ABSTRACT

A Power for Good in the Church: Women's Organizations within the Black Baptist Church in Texas, 1880-1895

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Black Baptist churches across the United States found themselves facing an unique opportunity at the end of the Civil War. One of the most frequent topics to be discussed was what role women should play, not only in the local churches but also in the regional Baptist associations. This thesis traces the question of women's roles in the church from the debates and presentations in the early black Texas associations to the development a few years later of official women's organization within the black Baptist churches. The thesis provides insight into why the women's organizations developed within this small time frame formed a close relationship with missions organizations. Associational minutes as well as speeches are used to show the diversity of opinions present in the Texas churches at the close of the nineteenth century.

“A Power for Good in the Church”: Women’s Organizations within the Black Baptist Churches in Texas, 1880-1895.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In 1894 M. E. Terrell stood before the men who had elected him to the presidency of the American Baptist Free Mission State Sunday School Convention, and used his time at the podium not to give an overview of the work of the convention over the past year, but to praise the newly formed Woman's Home Mission Convention. Only one year after being formed the women's group had revived many of the struggling congregations which made up the convention. Terrell chided those pastors who had not yet organized a branch of the Woman's Home Mission Convention in their home churches saying that, "The churches that have these societies are by far the most energetic and progressive; notwithstanding some of our pastors do not encourage them in their churches." He went on to state that it was at the expense of the spiritual health of the congregation when there was no local women's society. "Woman was the first to carry the gospel tidings . . . holds a prominent place in the Bible . . . and until this day she wields a power for good in the Church.”[1]

Terrell’s speech in 1894 stemmed from an active decade long debate in black Baptist Texas churches and associations. His conclusion that women should not only be active in the local church but that pastors should encourage such behavior was only one of the results of this conversation. By the mid 1890s the question of what role women should occupy in the church dominated discussion in nearly every black Baptist association in Texas. The answers were varied, ranging from that of childcare providers to active missionaries. And the reasoning behind each answer was equally complex as Texans sorted through their quickly changing society.

Every group in history has a complex story to tell; identities are not forged by isolated events leading to neat conclusions, but rather by an assorted mix of circumstances and struggles. The Texas women at the center of the black Baptist churches were no different. Their every day existence was greatly shaped by their place in post-reconstruction society, but they did not define their lives' purpose solely by their place in that society.[2] Although they benefited from and often supported various progressive political movements, they refused to become fully aligned with any one cause that would compromise their faith. These women exhibited a spirit of enthusiasm that matched other Texans of their time, but they were not deceived into believing that the society being put into place was in fact the best Texas could offer to them. With the pressures of new political and economic structures beginning to shape their lives the Baptist women rallied together in their churches to develop communities to accomplish their goals within the larger social realm. Before looking at the debates involving women in church life, it is necessary to look back at how the African American community was formed after the Civil War. Issues of family identity, labor disputes, and citizenship rights framed black women's lives. After examining the religious and social climate, this study will trace the debates within the Texas regional Baptist associations regarding what role women would be allowed to fulfill publicly in their local churches and in the wider associations. The answers to these questions not only determined the future for Texas women in the black Baptist churches, but also the resulting organizational structures, as the Baptist churches developed a more concrete infrastructure than was possible directly following emancipation.

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[1] *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Session of the American Baptist Free Mission State Sunday School Convention Held at Conroe, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1894), 25.

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[2] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 121.

Lives of black women in Texas during the 1860s and 1870s looked different across the state. Many families lived and worked on farms where they had been slaves just a few short years before while others had broken all ties to their former masters and set out on their own dangerous journeys. Most black Texas women lived in the rural areas of central and eastern parts of the state, where they had recently been slaves on the cotton farms. The success of cotton in these areas resulted in a higher concentration of slaves compared to the rest of the state. Regardless of their specific family and labor conditions, the identities of most black women in Texas, like those of their counterparts across the nation, were wrapped up in their adjustment to an emancipated society. The social landscape these individuals faced was cold and intimidating, quickly forcing them to relinquish any ideas of grand equality coming with emancipation.

During the war news of emancipation reached different parts of the South at various points. Some slave communities assumed that as Union troops came through town that they would be automatically freed, but as those troops left town so did the reality of freedom and life reverted back to the old system.[3] Due to the physical distance from much of the warfare, communities in rural Texas were some of the last groups to learn of emancipation.[4] The newly freed slaves, while thrilled with the prospect of freedom, were unsure of how to exercise the rights of emancipation. Families faced hard choices in deciding whether or not to leave the only home they had known in order to set out in pursuit of a better life.

Many chose to remain with their former masters, often claiming that they would only stay through the next harvest. This initial decision held enormous significance for each person and family. For rural communities it was much harder to envision what life would look like away from the farms. They had no experience with any other type of labor, and often no means to gain that experience without a significant journey away from the only place they had ever known.

Even by choosing to remain on farms where they had recently been slaves, people were exercising their freedom of choice, the first decision that a family could make without needing the approval of their former masters.[5] Frequently cited reasons for remaining on the farms ranged from a desire to help the white farmers with one last harvest, to elderly slaves not being physically able to relocate, to a hope of remaining in place so that displaced family member could find their way back to them.[6] No matter the reason, this mental independence from white control was immediately groundbreaking in so far as its effect on southern society. No longer did these families live in complete fear of their white counterparts. Although they had chosen to remain, often in the same exact location they had once been enslaved, it did not mean these individuals did not prize their freedom. The eagerness to assume "the graces of civilized life" manifested itself in ways which many of the whites found disturbing.[7] Unsure of what society would soon look like, the white population began to draw back from societal customs which previously had encouraged a close interaction between the races.

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[3] Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction: 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 30.

[4] James Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans during Reconstruction* (London: Kinnikat, 1981), 17-18.

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[5] Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of* Slavery (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979), 183.

[6] Foner, 38.

[7] Litwack, 228-44.

Individuals who did decide to relocate after the war did so for a variety of reasons, most of which the white population wrote off as excuses for the real motivation of acting out against white society. Many former slaves found the initial adjustment hard due to the practical difficulties of not having open access to transportation and jobs. They often found themselves lured away from their homes by less than honest advertising on the part of some cities and industries. Certain areas, specifically Texas, had been advertised as a "land of milk and honey," yet some people expended all of their resources to get there only to discover that finding a decent job was not any easier than in the area from which they had come.[8]

The reality in the cities was often far too few jobs for the number of workers, as well as an increased social tension as high numbers of freed people began to flood the towns. New migrants to the urban areas found it extremely difficult to be successful with most of the established city dwellers working against them either out of a blanket racial fear or a fear for job competition.[9] The Freedman's Bureau opened Texas offices in 1865 under the leadership of Major General Edgar Gregory. Gregory viewed his main role in Texas as establishing a free labor system for the former slaves. He pressed black workers to stay where they had been formerly enslaved and sign contracts to work on the farms rather than add to the population crisis in the cities.[10]

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[8] Ibid., 306.

[9] Foner, 61-65.

Immediately after the war new laws were created which became known as the Black Codes. Under the banner of protecting the African American population from the hardships of the free market, local governments began to legislate exactly what citizens could and could not do. The most overarching laws were those pertaining to the restriction of mobility for the black population. By not allowing individuals to travel and search for work, these laws forced many freedmen and women to approach their former masters in hopes of finding a job.[11] Although the Texas law did specify many rights, its silence on other topics allowed for local courts to determine the extent to which the black citizens could participate in Texas society. The act did not grant voting rights; however, it did explicitly ban black children from the right to attend public schools. Other legal rights, such as gun and property ownership, given freely to white citizens were severely limited to black individuals. The Black Codes demanded permits and fees be paid in order for black citizens to wield the same individual rights as their white counterparts.[12]

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[10] Smallwood, 33.

[11] Donald G. Nieman, *To Set the Law in Motion: The Freedman's Bureau and the Legal Rights of Blacks, 1865-1868* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1979), 72-74.

With the election cycle of 1866 came a drastic change in the federal government. Republicans took control of Congress and immediately began revising many of President Johnson's Reconstruction policies. Congressional Reconstruction established martial law in the many southern states, putting all state and local government under strict federal scrutiny.[13] The Congress also began a process which repealed state laws found to be discriminatory. Soon all Black Codes had been declared void, but social unrest remained as southern white citizens developed new means of discriminating against the black population. State legislatures reacted immediately by crafting all new laws in terms that were not outright racially charged, but in reality would only apply to the poorest of workers, the majority of whom were black.[14]

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[12] Ibid., 76-91.

[13] Foner, 270.

[14] Nieman, 95.

