parts of Ethiopia, Egypt, North Africa, South Africa, and in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique; it was regional and not widespread on the continent. Christian missionary efforts stalled during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the worldwide religious revival of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries resulted in a surge of missionary fervor on the continent.[18]

Before the establishment of European colonial rule in Africa in the late nineteenth

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[16]Virginia Patterson, "Women in Missions: Facing the 21st Century," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Volume 25, Number 1 (January 1989), 62-71.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas of Action, 1780-1850*, Volume 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 259-260; Joel E. Tishken "Christianity in Colonial Africa," in *Africa: Colonial Africa, 1885-1939*, Volume 3, edited by Toyin Falola (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 157-159; Sylvia M. Jacobs, "The Historical Role of Afro-Americans in American Missionary Efforts in Africa," in Jacobs, ed., *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa.*

century, European and American missionaries stationed on the continent depended on the goodwill of their African hosts. By that date, all of Africa, except for Liberia and Ethiopia, came under colonial rule and missionaries operated independently only as long as the colonial power allowed it.

The colonial powers controlled missionaries through the issuance of governmental decrees which required official authorization for mission activities. For example, the French proclaimed laws in 1922 and 1923 in French West Africa that would allow the government to control missionary activity in the confederation by requiring that missionary teachers hold degrees from French institutions and teach in French, Latin, or an indigenous language from a curriculum that had been approved by the French colonial government. Several years later, all missions had to get official permission from the French government before they could preach or establish schools.

In 1926, the British government in Nigeria enacted legislation to allow it unilateral power to shut down any school that did not meet its standards. The British passed an ordinance in Sierra Leone in 1929, the "Amalgamation Scheme," which allowed the government to consolidate mission schools, standardize teacher salaries, collect school fees, and shut down schools deemed unsafe; in effect, nationalizing the mission schools.[19]

Although colonial governments were skeptical of mission schools, only France founded a universal state school system. The other colonial governments also wanted to establish state schools but the lack of money and entrenched missionary societies prevented it. In colonies of

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[19]Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 363-365; Andrew E. Barnes, "Western Education in Colonial Africa," in *Africa: Colonial Africa, 1885-1939*, Volume 3, edited by Toyin Falola (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 146-148.

Catholic colonialists, such as in the Belgian Congo in 1924 and in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique after 1940, the Catholic mission schools were nationalized; in other words, they qualified for state subsidies. Protestant missions and mission schools did not receive this financial banking. Later degrees and certificates from Catholic schools was a requirement for state jobs in these colonies.[20]

Islam was found in parts of Africa centuries before the establishment of European colonial rule. In fact, there was a long history of distrust and hostility between Christian Europe and the Islamic world. European missionaries saw the conquest of Muslim Africa crucial to the competition for converts between the two groups. However, in those areas where Islam already existed before colonial rule, Christian missionaries had few converts. It was only in those areas where Islam had made no headway that Christian missionaries had any success.[21] Therefore, in certain areas, such as North Africa or northern Nigeria, Christian mission societies did not even bother to open stations.

European and American missionaries assumed that Africans would be receptive to the new religions that they brought, although it is not clear why they believed that. However, since Christianity and Christian missionaries failed to influence the racist attitudes of the European colonialists in Africa, Africans saw the two groups as allies in the mutual goal of the destruction of the African traditional way of life and, therefore, surmised that there was no difference between the two groups. This was true despite the fact that missionaries, for all practical

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[20]Barnes, 148.

[21]Ibid; Jonathan T. Reynolds, "Islam and Colonialism in Africa,"in *Africa: Colonial Africa, 1885-1939*, Volume 3, edited by Toyin Falola (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 183-184.

purposes, represented the mission-sending societies that sent them out and not the governments of the countries where they originated..[22]

For the African, Christianity perpetuated racial inequality, racial subjugation, and colonial domination. African Catholic and Protestant priests were relegated to inferior positions in their churches, African congregations were segregated from white ones, and African churches were supervised by white missionaries. Africans believed that mission education was designed to indoctrinate them into a permanent state of subservience. In fact, it was the racist attitude of some white missionaries toward African peoples and African forms of worship which helps to explain the religious nature of some prophet and resistance movements and separatist and independent churches which developed around the continent between1880 and the 1930s.[23]

Examples of these self-directed religious expression included Nehemiah Tile's Tembu National Church organized in South Africa in1884; the Ethiopian Church named by Mangena Maake Mokone in South Africa in November 1893; Pambini Mzimba's African Presbyterian Church founded in South Africa in1898; the Ovimbu resistance group in Angola which was not put down until 1902; the Chokwe in Angola who were able to resist military occupation through forceful means until 1914; John Chilembwe's uprising in Nyasaland in 1915; Simon Kimbangu's movement in the Belgian Congo in 1921; the Kitawala or Watchtower movement in the Katanga region of the Belgian Congo in the inter-war years; and the nationalist movement of the

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[22]Edward Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), 30; Robert July, *A History of the African People* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1998), 431.

[23]Ibid.

