

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ROLES IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH:
EQUALITY WITHIN THE NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION, U.S.A

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of African American women in the black Baptist churches from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, with emphasis on four women associated with the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. - Virginia Broughton, Mary Cook Parrish, Sarah Layten, and Nannie Burroughs. Historically, men have had dominant leadership roles in the black Baptist Church, most obvious in the development of the National Baptist Convention in the early twentieth century. Although women were present and active in the work of the church and community, they were not able to achieve leadership equality within the organized religious structures of Baptist life. African American women experienced a system of oppression, racism, and sexism, yet remained supportive of the National Baptist Convention. Even though they used their voices, intellect, and anointing as leaders within the Woman's Convention, an independent and often unrecognized organization that served the churches and communities, these women never achieved equality within the leadership of the National Baptist Convention. This work raises the voices of forgotten women by exploring the life and work of four important women-- Broughton, Parrish, Layten, and Burroughs.

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INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the dynamics of gender roles in the black Baptist church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the history of the African American people before and after emancipation must be explored. This information raises the awareness of the conditions in society for African Americans.

Historians and other scholars of the African American experience agree that the church has played a vital role in African American life. The African American woman, representing almost two-thirds of active congregants within the church, was crucial in broadening the public sphere within church. The church was and continues to be the most powerful institution for racial self-help in the black community (West 187). During the nineteenth century, African American churches served many purposes in that era: refuge in a hostile world, promoter of business, sponsor of education, and dispenser of benevolence. Many slaves who were permitted by their owners to attend revival services and camp meetings embraced the Baptist faith. In opposition to ungodly systems of oppression, Baptists preached the equality of all believers and the autonomy of faith in local communities of the faithful. In this sense, for poor whites and slaves, the Baptist message promised full humanity and democracy despite the restrictions of the unchurched world (Pinn 67).

In some myths about heritage and national community, the church became the domain for the expression, celebration, and pursuit of the black collective will and identity (Higginbotham 8). The church became the place of personal courage and collective empowerment against the dominant white culture. The irony is that as the dominant society denied relevance and presence to the African Americans, so did the

dominant African American male leadership of the Baptist church deny relevance and presence of the African American woman church leader.

In most churches down through history, the congregants are predominantly women and for this reason women's role within the church is important. In looking at the beginning of the black Baptist church in the United States to the early twentieth century one sees a pattern of inequality for the women in the black Baptist church. From early on in history, the traditional female gender roles were already in place, namely the role of women is in the home. This precedence sets women's inequality within the black Baptist church. Slavery heavily influenced black women's roles in the church during the late nineteenth century. In looking at slave history, male church leaders copied male dominant gender roles from their white counter-parts. Male slaves mimicked their dominant behavior over the black female. As the white master controlled his wife and slaves, men within slave society adopted this behavior of control. This behavior of control seemingly influenced the male leaders within the black Baptist church.

The black Baptist church developed after separating from the white Baptist church. Black women's oppression, however, continued within the church. Along the way, many women stepped up to take a stand within the church. These women successfully managed to form women clubs, missions, and training schools to support the racial issues and to train black women in society. Although black women accomplished many things within the black Baptist church and in the community, leadership equality was not available to women in the church. This condition remains today.

During the religious awakening of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many slaves, male and female, converted to Christianity. Those conversions were

influential in the character of religious experience among Africans in American colonies. The Baptist movement thrived among these converts, who organized churches and denominations. This was the beginning of the political, social, and economic autonomy of the Afro-Baptist church. Eugene Genovese suggests, "By the time of the antebellum period, most southern blacks who professed Christianity called themselves Baptist; the Baptist ethos appealed to blacks for one special reason "magical power in church doctrine" (Leonard 263).

White Baptists permitted Negroes to worship with them prior to emancipation within certain fixed limits. This worship experience worked well for a period. Later they were allowed another hour for worship, with large bounds and privileges. The white churches provided them with all the privileges of the Baptist-meeting house under certain restrictions. The master class gradually reached the position of separating the races in worship, but for the security of slavery, they deemed it wise to hold the Negroes as members of the white churches (Woodson 3). This arrangement allowed some control over the slaves religious experience; however, the slaves wanted to worship freely without restrictions.

This paper will survey two important historical periods of the African American Baptist Church while becoming independent of the white Baptist church and prior to the development of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A. The first part of the paper will focus on the formation of the National Baptist Convention (NBC). The second part will focus on examining the roles of the African American women in leadership positions within the Woman's Convention. Throughout different segments within the paper, one will make obvious the inequality of black women leaders in the NBC will be obvious

during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In describing the exclusion of women from leadership roles of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., this paper will also focus on spotlighting the lives and work of four women, who were influential but not formally recognized by the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A.—Virginia Broughton, Mary Cook Parrish, Sarah Layten, and Nannie Burroughs.

CHAPTER ONE

Slavery's Limits on Religious Organizations

Some historians argue that in all nature living creatures move instinctively in groups after their kind, and that the “Negro” and the white man, left to themselves, do the same thing (Woodson 4). Religion not only added some moments of brightness to the day-to-day life of the slave community, but it also provided special rituals to mark the important events of life such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals (Raboteau 227). The fact is that the black slaves were offended against the institution of slavery. They held religious services after their own liking where only black people were present and shared in the devotion. On the other hand, the white master justified himself by making comparison of segregation to the biblical account of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple of Jehovah. The white master used this biblical account to confirm the righteous act of segregation within the church. Nevertheless, for some reason the untutored black slave never entirely was at home in the white man's church. The black man knew that the master could be at ease in any part of his church edifice. It was all his and he moved about through its aisles as a free man, but the slave was limited in his privileges and was counted a good man only as he kept within the limits assigned him (Woodson 2).

White church leadership wanted continuous control over the black converts for fear of losing dominance over them. This fear increased whenever black church population outnumbered white church population at any one church. For this reason, no single example is to be completely typical. The First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, however, is a good example of the simple problems of overwhelming racial proportion. Founded in 1780, the First Baptist Church of Richmond had the subsequent

proportions of black and white ratio: in the year 1800, 150 blacks and 50 whites; in the year 1835, 1600 black and 350 white (Mitchell 47). Even if the white Baptists had granted full black independence, the 1838 Virginia Legislature denied permission for any independent black church. These legal restrictions prohibited the blacks to worship freely. No valued records exist dating the historical accounts of racism within the church. Even when there are dependable records, any objective level of black independence is impossible to establish because of the inescapable white dominance and culturally supposed ignorance of the African Americans in the literature. One can assume from the records available that some biases may have influenced record keeping during that era.

The evangelizing of slaves served as a generalization for slavery from the earliest period of the African slave trade. The assumption was that blacks benefited from their chains as explained by some, the oppression of slavery exposed the black man to salvation from sin. Yet, there was gross apprehension on the part of many slaveholders regarding the evangelizing of slaves. Slaveholders felt that conversion would make slaves rebellious and haughty. The revolts led by slaves Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner satisfied their apprehensions¹ (Hall 14). Slaveholders sensed the relations between religion and rebellion and tried to limit opportunities for slaves to engage in religious activity. In South Carolina and Virginia, law prohibited the assembly of blacks between sunset and sunrise, even with the presence of whites. This forced the Negro to worship with their white masters.

When the Negroes in the white Baptist churches of the South became very numerous, services took place in the church edifices, usually in the afternoon (Woodson

¹ Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner both organized and led slave revolutions in the United States.

2). When they met, the colored members of the church not only enjoyed the freedom of the place for the time being, but also often listened with great satisfaction to the exhortations of one or more of their own brethren who spoke by permission from the floor and not from the pulpit platform. These Negro exhorters were encouraged to exercise a measure of spiritual oversight in the midst of their brethren to help the church and pastor in caring for the flock (Woodson 2). The blacks worshiped in a segregated group, met for worship at the same hours as the parent body, gave rise to the separate church altogether, with a white ministry. Many of the large and most progressive Negro Baptist churches of the South had their beginnings amid white churchmen.

The degree of independence diminished, however, as the number of slave members increased despite the strict regulations requiring that they have written permission to leave plantations for worship. In racially mixed churches, it was not uncommon for slaves to outnumber masters in attendance at Sunday services (Raboteau 212). More often than not, memberships of white churches were mostly slaves as they outnumbered the white membership. Some examples of this type of membership ratio is noticed in a church in Georgetown, South Carolina 1846, the ratio was thirty-three white members compared to 798 black. Another example existed in Natchez, Mississippi, this church had sixty-two white members and 380 black (Lincoln 24). Prior to the Civil War, records demonstrate the likelihood of similar white—black church membership ratio. Before the war, most black Baptists in the South worshiped in mixed churches under white ministers or in black-led gatherings of slaves known as “hush harbors” outside the sight of their white masters.² The whites forced the African American worship

² The “hush harbors” slaves hidden places of worship to avoid detection of their slave masters.

experienced to remain secret. Many slaves were obliged to worship clandestinely in hidden enclaves on the plantation. Peter Randolph, a nineteenth-century slave in Virginia, describes such a scene:

Not allowed to hold meetings on the plantation, the slaves assembled in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols. They have an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together... They first asked each other how they feel, the state of their minds, etc. The male members then select a certain space in separate groups, for their division of the meeting... Then praying and singing all around, until they generally feel quite happy... The slave forgets all his sufferings except to remind others of the trials during the past week (Raboteau 217).