In spite of the difficulties presented by the new discriminatory laws and unofficial means of persecution, African American laborers in the South found themselves in a unique position at the bargaining table for employment in the 1870s. Texas farmers were forced to use former slaves in order to keep their production at profitable levels.[15] White land holders developed a skewed perception of the labor force. They viewed the former slaves as disloyal, ungrateful, and possibly even immoral for abandoning what the land owners viewed as their proper roles within agricultural society. With this characterization in their minds it was nearly impossible for land owners to believe that the labor force of mostly freedmen would contain anything other than untrustworthy undisciplined workers.[16] On the other hand, the workers also had certain presumptions about their employers. Many had been abused and treated as less than human for most of their lives, and therefore did not expect the perpetrators of those crimes to be respectable employers. Much like the fear of the unknown that existed in the social environment, a tension immediately rose up between the races in dealing with issues of work and production. Both white missionaries and black leaders stressed the importance of self-help and employment to the faltering African American workforce, however the reality was often mistreatment by former slave owners.[17]

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[15] Lawrence D. Rice, *The Negro in Texas: 1874-1890* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Stat University Press, 1971), 99-103.

[16] Foner, 59-63.

Where as being seen as a valuable piece of property had once provided some protection to black individuals, even from people other than their owners, after emancipation whites were not restrained in their violence. In fact, many cited the new "social unrest" as justification for a wave of violence. Isolated incidents of violence drew little attention from communities, as most white citizens defended the attacks with little evidence claiming that the black victims deserved the beatings for violating social norms. It seemed as though the whites who were grieving their loss of power through the downfall of the institution of slavery, reclaimed a sense of that authority through attacking freed people with whom they had not been previously associated. Although initially Union troops had provided some protection for black individuals, after the 1860s black communities were left with little or no help from local and state governments in combating this violence.[18]

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[17] Rice, 110-25.

Frustrated both by the authorities and the violence encountered in society some black workers tried to organize resistance to the laws, only to find themselves quickly out of work with no way to provide for their families. Throughout the end of the century sharecropping and stringent employment contracts plunged the African American population deeper into dependency on white society. The only means of true autonomy was found in land ownership, which due to a lack of capital was extremely difficult for most black Texas families.[19] Although many aspects of the workforce changed, white landowners specifically lamented the loss of black female labor directly following emancipation. They accused black women of acting beyond their social class and mimicking the roles they saw in white middle-class life. Although some black women did retreat from the work force all together, most simply altered the way in which they worked. The economic difficulties presented to black families during the late 1860s and early 1870s forced black women to help provide materially for the family. Although many of these women had worked in the fields as slaves, their freedom now allowed them to choose where and when they would work.[20]

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[18] Ibid., 132.

[19] Ibid., 168.

Although many white planters searched for white labor to meet their needs, the reality was that there was no way to continue production of agricultural goods at the same level without utilizing the African American workforce. This was found to be particularly true on the large expanses of cotton farms in central and eastern Texas. Although the Texas population grew rapidly throughout the end of the century, an intense economic depression hit agriculture hard in the 1870s and then again in the 1890s. Texas remained the nation's top producer of cotton although the value of land plummeted.[21] Those farms which did survive with fewer workers experienced a drastic shift in their way of life. No longer did the land owner and family experience the lives of luxury to which many had been accustomed prior to the war. [22] In order to survive in the rough economy, white families would physically have to perform the menial jobs that they had once deemed uncivilized for their social class.[23] While this affected all members of the family, it was an especially drastic change for many white women, who had previously only provided a supervisory role in running household affairs, and were now forced to take on the day to day tasks involved in preparing food and cleaning the house.[24]

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[20] Foner, 38-39.

[21] Rice, 217.

[22] Smallwood, 120-38.

White women were not alone in facing changing family structures in light of the new pressures from the economy. Although under slavery each gender had separate roles to fulfill, "slave men did not function as economic breadwinners . . . within the household. In a sense, slavery had imposed on black men and women the rough 'equality' of powerlessness."[25] Although women often did work outside the home after slavery, they still focused most of their attention on domestic matters; this, in addition to unequal wages, resulted in men becoming the chief economic provider for the families. Within the new family structure a sense of patriarchy developed that had not previously existed among African American families. Black men who found it frustratingly hard to exercise their new freedom in a faltering prejudiced economy, grasped on to the new power provided within the family structure. Families which were already under the stress of relocating and surviving in the harsh social environment also underwent the pains of redefining their family structures as men increasingly took on roles of leadership within the household.[26]

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[24] Litwack, 360-62.

[25] Foner, 39.

During these formative years in black civil society a very interesting paradigm of power had developed. The community had risen from being a powerless group mostly enslaved by the richest class of society to an independent segment of society that had the ability to form its own infrastructure. Emancipation did not give the black community power or even status in the eyes of their white counterparts, but rather the potential to undermine the white power structures.[27] As white society began to draw back and eventually lash out in defense of its way of life, black citizens slowly began to shape a community alongside that of their white counterparts. Although this new community did not wield significant power in the larger society, its institutions began serving a vital role in the lives of black Texans. In order to survive the harsh economy, racial discrimination, and blatant violence black institutions had to function in a way that would provide vital support to their members, helping them survive from day to day.[28] Yet, within the institutions that gave this vital support, such as families, schools and churches, power hierarchies began to form which were very similar to the white paternalistic examples.

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[26] Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 37-45.

[27] Smallwood, 54.

This thesis focuses on what happened in the black Baptist churches from 1870-1900, specifically how the communities engaged questions dealing with what roles women would fulfill in the churches. After looking at the larger picture of the churches' development apart from, and often in spite of, white benefactors, this study will examine the debates over women's roles within the Texas Baptist associations, giving time to both male and female voices from the discussions. The study will also look at what roles women played in those very discussions. The study will conclude by examining the specific organizational roles that women filled within black Baptist churches. Some of the associations did not come to a clear answer on the scriptural rights of women to hold leadership positions in the church body, but rather let that issue lay undecided as they embarked on what seemed like practical solutions to their questions. Most congregations found that pairing the women's organizational and fund raising skills with newly found missions organizations allowed both groups to flourish. The intertwining of the two movements allowed women to contribute heavily to the greater mission of the church while not requiring the associations to come to a resolute answer on whether women should be granted full equality in church life. These solutions did not necessarily reflect the discussions that had taken place, but rather the groups' inclinations to make practical decisions by assigning women to help in an area where their strengths could be utilized immediately. These new women's and missions groups reflected a more concrete infrastructure than was possible in the social turmoil directly following emancipation. In spite of the patriarchal power system that was gaining ground in the African American community, even to the extent that it shaped the groups in question, these women's organizations gave their members a way to contribute to the mission of the church, therefore strengthening the community in an ever changing social setting.

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[28] William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the South 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Univeristy Press, 1993), 137-40.

CHAPTER TWO

Black Baptist Growth

Texas churches were not alone in asking questions about what role women would play in the regional associations and conventions. As black churches gained independence from their white counterparts after the Civil war, many church traditions were laid on the table for discussion. The importance of independent black churches developing in the period following the Civil War cannot be over emphasized. The black population hungered for a place of safe community to encourage one another through the hardships of freedom.[1] The rapid growth of independent congregations attested to the fact that the churches were quickly becoming the best suited institution to fulfill this need for community. In 1890 over 50 percent of black Americans were a part of a Baptist congregation. By 1906 that number had risen to over 60 percent.[2] Many black congregations were appalled at the refusal of the white southern church to admit that slavery had been wrong. They saw no way to reconcile the racist views the white churches were espousing with the equality that seemed to be implied in their newfound freedom. By the end of the 1860s, black churches realized that in order to meet the needs of their members, they would have to sever ties with the white Baptist churches. Local congregations that had once been affiliated with white Baptist churches during the antebellum period worked quickly to gain full independence from their former partners. The general movement of the black churches was quickly to define themselves as fully self-sufficient; in no way dependent upon white churches that were still supporting a defense of slavery.[3] Black Baptist leaders who had once preached the importance of abolition now began to preach that accepting Southern Baptist or oftentimes any white aid was simply reinforcing the paternalistic elements that had defined the relationship between white and black Americans for so long.[4] In order to distance themselves from their white southern counterparts, independent black Baptist preachers across the nation traced their theological traditions away from the former slave owners to the larger Baptist tradition.[5]

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[1] Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1985), 233-38.

[2] Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925,* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 46.

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[3] H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1972), 210-12.

[4] James Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), 64.

Of all the voices giving advice and warning to the fledgling black communities across the South, the school came alongside the church in demanding authority. Often times the two were so intertwined it was hard to tell them apart, with churches stressing the importance of education to their congregants. E. C. Morris, a prominent leader in the black Baptist church, often preached the importance of education before all other pursuits, claiming that if "we stop educating, we go backward toward slavery and eternal obscurity."[6] The importance of education and political power was publicly emphasized by the black community, most often in the local churches.

The impulse of black Baptists to define their identity apart from their white southern counterparts quickly carried over into the relationships between southern black communities and northern benefactors. Prior to the Civil War there was a small philanthropic movement in American society devoted to helping freed men and women be successful in society.[7] After the war this movement intensified as many northern churches, as well as humanitarian organizations, felt a call to duty regarding the masses of people experiencing newfound freedom.[8] Hundreds of volunteers headed south armed with good intentions. The focus of the individuals varied across a range of issues from education to finance to religion.