Salvation Army convert, Simon Mpadi, in the late 1930s in the French Congo.[24]

The conflict of identity, culture, ethnicity, and world view between the missionary and the potential convert was one of the major obstacles that the Christian churches had to overcome. European and American missionaries, white and black, regarded the traditional African way of life and African values and customs with contempt. They attacked the foundations of African society and denounced traditional African religions, polygamy, and what they viewed as depravity in African life. Mission schools produced African children who were disrespectful of African traditions, denounced traditional religions, and held African culture in contempt. Therefore, the chief hostility of Africans to missionaries was that they tried to undermine the African traditional way of life. Missionaries hoped to destroy what they saw as "barbaric and heathen" among Africans and this attitude colored their proselytizing activities. This also, for all practical purposes, explains the low conversion rates among Africans during the fifty year period of this paper.[25]

Part of the reason why Africa and the rest of the non-Western world was presented in such a negative light by American black and white churches, and for that matter, mission boards everywhere, had to do with the financial nature of the mission movement itself, which depended

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[24]July, *A History of the African People*, 363, 431-432; J. Mutero Chirenge, *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 44; Marie-Louise Martin, *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and His Church*, trans. by D. M. Moore (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdsmans Publishing Co., 1976), 62; Femi J. Kolapo, "Central Africa," in *Africa: Colonial Africa, 1885-1939*, Volume 3, edited by Toyin Falola (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 356-357; Johannes Du Plessis, *Thrice Through the Dark Continent, A Record of Journeying Across Africa During the Years 1913-1916* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), 9, 346; George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising in 1915* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1958), 135.

[25]Crowder, 364-365; July, 430; Tishken, 170-172.

upon voluntary contributions. It was necessary for all missionaries to prove the "need" for missionary work by emphasizing the "depraved, degraded, and debased" conditions in these areas where they worked. Pity increased contributions.[26]

Missionaries, regardless of their denominational affiliation, location in Africa, or colonial ruler of the colony where they were assigned, used some of the same tactics and methods for conversion. If one technique resulted in larger numbers of converts, it was used in that area among those people; however, if it did not increase church membership, then that technique was abandoned. The three major strategies that were used included employing the single traveling missionary, establishing mission stations, or founding schools on mission stations.[27]

It was the last strategy which proved to be the most successful for increasing membership in mission churches, particularly the organization of boarding schools. A building would be constructed where the children would live year round. They were encouraged to accept Western and Christian ideas and reject their old way of life. Converts were easier to find among the children. In fact, there was a direct relationship between the establishment of schools on the mission stations and the winning of converts. Missionaries had complete control of those children who boarded on the mission stations. As their whole lives centered around the station, conversion for these children became more than a religious experience, but also resulted in a cultural and social metamorphosis.[28]

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[26]Sylvia M. Jacobs, "African Missions and the African American Christian Churches," in *Encyclopedia of African American Religions*, edited by Larry G. Murphy, J. Gordon Melton, and Gary L. Ward (New York, NY: Garland Publishing Company, 1993), 10-23.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid.

The total number of American Protestant missionaries sent to Africa during the initial years of missionary fervor in the early nineteenth century to the period in the mid- to late twentieth century when Africans assumed control of missionary work was about 300,000. By 1970, African indigenous missionaries basically had replaced the foreign ones. Over this 150 year period, black Americans represented an infinitesimal percentage of the total figure of missionaries who were assigned to Africa. Between 1820 and 1970, probably no more than 600 African Americans, sent out by two dozen missionary societies, served in twenty-five (or almost half) sub-Saharan African countries.

Many of the observations, activities, and attitudes of African American missionaries stationed in Africa during this period were discussed in the letters and reports that they sent home and reminiscences that they wrote after they returned. It is remarkable that in the midst of their heavy duties, these missionaries found time to write innumerable letters and reports. When grouped thematically by colonial ruler, these missionary writings are revealing. Nearly seventy different sources, usually published monthly, contain information on these African American missionaries who served in Africa over these 150 years.

This includes denominational and non-denominational annual reports, journals, and magazines; mission papers in various university, state, or local repositories; and letters and reports written by these missionaries or about them. Other materials that exist on African American missionaries assigned to Africa during this period include nine autobiographies, four biographies, and two reminiscences. The letters, reports, and reminiscences written by these missionaries to mission boards, mission secretaries, home churches, family, or friends discuss their careers in Africa and the challenges that they faced there.

The content and nature of missionary writings, to some extent, often varied depending on

to whom they were being written. The letters and reports reveal the preconceived notions of these missionaries upon their arrival in Africa, how they came to view their ancestral homeland and its inhabitants, and if and how their attitudes changed over time. Also recorded are the activities that these missionaries were engaged in while on the continent, their concerns and priorities, and whether or not they were able to balance the dilemma of racial identification with those to be converted. These documents demonstrate the dissimilar roles and duties of male and female missionaries, their varying experiences working under different colonial rulers, and the differences in the thrust of the mission movement over time.

