

## SEPARATION, INCLUSION, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK LEADERSHIP IN THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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In its last issue of the nineteenth century, the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, the paper that served the African American membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, put out a special edition taking stock of the race's situation. A piece on "The Negro Educator" was contributed by William H. Croghan, professor of classical languages at Clark University in Atlanta. As one of the first African Americans to join the professoriate, Croghan was a fitting choice. The West Indies native came south in 1870 as part of the operations of the Northern Methodists' Freedmen's Aid Society. After teaching at Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, for three years, he returned to school to complete his education at Atlanta University. In 1900, he was squarely in the middle of a distinguished, forty-year career teaching at Clark.<sup>1</sup>

Croghan was a justifiably proud man who had recently taken to walking the two and a half miles each way from the Clark campus into town rather than ride the Jim Crow street car. His article for the *Southwestern* took particular pride in the observation that "we are largely our own instructors, to-day, throughout the South." He considered it "a fact of great significance, as every race must develop [*sic*] its own leadership, if it is to respect itself or command the respect of others." He recalled, "For the first ten years after emancipation [the black teacher] had to confront the aversion of his own people . . . All their ideas of excellence and nobility were white." The sentiment was understandable in a people just emerging from slavery, and the rise of African-American teachers signaled to Croghan that "much of the servile spirit" had passed away.<sup>2</sup> The Freedmen's Aid Society could claim to have educated more than 15,000 of those teachers.<sup>33</sup>

The development of black leaders for black people fulfilled a major goal of the Northern Methodists, but it told only part of the story. The last year of the century had also witnessed a test of the Methodist Episcopal Church's commitment to developing black leadership that did not end so well. A long

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<sup>1</sup> George A. Towns, "William Henry Croghan," *Journal of Negro History* 19 (April, 1934): 213-217.

<sup>2</sup> William H. Croghan, "The Negro Educator," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Dec. 27, 1900).

<sup>3</sup> J. W. Hamilton and M. C. B. Mason, Corresponding Secretaries of the FAS, "Lincoln's Birthday," *Christian Advocate* (Feb. 9, 1899).

and concerted campaign to elect a bishop of African descent had reached a culmination at the General Conference of 1900, and it had fallen short. The key difference between the two forms of leadership was that African-American teachers were leaders within their own communities, whereas bishops exercised general superintendency throughout the denomination. In other words, an African-American bishop would be in a position to wield authority over white people as well as black. African Americans had been welcomed into the M. E. Church with a promise of full equality, but they had come up against a glass ceiling that raised serious questions about the Church's commitment to that principle.

The freed slaves who joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, rather than the African Methodist Episcopal or African Methodist Episcopal Zion denominations, were attracted in part by its uniquely biracial membership. The Civil War had given the Northern Methodists an opportunity to reenter the South, where they sought to regain white members who had never been truly loyal to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as well as undertaking missions to the freed slaves. Over the next three decades, the outreach efforts of the Northern Methodists drew an African American membership of over 250,000 into the denomination. At the same time their appeals to white Unionists attracted an even greater number of Southern whites to join.<sup>4</sup> No other Protestant denomination could claim that kind of success in building a biracial membership, but hopes that bringing the races together in fellowship would gradually overcome racial prejudice proved illusory. The "white work" of the M. E. Church developed along separate lines from their work with the freed slaves and remained that way.

However, African Americans who joined the M. E. Church were admitted as full and equal members of the denomination with the right to participate in all the Church's doings. The African Americans who joined the M. E. Church saw in this inclusiveness a repudiation of racial caste, and they looked forward to building a new society in the South where the races could work together in harmony. That ideal served as their defense against rival appeals from the African Methodist churches, who argued, "In the white churches the Negroes occupied only subordinate positions. *They are dictated to as your masters dictated to us in slavery times.*"<sup>5</sup> The view of those blacks who joined the M. E. Church was expressed by Rev. Emperor Williams, an early leader in the important center of New Orleans: "In battling with the great sin of caste prejudice, we think it better to have all our people . . . in the same church organization."<sup>6</sup> Committed to breaking down caste barriers within the denomination as a whole, African Americans sought leadership

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<sup>4</sup> "Quadrennial Report of the Freedmen's Aid and Southern Education Society, *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Cleveland, Ohio, May 1-28, 1896*, ed. by David S. Monroe (NY: Eaton & Mains, 1896), 717. The report listed their colored membership as 252,676, and the Southern white membership as 301,234.