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[5] E. C. Morris, *Sermons, Addresses, and Reminiscences: and Important Correspondence*, (Nashville, Tennessee: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1901; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1980), 24.

[6] Ibid., 56.

The movement of northern philanthropists to aid the former slaves did not go unnoticed by the white southern churches. In 1866 at their first meeting since the end of the Civil War, the Southern Baptist Convention established a Committee on the Religious Instruction of the Colored People. This committee's purpose was to create a standard for Southern Baptist congregations to follow when engaging in services and ministries dealing with both races. One of the committee's earliest resolutions, however, was a claim of its superiority to northern congregations in providing charity to southern black communities. While the resolution did include the caveat that they were "not opposed to any rightminded man aiding in this important work," the implication was clear that the Southern Baptist

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[7] Washington, 28-32.

[8] William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the South 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Univeristy Press, 1993), 38-42.

Convention had no intention of welcoming northern volunteers who came south to help the black community.[9] Although this hostility was directed toward northern missionaries of both races, it was intensified when dealing with white missionaries. "Southern whites detested the Yankees who represented the imposition of northern authority, riding boldly into Dixie in the company of Federal troops and endeavoring to inculcate their repugnant northern values in the 'darkies,' educating them to become model citizens equal to whites and luring them out of the southern white churches and into northern denominations."[10]

Despite little support from southern white congregations northern denominations began to sponsor missionaries assigned specifically to minister to former slaves. In nearly every case these northern missionaries often had no concept of the realities of slavery and therefore found many black religious traditions to be absurd. Evaluating traditions against their line of reasoning and social norms, northern missionaries could often not find what they viewed to be legitimate theological reasons for some of the religious practices, particularly the more charismatic elements of worship, which one northern missionary claimed to be nothing more than a "relic of bondage."[11] Many northern missionaries believed that the communities must put all of their "customs, beliefs, and values" behind them in order to rid themselves of the baggage of slavery.[12] The missionaries often had a view of church history that focused on the white church in the South which had used religion to justify slavery. They believed that by coming in and helping the black churches to cull out anything that did not match their northern traditions they must be helping to rid the communities of the impact of a religion that had helped to enslave them. The missionaries failed to grasp that while white southerners had used their religion to defend their way of life, black communities had come to depend on their faith to sustain them through the horrors of that institution.[13] Although most black communities and individuals welcomed help from northern societies and missionaries, slowly an independent spirit began to take root in the black churches. As schools and congregations became the center of the black communities, the members of those institutions began to see the importance of taking on leadership roles themselves rather than relying on northern volunteers.

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[9] Washington, 63.

[10] Montgomery, 66.

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[11] Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979), 459.

[12] Montgomery, 45.

[13] Harvey, 9.

Beyond asking the freed men and women to lay aside much of their former belief system, the northern missionaries continued to display little understanding of the religious history of the communities in which they were ministering. Many of the black congregations had been adapting Christianity to fit their circumstances for over a hundred years, and yet the missionaries often spoke in language that relayed a sense that their audience knew nothing of the true Christian faith.[14] Aside from the misunderstanding on the part of the white missionaries, black congregations began to see a conflict of interest in having white individuals in leadership roles. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of Georgia from the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church often preached the importance of independence from the white benefactors to any congregation, Baptist or Methodist, which would allow him time to preach. He realized that former slaves only had superficial freedom until they were educated and could build a religion apart from their white patriarchal

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[14] Litwack, 461.

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experiences.[15] A growing distrust of white power structures in society added to the push to eliminate the influence of white individuals within the religious communities. Theophilus Steward an AME clergyman originally from New Jersey argued that white society had caused most of the problems in the world through capitalism and imperialism, and that in order for God's kingdom to be present on earth, white social structures would have to be replaced with more egalitarian means of rule. While most southern black believers did not study the theological motivation Steward was presenting, they did grasp the central point that white individuals should not control all aspects of society, particularly churches in black communities.[16]

Still many black pastors understood that by refusing partnership or sponsorship with northern churches, they were pushing away their only white allies. Southern white ministers claimed that Northern and black ministers were too political and needed to focus more on the gospel than on giving freed people more power in society. Although prior to the war many churches had served as home to both white and black congregants, such relationships deteriorated quickly after the war as social identity seemed to be controlled by fears of the other race. Black ministers who took control of the newly formed congregations quickly became the community symbol for independence and leadership, providing not only spiritual but also social and political direction for the communities.[17]

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[15] Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 62.

[16] Albert G. Miller, *Elevating the Race: Theophilus G. Steward, Black Theology, and the Making of an African American Civil Society, 1865-1924* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 77.

Baptist congregations, with their emphasis on personal experience and salvation, as well as their lack of focus on official hierarchy and education, grew the fastest in rural black communities across the South. In 1869, over three fourths of all black congregations in the country were identified as some form of Baptist or Methodist.[18] In Texas the Regular Baptists made up the largest single group of black believers with their membership representing over a fourth of the black population.[19] As the social roles of the church multiplied by taking on issues such as the reunification of families and providing material needs for members of the community, friction between the northern missionaries and native pastors continued to rise.[20] By 1870, many preachers were using warfare language in describing the importance of ridding the black denominations of white influence.[21]

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[17] Harvey, 23-55.

[18] Montgomery, 150.

[19] US Census Records 1870. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1870.htm> (27 February 2008).

Black Texans were not unified in all religious decisions. Some conflicts arose between the community's emphasis on education and the reality that most of the new preachers had not received formal seminary training. In religious traditions that treasured "gifts of the spirit" it was hard to condemn a pastor who seemed to be an excellent preacher simply for not having the correct education.[22] Many black denominations began to require all of their pastors to seek further education. Noticeably, the last large group to suggest theological training to its pastors was the Baptist associations. The Baptist churches continued to place an emphasis on congregationalism, a system in which each local church is independent from a larger governing body. This autonomous heritage made any top down mandate impossible if not heretical for the Baptist associations, so the push for education had to come slowly from individual congregations.[23] Congregations near large cities such as Houston and Dallas were the first to begin hiring only pastors who had some element of formal education, while rural congregations saw the push impractical. They did not have the ability to send their current pastors to school, nor the resources to compete with the city congregations in the hiring process for educated pastors.[24] This problem was unique to the Baptist churches in comparison with the next largest group in Texas, the AME churches, whose congregations by nature of their denomination's hierarchy were not in total control of hiring and assigning pastors to the local churches.[25]

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[20] Harvey, 62.

[21] Litwack, 467.

[22] Miller, 45.

While Baptist churches were slower to demand formal education for ministers, many other denominations were engaging the intellectual community. The Baptist church continued to gain prominence among the uneducated masses of workers and by 1890 a majority of black Americans were part of a Baptist congregation.[26] In Texas, over 1,500 out of 2,400 black congregations identified themselves as

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[23] Miller, 46-47.

[24] *Minutes of the Nineteenth Annual Session of the Texas Baptist State Convention held at Houston, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Printers, 1890), 21-23.

[25] Lawrence D. Rice, *The Negro in Texas: 1874-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 57-65.

[26] Harvey, 46.

Baptist.[27] William E. Montgomery, in his discussion of black church development during this time period, lists several factors that influenced the growth of the black Baptist church:

> Baptist theology blended particularly well with African religious traditions. The Baptists' insistence on baptism by immersion clearly distinguished them from other evangelical denominations and resembled some of the river ceremonies common in areas of West Africa . . . . More important, Baptist polity attracted blacks who wanted independence from white control. The principle of congregationalism allowed for the accommodation of a wide range of beliefs and practices. . . . Congregationalism also facilitated the proliferation of Baptist churches by allowing new congregations to form and old ones to divide.[28]

The explosive growth in black Baptist churches soon led to the need for a more sophisticated network both on local and national levels.

The Baptist churches built their network from the ground up, often forging relationships by helping one another out with structural tasks such as finding a place to meet or recommending possible preachers to a neighboring congregation. Quickly, informal local networks morphed into official regional associations, consisting of anywhere from 15 to 180 congregations, depending on the size large of cities within the association’s area of influence. The regional associations provided a place for representatives of different congregations to gather and help one another with various issues.[29] The regional associations led to state-wide conventions and eventually national organizations that could represent the masses of newly formed independent black churches. In 1880 over a hundred pastors met in Montgomery, Alabama to form the Baptist Mission Convention. This association grew over the next decade and a half; then in 1895 it merged with two slightly smaller conventions in order to form the National Baptist Convention of the United States of America (NBC).[30] This convention rapidly reached a position of power and prestige within the black community.

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[27] US Census Records, 1890. <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890a_v9-01.pdf> (27 Feburary 2008).

[28] Montgomery, 107.