Undoubtedly, black American missionaries went to Africa as representatives of an American/Western culture. The majority endorsed the Western image of Africa as a "dark continent" in need of the "civilizing"influences of Christianity. They supported mission work there, believing that the exposure of Africans to Western religious, social, and cultural influences would make the continent more acceptable to white Americans and to the wider world. Whites made a point of constantly emphasizing the racial and historical link between African Americans and Africans. Since African Americans at this time felt that the negative images of Africa affected white attitudes toward them, they saw the evangelization of Africans as their "special duty." So, as whites took up the "white man's burden" in Africa, black American missionary men and woman volunteered to help in the "civilizing mission" there.[29]

The motives of individual African American missionaries in Africa may have varied, but it is clear that the overriding theme of duty to their ancestral homeland helps to explain why so many volunteered for mission work there. Evidently for most, participating in mission work was

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[29]Jacobs, "The Historical Role."

more of a goal than appointment by any specific board since there were many instances where they were sent out by a church other than their own. Apparently, they also did care to which African country they were assigned because they volunteered to go to areas where they did speak the language or were unfamiliar with the culture.[30]

Although it would seem that African American missionaries in Africa would repeat the same general themes as European and white American missionaries on the continent, nonetheless, there is some diversity in what they wrote about, what they believed was necessary for African conversion, and their interpretations or perceptions of what they observed. Even though they were, for the most part, ministering in non-Western and non-Christian areas, all black American missionaries did not necessarily condemn African society or religion outright. The major issues which African American missionaries stationed in Africa talked about in their letters fall into the same two categories as other missionaries: personal concerns or issues related to the functioning of the mission station.

African American missionaries sent out by the always-financially-strapped black boards or by smaller white boards seemed to face the most dismal situations. In nearly every letter that these missionaries wrote home, they talked about the need for additional money for the missions, their minimal salaries that went right back into the work, and the dire financial situation on the stations. Sometimes they sounded almost destitute. Each letter began with missionaries thanking the church for sending their salaries, almost as if they feared that if they did not mention it or were not appreciative, that the money would not be sent. There were a few cases when missionaries complained that they were out of provisions or only a few days from running

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[30]Ibid.

out of food.[31]

For example, the letters from National Baptist Convention missionaries, published in *Mission Herald*, contain long lists of the names of people, groups, and churches that had sent gifts of clothing, books, supplies, or monetary donations for the missionaries and the mission stations. Apparently, Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City with Adam Clayton Powell, pastor, assisted several Baptist mission stations in Africa. Reverend Edward H. Bouey, pastor of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, the son of a missionary and later himself a missionary in Liberia in the 1920s, was thanked often in the letters. In addition, church women in the auxiliary state conventions collected thousands of dollars to support mission programs and to pay the salaries of female workers in the field.[32] Frankly, many of these missionaries are to be admired for the perseverance and dedication to the work that they demonstrated despite their often grim financial circumstances.

The largest number of African American missionaries sent out by black and white boards went during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From 1880 to 1930, almost 260 African American missionaries served in sub-Saharan Africa. This was not quite half of the total number of 600 black missionaries sent out from 1820 to 1970, and the largest number of any other 50 year period. Women represented 50% of those missionaries who served from 1880 to 1930. There is biographical information on nearly 70 of these 126 black women. This paper

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[31]Emma Delany, *Spelman Messenger*, January 1915 and November 1916; Clara Howard, *Spelman Messenger*, November 1894.

[32]Jacobs, "African Missionary Movement"; Sylvia M. Jacobs, "Give A Thought to Africa: Black Women Missionaries in Southern Africa,"in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, edited by Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 207-238.

discusses how about a half dozen of these African American women missionaries in Africa from 1880 to 1930 navigated national and racial identities in their encounters with Africans as they confronted European imperialism on the continent.

African American women missionaries made their major contribution to African society during this fifty year period in several areas: the establishment of homes, orphanages, and schools for children; the development of agricultural and industrial schools; and the translation of grammar books, dictionaries, hymns, proverbs, folk stories, and fairy tales into indigenous languages.

As would be expected in Booker T. Washington's era of the establishment of agricultural and industrial schools as the "proper" education for African Americans, European colonial governments wanted mission societies and missionaries to establish these same type of schools as the "proper" education for Africans. Therefore, African American women missionaries in Africa, like all missionaries, were engaged in these kinds of activities.

However, despite the obvious attempt by European colonialists to pigeon-hole mission work into this one category, the efforts of African American women missionaries was focused on a variety of projects which demonstrated their dedication and commitment to the work that they were primarily concerned with and the one that they believed would be most important, assisting and improving the lives and status of women and children in African society.

In the letters, reports, and articles sent home, African American women missionaries described African society and African people, including their homes, customs, traditions, dress, and religious practices. These women missionaries particularly discussed their experiences with African women and children since this was where they would concentrate their efforts and how they would spend their time in Africa. They also mentioned their relationship with white

missionaries and their interactions with European colonial administrators.

African American women missionaries were ever mindful that their writings and letters would be printed and reprinted in many publications in the U.S. and read by and read to black and white audiences throughout the country. Therefore, although they enunciated some of the same stereotypes as other missionaries stationed in Africa, they often tendered them with humorous or personal anecdotal stories.

These black women missionaries continually justified the need for the conversion of Africans to Christianity by describing Africans as "dark" and "darkened people," an allusion to Africans' lifestyle and not their skin color. Lulu (Louise, Lulu was a nickname) Fleming in the Congo commented in one letter on the sad situation that she found in Africa, "truly the people here ... for centuries have been sitting in darkness ..."[33] In another letter, she bragged that "more people have been reached and some have turned from sin and darkness into the light," the light of Christianity, of course.[34] In an 1888 report, she spoke directly about the importance of missionaries reaching African women. She lamented: "All our converts thus far are men. Oh, how I long to see the women reached..... The women must be reached in their homes, so must the children."[35] This was a refrain that would be repeated often by women missionaries.

Nancy Jones, who served in Mozambique and Southern Rhodesia, was disappointed with the progress of the children and blamed it on the customs and practices of the adults. She observed that, "the children have bright pretty faces and seem quite anxious to learn, although

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[33]Lulu Fleming Letters, Letter No.16, May 26, 1887, American Baptist Historical Society, Archives of the American Baptist Missionary Union, Rochester, New York.