Slave masters prohibited slaves to congregate openly as a group. For the reason that slave masters prohibited these gathering, slaves held their meetings in secrecy. Three main reasons the slave owners were against those gatherings. First, they did not understand the African principles carried out during these meetings. Second, they disliked the idea that the meetings could reduce slave energy for work. Third, they considered any prolonged slave gathering might cause a reduction in the economical production on the plantation. Therefore, slave owners outlawed such meetings and punished the slaves who rebuked their orders.

Once slaves came into their own religious awareness, they were forced to worship in secret. All across the South the slave community established hidden quarters to embody their own religious ideals and aspirations (Lincoln 24). The slaves were dissatisfied with the plantation preachers whose message was controlled by the slaveholder. (Hall 16). Despite the good intentions of some whites in the faith, the persistence of slavery as an institution in a white democracy encouraged blacks to develop and maintain a clandestine social and religious network (Washington 15-16).

The Civil War and emancipation of the slaves changed the African American worship experience.

Since African American slaves and their children needed to keep these fellowship and religious meetings secret, they invented codes and practices unknown to the slave owner and his staff in order to convene such gatherings. A favorite code was usually a song, or spiritual, such as “Steal Away to Jesus,” that told of such a meeting in words of double meaning (Pitts 37). The slaves found a way under the cover of night, and would “steal away” to “hush harbor,” the “praise house,” the secret “praying ground” out in the woods when they felt the need for a “real meeting with some real preachin’ ”³(Lincoln 14). However, even when secrecy was not mandated, the scattered independent churches were never allowed to develop formal black associations. Miles Mark Fisher, Baptist minister, summarizes the situation with sensitivity when he observed that:

A Negro Baptist church was somewhat independent in the North, although Associations like those in Philadelphia and New York could appoint preachers for Negro churches. In the South a large congregation of colored people could lay no claim to sovereignty apart from the white people. This point is illustrated in the First African Baptist Church, Savannah, whose membership of seven hundred was divided into three churches by the Savannah Association in 1802...Only after emancipation can complete autonomy be called a distinguishing mark of a Negro Church (Lincoln 25).

It appeared that regional differences played a major role in black church worshipping independently. By the eve of the Civil War, Christianity had pervaded the slave community (Raboteau 212). The greatest glory of Negro Baptists, however, is the spirit

³ Please note that any direct quotes from nineteenth century texts are written in their original form, which may contain grammar mistakes according to twenty-first century grammar rules.

of self-help and heroic sacrifice in the endeavor to help others, and that spirit is now everywhere prevalent (Woodson 3).

Through the emancipation in 1863, slaves met with religious challenges in the south. The freed slaves had a task of organizing religious institutions in their communities. The black northerners had already gained freedom as a people and the northern leaders established missions to assist the four million freed slaves in the south. Some white denominations such as Presbyterian, also sponsored missions and aided in the welfare of southern blacks. In another effort to help the freed slaves with independence, the northerners stressed the importance of the ability to read. The northern leaders advised the slaves that a person unable to read the Bible and understand written textual literature was not a Christian. At that point, the African Americans recognized the importance of education for survival and growth.

Education became the center of any association within the Negro churches. From an oppressed state, the Negro Baptists in a land of slavery were not supposed to be versed in the knowledge of books. With the master and slave instructed from the same inspired writings Sabbath after Sabbath, the slave quite frequently was as familiar with the Bible as his white master. The terms ignorance and illiteracy are not one in the same. The black slave may have been illiterate, unable to read the Bible words, but he was not very ignorant to the Bible readings he heard repeatedly, as any unlettered person can learn the word of God and be made wise to salvation. Apart from the knowledge received through the regular preaching of the gospel by the best preachers of the South, it was unlawful to impart verbal instruction to slaves. In other words, some Baptists appear to have given some measure of literary training to Negroes attached to their churches. Andrew Bryan,

in an effort to teach slaves in 1800, says, “of the fact that certain friends in Savannah, Georgia, had purchased a man of color of many excellent qualities, the Reverend Henry Francis, and had given him his freedom that he might be a teacher to his people.” In an effort to help the slaves, Bryan allowed Francis to open a school for the slaves on his plantation outside of Savannah (Woodson 3).

To understand the history of Baptist African American organizations, one must introduce with explanation the definition of two terms, “convention” and “association.” In the Baptist church, the distinction between the usage of the terms “convention” and “association” dates back to the era prior to the Civil War. For some persons not versed in church history, the term “convention” might bring to mind an annual meeting. Some Baptists reserve the term “convention” for statewide and national bodies, so that “associations” denote an organization smaller than a convention (Washington 38). The terms have two different purposes and meanings. Associations are the local church organizations formed and convene to address issues on the local and state level. These church associations conduct meetings, workshops, and gather information and concerns to assign delegates to represent at the national organization. Conventions are the state and local associations organizing together on a National level. The National organization has more authority than the local and state organizations. The terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but in Baptist national organizations, they have different affiliations.

The following is a series of historical events, which occurs before the formation of the National Baptist Convention. White men, to be sure, did not aspire to the pastorate of Negro churches; but they undertook to dictate the policy of associations and conventions to retain their hold on the Negro Baptists. The management of the American

Baptist Home Mission Society began to question the motives of its official staff.⁴ More fuel was furnished for the flames when, after having all but agreed to accept contributions of Negroes to its Sunday school literature, the American Baptist Publication Society, upon protest from Southern churchmen, receded from that position. As the struggle grew more intense, the black church extended to destroy the influence of white national bodies among Negroes.

⁴ The American Baptist Home Mission Society began in 1832 to address the spiritual needs of people in the frontier. The American Baptist Historical Society (ABHS) is the oldest Baptist historical society in the United States.

CHAPTER TWO

The Origin of the National Baptist Convention

The 1890s brought about a change for black Baptists in the form of the National Baptist Convention. This was the beginning of an African American Baptist organization focusing on enhancing mission work and educating the black race. During this time in history, the enforced segregation laws caused unrest in black communities. With the Baptist churches as part of the communities, this racial segregation in the form of “Jim Crow” laws may have had an impact in the development of the Convention.⁵ The African American Baptist churches and its leaders during this era were central to the lives of the black people in society. The church was responsible for meeting the spiritual needs of the people; however, they had some responsibility for providing unification and a social setting that allowed a respite from the oppression most blacks faced on the streets.

Within the closed society of Jim Crow, the church afforded African Americans an interstitial space in which to evaluate and contest white America’s racial domination (Higginbotham 10). Yet the enslaved Christians endured much turmoil within their worshiping experience before and after emancipation. As advocates for the church, the Baptist leaders planned their next move from the local and state arena. Although they encountered challenges, they found strength to form several organizations beyond the local churches. The Baptist leaders realized as a people that a cooperative movement beyond state lines would accomplish more than separate smaller local and state

⁵ Jim Crow was a racial system against Negroes of rigid anti-black laws that existed between the 1870’s and the mid 1960’s. Segregations separate but equal laws against black.

associations. Even with challenges, freed Baptists, well aware of their past, had the urgency to move forward in missions work through creation of the NBC in order to help advance the black community.

Literature suggested that during the time of struggle for blacks, the black society used the church to maintain family and community cohesiveness. At which point in history the black society started to understand the dynamics of education and learning. The blacks began relying on themselves to educate their own people, care for the needy, facilitate economic development, and address political concerns (Higginbotham 5). After being almost powerless in the fight against racial injustice, associations and conventions allowed African Americans to combine resources earmarked for religious and material needs. The Baptist leaders acknowledged that the one way to develop and prosper would be to form a partnership. The Baptist churches, however, were unable to place this partnership within the context of a national organization until the end of the nineteenth century. In an effort to balance autonomy and cooperation to benefit their shared concern, the National Baptist Convention formed. The development of the convention was an effort to make the church the flagship of black dignity and to espouse strong race consciousness concerning the preservation of the black community. The development of the Convention was a divine opportunity for the African American Baptist churches in spite of the challenges earmarked for the convention.

The black Baptists encountered many obstacles in becoming an independent black church. Due to the lack of funds, some black Baptists often worshiped in primitive conditions. Although the African Americans were free to worship as they pleased, the shackles of slavery inhibited their growth. The whites controlled all of the resources that

blacks needed to become independent. Because they were an oppressed people, many lacked the intelligence, funds, and strength to move forward independently. With the help of some white missions, some black churches successfully separated from white churches and formed their own congregations with blacks as pastors. These churches became the central institution within the black community as pastors emerged as civil and social as well as religious leaders.

History reveals that several black Baptist associations existed prior to the established National Baptist Convention. A number of black organizations formed as early as around 1830 when religious blacks and whites moved apart and began to form separate organizations. In the old northwest small weak churches first attempted to form regional black organizations. For example, in September 1835, six Ohio churches, whose congregants were primarily ex-slaves, formed the Providence Association. The largest church among them had forty-nine members, and all six together represented 178 parishioners (Sobel 363). Another example was with the development of The Association of the Regular Baptist Churches of Color in Ohio, also known as the Union Association, formed in 1836 from churches in Cincinnati, Columbus, Chillicothe, and Brush Creek (Leonard 268). These were some of the attempts made by black Baptists to form independent black organizations. In one response the subject of Negro Baptist, "What are the Negro Baptists?", Dr. R. H. Boyd, founder of National Baptist Publishing House wrote:

When the Civil War gave the Negroes their liberty there was a spirit among a few eastern Baptists to allow them full privileges in missionary and educational organizations, but eventually these too, like their Southern brethren, felt that the Negro by environment, opportunity, association and affiliation was inferior and hence should take a secondary or inferior place. The leading Negro Baptists, imbued with the spirit of freedom and

religious liberty, and accepting the situation thrust upon them, began to form district associations, state organizations, and finally felt the need of national organized movements for the purpose of forming acquaintances, better understanding church polity, gathering statistics, doing missionary, educational and publication work (Woodson 1).