The NBC established organizations and doctrines which were protective and encouraging of the extremely vulnerable independent congregations. A quick look at some of the earliest catechisms from the convention shows this devotion to providing for the weakest in the group. Although an officially published statement of doctrine seemed contradictory to the theological autonomy that Baptist congregations define themselves by, the NBC saw the need to quickly build a sense of community among black Baptists. The catechism was written to fill this need, "for the purpose of giving to the thousands of Baptists who [did] not have [the] opportunity of attending the annual meetings . . . a chance to learn the objects, aims and purposes of [the] Convention." The second point in the catechism affirmed this sense of overwhelming community by stating that the NBC represented "about one-third of all the Baptists in the world, and nearly all the colored Baptists."[31] Likewise, many of the subsequent questions dealt with the background and organization of the NBC rather than the specific beliefs of the group. Some points of concern dealt with the educational and missions boards, which both were formed within a year of the NBC's founding. The catechism was very consistent in stressing that each organization under the NBC should be readily available to serve the needs of black Baptists throughout the nation.[32]

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[29] Fitts, 64.

[30] Ibid., 87-90.

One of the immediate needs of many black Baptists was that of a way to spread information. By 1890 many of the white presses throughout the South were beginning to refuse to print works written by black pastors, understanding that allowing the authors access to publication was allowing them access to social gain. "Any request for a greater share of social power struck most white power brokers as unreasonable, if not absurd."[33] Black authors had to look elsewhere to publish their work; however, the opportunities for black authors to publish continued to decrease in the five years leading up to the formation of the NBC. In 1896 the NBC established the National Baptist Publication Board in Nashville. The National Baptist Publication Board provided state of the art technology for publishing in the black community.[34] Armed with a publishing house, annual meetings, and an ever-growing membership, black Baptist churches became the cornerstone of their communities across the South.

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[31] Morris, 151.

[32] Ibid., 151-60.

Women within the church body faced a different set of struggles as they began to engage in the new social structures that freedom was offering. They felt compelled to act on behalf of their newly founded associations, yet there was no consensus as to what role they should be fulfilling in the church. Across the nation black women had to forge new paths for their gender in order to provide the support their race desperately needed.[35] Many local congregations formed women's organizations, which served as a place for women to minister to specific needs in the church. The women's groups quickly grew to become one of the most public arms of the black church. "As had been true all along, the women of the church played the leading part in nurturing the community. Because they were a sizeable majority of the communicants (nearly two-thirds), they were able to give strong direction to the church."[36] On a local level the earliest women's organizations faced the same bitter decisions the larger denominations had between choosing to receive funding from seemingly well intentioned white women's groups, or creating a truly unique structure to give emotional, economic, and physical comfort to the black community.[37] In Texas the women of the Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association, one of the largest associations in the state with over 160 congregations, dealt with this issue directly in 1890. They passed a resolution which affirmed that white women's groups were acting out of good intentions, but in order for their communities to thrive the black women must lead their own local groups.[38]

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[33] Washington, 159.

[34] Ibid., 90-91.

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[35] Dorothy Salem, *Black Women in United States History* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), 79-83.

[36] Montgomery, 229.

[37] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-18.

Within this young community of churches trying to establish themselves despite the racial tensions in society, Texas congregations had multiple advantages over their counterparts in other states. Many of the differences stemmed from the fact that most of Texas did not physically experience the Civil War in the way most southern states had. Comparatively, Texans lost very little capital, land, and fewer lives than other southern citizens. Building a new community was naturally easier when the society's infrastructure was not undergoing as harsh a rebuilding process.[39] As a result black Baptists in Texas began to organize sooner than in many other parts of the South, with some of the earliest official associations dating back to 1871.[40] By 1880 there were at least twenty-three black Baptist associations in the state.[41]

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[38] *Minutes of the Twenty-third Annual Session of the Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association held at Cameron, Texas* (San Antonio: John Routledge, Joe Printer and Bookbinder, 1890), 45.

[39] William E. Montgomery, "The Formation of African American Churches," Introduction to *Black Churches in Texas* by Clyde McQueen, (College Station, TX: Texas A & M Press, 2000), 17-20.

[40] *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Session of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention held at San Antonio, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1891).

[41] Lawrence D. Rice, *The Negro in Texas: 1874-1890* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Stat University Press, 1971), 272.

Into this world of uncertainty and turmoil the black Baptist churches of Texas began to ask themselves exactly where women would fit into the picture. As fledging organizations, both individual congregations and the associations had depended heavily upon all of their members to form the backbone of the institutions. But ten to fifteen years out from emancipation, the structures were a permanent fixture in Texas society, no longer in a state of flux requiring women to serve at every level. Just as men had begun to claim authority in the homes, many women found themselves fighting to have influence in the church as well. As local congregations unofficially altered their structures, the associations very publicly looked at what would happen to women within their meetings. Should women be allowed to serve as messengers from their local congregations to the regional associations? Once at the meetings would women be allowed to serve in any of the elected leadership positions? Should the associations form separate organizations for women? The answers developed to these questions framed the future for Texas women in the African American Baptist churches.

CHAPTER THREE

The Development of Women’s Groups within the Texas Regional Associations

The question of what roles women were to play in African American churches began to surface in Texas congregations and associations in the mid 1880s. Many of the associations, which had been formed ten to twenty years earlier, were coming to a point of organizational maturity that invited serious critiques of the roles different groups were fulfilling within the organizations. Although some of the associations did not immediately form a women’s committee or convention, most associations brought the question up for discussion by 1890. Once the question had surfaced, many associations created a committee to research women’s roles in the church. After forming these exploratory committees, the associations took anywhere from one to five years discussing the topic before action was taken. The committees compiled their research and opinions and then elected representatives to speak on the floor at associational meetings and present their findings. From that point, the regional associations would decide whether women could serve as normal delegates to the association or if a women's branch would be set up to meet simultaneously.[1] Within this basic framework for development associations across Texas began to explore the question of what role women should play in the local congregations, as well as in the larger associations.

The Texas Missionary Baptist State Convention was one of the first associations to engage the issue actively, forming a committee in 1884 to explore the role of woman's work in the church.[2] After spending the year considering the roles women's missionary societies were filling in local congregations, the committee reported back that "if the sisters of all our churches were organized into Missionary Societies, than the grandest record of mission work would be accomplished that was ever known in the State."[3] Using the findings from this report the committee presented a resolution, that passed unanimously, which requested that the convention devote itself to organizing local women's groups that could join together annually in concurrent session with the general convention.

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[1] James Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), 138.

[2] *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual session of the Missionary Baptist State Convention held at Houston, Texas* (Houston: Independent Printings, 1884), 18.

[3] *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual session of the Missionary Baptist State Convention held at Hearne, Texas* (Houston: Independent Printings, 1885), 31.

The following year the minutes from the Missionary Baptist State Convention included a brief history of women's organizations within the black churches in Texas. The history cited a few informal gatherings of women in eastern Texas in 1880 as being the cornerstone from which other groups had risen. The report also stressed the importance men such as the Reverend Allen R. Griggs played in facilitating many of these early women's meetings. At the time of the convention, over 1,100 women had already been involved in some type of women's association or missions society.[4]

Other regional associations followed the Missionary Baptist example and had begun to form exploratory committees by the latter part of the 1880s. Most of the larger associations seemed eager to take the next step and by 1890 had established some form of women's organization. By 1889 even smaller groups such as the La Grange Missionary Baptist Association, which was only comprised of nineteen churches, had officially formed Woman's Work committees.[5] Taking the step of forming a committee did not automatically result in founding a new woman's convention or organization to be the counterpart to the general association. The Guadalupe Baptist Association first addressed the issue in 1889, but refrained from taking any significant actions on the issue until 1897.[6] The Bowen Missionary Baptist Association minutes reflected conversations about other associations having women's organizations in 1890, but they made no effort to form a similar group to serve their association.[7] By 1893 even most of the smaller groups had begun to engage the issue of what defined a woman's duty in the church, and how the associations should be facilitating that role.

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[4] Ibid., 20-21.

[5] *Minutes of the Tenth Annual Session of the LaGrange Missionary Baptist Association held at Borden, Texas* (Austin: Baptist Print, 1889), 36.

As each of the exploratory committees examined the role of woman's work in the church, they commissioned their members, male and female, to write letters to the general associations defending the committees' newfound positions on the topic. The committee membership was not typically proportionate to the gender demographics of the general associations. At the Missionary Baptist State Convention in 1886, all of the women present served on the Woman's

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[6] *Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Session of the Guadalupe Baptist Association held at Swann, Texas* (1889), 24; and *Minutes of the Twenty-Sixth Annual session of the Guadalupe Baptist Association held at Jone's Prairie, Texas* (1897), 46.

[7] *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Session of the Bowen Missionary Baptist Association held at Mt. Herman Church, Houston County, Texas* (Houston: Independent Printings, 1890), 23.