[34]Lulu Fleming Letters, Letter No. 9, January 10. 1891.

[35]Lulu Fleming Letters, Letter No. 4, October 12, 1888.

their parents are very superstitious and have no idea of the right way of living."[36] Almost as a confirmation of what they believed to be the "backwardness" of Africans, some African American women missionaries in Africa talked about the idols, fetishes, witchcraft, and superstitions of the people. Emma Delany compared the customs of Africans in the Congo with those in Nyasaland where she worked and concluded that they were about the same everywhere, "their superstitions are numerous."[37]

So crucial was getting children to schools on the mission stations that many missionaries bribed the children with clothing or paid cash to the parents to get the children to attend school. Apparently, giving children cloth to make wraps or clothes was a method that missionaries used throughout the continent to persuade African children to come to school and to attend regularly. Subsequently, the missionaries hoped that they would be able to convince the children to convert, and maybe later they could persuade their parents to convert. Missionaries throughout the world understood that their best chances for conversion would be with the children.

Clara Howard in the Congo reported that missionaries at her station did not pay a "dash" to the parents for letting their children come to school. She insisted:

> The children are all free--that is, we do not believe in buying them as some do for the purpose of educating them, nor do we give their parents "dashes"or gifts for allowing them to remain. At first parents would bring their children and say: "Here is my child, I want him to stay with you." They would wait around until he was dressed and then say: "Where is my gift?" Sometimes after trying to explain and tell them the object of the school, they would take the children back. I have not troubled myself about them, and have my first "dash" to give, and yet have all the time a large number of little noisy rompers. Now it is an understood thing and no one even mentions "dash."[38]

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[36]Nancy Jones, May 29, 1888, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Papers, Houghton Library of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[37]Emma Delany, *Spelman Messenger*, October 1903.

[38]Clara Howard, *Spelman Messenger*, November 1894.

Though she tried to resist it, even Howard had to deal with the children asking for cloth (pay) for attending school.[39]

Clara Howard asked church women in America, "sisters in the civilized land" as she called them, to financially support the girls in the Congo by sending them dresses or cloth to make dresses. She emphasized that there was little difference between girls in the Congo and those in America:

> Doubtless, many of you have formed a very strange picture of our Congo girls. Well don't do so again, for I have seen no difference. They are such as you daily meet and talk with, of all shades and colors. They do differ in one respect; that is, they wear little or no clothing except a little piece of cloth or several rows of beads around their bodies. . . . [But] when they accept Christ, their eyes are opened and they began to want clothes, and especially dresses to cover their nakedness.[40]

Even when she did receive cloth from home, Howard was unable to get the women and girls to make dresses. She could not understand why they did not want to learn how to sew. That was not until one woman explained it to her. When Howard tried to give the woman a needle and thread to re-string broken bead, the woman exclaimed: "Am I a man? I don't want that needle to sew; that's man's work."[41] Here again, missionaries did not understand another African custom; in Africa, men did the sewing.

Emma Delany, when she was stationed in Nyasaland, commented on the inferior status of girls and women in that society, but admitted that she did not have enough money to buy clothes for the girls to wear to come to school:

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[39]Clara Howard, *Spelman Messenger*, January 1896.

[40]Clara Howard, *Spelman Messenger*, February 1892.

[41]Ibid.

> No girl has had an opportunity to rise above her present condition. . . . My daily thoughts are: What can I do to help the women and girls? And then what am I to do to help them? As I make my weekly visits to the villages and tell them to come to church and school, the first thing they say is: "I have no cloth to wear." They are willing to work for the cloth, and I have plenty of yard and garden work that I could give them to do, but have not money, cloth, nor even salt with which to pay them, little as you have to pay them for wages.[42]

When she transferred to Liberia, the problem of getting girls to come to school on the mission station was the same. As she pointed out, sometimes it was nothing more than the fact that the mission did not have enough money to pay for their upkeep. She described how the sixty-seven children on the mission station were crowded in the boarding school but mentioned that she would have liked even more students, "if I could house, clothe, and feed them."[43] Possibly because they were working predominately among Christian emigrant settlers, and not indigenous Africans, black missionaries stationed in Liberia seemed to use fewer negative images and references to describe Africans and their way of life than did missionaries elsewhere on the continent.

The idea of paying children to come to school did not sit well with most missionaries and some even wrote foreign mission secretaries in the U.S. to see if this was an acceptable practice. In the end, however, it was often the only way to get students. So the issue that missionaries had to resolve was what would be the conditions under which children (or their parents) would be paid for them to attend school. Nancy Jones in Mozambique complained about another problem related to the children. She feared that some children were converting just to get paid or to

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[42]Emma Delany, *Spelman Messenger*, January 1903.

[43]Emma Delany, *Spelman Messenger,* November 1915.

please the missionaries.[44]

Jones focused her attention on getting girls from surrounding villages to attend the mission school. She hoped to dramatically change and maybe even improve the lives of these girls by educating them. However, she was regularly saddened by the realities of these girls' lives and found that some of the things that she demanded from the girls went against the tide of tradition, such as insisting that they wear certain clothing and requiring that they come to school regularly.