<sup>5</sup> From *Southern Christian Recorder*, quoted in "Our White Masters," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Apr. 17, 1890). Italics from original article.

<sup>6</sup> "Fraternal Speeches," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Jan. 16, 1879).

roles not only within their communities but also within the M. E. Church. The resulting tension between separation and inclusion defined the politics of race relations in the denomination for at least a century.<sup>7</sup>

### The Freedmen's Aid Society

The promise of inclusion, many black Methodists believed, would be fulfilled by embracing the promise of education offered through the schools of the Freedmen's Aid Society (FAS). The Society was established in Cincinnati in 1866 by a group of anti-slavery Methodists and was later adopted as an official agency of the Methodist Episcopal Church. By the end of Reconstruction, the FAS shifted its focus toward institutions of higher education, leaving the bulk of primary education to common schools. Unlike similar organizations, notably the Congregationalist American Missionary Association, the FAS successfully combined evangelization with education. Indeed, to understand the role of the Freedmen's Aid Society in developing black leadership, it is essential to recognize that the FAS was a missionary enterprise. Typical of the historiography of missions, the literature on the freedmen's education movement tends to alternate between celebrations of their heroic devotion and critiques of their cultural insensitivity.<sup>8</sup>

That is a fair assessment in many ways. Yankee teachers in the South endured social ostracism at best and often very real threats of violence. In 1880, Erasmus Q. Fuller, a Methodist editor, compiled a report that counted seven ministers and one black female teacher who had been murdered "because they were Laborers in the Methodist [Episcopal] Church." Many more were assaulted. The victims were as likely to be white as black. At the same time, there was also a strong streak of paternalism in the uplift efforts of Methodist missionaries. They operated from the perception that under slavery African Americans had developed a corrupt and degraded form of Christianity that placed too much emphasis on emotionalism and too little on instilling the standards of "civilized" morality—that is, "industry, economy, frugality, patience, intelligence, virtue and piety" was one version of

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<sup>7</sup> For the later history, see Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era* (New York UP, 2008); and Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930-1975* (Columbia: U Missouri P, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2010); Ann Short Chirhart, *Torches of Light: Georgia Teachers and the Coming of the Modern South* (Athens: U Georgia P, 2005); Carol Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2006); Elizabeth Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries in the South: The Penn School Experiment* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1980); Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1980); Richard C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1976); Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens: U Georgia P, 1986); and Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

the litany.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the ultimate goal of missions was not to impose a paternalistic regime over people they believed their inferiors. The development of black leadership loomed large in the way missionaries understood their long-term goals and the means to reach them. In that respect, the FAS mission to the post-emancipation South was in line with other missionary policies at home and abroad. Briefly put, the goal of Protestant missions generally during this period was to raise up self-sustaining Christian communities, spiritually and educationally empowered for social betterment. Central to that project was the task of educating indigenous leaders.<sup>10</sup> The Freedmen's Aid Society came south with precisely that goal in mind. On one level, the missionary operations of the Methodist Episcopal Church were thus separatist by design, encouraging the development of a black leadership focused inward on uplifting their own people.

Among the founders of the Freedmen's Aid Society one of the most important was John M. Walden, a minister who had been involved in the Bleeding Kansas struggles before the Civil War and would later become a bishop in the Church. At the 1875 anniversary of the Society, Walden explained the thinking behind it. "The basic idea of this Society," he said in his address, "was, that missions among the freedmen could not be successful . . . without employing the school as one of the means." Northern teachers were important at the outset, but from the beginning they were seen as a passing phase. In Walden's words:

The people are to be evangelized and elevated, and it must be chiefly by their own efforts, directed and encouraged, in the beginning, by those upon whose heart the duty is laid. Their teachers and preachers must come up among themselves. . . . Again, every one who rises into an intelligent leader among them, either as preacher or teacher, illustrates what others may do, and thereby becomes an inspiration to noble purposes and manly endeavor.<sup>11</sup>

The chief purpose of the Freedmen's Aid Society schools, then, was to educate preachers and teachers who would serve as leaders in lifting up their own communities of color and strengthening them spiritually, morally, politically, and economically. It was a laudable effort that did indeed strengthen black communities, but in a segregated context, it proved to have little impact on the deep-seated racial prejudice faced by African Americans.