Work committee.[8] As the associations were asking the question of what role a woman should play in the church, they seemed to be answering themselves by assigning most of the women present to Woman's Work committees, rather than dispersing them in various roles through the association. Many associations were sending the message before the first reports were ever written, that within their meetings the women's roles would be consumed with issues dealing directly with women, not the association as a whole. Still, the speeches and reports that resulted from these early committees verbalized how the church viewed women within the body of Christ.

The reports can be sorted easily into male and female responses. The men's discussions often focused on defining gender roles and the power hierarchy within the church. The women's speeches tended to center around issues of efficiency in completing the church's mission with very little talk of power structures.

Men's responses displayed a tendency to define the questions about roles in terms of authority. In a report from a committee assigned to ask the question of how relevant women's home mission societies were to the general effort of missions in the church, J. H. Hall and M. E. Terrell argued that women were central to the life of any local congregation. The women's vital role in carrying out the work of the church at home encouraged the work of the church on a universal level. In a statement which alluded to the men's view of women's general purpose in life, they statee, "It is her nature to assist in multiplying the earth; therefore [missions] is a duty they owe to God."[9] The idea that a woman's central characteristic being that of reproduction and nourishment, which was not unique to the church but mirrored that of general society, surfaced repeatedly in the speeches written by males. Rather than focusing on women helping to create new converts, J. R. Campbell concluded that the woman's primary role in the church was to use her tenderness to comfort the motherless and fatherless who attended local Sunday Schools.[10] In 1893, J. H. Diggs cited women's primary role as the reproductive sex as one of the central reasons that the committee should not suggest any authority be given to women in the pulpit.[11] So, although different authors focused on various ways that these characteristics could play out in service to the congregations, the traditional views of the female being defined by reproduction and nourishment were still at the core of most of the men's assessments of women's value in the church.

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[8] *Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Missionary Baptist State Convention held at Waco, Texas* (Houston: Independent Printings, 1886), 16-17.

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[9] *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Session of the American Baptist Free Mission State Sunday School Convention Held at Conroe, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1894), 8.

[10] *Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Friendship Baptist Association held at Waxahachie, Texas* (Dallas: B. J. Hall Print, co., 1891), 9.

In striking contrast to most of the men's reports was Professor David Abner's resolution to the Missionary Baptist State Convention in 1889. Rather than basing his argument on how society viewed the role of women, he focused his attention on the New Testament passage which claimed that "there is neither male nor female, but all one in Christ Jesus." He then congratulated the convention on reaching a point where women could be welcomed as equal laborers in the work of the church. He stressed that it was the duty of the local pastors to strengthen and encourage the women's societies by all possible means.[12]

Some of the men echoed Abner's excitement over women playing an active role in the church, even if their basic beliefs about what women should be doing differed greatly from his. Repeatedly the presidents of the conventions voiced their support and gratitude towards the women's organizations which were growing quickly in the state. In 1891 the president of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention reprimanded the members present who voiced dissent over creating a budget specifically for women's work. He stressed his excitement over the potential of the women to accomplish great things for the convention and urged his fellow delegates to follow suit.[13] Likewise, the president of the Friendship Baptist Association devoted a section of his presidential address to discussing the importance of women's societies in the churches. He gave detailed instructions as to how a local congregation should go about establishing women's groups, in order to best serve the church body.[14] William Beckham focused his opinion of women in ministry on a passage from the book of Acts which states, "This woman is full of good works, and alms deeds which she did."[15] From this verse he concluded that women could have a specific mission, that the church needed working women, and that it was the duty of Christian women to fulfill this mission.[16] One of the most emphatic expressions of support for women's committees in the associations and congregations came from I. Toliver during the 1891 LaGrange association meeting. He claimed that women were the "life-blood" of every local congregation and that actively supporting women's involvement in the association was key to the success of the organization.[17]

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[11] *Minutes of the Tenth Annual Session of the Immanuel District Baptist Association held at New Franklin, Texas* (Austin: Baptist Print, 1893), 25.

[12] *Missionary Baptist State Convention*, 1884, 24.

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[13] *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual session of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention held at San Antonio, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1891), 12.

[14] *Minutes of the Ninth Annual session of the Friendship Baptist Association held at Mexia, Texas* (Dallas: B. J. Hall print, co., 1885), 45.

[15] *Immanuel District Baptist Association*, 1893, 56.

In contrast to the speeches presented by male delegates which included broad statements and general support of women's work, the presentations by women focused more directly on the specifics of women's duties within the churches and associations. Although often women saw their duty as aligning with the nurturing roles that men were assigning to them, the women's speeches reflected a more critical approach to why these roles belonged to women. In a paper presented in 1894, Hattie Tee referenced women's greater sense of moral responsibility as the purpose for action within the church community. She placed the hope of future generations on the influence of women's actions in the church and home. Without directly claiming that men had no concern for the future, she subtly suggested that without women as the backbone of the church there would be no congregations to which the "great evangelists" could preach.[18] Lest the association fear that the women were suggesting a major power shift within the church body, Sallie James immediately followed Tee's paper with a resolution to increase the pay of preachers, because "of all men in professional life the poor preacher works harder and gets less money than anyone."[19]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Session LaGrange Missionary Baptist Association held at Ledbetter, Texas* (Austin: Baptist Print, 1891), 26.

This pattern of suggesting women's centrality in the church and then immediately reaffirming the males' dominance and importance in the church body, was also present in the 1886 Missionary Baptist State Convention. Sister F. Dysart delivered a speech commending the ability of women to reach out to their "back-sliding" neighbors through genuine friendship and love. The very next speech presented was a work written by Mrs. Haws, which lavished praise upon local preachers, all presumably male, who could give a sermon that would persuade any individual back into the faith.[20] This pattern was probably not a conscious strategy by the women to chip away at the gender power structure within the church, but rather a way of approaching gender relations that had been taught to them since they were young. If they were going to praise women in such outspoken ways, then it was almost a natural response for them to follow it with equal or greater praise to men.

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[18] *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Session of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention held at San Antonio, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1891), 12.

[19] Ibid.

[20] *Missionary Baptist State Convention*, 1886, 14.

Although most of the women's responses seemed to ignore or cater to the men's discussions of power hierarchies within the church, a few exceptions can be found through Texas. Anna Wilbourn directly contradicted her male counterparts during discussions about the progress of women's societies within the Northwestern Baptist Association in 1890. All of the men's reports from that day claimed that the women's work committees were successful in accomplishing their purposes. Anna Wilbourn gave a drastically different report Texas as she spoke of groups which had been discouraged by their local pastors and even dismantled by their congregations. She concluded her thoughts with the decisive statement that it was the men within their own association who caused the greatest hindrance to the women's work.[21]

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[21] *Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Gainesville, Texas* (Bonham, TX: New Print, 1890), 50-55.

Nearly all of the presenters at the Friendship Baptist Association in 1891, spoke directly to women's unique role in the church without mention of their male counterparts. Normally in such cases the speech titles implied that the roles presenters assigned to women would not necessarily be desirable to most men. The titles from the Friendship meeting included: "The Young Ladies of the Society," "The Duties of the Sisters to the Church in Teaching the Children," and "A Good Wife."[22] These speeches can hardly be viewed as questioning any of the traditional gender roles within the church.

However, there were a small percentage of presentations made by Texas women during this formative period of the black church structure in which traditional gender hierarchy roles were questioned. Patsy Hunter asked about women serving as missionaries in her 1891 speech entitled, "Have Women the Right to be Missionaries and How Can They Be?"[23] In a passionate speech about women stepping into leadership roles in the church Laura Jones asserted to a room full of men that "Woman, from a systematical standpoint is the most influencial [sic] being on earth."[24] She then continued to give an overview of most of the women mentioned in the Bible, showing how their lives shaped the entire nation of Israel and eventually all of Christianity. She acknowledged that women could use this influence in either harmful or beneficial ways. Before anyone could make the assumption that she was suggesting women should be excluded from leadership roles because of the potential for harmful effects, she began a list of the tragedies men had produced in leadership roles. She concluded that the only answer for the complaints of women that their pulpits were filled with "drunkards" and men who took advantage of their female members was for women to step up and take leadership roles in the church.[25] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's assessment of the Baptist women's organizations developing nationwide during this time period picks up this same idea by stating that "while the Bible depicted women in dual image, it also portrayed good and evil men, and thus only affirmed woman's likeness to man and her oneness with him in the joint quest for salvation."[26]

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[22] *Friendship Baptist Association*, 1891, 35.

[23] Ibid.

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[24] *Minutes of the Eighth Annual Session of the Immanuel District Baptist Association held near Kosse, Texas* (Austin: Baptist Print, 1891), 16.

[25] Ibid., 15-18.

[26] Higginbotham, 128.