> I am very much grieved because I have not been successful in getting hold of the girls as I wish to do. They seem very fond of me and I have had two to come and stay with me a short while. But the height of their ambition is to be bought by some man, old or young, for his wife. They do not desire much clothing, they want their forms to be seen by the men. They will not come to school unless they are expecting to be paid in some way. It is very sad to see them so low in the scale of morality and I am praying and hoping for a brighter future.[45]

She scolded the girls for emphasizing the wrong thing. Her main concern was about the girls' aspirations: "Their [the girls] chief ambition is to get married and work for their husbands, that he may be considered great by the large number of wives."[46] Possibly, Jones did not see that the lives of single African women were even more proscribed than that of single African American women.

Emma Delany expressed a continuing concern of black American women missionaries, maybe of all female missionaries. She was despondent because she believed that missionaries would be unable to improve the lives of girls and women. She related an incident when she worked in Liberia that seemed to tear at her heartstrings:

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[44]Nancy Jones, May 29, 1888.

[45]Nancy Jones, September 20, 1888.

[46]Nancy Jones, May 29, 1888.

> There are customs in Africa which make everything so uncertain, especially with women and children. I remember one of the most responsible men I thought in the district, and he was above the average, spoke to me of bringing his child to the Mission; time passed, he did not put in his appearance. After having waited for two months, I learned that the man bought an ox from his uncle some years prior to my opening the Mission. He failed to return the money. The uncle being in need of the money came to his nephew and demanded that the debt be paid at once.
>
> The nephew had no money, so the little girl who was to have been put in the Mission was given to the uncle in payment of the debt. The girl was never redeemed, hence she will be the property of her uncle all of her life; even the husband of this girl will be virtually the property of the uncle, and so it goes.
>
> Another will take his wife and child to pay his gambling debt just as quick as he will give his farm or his cattle. If his friend is in trouble, he will pawn his own wife and children to free the friend, just as quick as a man in this country [U.S.] for his friend.[47]

Nancy Jones echoed the sentiments expressed by Delaney. She also was frustrated that she was unable to "rescue" these girls from a life that she viewed as inferior and demeaning. To her, African traditions seemed to work against missionary efforts to improve the lives of girls and women. In addition, as an unmarried and motherless missionary, Jones probably developed a maternal and loving relationship with some of these girls.

> My little girl is learning very fast and is of much help to me. She told me that she wanted to be a Christian, and that she often asked the Lord to make her heart white and clean from sin. I trust that she may become a Christian and do much good for her people. I am afraid her father will come some day and take her home, and sell her to buy another wife. He has given her to me it is true but being a heathen, I cannot tell how soon he may change. And I would be much grieved to lose her.[48]

On another occasion, Jones was distressed about another girl who had been given to her, taken

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[47]Emma Delany, *Spelman Messenger*, March 1921.

[48]Nancy Jones, January 10, 1889.

back, then returned again. She expressed chagrin about the entire affair:

> This girl has been here before. Her friends failed to do as they promised and she came back again. I wish we could help such girls. I wish we had a fund to purchase them from their husbands who treat them so cruelly. They are mere slaves and I long to see them free. Of course when they come here I give them food and they are afraid the first few days to be seen by strangers. But if they stay long enough, I give them work and put them in school.[49]

Lulu Fleming was disappointed at losing a boy from the mission school in the Congo who she had hoped would be educated and baptized:

> The work at Palabala has known its hardest trial this past year and also its greatest lesson. More people have been reached and some have turned from sin and darkness into light. One little boy in my school took a stand for Christ and began to grow bold [for] Christ. His master, a backslider, learning of this, took the dear little fellow out of school away to a distant town and compelled him to enter a temple and become a fetish boy. How my heart has followed this dear young decifil [sic]. You can never know until you are bound in spirit with some poor soul who suffers persecution for the kingdom of God's sake. I have been with him in all of the bonds that bind him to that unholy temple with its unseemingly images and suffered with him all the insults thrown into his face because of the hope he has in Christ. All this has been in soul but the suffering has been so real as has been his who suffers in body.[50]

Nevertheless, most African parents and guardians were eager to send their children or wards to the mission schools because they believed that a Western education would better prepare them to succeed in the colonial system.[51]

In addition to chores in the mission schools and around the mission station, there was also work on the farms that were attached to the mission stations. Farms were important to the maintenance of the mission stations. Obviously, missionaries grew crops and raised livestock for their own food, but also for mission profits. Missionaries in different parts of Africa grew a

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[49]Nancy Jones, March 26, 1895.

[50]Lulu Fleming, Letter No. 9, January 10, 1891.

[51]Tishken, 168-169.

variety of crops, including sweet potatoes, rice, sugar cane, cassava, coffee, peanuts, cotton, pineapples, corn, bananas, and oranges. However, farming proved not to be as profitable as the missionaries had hoped.