### **Separate Annual Conferences**

With their focus on developing black leaders for black people, integration was not a priority for the national leadership of the Methodist Episcopal

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<sup>9</sup> Bishop Willard F. Mallalieu, "Twenty-Third Anniversary of Emancipation Day in the Crescent City," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Jan. 7, 1886).

<sup>10</sup> Paul W. Harris, *Nothing but Christ: Rufus Anderson and the Ideology of Protestant Foreign Missions* (Oxford UP, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> "Dr. Walden's Address on the Freedmen's Aid Society," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Feb. 24, 1876).

Church. White missionaries on the ground, along with emerging black leaders, often questioned whether the denomination was thereby surrendering to racial caste. One clear manifestation of that tension arose in a long-standing controversy over the organization of annual conferences. Annual conferences are generally organized by region, but the M. E. Church began to establish separate conferences for blacks and whites at the very outset of their Southern missions. The first colored conferences—the Washington and Delaware Conferences—were organized in the states that straddled the Mason-Dixon Line, where African-American members were a distinct minority lacking the educational advantages of the whites. When the General Conference of 1864 set them apart, it seemed like a sensible way to allow them to develop their own leaders.<sup>12</sup>

At first, these separations seemed to be generally accepted. In 1872, the Washington Conference argued against reintegration with white conferences, explaining that they did not wish “to be broken into fragments . . . . We can effect more good, and bring out more talent from our people, by being separate.”<sup>13</sup> Looking back years later, one black Methodist opined “that our colored fathers just from under the clouds of slavery being ignorant, felt embarrassed in meeting with their white brethren who were intelligent, and many of the whites did not desire to meet with them.” Because the initial separations met little organized opposition, the impression grew that the African-American members preferred that approach. Further south, however, it was quite a different matter.<sup>14</sup> In the heart of the Black Belt, the African Americans in the M. E. Church were not the scattered minority they were further north, and much of the white leadership was made up of the missionaries who had come to help them. Hiram Revels—who had briefly served during Reconstruction in the U.S. Senate in the seat formerly occupied by Jefferson Davis and afterward took a leading role in the Church’s Mississippi Conference—argued against separate conferences on the grounds that fellowship with whites modeled intelligent ways of conducting worship and business and also helped his people believe in the possibility of equality.<sup>15</sup>

Revels’s editorial appeared just as the General Conference of 1876 was getting underway and was clearly intended to bolster opposition to further separations. The Georgia and Alabama Conferences had petitioned for separation, and that had sparked intense discussion. Revels’s own conference presented a resolution describing separate conferences as “based on the detested principle of caste” and contrary to everything Methodism stood for; they concluded, “We protest against the formation of Conferences on any line that implies the inferiority of one race to another.” The issue was referred to

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<sup>12</sup> L. M. Hagood, *The Colored Man in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (1890; rpt. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 130-141, 167-169.

<sup>13</sup> “Washington Conference,” *Christian Advocate* (Mar. 14, 1872).

<sup>14</sup> N. H. Speight, “Separate Conferences in the M. E. Church,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Aug. 2, 1894); Rev. Christopher Hunt, “Dr. Dashiell’s Mistake,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Mar. 9, 1876).

<sup>15</sup> H. R. Revels, “We Ought Not to Separate,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (May 4, 1876).

the Committee on the State of the Church, which presented a lengthy report essentially favoring separation. Points in its favor included the fact that at the more local level of congregations and districts, separation already prevailed, so separate conferences were a “natural development,” and that “the recognition of caste, in any offensive sense, was not implied.” Above all, the argument for separation rested on “expediency,” and the report presented an extensive analysis purporting to show that separate conferences were more “prosperous” than mixed. After a lengthy debate, the Georgia and Alabama Conferences were granted their wish, and a rule was established to authorize further divisions if a majority of each race desired it.<sup>16</sup>

The report from the Committee on the State of the Church had been presented by Erastus O. Haven, who was already on record opposing separate conferences. In 1873, he had written, “If ministers begin to stoop in order to conciliate prejudice they must bend lower than their competitors, and finally crawl out of the country defeated.” He contended that separations might occur spontaneously because people had no desire to force themselves into social relations where they were not wanted, but that was fundamentally different from imposing it as a matter of policy.<sup>17</sup> Presumably he felt that the new policy requiring the support of both races meant that separation would not be imposed.