Not all of the Texas women's speeches focused on highlighting the differences between women and men. Many of the speeches presented under headings of "Woman's Duties" were simply appeals to hard work within the church that could have been associated with either gender. E. M. Ransom's paper entitled "Danger of Ungodly Associates," held equal warnings for anyone in leadership about the compromising situations created when one's associates did not follow the same standards of righteousness in leadership.[27] In 1895, during the time allotted for the Woman's Work committee report, Ruth Hall gave two speeches which dealt with general concerns about the mission field that were not directly tied to female missionaries.[28]

Often the association minutes did not include the full text of the speeches made; sometimes, they simply recorded a list of the titles and authors, without an abstract of the content contained within each paper. However, a brief overview of the titles recorded shows the focus on education, missions, and general engagement in public life that was central to most of the women presenting at the association. The 1892 Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention included speeches titled "Character Education," "Our Duty," and "Need of Mission Work in our Homes."[29]

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[27] *Minutes of the Nineteenth Annual Session of the Texas Baptist State Convention held at Houston, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Printers, 1890), 61.

[28] *Minutes of the Third Annual Session General Missionary Baptist Convention of Texas held at Houston, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1895), 34.

With the exception of the pattern discussed of praising women in the church and then immediately over-praising their male counterparts, the speeches that women presented in response to the question of a woman's duty in the church varied not only from association to association, but from woman to woman. Within many of the associations, speeches from each of the general categories mentioned above were presented all in one day. The women's views seemed to be shaped by personal experience and interpretations of scripture, rather than a need to conform to the other ideas being presented at a given time.

The amount of participation that women took in the general associations speaks to the experience of black women in the churches during this time. One of the most frequent places to find a woman's name in minutes of any association was in the welcome speech. Even after separate meetings had been established for the women of an association, a woman from the host church would still give the opening speech at the general convention.[30]

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[29] *Minutes of the Twenty-First Annual session of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention held at Waco, TX* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1892), 37.

In some cases, such as the 1894 meeting of the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Texas, the woman giving the welcome speech was the only example of participation or mention about females throughout the entire general association.[31] This convention was a younger group which had only split from the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention of Texas a year previously. However, at the time of the split they adopted an almost identical structure to that of their parent organization. The first year the General Missionary Baptist Convention met they had a separate meeting to form officially the Women's Home Mission Society. Once this society was in place the general convention did not mention women's roles in the church body and no more female delegates were on the rosters for the general convention. There were no motions to reevaluate any of the debates over women's roles or purposes. It was assumed that the Home Mission Society was now the authority, and the general convention would no longer be bothered by such issues, they would acknowledge the female domestic role by still inviting a woman from the host church to give the welcoming speech. Obviously, this role did not point to any sense of equality in the associations but a continuation of the idea that women could provide little more to the whole group than the duties of a hostess.[32]

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[30] The Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention, which had a separate convention for Women's Work from 1891 forward, still retained a female speaker for the welcome speech until 1897. *Minutes of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1891-1897).

[31] *Minutes of the Second Annual General Missionary Baptist Convention of Texas held at Houston, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1894), 3.

Not all of the associations viewed the answer of forming a women's organization as the end to the discussion of women's roles in the church. As is evidenced by the presence of female delegates and even officers, many of the associations valued women's contributions to the general body. One of the most dynamic examples of integration of women into the general work of a convention came from the Texas Baptist State Sunday School Convention. The earlier records from the convention did not denote 'Sister' or 'Ms.' before any of the delegates' names on the rosters, but when delegates played an active role in the convention their full names were used in the minutes. In 1886, there was mention of at least fifteen females present.[33] A few years later the rosters included specific denotation of the females and 21 of the 120 members present were female.[34] This number is extremely high compared to any other Texas association or convention from the time period. The Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association was of comparable size, with 111 delegates attending their meeting that same year; however, the Lincoln Association only had two women active in the meeting.[35] The women of the State Sunday School Convention were not only present, but fairly active. Of those twenty-one women in attendance in 1888, seven of them held offices or sat on executive committees.[36] By 1892 the number of women delegates had risen to 23 while the number of total delegates present had fallen to 103.[37]

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[32] *Minutes of the First Annual General Missionary Baptist Convention of Texas held at Austin, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1893).

[33] *Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Texas Baptist State Sunday School Convention held at Austin, Texas* (Austin: Baptist Print, 1886), appendix.

The percentage of females present at the Missionary Baptist State Convention never rose as high as at the Texas Baptist State Sunday School Convention, but they still had consistent participation. This involvement in the general convention continued for several years after the separate women's branch of the convention had been formed. Previous to the separate meeting women were often found in various roles, such as Sister Garnett serving as treasurer in 1884.[38] In 1888, two years after the separate meeting had been established, seven women were still present on the agenda of the general convention.[39]

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[34] *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Session of the Texas Baptist State Sunday School Convention held at Dallas, Texas* (Austin: Baptist Print, 1888), appendix.

[35] *Minutes of the Nineteenth Annual Session of The Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association held at Hempstead, Texas* (Cameron, TX: HERALD Office, 1888), 5, 13.

[36] *Texas Baptist State Sunday School Convention*, 1888, appendix.

[37] *Minutes of the Twenty-Second Annual Session of the Texas Baptist State Sunday School Convention held at Austin, Texas* (Austin: Baptist Print, 1892), appendix.

Baptist groups which did not have female delegates were influenced by the trend to include women in the religious circles. The Baptist Preachers' Co-Operative Association was a small group primarily based on discussing new public speaking and preaching techniques for pastors from eastern Texas. Naturally their agenda would not include very many females because most congregations in the state were led by males; however, the group still sought female speakers to talk about issues such as education, alcohol, and tobacco.[40]

A wide array of stances appeared in the associations' and conventions' various committee reports, resolutions, and actions over the developmental period of the women's Baptist organizations in Texas. Although clear distinctions can be seen in the language used to talk about women’s roles in society and the church, as men used power rhetoric and women used language which focused on efficacy, both genders contributed to the formation of these groups. By 1890 most of the regional associations in Texas had formed separate meetings for the women within their groups, not only at the local levels but actually at the regional meetings as well. While some of the women’s groups attempted to tackle multiple issues facing the church, most of them found their niche by combining efforts with the other groups specifically with the missions movement which was developing at the same time.

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[38] *Missionary Baptist State Convention*, 1884, 3.

[39] *Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Session of the Missionary Baptist State Convention held at Houston, Texas* (Houston: Independent Printings, 1888).

[40] *Minutes of the Baptist Preachers' Co-Operative Association held at Crockett, Texas* (Dallas: B. J. Hall Print, co., 1888), 8.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Relationship between the Missions and Women's Movements

The discussion of women's roles in the churches was not the only recurring topic in Texas African American Baptist churches throughout this time period. Temperance and missions also received a great deal of attention. As the regional associations formed committees across Texas to look into the questions explored in the previous chapter about women's roles, they also formed groups to investigate these other two topics. While temperance discussions in the black associations mirrored the nationwide argument over the propriety of alcohol, the missions discussions in those meetings were very different from those in the white religious organizations. Discussion over missions resulted in new missions organizations that had an intricate relationship with the women's groups. By the end of the 1890s these two issues had become so entwined that the titles containing the term "Women's Work" often simply meant "missions."[1] The end result of the missions' work and women's work organizations being entangled was not unique to the black Baptist churches. In fact many white denominations and other black denominations saw this same pattern develop. It is the timing of this partnership, however, that is unique to the black churches. Unlike their white counterparts and even the black Methodist denominations, the missions movement in the black Baptist churches developed hand-in-hand with the founding of the women's regional associations.[2]

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[1] Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1985), 82-95, 102.

From 1880 to 1900 messengers sent to regional associational meetings in Texas spent a great deal of time explaining the rationale and ideals behind the missions work for which they were lobbying. Many of the ideas expressed by these Texans were similar to those of their counterparts in other southern states. The motivations can be categorized by those which mandated all Christians to the mission field, and those which were applicable only to the African American population. The first category of speeches mirrored what could be heard in the white churches during the same time period.[3] The scriptural references centered on a few key passages, such as the calling of

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[2] William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the South 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Univeristy Press, 1993), 230-243.

[3] Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa: 1877-1900* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 66.

Jonah and Isaiah, both stories which demanded the sacrifice of all worldly goods in order to follow their mission.[4] Often the idea of Christ literally being the first missionary took center stage with the exact references of scripture being pushed aside. At the 1881 meeting of the Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association, the emotional description of Jesus laying down his life to spread the message of God’s love led to the largest offering collected during the four day event.[5] The speeches used the biblical stories to motivate the local churches to engage in intentional mission work.