Again, the issue of gardening and farming resulted in another culture clash between African American women missionaries and Africans because in Africa this was girl's and women's work. African American women missionaries saw this as demeaning since it reminded them of slavery when men, women, and children worked in the field. In addition, work in the gardens and fields kept the girls from attending school. In a letter, Clara Howard compared the life that girls in Africa faced to little girls in the U.S.:

> I have before me every day so many little boys and not many girls. I am very sorry not to have more girls; but let me tell you why the little African girls do not come to school. The little girls and women do all the garden work, and have to get food for their husbands and brothers. Little girls like you get up very early in the morning and with their little, short-handled hoes go to their gardens and dig way in the hot sun bare-headed and naked, with the exception of a loin-cloth, and seem happy. You would not be happy, I know, if you were obliged to live in this way. Would you? Thank God, dear girls, that you have a Christian papa and mama to care for you, and who like to give you food and clothes instead of having you do as the Congo girls do.[52]

Some denominations would eventually add agricultural, industrial, vocational, domestic science, and printing departments to their schools at the mission stations. European governments wanted mission societies and missionaries to establish agricultural and mechanical schools for Africans. Colonial governments hoped to counter the literary and intellectual focus of mission schools. Later, seminaries and hospital were added to the mission schools.[53]

In 1920 in Southern Rhodesia, the British proposed setting up two industrial schools but

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[52]Clara Howard, *Spelman Messenger*, February 1894.

[53]Barnes, 150.

by 1925 the idea was shelved because of protests from Africans and missionaries. The Phelps Stokes Fund in the U.S. sent experts on industrial education to Africa in1921 and 1924. The British Colonial Office created the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies in 1924 and it shaped educational policy in the British colonies until the 1960s.[54]

Despite the good conversion rates among children at the mission schools, missionaries did not have the same success in winning converts outside the mission stations. Missionaries would invite people from nearby villages and towns to come to Sunday services on the mission stations. Or on Sunday afternoon, the missionaries and evangelists would go to the villages, taking children from the stations with them. The evangelists would preach and the missionaries and children would sing. Although missionaries held out hope that this technique would result in more converts than on the mission stations, in reality, fewer Africans converted in this way. Truthfully, mass conversions were uncommon anyway. Still the missionaries saw village visitation as the best strategy for expanding their work on a broader scale.

After the 1880s, European powers spread throughout Africa and subsequently carved it up amongst themselves. One major dilemma that missionaries faced who were stationed on the continent at this time was how to work effectively with the different European colonial rulers in Africa without jeopardizing their status as representatives of the various mission societies.

When missionaries first arrived in Africa they had to adapt to the African chiefs and rulers, and now they would have to adjust to the new European ones. All missionaries in Africa at this time faced the daunting task of having to find a way to work within the colonial system. Missionaries, after all, were working toward their own goals of evangelization; they were not agents of the colonial powers.

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[54]Ibid.

In this era of imperialism and racism, African American missionaries, particularly, had to take care not to offend Europeans in Africa. They were doubly sensitive about their presence because Europeans saw them not only as foreigners, Americans, but also as Africans, or at least of African descent.

When Nora Gordon arrived in the Congo in the late 1880s, soon after the Berlin Conference, she came face to face with hordes of Europeans settling on land in various regions of the continent. In a letter home in the early twentieth century, she lamented the large number of different groups around her mission station. In describing her neighbors, she mentioned that, "there are more than one hundred foreigners around the Pool, English, Scotch and American missionaries, Belgian officials and traders, and on the other side of the river there are French officials, traders, mostly Dutch, and Roman Catholic missionaries."[55] So not only were black American missionaries dealing with the large number of Europeans vying for land and control of territory on the continent, but they also were competing with foreign missionaries who also were trying to win converts.

Clara Howard, also in the Congo, criticized almost all the colonial rulers. She condemned Belgian officials in the country for their indifference to the indigenous people, "the government authorities are pushing and extending their power into the interior with no thought of the moral and spiritual welfare of the people." She further criticized the Portuguese for allowing foreign traders in their colonies to import rum or other distilled spirits. Inland, she accused British state officials of driving Africans from the towns by the cruelty of their state officials.[56]

Nancy Jones first was stationed in Mozambique but later was transferred to Southern

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[55]Nora Gordon, *Spelman Messenger*, May 1897.

[56]Clara Howard, *Spelman Messenger*, November 1904.

Rhodesia. When she arrived in Rhodesia, she complained that the British settlers there did not encourage African children to attend the mission schools because, instead, they wanted them working on European farms: "It is too bad there are so few people [working] on the farms and unless the settlers allow the children to come to school from the adjoining farms, we cannot have a large school."[57]

Although African American missionaries in British colonies did not have to deal with denominational, political, or language barriers, they did face governmental measures to ban them. Visa restrictions were the most serious impediment which these missionaries faced, but they also often had to receive permission from the governor of the colony before entering. In West Africa, the British placed barriers on the entrance of black missionaries through restrictive ordinances which banned "alien missionaries and teachers."

British colonialists in Nyasaland also were suspicious of African American missionaries and began to restrict their entrance into the country by 1910. They believed that the teachings of black American missionaries in that country had induced a spirit of independence and insubordination amongst Africans, although there was no evidence of this and there had been only three in the country before 1907. Nevertheless, British administrators argued that the protectorate had been free of subversive elements until African Americans entered the country and they accused these missionaries of teaching revolution rather than religion.[58]

Emma Delany had been first stationed in Nyasaland in1902, and she took a furlough in

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[57]Nancy Jones, March 26, 1895.

[58]Johannes Du Plessis, *Thrice Through the Dark Continent, A Record of Journeying Across Africa During the Years 1913-1916* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), 9, 346; George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African. John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising in 1915* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1958), 135.

the U.S. in 1906.. Believing that her visit to the United States was only temporary, she requested in 1912 that the Baptist Board reappoint her to mission work in Nyasaland. She found that such permission was denied by the British government.[59]

The six member Nyasaland Native Rising Commission, appointed by the governor of the colony to inquire into the causes of the John Chilembwe uprising in 1915, mentioned, "the establishment of certain European and American Missions in the Protectorate" as one of the contributory provocations of the disturbance and suggested that small, insufficiently financed missions conducted by unsuitable persons and under no proper control had sown the seeds of revolt.