Even though the black Baptist church was under scrutiny brought on through enslavement and white supremacy, they remained focused on the betterment of their people. Some visionaries with the capability and loyalty to the black race realized how black people would benefit from forming independent national organizations. The inability to form a successful national organization concerned some black people of interest.

One black historian, James Washington, suggested that the societies, conventions, and associations were not as long- lasting as they would later become (Leonard 270). Many of the early African American Baptist Conventions were short-lived, one integrating with another or ending altogether. These organizations and others like them functioned as best they could under existing social restrictions. Once organized, missions work was the focus for these associations.

Involvement in missions shadowed every African American association. The African Americans determined early on to become advocates for the organizing of missions. Leroy Fitts states, "The evolution of an African mission was a strong motivating factor in the development of associations and conventions among black Baptists. With their primary objective to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to millions of Africa's sons and daughters groping in spiritual darkness. One then can assume that much of the economic strength of the associations and conventions were in support of an African mission" (Hall 12).

One of the first national mission societies to focus on missions was the American Baptist Missionary Convention, founded in 1840 at Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York. The convention members came from African churches in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. Although the missionary convention endured for twenty-six years, the leaders were unsuccessful in maintaining a centralized coordination of programs and eventually failed (Leonard 271). The failure of that convention was a clear example of an organization formed with good intentions, but probably lacked support from resources to continue. The longevity of this convention is proof positive that future conventions can achieve some success.

After Reconstruction, the harsh race relations in the south made the formation of African American alliances even more dangerous, if not impossible. When associations formed, they tended to embrace abolitionist views. African American Baptists experienced opposition from whites when they attempted to establish or advance their organizations. Members of the Executive Board of the Virginia Baptist State Convention, an African American body, noted in 1869, "That there is opposition against us which cannot be disguised. Men prejudiced to our advancement, simply because of our sable hue, have held churches aloof from us, telling them that it is too expensive to join us, yet draining the church of larger sums than we ask, or is necessary to act with us" (Leonard 265). At the same time in some biracial churches, whites had relegated the blacks to balconies or other separate seating areas and prohibited them from voting on church matters (Fallin 31). However, some white churches insisted on the continued insults against black by white supremacy.

The ancestry of the National Baptist Convention reaches back to the first known black churches in America, generally acknowledged to have been the African Baptist or “Bluestone” Church on the William Byrd plantation in Mecklenburg, Virginia in 1758, and the Silver Bluff Baptist Church, located on the border of South Carolina and Georgia (Lincoln 13). Historian Carter Woodson claimed that the Silver Bluff Church was formed sometime between 1773 and 1775. A slave converted at an eighteenth-century missionary revival, George Liele, served as pastor of the church until the British captured Savannah. At that point, the British gave Liele and most of the congregation their freedom. As Liele’s church grew and multiplied in Savannah, in cities such as Williamsburg and other independent black Baptist churches established. Also in Richmond and Petersburg, black Baptist established from a number of proportionately free blacks. In some southern states, North and South Carolina Baptist churches established there also. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the number of black Baptists estimated to be in the excess of 25,000 people (Lincoln 24). These churches, however, were not at liberty to worship freely because they remained under the jurisdiction of white church leadership.

The Baptist denomination established associations years before the origin of the National Baptist Convention. In the year 1880, 150 Baptist pastors met in Montgomery, Alabama to form the Baptist Mission Convention. On September 24, 1895, the Baptist Mission Convention merged with two other conventions and formed the National Baptist Convention of the United States of America. There were several associations, which preceded the NBC. One association was the Foreign Mission Convention, which was to some degree a result of the demise of the Consolidated Convention. The death of the

Consolidated created a vacuum in missions work, especially for African missions. In response to this void, the Reverend William W. Colley, a missionary to Africa under the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, issued a call for black Baptists to meet in Montgomery for organizing a national convention to do extensive foreign missionary work. Subsequently, two other national conventions formed prior to the NBC with missions work as the main objective. One convention originated in 1886 was the American National Baptist Convention led by Reverend William Simmons of Kentucky. The other convention was the National Baptist Convention led by the Reverend W. Bishop Johnson of Washington, D.C. in 1893. The Baptist desired to have one convention and not two separate ones. To remain alive, this movement reached its fruition in 1895 at the Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, when these three conventions came together to form the National Baptist Convention of the United States of America. Those of its founding organizations shaped the purposes and objectives of the unified entity. The constitution of the National Baptist Convention adopted in 1895 and revised in 1915 states the business and objectives of the Convention to be:

to promote a growth and propagation of religion, morality and intelligence among the races of mankind by engaging in missionary work in the United States of America and upon the Continent of Africa, and elsewhere, by fostering the cause of Education and publishing and circulating literature and in providing the necessary ways and means for carrying on such work (Hall 55).

The Convention supported education as a missionary enterprise. The constitution of the NBC did not refer to gender in its membership or general leadership qualifications.

Most records support the movement that brought into existence the National Baptist Convention to represent the largest organized black affiliation, religious or

secular, of black Americans history. The path to the formation of the Convention was characterized by many previous cooperative efforts. Throughout the history of the convention, there have been many ups and downs, peaks and valleys, triumphs and failures, splits and attempts at unification (Fallin 1).

For as long as blacks were under the leadership of the white Baptists, their way to promotion was blocked and their literary aspirations crushed with little hope to rise. Black Baptist needed a new religious organization with leadership for black Baptist.

Education would not be of any benefit to the blacks if it did not equip them to do for themselves what the white man at first had to do for him. The idea that the African American was challenged by illiteracy had to change. The black Baptists realized a change had to come in the emergence of the NBC. The Conventions leader was Dr. E. C. Morris, a self-asserted leader of the Negro Baptist, became an important leader in the movement. From the beginning in 1898, the Reverend E. C. Morris, the elected president, led the National Baptist Convention. While serving for 27 years, his tenure was important for laying the foundation of the Convention. Let it be noted that no woman leaders were named during this time.

Historical evidence demonstrates that although successful conventions did not originate until the late nineteenth century with the black Baptists, their profound importance rests in their deployment as vehicles of black identity and empowerment. Ironically, the issue of slavery is what divided white Baptists into northern and southern conventions in 1844. The southern white Baptist was not as lenient with the abolishment of slavery as the northern Baptist. The close of the Civil War did not heal the rift among white Baptists, but it did give black Baptists the opportunity to forge a national unity and

identify of their own. The decision to form a black national convention was motivated by discriminatory policies on the part of white Baptists, as well as by the growing support among African Americans in general for racial self-determination (Higginbotham 3). Black Baptists persevered with their goal of organizing black Baptist activity on a national level with the emergence of the National Baptist Convention. Like their white brethren, these conscientious and loyal Negro Baptists found it necessary that their churches should affiliate and co-operate for the edification of all and for the spread of the gospel throughout the land.

Formally separated from the white churches following the Civil War, the black churches worked with the help provided by Northern philanthropists and their churches to set up schools throughout the South (Hall 26). Because of their help, independent Black Baptist groups established schools in Lynchburg, Virginia, Louisville, Kentucky, and Selma, Alabama. The ministry of education was carried forth with evangelical zeal as black literacy rose from a mere 5 percent in 1860 to 70 percent in 1910 (Higginbotham 11).

The National Baptist Convention also provided structure for electing representatives, debating issues, and exercising many rights that white society denied them. The convention's leaders equated racial self-determination with black denominational hegemony. The black Baptist convention movement facilitated the sharing and distribution of information through periodic statewide and national meetings where thousands gathered and discussed issues of civic concern. The formation of the convention offered African Americans space in which to analyze openly the United States government, its laws, and its institutions. The NBC viewed itself as a public

opposition to white Americans. They also referred to the importance of its press in this context: “The Negro Baptist of this country... must discuss, produce or provide literature capable of keeping the identity and increasing race pride of the rising generation or they must be overshadowed by the dominant race of this country” (Higginbotham 12).

Organized religious life through the structures of the National Baptist Convention afforded opportunities for education, literary training, and missionary ventures. In addition, the NBC provided an organization for African American independence from white religious organizations, creating a sense of empowerment for a race forced to follow the faith and religious system of the white man in the days of slavery. In this movement for religious independence and self-expression, however, the black woman remained in the shadows of religious leadership. Working for the development of faith and community, the Baptist women would not be allowed to participate in the decision making roles of growing religious denomination – The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Women, however, would contribute to the well being of their community even without formal roles of authority in the church.

CHAPTER THREE

Women Leaders Prior to the Formation of the National Baptist Convention

The literature about the formation of African American women in the Baptist church would not be complete without considering the influences of several notable females who provide examples for women to fight oppression. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, African American women worked in a cooperative fashion rare for the times.