The central argument for the importance of missions in the church came from scriptural references to Christ’s personal example and the passage found in the book of Matthew known as the Great Commission. Nearly every missions report includes a reference to Great Commission. The committee on Foreign Missions from the Regular Baptist New Home Association, one of the smaller regional associations in central Texas with twelve churches, attended the meeting in 1896 and bluntly stated their belief that, "Christ's command to 'Go ye therefore and teach all nations' stands alone as the main purpose of the church."[6]

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[4] Sermons referencing Jonah and Isaiah are found in the *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Session of the Missionary Baptist State Convention held at Houston, Texas* (Houston: Independent Printings, 1884), the *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Session of the Regular Missionary Baptist New Home Association held at Jewett, Texas* (Bryan, Texas: Eagle Printing Office, 1899), and the *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Session of the Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention held at San Antonio, Texas* (San Antonio: H. A. Moon Printers, 1891).

[5] *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Session of The Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association held at Palestine, Texas* (Galveston, Texas: Mckenna & Co., Book and Job Printers, 1881), 18.

These scriptural references for missions, many of which could also be found in the white church, only give a partial view to the missions forces which were gaining power in Texas black Baptist churches during the late nineteenth century.[7] Much of the discussion involving mission work included motivations unique to the black Baptist church. The desire to spread the message of Christianity was paired with a belief that the church could improve the social status not only of black Texans, but also of Africa. The theme of communal redemption was central in black missiology.[8]

One key to understanding the concept of Christianity being able to redeem both the population in Texas and the whole of Africa was the relationship between local and foreign missions in the black Baptist church. In most missions reports and sermons there was no intentional line drawn between local and foreign missions. If a church was carrying out the orders of Christ it was assumed that they would be active on both mission fronts.[9] Within this framework, any work deemed worthy of the church's attention in Texas carried over into their foreign missions.

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[6] *Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Session of The Regular Baptist New Home Association held at Galilee, Texas* (Austin: Herald Pub. Co., 1986), 17.

[7] Fitts, 14-17.

[8] Sandy D. Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of a Movement 1880-1915* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), 22.

The deep focus on community can be seen in the language and theology of the church. In a speech about raising children who valued missions work, Psalm 22 was read as the community, rather than individual parents, were commanded to "raise up the child in the way he should go."[10] The reality of Texas society was that many families were broken apart by poverty. The church's response was to serve as a unifying structure for the destitute families. This sense of local community carried over into sympathies for the people in Africa. Although most black Texans were several generations removed from any direct ties to Africa, the idea of a history before slavery, and a community different from the poverty in the United States provided great inspiration in the church. Speakers commonly referred to their "brethren" and "sisters" in Africa with the same sentimentality they used toward one another.[11] In a speech in 1887 a reference that "our people" were starving and destitute referred both to populations in rural areas of Texas as well as those in Africa.[12]

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[9] *Minutes of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Session of The Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association held at Rockdale, Texas* (Austin: Herald Pub. Co., 1896), 13.

[10] *Minutes of the Tenth Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Denison, Texas* (Dallas: Texas Baptist Publishing House, 1884), 13.

The desire to rebuild a connection with Africa stemmed from a longing not only to see the redemption of African society, but in many ways a redemption of the church's most recent memories, including the horrors of slavery and deplorable conditions most black Texans found themselves in after emancipation. Although black men and women felt a connection with Africa, "they endorsed the Western image of Africa as the 'Dark Continent.'"[13] They believed that the continent was suffering due to a lack of religion.[14] Unlike the white missionaries of the time, the black church was very careful to distinguish the differences between

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[11] *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Fort Worth, Texas* (Dallas: Texas Baptist Publishing House, 1885), 12.

[12] *Minutes of the Thirteenth Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Sherman, Texas* (Bonham, Texas: News Print, 1887), 25.

[13] Sylvia M. Jacobs, "The Historical Role of Afro-Americans in American Missionary Efforts in Africa," in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. by Sylvia M. Jacobs, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 17.

[14] *Minutes of the Second Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Melissa, Texas* (Dallas: "Texas Baptist" Publishing House, 1876), 3.

Africa's lack of religion and Africa's lack of Western culture. Black Baptists hoped that exposure to religion rather than adoption of Western culture would make the continent acceptable to the world.[15] A letter from F. G. Davis revealed a more urgent tone as he warned, "that something must be done to spread the gospel in our fatherland, Africa, the dark continent. Oh, pity them!"[16]

Annie Franklin of McKinney, Texas gave a passionate speech in 1889 on how the "destiny" of black Americans was not to sit and enjoy the benefits of Christianity, but to take religion "back to our motherland" in order to redeem the suffering her ancestors experienced through slavery.[17] For her the redemption was not simply for Africa, but for her own community's recent history. Her speech mirrored the excitement about missions that was growing in other regional women's groups across the state. The same sentiment of Africa as "motherland" was echoed by the Northwestern Baptist Association's Missions Committee which pondered what difference there was in the "desolate wilds of Africa" and the dark regions of Texas where no Baptist missionary had yet established a congregation.[18] The report concluded that entire communities needed to be redeemed, and that it was the Baptist church's duty to do so in both places. Elder Pryor's idea, that the church in Texas should freely give to Africa the message of the gospel which it had freely received, continued the theme of redemption for both populations.[19]

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[15] Jacobs, 7.

[16] *Northwestern Baptist Association*, 1887, 26.

[17] *Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Bonham, Texas* (Bonham, Texas: News Print, 1889), 64.

Beyond the spiritual redemption of both populations, a desire for the black community in America to prove itself competent to its white counterpart accounted for much of the push for foreign missions in the late nineteenth century. The church believed that success on the mission field would show the white community that the black population in America was capable of organizing, funding, and accomplishing difficult tasks.[20] One committee described it as the opportunity to "show that we are not simply fit for manual tasks, but able to succeed in the religious and intellectual challenges of our day."[21] This combination of scriptural and communal motivations provided the black Baptist churches with the fortitude to begin attaining goals which had previously been unfathomable to many of their members.

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[18] *Minutes of the Seventh Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Gainesville, Texas* (Dallas: Texas Baptist Publishing House, 1881), 9.

[19] *Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Dallas, Texas* (Dallas: Texas Baptist Publishing House, 1886), 24.

[20] Donald F. Roth, "The 'Black Man's Burden': The Racial Background of Afro-American Missionaries and Africa," in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. by Sylvia M. Jacobs, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 32-33.

The associations gave constant suggestions as to how local congregations should approach missions work. The first key to successfully supporting missions was to keep the cause in the public's eye. Nearly every report from missions committees included some statement as to how frequently pastors should preach on missions. The suggestions ranged from every other week to once every six months, but the motive to keep missions as a recent topic of discussion was consistent.[22] Some churches even created an African Mission Rally Day, in order to set aside a full day to educate the congregation about Africa and to raise funds to support missionaries.[23]

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[21] *Minutes of the Ninth Annual session of the Friendship Baptist Association held at Mexia, Texas* (Dallas: B. J. Hall print, co., 1885), 45.

[22] *Minutes of the Ninth Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Denison, Texas* (Dallas: Texas Baptist Publishing House, 1883), 9; and *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Denison, Texas* (Bonham, Texas: News Print, 1888), 16.

[23] *Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Dallas, Texas* (Dallas: Star Publishing House, 1892), 29.

The Reverend D. Abner argued that Christ's command to follow was not given in forceful terms but rather in gentle and persuasive language. He believed that "every man and woman by nature has a will of his own . . . and must come in by his own will power."[24] He asserted that the role of missions was not to force a new religion upon nonbelievers, but rather to calmly present the world with the ideas of Christ and wait for God to produce results. With this concept of missions, Reverend Abner suggested that individual churches needed to constantly, through fasting and prayer, seek out God's specific role for their congregation in missions. Although his appeal to the gentleness of Christian nature was unique among the speeches at this meeting, his call for prayer as a primary response to the importance of missions was not unique. Often it was the newly formed women's groups in the church which took seriously the pastors' pleas for constant prayer for the work in the mission fields.[25]

Despite the intentional focus on missions, the associations had a hard time getting congregations to support the work in the practical terms of volunteers and finances. All of the regional associations in Texas had a hard time finding volunteers to serve as local missionaries. S. M. Price, a pastor who held various regional and state offices through out the 1880s and 1890s, wrote that, "The work is great and the laborers few. Let us pray God send forth more laborers in the vineyard."[26] Many of the associations came to a point where they simply asked local pastors to serve as local missionaries to nearby communities that did not have Baptist congregations. The result was overworked pastors who were not meeting the needs of their congregation and were meeting little success in planting new churches.[27] The missions committees quickly spoke out against this practice urging more volunteers to come forward who could commit to the full work of missions, rather than dividing one's attention between pastoral and missions duties.[28] The issue of appointing foreign missionaries was even more daunting than the obstacles of local missions.

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[24] *Northwestern Baptist Association*, 1886, 25.

[25] Ibid., 1885, 12.

Women's groups which had been formed within the regional associations in the 1880s were quick to look into the lack of foreign missionaries. Alongside education, missions began to take a prominent place on the agendas for the regional women's meetings. Beyond acting on the financial burdens, these women's groups took the pleas for prayers seriously and formed prayer groups focused on the lack of able volunteers for the work the church wished to accomplish.[29]

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[26] *Regular Missionary Baptist New Home Association*, 1899, 15.