At first that seemed to satisfy Joseph C. Hartzell, the founder and editor of the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*.<sup>18</sup> Hartzell had come south from his native Illinois to lead the missionary efforts of the M. E. Church in Louisiana. Like the Mississippi Conference, the Louisiana Conference was staunchly opposed to separation, and there was no prospect of a majority’s voting for it.<sup>19</sup> However, satisfaction with the policy proved short-lived. The preachers’ meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, registered “a strong protest” against it as “a compromise with caste prejudice.”<sup>20</sup>

The problem with the policy soon became evident in the Tennessee Conference, which included sizable contingents of both black and white members. Although the African-American ministers were united against division and were able to block it initially, they came under strong pressure. The whites argued from expediency, claiming that “meeting in an annual conference with the colored brethren hedges up their access to a class of people they might otherwise reach, and bring into the church.” With the support of Bishop Randolph Foster, the white ministers persuaded the African Americans to accept a separation if the white members still wanted it at the

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<sup>16</sup> *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Baltimore, Maryland, May 1-31, 1876*, ed. by George W. Woodruff (NY: Nelson & Phillips, 1876), 130, 145, 152, 164, 170, 177-178, 188, 195, 206, 235, 245, 280, 287-288, 325-331.

<sup>17</sup> E. O. Haven, “No Separate Conferences for Whites,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (July 3, 1873), rpt. from the *Christian Advocate*.

<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the General Conference,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (June 1, 1876).

<sup>19</sup> James B. Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton UP, 2005), 21-26, 44-48.

<sup>20</sup> “Editorial Notes,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Aug. 3, 1876).

next session. That made it a foregone conclusion. One white minister who stood by the African Americans was John Braden, a missionary who had come down from New York to assume the presidency of Central Tennessee College and who for years endured the taunts of whites who referred to the school as “John Braden’s Nigger College.” Braden lamented, “The divisionists have the popular feeling of the whole South against the colored man in their favor, they have the great majority of the last general conference in sympathy with the divisionist movement, and the Bishops presiding at the conferences are not careful to conceal their views of the matter, and generally they favor the separation.”<sup>21</sup> With all that stacked against them, one by one the conferences would yield to division.

### Aristide E. P. Albert

African-American leaders in the M. E. Church were caught between a commitment to defending what they called their “manhood rights” and a desire to cultivate friendly relations with whites. Criticism of the Church itself also tended to be muted by their deep loyalty and gratitude for the help they had received.<sup>22</sup> A case in point is A. E. P. Albert, who became a major voice of black Methodists through his role in editing the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*. Although his father was a white Frenchman, Albert was born into slavery on a sugar plantation in 1853 and knew the horrors of that system. He and his mother were able to escape to Union lines when New Orleans fell in 1862, and he began a long struggle to educate himself that took him to Atlanta for four years of study at Atlanta University and Clark University and culminated in a theological degree from Straight University. He taught school in both Georgia and Louisiana, and in both places experienced the reign of terror that Southern whites inflicted on aspiring African Americans during Reconstruction. He entered the ministry in 1880, and the following year he was appointed the associate editor of the *Southwestern* by Joseph C. Hartzell, who had launched the paper as part of his mission in New Orleans.<sup>23</sup>

Working with Hartzell and his successor, L. P. Cushman, Albert joined the fight against the growing color line in the Methodist Episcopal Church. After the controversy in Tennessee, the paper stepped up its attacks, alleging that the push for division sprang from “prejudice the offspring of American slavery” and that in capitulating to it, the General Conference “lost by a single act the fruits of twenty-five years of victories.”<sup>24</sup> Albert had reason to fear

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<sup>21</sup> Rev. J. Braden, “By Lamplight,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Nov. 23, 1876); Annual Conference Minutes for 1876, GCAH; William Osburn, “Biographical Sketch of Rev. John Braden, D.D., and a Brief Tribute to His Memory,” and “A Hero Surrenders to Death,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (June 21, 1900). [Language original to the quotation.—Ed.]