These women played major roles in the history of African American communities at large, prior to the development of an organized church. These women worked not in opposition to faith but independent of an organized religious system. The following four women are models in the consciousness of black women. Each of the following females invested in what they believed. In their own way, they had a vision to make it through transitions, which influenced the lives of many African American people for years to come. Phyllis Wheatley, the first African American woman poet, was educated and writing poetry by the young age of twelve. Her published poetry confirmed to the African women the importance which education had on their lives. The orator, Sojourner Truth, derived her courage from a difficult childhood of abusive slavery. Her religious awakening led her to preach for women's rights and non-violence as she worked in missions work. Another influential female, Harriet Tubman, worked as a conductor of the Underground Railroad over the period of ten years risking in heroic activity her life as she led hundreds of slaves north to freedom. The fourth African American woman, Callie House, was a political lobbyist who worked with an associate to organize the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty, and Pension Association in 1894, a poor-relief

association to benefit ex-slaves. These four African American women were not only “heroines” of their sex and race but were an inspiration to black women who worked in their communities to enhance their race. They were a group of gifted and courageous women who diligently worked for a cause despite the challenges they faced. All of these women, along with many unnamed others, were role models for the African American women in the black Baptist church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Each one in their own way found avenues to help with the advancement of African Americans just as females in the black Baptist women organizations would later employ. Exemplified in the lives of these notable forerunners are boundaries between the sacred and the secular. Wheatley stepped outside the norm for her historical era reading and writing poetry far beyond the educational level for an enslaved African American. Truth demonstrated remarkable courage in her travels, “preaching” in perilous situations in protest of racial issues. Tubman’s bravery pushed her in unsafe environments in order to assist slaves to freedom. House stood up to the political arena in a fight for destitute ex-slaves. They were courageous and motivated by their faith, and dedicated to the rescue, survival and freedom of their people. They labored where possible leading their religious crusades (Hall 43). Each one had staying power that afforded them consistency under pressure. They did not see denominational work and race separate (Keller 193). Through their work, African American women identified themselves with the Christian faith and played a major role in the social, religious and civil advancements of this country. All four of these women set examples to help fight oppression while fighting for a cause in which they believed. These elite females had a heart for people,

and even with difficulties, they rose to the challenge. One must wonder how the males of this era viewed these courageous women.

Finally, many of these women entered the national public sphere as workers, principally domestic or seamstresses. In this unprotected public sphere, black women suffered indignities and assaults not experienced by their white counterparts. As public workers, these women gained little prestige but achieved geographic mobility and physical freedom that enabled them to take part in public work in evangelism, abolitionism, temperance, and women rights (West 382). Each one of these women experienced the call to ministry and, had the opportunity for service as a clergy been available to them, they probably would have joined the ranks of males as clerical leaders in the African American religious tradition (Hall 33).

The women in the black Baptist churches may have envisioned these predecessors as role models, which allowed them to have the insight to organize the national women's organization. While it is always good to affirm the influence of such well-known figures, it is equally important to recognize that they were neither isolated nor atypical, but were inheritors of a black female tradition of activism founded on a commitment to religious faith, human rights, and women's struggles (Andrews ix). Once convinced of their destinies, they were able to defend themselves against hostility and censure with appeals to biblical and historical feminist precedent, by defining themselves as instruments of God's purpose. They never allowed themselves to be stagnant or complacent. They launched themselves into endless rounds of grueling travel and tense and dangerous journeys; they traveled by foot, by wagon, by boat and even through the underground to complete the endeavors they had undertaken. Although they were not all Baptist, they

played major roles in the development of the female role in the African American Baptist organizations.

Compared to the women in the Woman's Convention, they gained the respect of the males in society. For the most part, their work in the community assisted the entire black society. Through their participation on many levels, they claimed a prominent place in African American history. In many ways, early generations and organizations connect these women in activities in society. Historian Bernice Johnson Reagon emphasized this continuity:

If we understand that we are talking about a struggle that is hundreds of years old, then we must acknowledge a continuance: that to be black women is to move forward the struggle for the kind of space in this society that will make sense for our people. It is different today. Things have changed. The search for high levels of humanity and space to be who we know we are is the same. And if we can make sense of our people in this society, we will go a long way in making sense for the rest of the peoples who also live and suffer here (Gilkes 19).

CHAPTER FOUR

Movements Preceding the Woman's Convention of the National Baptist Convention

At the emergence of the twentieth century, the black female religious experiences fluctuated from the local church, the denomination, culture, and community. Since the black church is the organizational core of black culture, black women played a most important role in the maintenance of religion in black America. The consciousness of African American women about the intersection of work, class, race-ethnicity, and gender in their experiences led to political activism that was self-consciously female (Keller 160).

Sometime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the black woman's club was organized. The club movement gave black women an outlet to express their social witness based on their Christian faith (Keller 163). First on a local and later on a state and national level, this movement was developed for educational, philanthropic, and welfare issues, as it represented another working environment outside the home. Still independent of organized religious system of the church, the women active in this movement realized the power of partnership. As a major force in the formation of the Black woman's club movement, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, founded the club movement.⁶ She believed that the club movement should be involved in temperance, morality, higher education, and hygienic and domestic questions (Keller 162). These women-only-clubs gave women an opportunity to participate more fully in the work of their religious traditions, expressing ministerial gifts and leadership within the patriarchal

⁶ Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin was a black civil rights leader and journalist.

paradigm (Mckenzie 25). The women learned valuable leadership skills through teaching and working in the ministry. These skills equipped them for the tasks that needed to address in the community as well. Clubwoman and journalist, Fannie Barrier Williams reported:

The churches have been sustained, enlarged and beautified principally through the organized efforts of their women members. The meaning of unity or effort for the common good; the development of social sympathies grew into women's consciousness through the privilege of Church work (Hall 43).

The black women reformers, who comprised the Clubwomen's movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, received their inspiration for the leadership sessions from biblical teachings. Like African Americans during the time of slavery, they saw the Bible as an instrument of liberation (Gilkes 111). They learned valuable leadership skills and formed autonomous and elaborate women's organizations within their churches. For the women to participate fully in the religious life of their churches, they often formed women-only groups. Nannie Burroughs instituting "Women's Day" in black Baptist churches in 1907, has spread to every predominantly black congregation and to black congregations within predominantly white denominations. The women in the African American churches sought to ignore religious boundaries, and not allow denominational differences to prevent their uniting as one unit. The African American women knew to advance as a gender they needed not to allow religious preferences to interfere with their progress.

Burroughs selected the fourth Sunday in July as the proposed National Woman's Day. According to Burroughs, it was a day primarily for praising women and a glorious opportunity for women to learn to speak for themselves (Gilkes 33). The main purpose of

Women's Day, was to raise the women themselves—to train them for public speaking and informed leadership through authentic, prepared, challenging speeches on how to get larger contributions for Foreign Missions (Keller 124). The following document recounts that the original purpose of Woman's Day was to raise women, not money:

Woman's Day Idea Is Now the Principal "Money Raising Day"

In Negro Churches Throughout America

Sow a thought
and reap a deed;
Sow a deed
and reap a character;
Sow a character
and reap a destiny (Keller 121).

As so poetically stated in her previous theme for Woman's Day, the primary intentions were to better prepare black women for work within their communities. The primary intent for Woman's Day had some challenges.

Burroughs great idea of a Women's Day did not convene without challenges as with most great ideas. The purpose for the day reversed when the funds from Women's Day was used for church buildings and other improvements or for local benefits.

Burroughs contribution of Women's Day, properly used, would put women's feet in the path of service and lift their heads up to see the field ripe unto harvest (Keller 125).

Instead, Women's Day was used to raise money to compete with the men of the church.

The churchwomen also used the club movement to carry on leadership roles outside the confines of the churches and connected with some independence governance. The women in the club movement organized to win elections in organizations seemingly

dominated by men, such as the NAACP and the Urban League⁷ (Gilkes 21). The African American women participated in the organizing of the two aforementioned African American political organizations. These associations challenged women to work toward economic, moral, religious and social welfare within their churches and communities. For these reasons, a number of clubs chose to affiliate with the National Association of Colored Women because of the positive impact in the community the association represented. African American churchwomen similarly sought to develop grassroots leadership by training rural and urban women to be public speakers at the turn of the century. Some churchwomen's clubs were formed for both White and African American women, as one group, in some northern areas.

The black women's club movement consciously reached across social classes to forge networks between women in professions and in industry (Gilkes 32). These women organizations afforded women the opportunity to learn leadership skill as churchwomen and teachers, to organized schools and churches throughout the South. In an effort to become prepared leaders and professionals, sometime in the 1890's, the women's club movement began simultaneously to form federations in different cities. "The new found pleasure in doing something really worthwhile is quite sufficient as a motive power to keep things going," Josephine Beall Wilson Bruce declared in 1904 in an enthusiastic report on the activities of the National Baptist Association of Colored Women⁸ (Hine 59).

⁷ NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1909, the nation's oldest, largest and most widely-recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization.

⁸ Josephine Beall Wilson Bruce, born October 29, 1853, is America's first black socialite.

The African American women established the National Association of Colored Women in 1896 with the motto “Lifting as We Climb.” The motto states the purpose for which the association was organized (Ruether 81). This association sought to provide women with alternative cultural experiences, which grew out of the merger of two nationally representative organizations, The Colored Women's League of Washington and the National Federation of Afro-American Women. Both of these movements confronted racism and its impact on every aspect of life. Within these organizational structures, the African American women insisted upon their organizations' autonomy while addressing their efforts to the condition of the entire community. Although the African American female organized to redefine their roles through club movements, they continued the fight over their future.

At the turn of the century, Jim Crow laws reinforced a sense of inferiority for African Americans. Many women, both black and white, worked to put an end to the terrorized existence it represented. Organizations such as the Young Women's Christian Association openly tackled racism (Keller 258). As a pioneer of race relations, the YWCA worked to empower women.⁹ The Supreme Court support of the separate but equal law, extended to cars, railroad and other public facilities. At that time in history, there was concern for the African American female's safety. This issue of segregation in Jim Crow cars was an urgent issue for many black women who needed to travel in the South (Cannon 13). This alarmed African American women who traveled in missions work but they developed an inner strength to sustain them in their travels. They used much caution in their travels and adhered to the restrictions placed on the black race.

⁹ YWCA is the Young Women's Christian Association.