The commissioners recommended that, "only properly accredited missions should be allowed in the Protectorate, that is, Missions which are supported by a responsible body at home, which do not teach doctrines politically objectionable, and which provide proper support for their missionaries here."[60] This, of course, meant that between World War I and World War II, African American missionaries would be banned from the country.

African mission work for African American missionaries changed after World War I as European imperialists solidified control over their African colonies. These colonialists believed that African American missionaries, female and male, were dangerous to the maintenance of law and order in Africa because Africans might identify with their better educated and more politically conscious brothers and sisters. The European powers feared that these black

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[59]Sylvia M. Jacobs, "Emma Bertha Delaney," in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, edited by Darlene Clark Hine (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1993), 316.

[60]Du Plessis, 346; Native Rising Commission, *Report of the Commission on . . . the Native Rising within the Nyasaland Protectorate* (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland Protectorate, c. January 7, 1916), 4, 6, 8.

American missionaries might unwittingly, or wittingly, encourage protest and political unrest among Africans. European governments in Africa were unanimous in their belief that African American missionaries, because of their direct and intimate relationship with Africans, upset the status quo and caused too many disruptions to warrant their effectiveness in the "civilizing mission" in Africa.[61]

Not only did black American missionaries face discrimination from European colonialists, but they often had to deal with the racism of some white missionaries. Nancy Jones, Benjamin Ousley, and Henrietta Ousley had pioneered the Kambini mission station in Mozambique and worked there alone for five years. They had been able to negotiate successfully with the Portuguese government. However, in 1893, when the Ousleys left Mozambique and returned to the United States, leaving Jones alone at the Kambini station, the American Board decided to transfer its mission inland into eastern Southern Rhodesia. Along with eight white missionaries, Jones joined the staff of the new Gaza Mission as the only black person.

At Mount Silinda, Jones initially worked as a teacher in the day school, but eventually was relieved of that duty. Finally in 1897, she resigned from the East Central African Mission, stating that she, "was unable to work in harmony with the mission," because of the prejudice of some of her white co-workers. Although she asked the board to assign her, with other black missionaries, to an area where white missionaries could not live well, she was never reassigned and returned to her home in Memphis.[62]

Both white and black boards had mission stations in places other than Africa, but the vast

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[61]Jacobs, "African Missions and the African American Christian Churches."

[62]Ibid.

majority of African Americans volunteered for mission work on the continent. This seemed to indicate some sort of allegiance or identity with Africa and Africans, even if ambiguous, among African Americans. African American missionaries probably responded to Africans because of what they saw as African in themselves. Additionally, both groups were treated with the same prejudice by white Americans and Europeans.

It was not unusual for African American women missionaries in their letters to refer to Africans as "our people." They often mentioned that they loved Africa and the people or admitted that they identified with them.[63] They confessed that they had volunteered for mission work to help their "brothers and sisters in Africa."[64]

Clara Howard related a story about how she and other missionaries prepared a Christmas dinner for boys on the station. The dining room table was set with a white tablecloth, glasses, silver plated knives and forks, and dishes before the boys were called to eat. The missionaries served them and then cleaned the table. Howard admitted that, "it was such a pleasure to see them enjoy themselves and be so happy." She described the boys after the event: "Such a happy set! I love them very much."

Landon Cheek, a missionary in Nyasaland with Emma Delany, in a reminiscence written years later, related an incident when he and his wife were leaving his post in Nyasaland in 1906 to return to the U.S. As they traveled through Mozambique, his wife was unable to persuade some African girls and women to go with her to wash clothes in a nearby stream. However, they joined her after the men of their village told them that Rachel Cheek "was of their own and would not hurt them." Interestingly, Rachel Chilembwe Cheek was herself an indigenous

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[63]Clara Howard, *Spelman Messenger*, April 1891.

[64]Clara Howard, *Spelman Messenger*, February 1892.

African, the niece of Nyasaland nationalist, John Chilembwe. But by marrying an African American, African women no longer saw her as African. They now viewed her as an American and the African men had to convince the women that Rachel Cheek was "one of their own."[65]

This episode speaks volumes to the reality of the national identity of African American missionaries stationed in Africa. They could not escape the fact that they were Americans. Even when they identified with Africans, they still valued their Americanism. Europeans viewed them as Americans of African descent. Africans saw them as Americans, Westerners. Besides, in the final analysis, African American missionaries did not reject their American nationalism. They were American citizens, maybe second-class citizens, but Americans first and foremost.

Lulu Fleming told an interesting story about a trip that she took through the Congo. Her experience related to race, culture, and identity:

> The King seemed overjoyed at our coming and wished us well in his land. He asked questions on the love and immortality of God and the resurrection of the dead and seemed downcast in soul to hear such astonishing truths. I then had the girl to tell him that I was one of his. My grandfather and his being [from] the same country. This he could or would not believe. "No, no," said he, "she is a white/black woman." Then all his town joined in saying it.[66]

Africans often referred to African American missionaries as "white men and women in black skin," a reference obviously to their culture and identity, not their skin color.