<sup>22</sup> An excellent example of that balancing act is D. W. Hays, “Let Us Show More Manliness,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (May 1, 1890).

<sup>23</sup> Emerson Bentley, “The Associate Editor of the ‘South-Western,’” *Christian Advocate* (Mar. 16, 1882); Bennett, 71-72.

<sup>24</sup> “The Question of Division in Tennessee,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Aug. 30, 1877); see “The Colorline Legislation of 1876” and “As We See It,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Jan. 3, 1884).

that separate conferences would become “the entering wedge to a final separation in the general conference,” and he urged readers of the *Southwestern* to “do and say everything against the unreasonable prejudice that seeks to alienate us from our best friends . . . . Contend for equality; show backbone, grit and grace, but let us stay together and fight it out.”<sup>25</sup>

When the Freedmen’s Aid Society established a university for whites in Chattanooga that refused to consider the applications of African Americans, Albert played a pivotal role at the General Conference of 1884 in crafting a policy to forbid exclusion. It was probably no coincidence, however, that the same General Conference defeated Albert’s initial bid to become editor of the *Southwestern* in favor of Marshall W. Taylor, a fellow African American who had claimed on the basis of his own experiences in Ohio that “it is not a ‘color’ but a character line which exists in the M. E. Church.” In contrast to Albert, Taylor counseled that African Americans in the Church “will have ‘to labor and to wait.’” He preferred during his brief tenure to aim his barbs at the African Methodist denominations rather than the whites in the M. E. Church.<sup>26</sup> After that rebuff, Albert sought to demonstrate his loyalty to the Church by changing his position on separate conferences. In an article billed as “A New Departure,” he acknowledged that separate conferences were a means of developing leadership and self-government and only asked that their conferences be treated as separate but equal. His change of heart brought a quick and stinging rebuttal from his former ally L. P. Cushman, alleging that Albert’s New Departure was part of a cynical ploy to advance himself in the Church.<sup>27</sup> Albert’s reversal proved temporary, and ten years later he was again condemning division on the color line as “a great blunder and an unpardonable sin.”<sup>28</sup>

## The Activist

Albert got his chance to edit the *Southwestern Christian Advocate* when he stepped in following Taylor’s unexpected death in 1887, and the General Conference subsequently elected him to the position in 1888. He proved to be a fearless advocate for his people when the opportunity arose to take up an issue that had long rankled him: the rise of Jim Crow segregation on Southern rail lines. Frequent articles and editorials in the *Southwestern* complained about the treatment of respectable African Americans forced to

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<sup>25</sup> A. E. P. Albert, “The Color Line,” *What They Say; Or, Echoes from Birmingham* (New Orleans: Southwestern Office, 1883), 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Lovingood, *The University of Chattanooga: Sixty Years* (University of Chattanooga, 1947), 33-44; *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Philadelphia, May 1-28, 1884* ed. David S. Monroe (N.Y.: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), 82-83, 234-235, 248, 254, 246-248, 280, 299-300, 305, 334; Marshall W. Taylor, “What I Know About a Color Line in the M. E. Church,” *What They Say*, 10-20; “Two Northern and Three Methodist Episcopal Churches ‘South,’” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Aug. 5, 1886).

<sup>27</sup> A. E. P. Albert, “A New Departure,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Apr. 22, 1886); L. P. Cushman, “Kicking Guns,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Apr. 29, 1886).