Even though they had to travel in uncomfortable conditions that were not suitable for women, they worked to never lose sight of the end. The separate car system for black women put them at risk for sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of violence against women. The assaults that challenged the black women damage their spirits as well, yet they learned to adjust to the restrictions. Black educator and feminist Anna Cooper vividly described the humiliation suffered as a black woman who frequently traveled on the railroad in the South: “The feeling of slighted womanhood is unlike every other emotion of the soul . . . Its poignancy. . . is holier than that of jealousy, deeper than indignation, tenderer than rage” (Andolsen 13-14). The black women persevered for the sake of missions work to help others who were in need.

Because of the plague of lynching forced on the black community, the African American women feared for black males. Many black men were singled out by the enemy organization, the white supremacy (Ku Klux Klan), as they were beaten and or lynched.¹⁰ The verbal threats, public humiliations, castrating, burning, and lynching were not limited to only the black male. The following is a summary of violent incidents against the black people brought on by Jim Crow laws, male and female:

In the thirty-three year period from 1863-1915, the annual toll of the Negroes lynched never fell below 50 but once—in 1914, when the number was 49. In nine of these years the Figures rose to more than a hundred. . . Negroes were lynched for such “crimes” as threatening to see a white man, attempting to register vote, enticing a white man’s servant to leave his job, engaging in labor union activities, “being disrespectful to” or “disputing with” a white man, or sometimes for no discoverable reason at all. Mary Turner, Georgia, was hanged and burned when she was almost at the point of child-birth because she threatened to disclose the names of the men

¹⁰ The Ku Klux Klan is a racist violent movement, which supports segregation and white supremacy.

who killed her husband (Cannon 50).

For these reasons, the work of women's organizations, which may have been influenced by the frontal assault on Jim Crow, chose to blend secular and religious concerns into effective actions for antislavery societies (Keller 163). The black women protested the creeping effects of Jim Crow laws and the systematic violence of lynching. Most black women of faith understood that their Christian duty called for them to oppose Jim Crow with every moral fiber of their being (Keller 161). Although the African American women walked in their God given privileges, they had to be equipped for the challenges of the era - - to fight racism.

The service-oriented club movement was also another avenue for the African American woman to become involved in the role of public leadership; whereas the dominant culture had ignored the black women as leaders, members of the black community did not (Gilkes 112). These women had to use strategy when they planned their moves. They put into practice the power to overcome oppression. Because of their intense commitment and participation in the club movement, black female women advanced in the black race. In 1895, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin wrote:

Our woman's movement is a woman's movement in that it is led and directed by women for the good of women and men, for the benefit of all humanity...We want, we ask the active interest of our men... we are not alienating or withdrawing, we are only coming to the front, willing to join any others in the same work...and inviting...others to join us (Gilkes 21).

The club movement advanced the female ability to represent the gender roles in a positive sphere. They made advances to increase the knowledge base through the press so they could represent the women role in a broader field. The African American women's role in publishing was vital in the club movement. For this reason, the club founded a

newspaper, *The Woman's Era*, which reflected concerns of Ruffin as well as the concerns of the club. Ruffin served as editor of the club's monthly journal. The magazine articles and editorials featured writings on various topics including religion, education, politics, segregation, and history. The black woman used the press to publish articles and editorial religious materials on a state and local level that reached more readers.

As noted earlier, black women did come together in significant numbers to form their local organizations—principally through literary, antislavery, mutual aid societies, and clubwomen societies—designed to take care of family and community needs. They formed antislavery and literary societies. They stretched beyond their reach to finish what they started in the movement. Yet in the final analysis, they created a national network of black women leaders, which allowed them to enter an arena of public civic debate (West 385). Although the club movement was successful, the African American woman continued to work toward an even broader sphere, in national and or globally to reach the smallest entity.

One important role the African American women insisted upon developing was the formation of missions. African American females formed mission societies during the 1800's first in local churches and associations, and then national organizations. The Woman's Convention raised funds for missions at home and abroad, but they also recruited women for services, which usually meant in the fields of home or foreign missions. Most of the training for missions work took place at the National Training School in Washington, D.C. At each annual Woman's Convention, the President emphasized her interest in Foreign Missions. There were several speeches on Missions during the course of the Woman's Convention. At the annual session, the leaders allowed

the women returning from Africa or other mission fields to speak to delegates. The missions work remained at the heart of the Woman's Convention.

Several female leaders were involved with the establishment of the early mission stations in South Africa, Haiti, Bahamas Island, and Liberia. The first missionary representing the Woman's Convention was Emma B. Delaney. She made her first mission trip to Liberia in 1903 and later in 1912, she organized a mission in Liberia. She and other missionaries from the Woman's Convention endured extreme hardship. At their stations in the mission field, they were sometimes without food, poorly paid, and housed in unfit housing. A native of Florida, Delaney founded a mission on 25 acres of land given by the government of Liberia in Africa on the condition the missions be used for educational purposes. A New Jersey Baptist church of the NBC chose to finance the mission station for many years. Her role as a missionary was a dynamic commitment. Delaney withstood many hardships in pursuit of her passion for the mission She used the resources that were available. Delaney initiated a policy, intended to make the mission self-supporting. She propositioned the parents on an agreement to food and other needed items in an effort to offset payment for their children education at the mission station. Later on, the Foreign Mission Board passed a policy that mandated parents' responsible for providing the food and clothing for their children while in the mission schools. Delaney leadership abilities helped her successfully modify situations to lighten her burden as a missionary. Delaney suffered ill health due to overwork and poor nutrition. A Louisiana attorney made a tour of the mission station and sent back the following report about Delaney:

On the 15th day of May, I visited our station at Suehn and found Sister Delaney there at her post of duty. I carried her a

barrel of fish that you had sent her . . . This she was very glad to receive for the reason that food was very scarce out there at that time, she having just sent her boys many miles in search of food for the children and they had just returned without finding any. I found Sister Delaney in the highest of spirits over the work, but much run down and in need of rest. I consider this station one of the nicest in the whole field, from the moment one enters . . . their heart is made . . . proud of the splendid place built up by our beloved sister, and given to the service of God . . . This station contains 225 acres of land and ten buildings, one of said buildings is not yet completed . . . and when completed will add much to the station . . . a beautiful little church also adds much to this station . . . Too much praise cannot be given this good woman for the noble work done at this station (Hall 112).

The attorney's report describes Delaney's sincerity in her missions work even under extreme conditions. Over the course of her tenure as a missionary, Delaney sent several women to the National Training School for Women and Girls. After training, the women returned to Liberia to serve as teachers or director in missions. Delaney was instrumental in the development of missions under the Woman's Convention. Through her missionary work, she represented the Woman's Convention for many years, educating and training many people that were less fortunate. She remained faithful to her work until her health failed, after making a tremendous impact on the black woman's role in society.

Women were creating organizations to benefit African American communities and they were leading them. The women's club movement served as a precursor to the development of the Woman's Convention, which would provide opportunities for women leaders, but would not be officially recognized as belonging to the leadership structure of the National Baptist Convention.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Early Developments of the Woman's Convention

Prior to the development of the women's national organizations, women's involvement in missions work was evident in the local communities. Women worked in religious, educational, and missionary quarters. Baptists knew of the intimate relationship that women had in the life of the church. They knew that the support of women was crucial to the success of any program of the denomination, whether local, regional, or national in scope. As early as 1884, one Baptist Missionary Association emphasized the necessity of securing women's support. The Convention's corresponding secretary, T.L. Jordan, said:

That these societies are much needed none will deny. It is said that none can feel, as women feels, or love as she loves, or is more successful than she in great undertakings, going where man dare not venture bearing what men shrink from and feeling what men never know. They are the controlling power in our Sunday-schools, and their pious wishes are always regarded. In our churches, cannot we combine our strength, and elicit their consecrated souls in this mission work (Martin 132).

Jordan's speech was in contrast to the traditional nature of the role of the females, which was assumed to be in the home. One must assume that the dialogue he used had an impact on females in the black Baptist churches after the enactment of the NBC in 1895.

Religious tradition granted women spiritual gifts such as the power of prophecy and charismatic preaching outside the male platform. For the most part, one problem for women in nineteenth-century America was in delivering the sphere in which they would have the freedom to exercise their gifts. For some women, the American "cult of true womanhood" had established woman's proper sphere as her home; any "outside" activity that conflicted with her domestic duties to her children and her husband was suspect. In

others, political agitation and money-making pursuits were “out” (Andrews 13). On the other hand, assuming that women were naturally religious, her participation in church work was seemingly beneficial to herself and to society. In keeping with the previous thought, one might define the black females’ role as one, a leader in society, the backbone of domestics in the home, and one who assumes a credible position within the church.

The nineteenth century experienced a rise of organizations run by and for the black women, such as women’s auxiliaries in church, missionary societies, and various agencies for moral reform. All were welcomed with enthusiasm in most quarters of antebellum America. The black Baptist church embraced the idea of separate associations for women because women demonstrated they would raise money over and above what their husbands pledge to the church. In these organizations, women could put their faith into practice without overstepping the bounds of proper feminine decorum or overreaching the traditional limits, that mainstream religiosity had placed around female leadership in the church (Andrews 13).