African American missionaries in Africa had to deal with the contradictions and conflicts of their presence in Africa. While they were on the continent to transfer Western religion and culture to African peoples, they had to deal with their existence in a "Jim Crow"

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[65]Landon Cheek, *Mission Herald*, March, April 1939, 15; May, June 1939, 16-17; September, October, 1940, 17-18.

[66]Lulu Fleming, Letter No. 16, May 26, 1887.

segregated America. White American society excluded blacks from full equality and equitable justice. Blacks understood, then, that as missionaries in Africa their job was a religious, cultural, and educational transformation of Africans, in other words, a re-invention of what it meant to be African.[67]

As revealed in their letters home, African American women missionaries faced some frustrations concerning the pace and progress of their work. They were disappointed that there never seemed to be enough resources for all of the mission programs, particularly those geared to women and girls. They complained that indigenous men and local government officials would not take directions or suggestions from women missionaries. But probably the most heart-wrenching aspect of the work for women was that most mission societies required that missionary parents send their children back to the U.S. for an education by the age of ten.[68]

On a broader scale, were those issues related to the finances on the mission station, such as the problems of limited staff, constant staff shortages, and need for reinforcements; inadequate supplies; insufficient financial support from the home church; the immensity of the work; and frustration with the rate of African conversion. Additionally, African American women missionaries were concerned with what they considered to be the low status of women and girls in African society.[69]

On a more personal level for African American women missionaries, were concerns over inadequate preparation and training for the field; lack of language instruction or difficulty

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[67]Tishken, 167-168.

[68]Welter, "She Hath Done What She Could."; Eikenberry, "Women as Missionaries."

[69]Ibid.

surpassing language barriers; constant health problems with prevalent typhoid fever, smallpox, and malaria along with their concomitant recurring attacks; adjustment to climate and temperatures; isolation and loneliness; weariness; poor preparation for the new culture; and a difficult adjustment to African customs and traditions.

However, the women also mentioned that they found fulfillment and joy in other areas. Many relished the progress made by the people who they worked among; some even admitted that they came to love the people. Relationships often developed between these women missionaries and the indigenous women and children. It was especially rewarding to African American women missionaries when African women teachers went back into their communities or nurses returned to mission hospitals after certification. Female missionaries admitted how satisfied they were with seeing growth in women's work and district women's meetings, or having seen African women lead a worship service for the first time. "Missionary wives" indicated that they were proud of the work that their husbands were doing and they found fulfillment in being a wife.[70]

Probably the most important and lasting contribution of African American women missionaries in Africa was in the changes that they helped to bring about in the lives of African women and children. It is significant to emphasize that, as Margaret E. Crahan and Franklin W. Knight point out, women form the integral link in the process of socialization and cultural transmission in any society. These black American women missionaries founded schools and colleges, opened medical clinics and hospitals, and supported orphanages. But while doing this, these missionaries underwent a cultural transformation themselves, which allowed them to

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[70]Ibid.

identify with a foreign culture and empathize with the lives of foreign women. They adapted their attitudes to at least a partial acceptance of the African way of life in order to be effective among them.[71]

In the area of Christian foreign missionary work, conversion to Christianity implicitly meant the rejection of indigenous religions and cultures and the acceptance of a Western religion and value system. Upon conversion, one had to withdraw from indigenous ways and embrace Western behavior and customs. Mission ideology always assumed a negativism about the society where missionaries worked and tended to imply that individual missionaries could not be separated from the damning missionary work. In addition, there was a peculiar train of thought in missionary ideology that Africans could not be complimented at the same time that their way of life was being condemned.[72]

Although they often went to Africa with the same negative images and stereotypes as whites about the continent and its people, as they worked among African women and children, many African American women missionaries came to identify more personally than white women missionaries with the people among whom they were working. These initial negative views of Africa and Africans often turned into respect for the differences in the African way of doing things that they observed. These women later mentioned that they had formed deep and lasting relationships with both women and men in the cultures to which they had come to work. Many times, African American women missionaries, particularly single ones, had little companionship in Africa other than African women. While ministering among Africans, these missionaries often underwent a cultural transformation themselves which allowed them to

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[71]Ibid.; Margaret E. Crahan and Franklin W. Knight, *Africa and the Caribbean: The Legacies of a Link* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

[72]Tishken, 167-168.

identify with a foreign culture and empathize with its people.

African American women missionaries in Africa had to deal with the oftentimes cultural, religious, and ideological contradictions and conflicts between allegiance, nationalism, and culture as American citizens and race, ethnicity, and identity as people of African descent. While they transferred American religion and culture to African peoples, they had to deal with the very hypocrisy of their existence in a "Jim Crow" segregated America. This was what William E. B. Du Bois called the "double-consciousness" or "two-ness" of being black in white America:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's souls by the tape of a world that looks on in an amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[73]

White American society excluded blacks from full equality and equitable justice. Blacks knew as missionaries in Africa that their job was religious, cultural, and educational conversion. But as they worked among Africans, they questioned whether rejection and substitution of African culture with American culture was a rejection of themselves, their culture, and their traditional identity. Finally, would admitting anything positive about African culture exclude them from American loyalty and national identity? Resolving these issues was probably the greatest challenge for these African American women missionaries who served in Africa from 1880 to 1930.

I am grateful to Jemetta Davis, my graduate assistant in the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 academic years, for her assistance in preparing this paper.

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[73]William E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: American Library, 1969).

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