<sup>28</sup> “‘Shall We Perpetuate the Color Line?’” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (May 26, 1896).

share cars with vile, sometimes vicious whites.<sup>29</sup> What was different about Albert was his determination to do something about it. In an 1889 editorial decrying such segregation as a “stamp of degradation [*sic*] and inferiority,” Albert called for a boycott and legal challenges.<sup>30</sup>

Albert’s activism propelled him to the chairmanship of the local chapter of the American Citizens’ Equal Rights Association of Louisiana, a key organization in the run-up to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case that famously challenged the Separate Car Law. In his role as chairman, Albert helped to build an alliance between the blacks of New Orleans and the Creoles of color who were in the forefront of opposition but who often looked down on the former slaves.<sup>31</sup> In testimony before the state legislature, Albert assured the legislators that the Association was committed to “the most friendly and fraternal relations between all classes” and “the promotion of peace and prosperity,” and that they had no interest in “social equality and Negro supremacy.” He protested, however, that the Separate Car Law then under consideration, while it ostensibly “provides for equal accommodation . . . is based upon caste. It assumes certain reasons why the one race is unfit to sit in the same railway coach with the other, to their great mortification.” He concluded, “Pass no law to oppress nor to humiliate them and they will ever prove as faithful to you as the needle to the pole.”<sup>32</sup>

Albert’s tone of moderation, even when most forcefully advocating for equal rights, was entirely characteristic of the African Americans who rose to leadership in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Albert not only spoke against segregation; he put his own body on the line. In December of 1891, he purchased a first-class ticket for a train from Houston to New Orleans and gained admission to the Pullman car by impressing the sleeping car conductor, “a Northern man,” as being “a dignified and cultured Christian gentleman.” A mob of white passengers, led by “a beer-bloated 250-pounder,” threatened to turn him over to the sheriff when the train stopped in Beaumont, but was dissuaded by the conductor. The narrow escape drew numerous expressions of sympathy and proved helpful in the campaign to raise funds for the legal fight to test the constitutionality of the law.<sup>33</sup> Although a number of prominent white leaders in the M. E. Church contributed, Albert’s notoriety may have been a factor in his again losing an election for the editor of the

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. A. J. Howard, “Race Discrimination on Railroads,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Nov. 14, 1889); “A ‘Jim Crow’ Car,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Apr. 20, 1893); “That Odious Jim Crow Law Again,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (May 4, 1893); “‘You Can, and You Can’t,’” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Nov. 9, 1893).

<sup>30</sup> “A Coach for Negroes,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (July 11, 1889).

<sup>31</sup> Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow*, 85-88; Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2010), ch. 3.

<sup>32</sup> “Pleas Against Class Legislation, by Rev. A. E. P. Albert, D. D.,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (June 19, 1890).

<sup>33</sup> “Dr. Albert Narrowly Escapes a Texas Jail,” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Dec. 17, 1891). Letters of support appeared in the issues of Dec. 24, 1891, and Dec. 31, 1891, followed by frequent notices about fund-raising.

*Southwestern Christian Advocate* at the General Conference of 1892.<sup>34</sup>

### The New Negro

Albert's successors at the *Southwestern* continued to speak out on public issues such as lynching, and the internal politics of the denomination also remained contentious. By the 1890s, the main issue had become the election of an African-American bishop. It was not a new concern and tended to resurface every four years as the next General Conference approached. At first the argument for a bishop of African descent was largely defensive, presented as an answer to the African Methodist critics who charged that in the M. E. Church African Americans "are regarded and treated as inferiors."<sup>35</sup> However, many white Methodists dismissed that argument on the grounds that bishops should not be elected simply on the basis of color. They counseled African-American members to be patient and assured them that a colored bishop would be elected as soon as a qualified candidate appeared. For a time, the relative inexperience of blacks in the Church hierarchy made this argument difficult to answer. As one admitted, "it is infinitely humiliating for us to ask the General Conference to elect a Negro to the office of a Bishop, simply because he is a Negro."<sup>36</sup> E. W. S. Hammond, Albert's successor as the *Southwestern's* editor, would call this their "Scylla and Charybdis," that whenever the issue came up, "he is reminded by one class of friends that he must not draw the color line, and by the other class that the question is premature."<sup>37</sup>

By the 1890s, however, their patience was fraying, and letters to the *Southwestern* began to take a more forceful tone. One writer asserted "that the time has come for the election of a colored bishop, and we strongly favor agitating the issue."<sup>38</sup> Another argued that a double standard was being applied and asked, "What evidence has any man ever given, before his election, of his fitness for this holy office?"<sup>39</sup> More importantly, the maturing leadership of men who had come up through the Freedmen's Aid Society schools put the lie to the claim that there were no qualified candidates. Most prominent among the group was J. W. E. Bowen. Born in New Orleans in 1855, Bowen had risen from poverty to become one of the most highly educated African Americans in the country, earning a bachelor's degree from New Orleans University; a master's at Central Tennessee College (while teaching ancient languages there); and both the Bachelor of Sacred Theology and Ph.D. degrees from Boston University—where for a time he lived on lem-

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<sup>34</sup> Albert was narrowly defeated by E. W. S. Hammond, an African American originally from Baltimore. *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Philadelphia, May 1-28, 1884* ed. by David S. Monroe (N.Y.: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 294-295. See also Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow*, 91-93.