Black women managed to bring together a massive network of women organizations that were able to mobilize leadership at national and local levels. The organizing of many of these societies was to promote intelligence and to educate the women in the Baptist churches as they worked to retain the autonomy of these societies. Black women invested considerable amounts of time, energy, and economic resources into the growth and development of religious organizations. Women’s mounting demands for greater participation in the denomination reached a high point with the organizing of the Woman’s Convention (Higginbotham 155). The women’s efforts made in the

formation of the local organizations won national status at the founding meeting of the National Baptist Convention. In 1895, at the NBC, women achieved a historical moment by advocating for a separate auxiliary convention (Higginbotham 155). In 1900, after a thirty-year period the African American women campaigned for gender identity within the black Baptist tradition, the Woman's Auxiliary Convention was founded.¹¹ The Woman's Auxiliary Convention (hereafter Woman's Convention) operated as an organization to the NBC, which embraced the purposes and objectives of the NBC. The Woman's Convention proposed attention to improving the circumstances of women and children in education and racial advancement through home and foreign missions.

The foundational commitment of the Woman's Convention, which was the ground of its organizational existence, was the work of missions. The primary purpose for which the Woman's Convention was organized was in support of the organization's constitution and remained the same during all the various phases of revision.

We, the women of the churches connected with The National Baptist Convention, desirous of stimulating and transmitting a missionary spirit and grace of giving among the women and children of the churches and aiding in collecting funds for missions to be disbursed as ordered by the Convention, organize and adopt the following (Hall 105).

It was that financial support for missions, to be disbursed as ordered by the Convention that led the male leadership of the NBC to consent to their organizing in 1900 (Hall 105). The National Baptist Convention and the Woman's Auxiliary held their annually conferences simultaneously; their sessions, however, were held in separate

¹¹ The term Auxiliary refers to a subordinate organization or group. One can assume the men of the NBC had input with the naming of the Woman's Convention with the use of the term auxiliary instead of the term Convention.

buildings. During this era, the male-dominated convention spoke for the denomination and monopolized the position of authority and power. Thus, women sought to develop their own voice and pursue their own interest (West 193). The Woman's Convention formed a valuable forum for women to discuss their own concerns. The officers of the Woman's Convention appealed to delegates and all who attended the sessions to support the work of missions in every way possible. On the local organizational level, churches affiliated with the Woman's Convention as Missionary Societies. The women of the Woman's Convention were on a mission, which empowered them with the sense of being on a holy crusade. The emergence of a Women's Convention in the NBC was a direct result of the feminist biblical tradition. Thus, women sought to develop their own voice and pursue their own interests in an organization monopolized by men (West 193). They believed that the spiritual, social and intellectual salvation of millions of African American people depended upon their work. African American women associated with the NBC during that period founded some 154 societies. Women were not allowed to serve in leadership positions in the Baptist Convention; they formed their own their own Woman's Convention.

One of the organizations associated with The Woman's Convention was the National Training School for Women and Girls. This School was a mission program birthed out of the Woman's Convention. The 1909 the school organized in 1909, in Washington with Nannie Burroughs, the Corresponding Secretary of the Woman's Convention, as its leader. The black Baptist women envisioned the school as a vehicle for winning friends for the race and for fostering positive images of blacks in the minds of white employers (Higginbotham 216). The NBC supported the African American females

because the women worked across the nation who worked for the betterment of their school within the black church.

The schools popularity and enrollment grew quickly. The financial reports of state contributions to the Woman's Convention between 1900 and 1920 revealed that the National Training School accounted for fifty-nine percent of all donations to the Woman's Convention (Higginbotham 220).

The school, however, encountered challenges from the leaders of the National Baptist Convention. The deed for the property for the Training School was in the names of trustees, Nannie Burroughs and Julia Layton. This arrangement caused concern for the leaders of the National Baptist Convention because they wanted more control over the school. The NBC wanted the transfer of the deed for the Training School to the Woman's Convention to make the school subject to the rules of the Woman's Convention. That move would place the school under the authority of the National Baptist Convention, the same as the Woman's Convention. Nannie Burroughs and the Woman's Convention eventually compromised with the National Baptist Convention for the Training School. Despite the debt, the school was a success. This success led the male leadership of the Baptist Convention to control its financial business. This is another example of male dominance within the Baptist Church. Not without challenges, the school became property of the Woman's Convention and operated under its own Board of Trustees.

The Training school had a strict discipline for learning. This institution survived as the School of the three B's for the importance placed on the Bible, bath, and broom as tools for racial advancement (Gilkes143). According to Barnett, a black activist, applied

the philosophy of “idealizing the real” to every aspect of the school. Barnett gives this description of the school:

The National Training School attempted to speak concretely to the material conditions surrounding black women. American society demanded that the black woman work no less than her man for survival, while for many decades both sexes were for the most part limited either to agricultural work in the South or domestic service in rural and urban areas throughout the nation. . . Stressing the importance of thorough domestic training at the National Training School for Women and Girls, Nannie Burroughs reasoned that ‘The Negro girls must be taught the art of home-making as a profession, because 98 percent of them must keep their own homes without any outside ‘help’ and, according to percent statistics, 58 percent of the women who work out are cooks, nurse-maids, etc’ (Gilkes 143-144).

Even though there were some internal tensions over the deed, the NBC supported the school’s curriculum, which they compared to that of Tuskegee Institute. In an article by Margaret Washington, wife of Booker T. Washington, noted in 1905, the women at Tuskegee’s curriculum taught academic preparatory and proficiency in at least one trade (Higginbotham 214). Burroughs Training School specialized in a variety of trades and academic subjects as well. The Training School differed from other black schools because of the high standards with which the school taught and trained for domestic work. Because of the success of the Training School, domestic science courses started to appear in the program at other schools, colleges and technical institutions throughout the United States. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Phyllis Palmer witnessed the terms “Professionalization of home economics as a female-led scientific field”¹²(Higginbotham 214). The Training School was a successful enterprise ran by and for women.

¹² Home economics is a formal way of teaching domesticity.

As active leaders in education, domestic training, and faith development, black women served their church and community. Resistance to their leadership remained in the organizational structure of the black Baptist church, particularly the National Baptist Convention.

CHAPTER SIX

Four Leaders of the Woman's Convention of the National Baptist Convention

The black church leaders encouraged the women's involvement in female church politics, but they limited their involvement in the National Baptist Convention. While the context is clearly patriarchal, where men are the decision makers and women have only a secondary role, black women have constructed a wide variety of leadership roles. These roles provide opportunities for both married and single women to be active in roles in and outside of the home. The male leaders agreed to support women's societies for the sole purpose of raising funds to support the objectives of the NBC. The women, however, chose to exercise oversight and financial control over the women's work (Hall 45). As leaders of the Woman's Convention, they expanded women's experiences. They worked to change, adjust, and modify the conditions for the African American women.

The black women who led in the formation of the Woman's Convention were young articulate reformers. They were also both radical and conservative. Against opposition of the black male, the women argued for the acceptance of black female leadership roles into the oral tradition of the black Baptist community (Gilkes 111). Four of the most outstanding of this group of role models of the NBC, with leadership in the Woman's Convention, were Virginia Broughton, Mary Virginia Cook Parrish, Sarah White Layten and Nannie Helen Burroughs (Hall 46). These four esteemed African American women were teachers and former students of Selma University and State University and were vital in the success of the Woman's Convention, serving with deep religious commitment and strong political impact. With these women, the Woman's

Convention made great strides toward equality for the black female. Even with these strides, however, the male leaders remained dominant.

Virginia Broughton, an advocate working towards equality for women and women's rights. As a young African American woman, she made history long before claiming her place as a leader in the Woman's Convention. Her work as a leader began early on in her life as a graduate of Fisk University in 1875 as a qualified schoolteacher. Recognized as the first woman of any race to gain a collegiate degree, Broughton graduated from a Southern school (Hall 48). Raised as a free black woman in the South, she was accustomed to independence from an early age. Unlike the other female leaders of the Woman's Convention, she openly objected male leadership. Teaching suited one of her many talents, mainly leadership. Unlike Cook, Broughton was married with five children, and even lectured on the subject of "the ideal mother" (Higginbotham 130). She spent little time with her children, for she considered missionary work above her personal life. Her feminist views surfaced when she and a black male (less experienced than her) competed for the same teaching position. Males did not intimidate Broughton, as she secured the teaching position.

Broughton was one who advocated for gender equality. Her roles included a feminist religious activist, an excellent writer and an advocate for African American women within the Woman's Convention. She worked tirelessly in the state of Tennessee promoting her beliefs to advance the lives of the African American women. Where some saw gender equality as unorthodox and in conflict with the Scripture, Broughton was able to find total support for it in the Bible. One of the ways she circulated her ideas was with her 1904 book, *Women's Work, as Gleaned from the Women of the Bible*, which blended

what she shared in her lectures and Bible studies. She shared her doctrine in the Bible bands, small women's group formed for daily Bible study that she seeded throughout Tennessee.

As a supporter of the Woman's Convention, she represented the Baptist denomination at various church and religious conferences (Smith 57). She was foremost the leader of black Baptist women in Tennessee until her death (Higginbotham 69). Hall describes Broughton as a "dynamic public speaker and a popular national figure who traced the Baptist women's movement and its providential evolution to Eve in the Garden of Eden" (Hall 48). Broughton, along with other colleagues, was active in the organization of the Baptist Woman's Convention, which developed different levels of male support and sometimes hostility. She worked with other women who were vocal in defense of women's rights to organize separate state conventions for black Baptist women. Viewed as a religious feminist, Broughton developed her own views on women's rights in the church and society.¹³ She held the position of recording secretary for the Woman's Convention and represented the convention well.