[27] *Minutes of the Twenty-Third Annual Session of The Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association held at Cameron, Texas* (San Antonio: John Routledge, Joe Printer and Bookbinder, 1890), 23.

[28] *Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association*, 1896, 20.

The second hardship the churches faced was the impractical aspect of raising money to finance local and foreign missions from congregations which had so little income. Often associations adopted grand ideas of supporting a district missionary or sending money to support a new missionary station in Africa only to be tabled until a later date "as soon as there may be sufficient money on hand."[30] Many associations set up certain criteria for exactly how much money each church should give to missions based on the size of the congregation. The Northwestern Baptist Association placed the missions funding chart as the first item on the inside cover of their published minutes every year from 1886 to 1892. The expectation was set that if a church wanted to participate in the association then they must be financially willing to back the association's missionary projects. Even with published guidelines and requirements, many associations, both large and small, could not produce the funding needed to support the mission projects.[31]

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[29] *Minutes of the Twenty-First Annual Session of The Northwestern Baptist Association held at Hempstead, Texas* (Cameron, Texas: Herald Office Job Print, 1888), 23.

[30] *Minutes of the Tenth Annual Session of The Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association held at Hempstead, Texas* (Galveston: Mckenna & Co., Book and Job Printers, 1877), 9.

The cost of travel and support for an individual to minister in Africa, as many of the preachers were suggesting was the black Texas churches' duty, was unfathomable to congregations which barely had money to pay their own pastors. As a result, regardless of the rhetoric used in the sermon about the importance of ministering to Africa, most congregations funneled their small budget into local charities and missions.[32]

Many regional associations began to discover that the women's groups formed in the 1880s proved to be much more efficient at fundraising than the general associations. William Montgomery noted this trend on a national level stating, "Fund-raising was one of the many ways in which women showed that even though men were up front and received most of the attention, they were the backbone of the church."[33] In Texas, many individual associations experienced this push in fundraising first hand. The Missions Committee of the Northwestern Baptist Association noticed this trend early and publicly praised the women's groups who "give the more liberally and cheerfully to the cause of Christ."[34] Although most of these groups could not raise large sums of money to help with the problem, they did try to address the financial issues at hand. At the Regular Mission Baptist Lincoln Association's meeting in 1887, the women collected two extra offerings on top of their original pledges to be donated to foreign missions.[35] The women's groups were more consistent with setting aside a higher percentage of their total budget to go towards local and foreign missions. In 1889 the women's convention of the Northwestern Baptist Association gave $38.50 which constituted over half of their total budget to missions, while the general convention only gave a fourth of its money to missions.[36]

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[31] *Minutes of the Sixteenth Annual Session of The Regular Missionary Baptist New Home Association held at Jewett, Texas* (Bryan: Eagle Printing Office, 1900), 15.

[32] James Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 102-105.

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[33] Montgomery, 221.

[34] *Northwestern Baptist Association*, 1886, 45-46.

[35] *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Session of The Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association held at Bryan, Texas* (Houston: C.P.B. Medlenka, 1887), 19.

[36] *Northwestern Baptist Association*, 1889, 22, 63.

The regional women's groups saw this opportunity to raise funds for foreign missions as a cause to rally within their organizations. By significantly contributing to a ministry that was accepted as vital to the life of the church, the women were defining themselves as indispensable to the church. The minutes from the Women's Meeting at the Northwestern Baptist Association conference held in Dallas in 1886 showed this understanding of identity within the church. After resolving to support fully a mission station in Texas, they laid out plans to request a station in Africa to be supported completely by their group in order that "it may stand as a memorial of the love the women of Texas bear toward their sisters in Africa."[37]

The missionaries who benefited from these efforts encountered physical and cultural difficulties which proved much harder than the churches in the United States had originally anticipated. Disease would ravage entire missionary groups leaving many dead without much to show for the financial investment of the churches. Other missionaries reported that the local cultures showed little interest in the Christian message, and often were physically hostile to the Americans.[38] Although the associations could do little to combat these problems once the missionaries reached Africa, the women's groups in Texas began to prepare a curriculum to instruct missionaries on the dangers and cultural differences the missionaries would experience upon arriving in Africa. The women of the Northwestern Baptist Association focused most of their local congregational women's meetings in 1885 preparing this curriculum. As a result, the next year they not only financially and prayerfully contributed to the foreign missions effort, but tangibly helped in the preparation by sending their materials to the missionaries who were about to leave for Africa.[39] Through this more intense preparation and more consistent funding and prayer women's groups formed the solid foundation for the missions movement in the black Baptist church in Texas during the late nineteenth century.

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[37] Ibid., 1886, 95.

[38] Ibid., 1885, 15.

Much like the mixed sentiment women met in dealing with their changing roles in general, their success in supporting missions was greeted with various responses. Some groups reported serious hindrances to their work due to particular pastors or elders who refused to give the women any authority within the congregations.[40] Other male leaders embraced the women's success in fund raising and encouraged further involvement. In a letter supporting women's work in missions, Pastor E. M. Wright wrote at length about the equality all Christians should hold in the church. He claimed that Texas churches had been "blessed with the finest minds, both male and female" and that to limit the work of women was to do an injustice to the church's ministry. He went on to explain that women had traditionally held an important place in missions. He traced the involvement of women in missions from the time of the first apostles through his own present day congregation.[41] Allen Griggs who was serving as the State Superintendent of Missions for the Regular Baptist Association added his voice to those in support of women's work by way of issuing a thank you in 1889 to two women in particular. He commended J. L Peck and Florence Dysart, who left their homes in Chicago to travel to Texas to work as missionaries in the destitute regions of the state.[42]

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[39] Ibid., 18-20.

[40] Ibid., 1889, 22, 63.

Neither the women's movement nor the missions movement received full support from all of the Baptist associations. Many of the participants had to face the adversity of attempting to serve bodies which did not have money to support the new groups nor have faith in their ability to complete the tasks at hand. As the women’s groups attached to associations grew, they poured money, time, and prayer into the missions movement. In turn, as the missions movement picked up momentum throughout the end of the century, it reflected well on the women’s groups. By 1900 many women’s groups only dealt with missions and many associations had completely turned their missions committees over to the women’s control. As the two movements progressed they built off the success of one another in order to prove their value and worth to the larger community.

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[41] *Regular Missionary Baptist Lincoln Association*, 1896, 29.

[42] *Northwestern Baptist Association*, 1889, 4.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

The social landscape in the late 1800s was chaotic for the African American community in Texas. In the wake of their freedom families faced tough decisions about how to establish their new lives. Texas churches provided stability to these communities in an uncertain time. In focusing on the needs of the black communities the churches saw a need to establish financial independence apart from their white counterparts. The Baptist congregations multiplied rapidly in the 1870s and 1880s, and began to form regional associations. These associations created a network to help local churches aid one another in practical means as well as providing a sense of unity and direction to the entire black Baptist community in Texas. Serving as networking and fund raising devices, the associations continued to foster growth in the Texas black Baptist churches. The end of the nineteenth century provided Texas Baptist with a unique opportunity to form new traditions that would carry their faith and values into the twentieth century.

The question of what role women could and should play not only in these new associations but in the local churches as well surfaced in a state wide conversation from roughly 1880 to 1895. Regional associations formed committees to discuss and develop ideas concerning the issue. Both men and women served on these initial committees and then reported back to the main associations. Each committee had reached different conclusions about what women's roles in the church should like. The arguments of the responses often were varied by gender. Men's speeches were centered on the rationale of scripture in supporting or denying women a greater role in power hierarchies. On the other hand, women speeches often articulated an argument that was laced with terms of productivity and effectiveness rather than that of power structures. The results of the committee reports and speeches led to the establishment of women's organizations across the state that would be affiliated with their specific regional associations. As the organizations began to take shape most groups did not directly answer the arguments of women's scriptural rights to hold leadership roles. Instead they acted on the practical solution that women should be allowed to organize into groups because they were efficient at serving the church's larger goals. Local churches embraced this and often assigned their fledging missionary groups to the women's care. These missionary groups found their strongest ally in women's groups, as both issues moved into the twentieth century.

The women's organizations continued to thrive as they focused specifically on raising money for and awareness of the mission work being accomplished by their associations.[1] In helping the missions effort succeed the women helped the developing churches in Texas achieve the goal of independence from any type of white charity. The women's groups came alongside other educational and missions movements to work together in building the infrastructure the black community so desperately needed in the chaos that had followed Reconstruction. While the whole community struggled to find its place in society, the Baptist women's organizations began to serve their community. In doing so the organizations gave the women a cause bigger than themselves to invest their time and hope into. M. E. Terrell's remarks that women "wield a power for good in the church" seem to echo true when looking at how these Texas women served their churches and therefore their communities.

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[1] James Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African American Church in the South 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 16-17.

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