<sup>35</sup> M. Dale, "The Colored Bishop Question," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Sept. 4, 1879).

<sup>36</sup> R. T. Adams, "Versus Negro Bishop," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Apr. 12, 1888).

<sup>37</sup> "Race Distinction and Caste," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Mar. 12, 1896).

<sup>38</sup> D. W. Hays, "Suggestions on Timely Topics," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Dec. 31, 1891).

<sup>39</sup> T. C. Clendinning, "Colored Bishops," *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (May 5, 1892).

onade and doughnuts. After a series of successful pastorates Bowen was appointed in 1893 to the chair of historical theology in Gammon Theological Seminary.<sup>40</sup>

From his new base in Atlanta, Bowen became involved in ambitious projects in partnership with I. Garland Penn, another talented young black Methodist. Most notable was their role in the Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895, where Penn directed the creation of the Negro Building as a showcase for African American achievement. Bowen delivered the keynote address at the opening of the building, and it makes for an interesting comparison to the more famous Atlanta Compromise speech given by Booker T. Washington at the Exposition a month earlier. While Bowen paid tribute to Washington and echoed his emphasis on gradualism and racial self-help, he also went further than Washington in his call for “equality of opportunity.” Bowen insisted that the African American must be a worker not just with his hands, but “a worker in the realm of the mind, contributing to the thought products of mankind.” To that end, “the education of the Negro must be on a par with the education of the white man.” With the development of his capacity for thought, Bowen concluded: “a new Negro has come upon the stage of action . . . . With this new birth of the soul, he longs for an opportunity to grow into the proportions of a new and diviner manhood that shall take its place in the ranks of one common humanity.”<sup>41</sup> Like a number of people who were connected to the Freedmen’s Aid Society, Bowen respected Washington but did not want to limit African Americans to the industrial education Washington promoted. He was essentially a moderate and refused to join W. E. B. DuBois in publicly opposing Washington.<sup>42</sup>

Bowen’s other contribution to the Exposition was the key role he played in organizing the Congress on Africa, dedicated to promoting the cause of missions there. Gammon Seminary was also home to the Stewart Missionary Foundation, a major initiative of the M. E. Church that sought to involve African Americans more fully in missions to Africa.<sup>43</sup> In a real sense, the missionary field became a place where African Americans could take on leadership roles that were denied them at home. When Joseph Hartzell was elected Missionary Bishop for Africa at the General Conference of 1896, one of his first projects was to recruit aspiring African Americans to take over the Methodist mission in Liberia.

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<sup>40</sup> James M. Washington, “John Wesley Edward Bowen, Sr.: The Public Theology of an African American Theological Educator, 1887-1915,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 47 (1993): 103-105; J. R. Van Pelt, “John Wesley Edward Bowen,” *Journal of Negro History* 19 (April, 1934): 217-219.

<sup>41</sup> J. W. E. Bowen, “An Appeal to the King,” *Christian Advocate* (Nov. 14, 1895). Orig. published in *Atlanta Constitution* (Oct. 22, 1895).

<sup>42</sup> Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1981), 18-21, 30-33, 37, 71-72.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Harris, “Racial Identity and the Civilizing Mission: Double-Consciousness at the 1895 Congress on Africa,” *Religion and American Culture* (Summer, 2008): 145-176.

### The “Colored Bishop” Campaign

Strong efforts were made to elect Bowen in 1896, 1900, and 1904, but each fell short. In 1896, he actually had the highest vote total of any candidate on the first ballot, though still far short of the number needed to elect. After the second ballot, however, his count fell off rapidly, and there was some suggestion afterward that the vote in his favor was intended “merely as a hollow compliment to the colored brother.”<sup>44</sup> Dismissing those allegations, the African-American leadership set its sights on 1900.