As a feminist theologian, Broughton worked to increase the role of women in a male dominant religious authority. Gordon Kaufman, historian, described feminist theologians as universal work belonging to every Christian:

Obviously, Christians are involved in theologizing at every turn. Every attempt to discover and reflect upon the real meaning of the Gospel, of a passage in the Bible, of Jesus Christ, is theologizing; every effort to discover the bearing of the Christian faith or the Christian ethic on the problem of personal and social life is theological. For Christians theology is the critical analysis and creative development of the language utilized in apprehending,

¹³ Religious feminist is one who considers religion traditions from a female perspective.

understanding, and interpreting God's acts, facilitating their communication in word and deed (Higginbotham 126).

Broughton's popularity, however, intimidated certain men. Some men, especially illiterate preachers, opposed her boldness; many disliked literate women using the Bible to refute the pretensions of males (Smith 58). Despite this controversy, she continued to place God and missionary work above all else, even her family. Her popularity was evident because many of her devotees hung a picture of her on their walls. Her aggressive, self-confident style led some men to deride her as a "mannish woman." However, Broughton claimed that her mannerism indicated divinely inspired power over her adversaries.¹⁴

In 1902, Broughton expressed her views and the views of the women of the Women's Convention when she called for blacks to publish distinctive literature that would instill pride on the race, especially women (Smith 59). Along with others, she criticized women's fashion of the time. Broughton found "gaudy colors and conspicuous trimmings" distasteful, and by 1913, the Women's Convention attacked the low neckline dresses and slit skirt, and advise mothers that their daughter's dresses should be made wide enough to make a slit unnecessary (Smith 59). Broughton's views on fashion were valued because of her position of authority and her contribution as an advocate for the moral influence of the African American woman.

Broughton worked as a missionary across the state of Tennessee, and under her leadership, women studied the Bible passionately. Her role in the Woman's Convention spread across communities as she influenced teaching literacy aiding the impoverished

¹⁴ The terms "mannish woman" refers to Broughton's willingness to express her views even among her adversaries.

and illiterate African American in the community. She extended herself to work for the cause of the Baptist church, dividing her time between two churches in the Memphis area. The schoolroom was not the only place in which Broughton made a positive impact. This devout Baptist was also a missionary and her primary area of ministry was to women. She emerged as a leading advocate for women's rights during her time working as a missionary for black women. When her husband asked her how long her missionary work would continue, she answered that she did not know, and it was up to God. She believed that she belonged to God first, and to her husband second so she told him that he would have to work that out with God (Hall 48). This statement is an example of her mannerism.

Broughton engaged in public lectures, house-to-house visits, and prolific amounts of correspondence. In 1904, she published a work called *Women's Work as Gleamed from the Women of the Bible*. In this publication, Broughton and colleagues stated:

Baptist interpreters of the Bible perceived as part of the vanguard of the movement to present the theological discussion of woman's place. They used the Bible to sanction both domestic and public roles for women. While each of the feminist theologians had her own unique style and emphasis, the basic arguments resembled each other closely on four essential roles for the women: in the home, in the church, in social reform, and in the labor force. In every case, Baptist women emphasized, biblical passages that portrayed women positively (Gilkes 111).

As one African American woman elite, Broughton occupied a conspicuous place in black society. She participated with numerous enterprises designed to promote racial equality. Her stance as a feminist theologian shocked the early twentieth century society, both male and female. Broughton was an acclaimed journalist and a supporter of woman's rights. She was a writer, educator, and a biblical teacher who was committed to

the advancing of the morality in the black female population. Broughton was not afraid to voice the concerns of her hearts passion. She remained anchored to improving the livelihood of black women in a male dominant society. Despite all her work and accomplishments, Broughton never achieved the same recognition as her male counterparts.

Without any doubt, Mary Cook Parrish helped to shape the role of the African American female in the Baptist churches during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Widely read, this educated female challenged the conviction that assigned intellect to men and emotionalism to women. Cook demanded that the church “Emancipate Woman from the chains that now restrain her admonishing who can estimate the part she will play in the work of the denomination” (Higginbotham 144). With her efforts to organize and implement, she worked without ceasing and became an activist for change. Her work for gender equality had a positive impact on the lives of black women then and even today within the church and community.

In 1893, while Cook was serving as a professor of Latin and Philosophy, she was elected recording secretary of the National Baptist Educational Convention. As one of the officers of the Woman’s Convention, Cook, worked tirelessly. In the role as recording secretary, she used her position within the church to defend women on exercising their gifts in the home, the church and in every profession and social cause that respected Christian values (Hall 47). As a woman with a lot to say, she was selected to speak on women’s behalf in the classic statement of black Baptist doctrine, *The Negro Baptist Pulpit*, published in 1890 (Higginbotham 125). Cook was successful in many of her

endeavors. She managed to accomplish much through her voice solid religious involvement of the African American female within the Baptist church.

Coming from a childhood in Kentucky, Cook later married a Reverend Charles Parrish a teacher with her at the University. Her marriage to Reverend Parrish afforded her stronger bonds with the Baptist ministry. Because he was a Black Baptist newspaper editor and a leader among black Baptist ministries. Cook's educational sponsorship by white Baptist missions gave her a passion for mission work and a connection with white women Baptist groups to do interracial work in the future. Because of the white women's interest in Cook, she developed a collegial relationship with many white Baptist women in the north, who later became an important part of interracial and inter-organizational alliances among Baptist women.

At a young age, Cook became familiar with missions work. The fact that a white Baptist women group funded her collegiate education influenced her role in missions work. For this reason, she worked with women in groups to transmit a missionary spirit, not only to raise funds for missions, but also to help women with education. Her idea of missions work was not only to assist at home and abroad, but also to recruit women solely for Christian service. Cook assumed the role as model for women in the church community and in missions work. Although she promoted missions work within the Woman's Convention, it was no accident that she yearned to affiliate herself with missions' organizations, because through missions she was awarded her education.

Cook's role as a leader affected different aspects of the black women's society. She realized to reach some black females in the community, she had to be associated with organizations that were not religiously based. With that as a motive, Cook was leader of

the secular black woman's National Association of Colored Women. This was an organization of local women's clubs, which, Cook as president, played a leading role until her death in 1945. In her role as president, she campaigned for women's rights and argued against lynching and the Jim Crow laws. Cook was a prominent activist in the Baptist denomination and carried that activism into her role as leader of National Association of Colored Women. She encouraged solid religious thought as a pioneer of the black feminist movement in Baptist life. In the late nineteenth century, Cook rallied for the National Association of Colored Women in an effort to prepare the female African Americans for the next century. Under Cook's leadership of the National Association of Colored Women, the African American female experienced an aspect of community life that maintained tradition and fostered social and individual change (Gilkes 45).

Cook worked to foster change for the African American female was one of her main objectives for her work. Through journalism, Cook could reach a broader audience. As a writer, she served as editor of the women's column of the *Louisville American Baptist Magazine* and as the education editor of *Our Women and Children*. Through these writings, she communicated with African American female audience. Her role as a journalist was to heighten the females' voice within the women's sphere. She wrote in the National Baptist Magazine in 1895, which rendered her the opportunity to recognize the important work of the convention, especially in the South. When writing in the different editorials, Cook gained the opportunity to express her views at the convention, which were school construction, organizations to assist the elderly and feeble, and the acquisition of land. Cook wrote in another magazine, *Hope*, a magazine edited by Joanna

R. Moore, a white northern missionary, which was an important link between black Baptist women's state conventions that offered articles on events in the varying states.

As a leader of black Baptist women, she worked closely with the black Baptist women of her state. Her ties with the white Baptist missions continued through her editorials. In so doing, she enjoyed communication with northern white Baptist Women (Higginbotham 125). As a writer, Cook articulated her views well. In an edition of the woman's column in the *American Baptist*, she wrote:

White faces seem to think it their heaven-born right to practice civil war on negroes, to the extent of blood-shed and death. They look upon the life of their brother in black as a bubble to be blown away at their pleasure. The same spirit that existed in the South twenty-four years ago, is still recognized in its posterity. The negro is still clothed in swarthy skin, and he is still robbed of his rights as a citizen, made clear and fairly won to him by the death of those who fell in the late Rebellion. The outrage cannot endure (Higginbotham 78).

Cook impressed the community with her many talents. She was intelligent, articulate and insightful and expressed her views in the black press and in speeches before various groups. Her articles and speeches reflected cohesive scriptural interpretation of the Bible. Her position as editor of several women's columns and recording secretary of the Woman's Convention enabled her to address African American women social, community and religious issues in a positive manner. Cook clearly articulated her view on human rights. She impressed the president of the college she attended, and because of that, he mentored her at the university. The President of the State University, William Simmons, described her as strong as Hercules and her work ethic like a Trojan (Higginbotham 62). He also, identified her boldness and ability to be vocal while, on a positive note, directly affecting the African American community.

One of the greatest efforts of the convention was the founding of the National Training School for Women and Girls in 1909, of which Cook was chair of the board of trustees. The National Baptist Convention received financial support from the Training School. Through her leadership, Cook was responsible for the education for over 2,000 women. Through her work at the school, she was instrumental in the progress of the African American women during that era. In addition, as one of the leaders of the Woman's Convention of the NBC, she influenced the role of the African American women. She assisted with the social improvement of associations that developed black women's leadership skills. Her many talents positively affected the Woman's Convention. Through her leadership, she increased the educational awareness and racial issues during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although accepted and respected within the entire black community, Cook never made it to the dominant podium as a leader.