Spearheading the campaign was Isaiah B. Scott, the latest black editor of the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*. In a series of editorials, Scott built a more elaborate and practical argument for electing a colored bishop, essentially grounded in an acceptance of their separate but equal status. He began by observing that, setting aside all the good reasons for opposing separate conferences, they had “given us a degree of self respect, self reliance and a leadership that is as creditable to the race as it is gratifying to the church.” Promising that they would propose nothing radical and had no intent to quit the M. E. Church, Scott asserted that “we are intensely convinced that the church cannot do the work of the Master among our people as it should be done without a colored bishop.” He explained in the second installment, “The social and economic conditions of the Negro race in the South make a problem for the religious leaders of the race that can best be solved by those most fully conversant with those conditions.” Scott recognized that segregation was perpetuating the social relations of slavery, creating both practical and affective walls between black Methodists and even the most well intentioned white bishops. Hemmed in as they were by racial oppression, the black church had come to play a special role in their communities, and Scott understood that a black bishop could function more effectively than a white as a guide and inspiration for racial uplift.<sup>45</sup>

Scott’s editorials elicited an impressive outpouring of letters to the *Southwestern* building on his points. Again, it was not enough. This time, Bowen received 211 votes on the first ballot, sixty-four more than in 1896 and the second highest total of any candidate, but still less than the number needed to elect. As before, however, he was unable to pick up additional support as the field narrowed.<sup>46</sup> One essential difference between white and black candidates was that few delegates were open to switching their votes to an African American. As it turned out, the first black bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church to emerge out of the Freedmen’s Aid Society schools was

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<sup>44</sup> *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Cleveland, Ohio, May 1-28, 1896*, ed. David S. Monroe (NY: Eaton & Mains, 1896), 439-440; “Was the Vote Merely Complimentary?” *Zion’s Herald* (July 1, 1896).

<sup>45</sup> “Shall We Elect a Colored Bishop?” *Southwestern Christian Advocate* (Feb. 22, Mar. 1, and Mar. 8, 1900).

<sup>46</sup> Van Pelt, “John Wesley Edward Bowen,” 220; J. W. E. Bowen, *An Appeal for Negro Bishops, But No Separation* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1912), 55-56; *Christian Advocate* (May 24, 1900).

not Bowen but Isaiah Scott, who was elected missionary bishop resident in Liberia in 1904.<sup>47</sup> The difference between missionary bishops and other bishops was that missionary bishops were not given the general superintendency that bestowed authority throughout the Church. The difficulty in electing an African American bishop with that degree of power clearly reflected a reluctance to put such a man in authority over white Church members. Scott was charged with overseeing the work of his fellow black missionaries in the task of bringing racial uplift to Liberia.

The fact that African Americans, who remained the object of Methodist missions, were also being recruited as missionaries is not surprising, but it is indicative of their liminal status. As they rose through the leadership ranks, they found that the creation of a uniquely biracial denomination did not purge the spirit of racial caste. On the contrary, it was becoming clear that northern Methodists felt a greater kinship with other white Methodists than with their black co-religionists, and a movement was underway toward reuniting with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. A condition of that unification, which finally occurred in 1939, was that black Methodists would be more separated than ever within the denomination.<sup>48</sup> The election in 1920 of Robert E. Jones and Matthew Clair as the first full-fledged bishops of African descent in the Methodist Episcopal Church did nothing to change that. In the face of growing segregation in the post-Reconstruction South, what had begun as a mission to help African Americans develop their own leaders for uplifting their communities had developed by the end of the century into a stubborn resistance to their full inclusion in the workings of the denomination.

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<sup>47</sup> Liberian Methodists had resident bishops between 1858 and 1875, but they were a special case. Francis Burns and his successor, John Wright Roberts, were elected by the Liberia Annual Conference under authorization from the General Conference. Scott was thus the first colored bishop elected by the General Conference (Theodore L. Flood and John W. Hamilton, eds., *Lives of Methodist Bishops* [NY: Phillips & Hunt, 1882], 376-480).

<sup>48</sup> Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era* (NY: NYU Press, 2008); Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930-1975* (Columbus: U Missouri P, 2004).