Compared to the leadership of the men convention, Sarah Layten, was an excellent leader of the women whom she led the Woman's Convention for forty-eight years. As a promoter of racial equality, she was a reformer for women. Under her leadership, the women in the convention fought for women's rights in the Baptist church. Her life as a leader developed early on in her life. As graduate of LeMoyne College, she taught in the public schools of Fort Smith, Arkansas where her father pastored a church. She later married and moved to Los Angeles, where she became a leader in denominational work and secular women's organizations. As founder of the Western Baptist Association of California, she served as the first president of its Women's Auxiliary. Outside the church, she worked in a variety of organizations to increase black

political power. She organized the first Colored Women's Club in California and became the first black woman engaged in Travelers Aid work.¹⁵ According to Layten, she had championed rights for blacks and women when she was a young girl (Smith 403). Even at a young age, she was acquainted with racial and gender issues of black Baptist women. Her father was a supporter for black denominational hegemony and introduced Layten to racial self-determination at an early age. Respected throughout the National Baptist denomination and interracial women's organizations she worked continuously for moral reform. Because of her childhood background and through her work as president of the Woman's Convention, Layten had a keen interest in social reform. With her leadership skills, she raised the bar to moral reform, addressing not only adult black females, but also young black girls. In an attempt to protect the rights of women, she called for an increased sense of community among black women.

Layten's leadership skills extended to roles outside the church, where she worked as a professional social worker and was active in Republican politics in Pennsylvania. In one of her efforts to increase social reform, she was organizer of the Philadelphia and New York Colored Women's Clubs. This organization grew to become the Urban League of the City of New York. Although an advocate for black women, she was also concerned with the tendency of society to hold black women accountable for the behavior of the race as a whole. According to the Journal of the Fifth Annual Assembly of the Women's Convention, held in 1904, Layten urged black women to react:

Mothers be stern, be firm and yet you can be kind
and symbolic. As a race we cannot afford to
contribute ONE single life to the bad, though the

¹⁵ To assist individuals in travel is Travelers Aid work.

individuals force it upon us. We are impoverished, unfortunately the minority of bad Negroes have given the race a questionable reputation; these degenerates are responsible for every discrimination we suffer (Smith 404).

Layten highlighted the negative impact that some black Americans had forced upon them as a people. She urged African American mothers to uphold their role as mothers and to provide moral leadership within the race.

As president of the Woman's Convention, Layten, along with Frances Kellor, a white social worker, worked closely with the National League for the Protection of Colored Women. This league worked to improve the moral and financial condition of women employed in domestic service (Smith 404). The Women's Convention worked to protect migrant women who moved North from excessive travel cost and other exploited practices. Churches in the North and South were intermediaries between Layten and the women who wished to migrate North (Smith 404). Layten was sensitive to the unscrupulous conditions black women encountered once they arrived to the larger cities. One of the concerns the National League for the Protection of Colored Women was to help improve the financial and moral conditions for the women in domestic work. According to Higginbotham, women who wanted to migrate worked through their churches at home to their migration north. In turn, the churches contacted Layten, who gave them traveling directions and other pertinent information for their journey (Smith 404). This league worked to promote better servants in the field of domestic service to search for better agencies who would offer better working conditions once settled in the north.

Layten was busy for her time as she organized women's groups in her travel to different places. One of the organizations for which she was most proud was the Women's Auxiliary to Bahamas Baptist Convention (Smith 105). She urged the Baptist women to work with her to organize and assist with war efforts during World War I. As an influential leader, she asked the women to help win the war by buying Liberty Bonds and war stamps, and also by conserving food and fuel. Her work in the community extended to numerous other areas as well. Her role as president of the Woman's Convention led to her membership on the executive board of the World Baptist Alliance, where she represented the Women's Convention in Stockholm, Sweden in 1922.

Although an advocate for the African American race, Layten argued for a joint meeting of black and whites that was highly significant. This meeting set a precedent for interracial cooperation and was crucial toward greater racial understanding in the South (Smith 404). The collaborative effort was evident when, in 1904, she represented the Woman's Convention before the Woman's Missionary Union, a southern white Baptist organization. These white women delegates attended a citywide conference on African American women; Layten asserted that this coming together of the two groups was an achievement. One can also interpret the union as one of success especially for that era. The union exposed the white delegates to the black perspective. The conference held for the white Baptist women created another label for the president of the Woman's Convention: a mediator.

Layten was an influential black woman leader whose role was devoted to the African American women during the early years of the twentieth century. Her presidential address to the 1915 Woman's Convention described the social context, out of

which the Woman's Convention was organized, and its many programs of constructive work and how it provided moral leadership and carried out its vigorous ministry of missions.

Layten's role as president asserted her understanding about how black people should act within their communities and addressed the problems and oppressive structures that need to be changed (Gilkes 142). This understanding affected the males in the community as well as the women. Although her works positively impressed both genders, she did not reach the male dominant platform in her addresses. Her speeches address the social service responsibility of the church and asked the church to 'reduce preaching to teaching' in order to facilitate the protection of homes, women, and children. Layton challenged the women community leaders and the elite, to become involved and mentor the young women in their communities. Layton had a vision for the Woman's Convention, and made a formal cry to the women reminding them that the race is not over.

In an effort to obtain equality with the leadership in the National Baptist Convention, Layten demanded that the women of the convention rally with her to help decrease the demoralizing views of the race; while increasing gender identity and moral respect of women in the black race. The condition of African American women described by President Layten at the convention in 1915, was tedious and treacherous. As the speaker, she voiced her race and gender concerns conveying step-by step encounters the women endured. Through her speeches, she informed the women of the Woman's Convention about activities and social and economic concerns of the black community.

She was highly regarded by the women of the Woman's Convention. Her role as president of the Woman's Convention lasted for forty-eight years.

In Layten's concern for education and religion, she stated, "Bring education closer to religion, relate it to health needs, industrial life, character building, work in prisons, reform among men, collect and organize social facts" (Smith 405). Through the leadership of Layten, the Woman's Convention of the National Baptist Convention pursued their task of organized and dedicated service with great commitment and vigor. She worked as president of the Woman's Convention and with their assistance; they made great strides for the church and the community. Under her leadership, missions' organizations birthed. She addressed female issues such as religious concerns within the Woman's Convention, prostitution, the substandard conditions of domestic workers, education, the unsafe travel for black females, social concern of the African American community and supported the relationship between white and black females. Although through her work, the black females' condition did improve. She achieved stardom as the leader of the Woman's Convention, yet she never entered the National Convention's platform. The condition of black women struggling to overcome the multidimensional oppression of the race and gender continued to exist. Although she held the attention and respect of the leaders of the NBC, the leaders of the NBC did not allow Layten a space with their leaders.

One will not enter the arena of the Woman's Convention without examining the many roles of Nannie Burroughs. She demonstrated through her life deeds religious motivation and commitment to African American women active in church and society. For some believed that for whom life was labor. Burroughs was an intense leader of many

women in the black community during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Burroughs like others, such as Cook and Layten, never achieved national status on the podium of the NBC. After a move to Louisville, Kentucky, she worked as a bookkeeper and secretary to L. G. Jordan, head of the Foreign Mission Board of the NBC for sixty-one years. As one of the organizers of the Woman's Convention in 1900, she served as Corresponding Secretary. In literature, Burroughs legacy remains influential in the facilitating of the Woman's Convention and The National Training School for Women and Girls.

Historically, African American women in the United States helped produced and shaped diverse and critical models of leadership and community organization (Gilkes 142). This African American woman Virginia Burroughs was one such person. Historians traced her birth to Virginia and later moved to Washington, D.C. It was in Washington she found a teaching position in the public schools. One historian, Earl H. Harrison has written that the bitter disappointment of her being passed over for a post as teacher in domestic science, in favor of a woman with some political influence, significantly determined her to establish a school.

An idea struck out of the suffering of that disappointment that I would some day have a school here in Washington that school politics had nothing to do with and that would give all sorts of girls a fair chance, without political pull to help them overcome whatever handicapped they might have (Hall 50).

As resourceful as she was influential and with eloquence, Burroughs turned her frustration into motivation. She initiated the idea of the Training school to the women of the convention and organized a women's industrial Club prior to the fulfillment of her

dream—The National Training School. Burroughs assured the Woman's Convention that the school's limited budget did not preclude high standards (Higginbotham 213).

Burroughs's stated, "We may have the poorest, but we are going to do the best that can be done with what we have (Higginbotham 213). The attitude of the male leadership of the Convention toward the training school is representative of their policy toward the work of the Woman's Convention. From the beginning of the Woman's Convention in 1900, until reorganization in 1938, the men primarily sought to "encourage the enterprise and at the same time. . . regulate its management (Hall 51). The Training School was a subsidiary of the Woman's Convention and the Woman's Convention was a subsidiary of the NBC. Because of this level of hierarchy, the NBC did not agree with the Woman's Convention maintaining control of the school. At one-point leaders of the NBC decided that the Woman's Convention can support and control the Training School, but the convention wanted the financial management under their ministry, not that of the Woman's Convention, which is an example of the male dominance within the NBC's leadership.

This idea of control posed some issues between the National Baptist Convention and the Woman's Convention. The issue over control interrupted Burroughs vision for women in the Woman's Convention. The male leadership questioned the schools' curriculum. The leaders for the NBC disliked the idea of the school training women to become independent wage earners outside the home. She asked for support from the women in the church and community on this issue. The women rallied as a team on the issue of the curriculum and the school was organized. At the beginning stages of the training School, Burroughs told the Woman's Convention: "We need an institution that is

going to make domestic and manual training a business and not take a side issue in school's most extensive and well-founded program (Higginbotham 214). The school's primary focuses were in homemaking, housekeeping, household administration, management of dining rooms, to name a few.

Burroughs was the principal proponent of the national Women's Day in the national Baptist Convention churches. Her feminist imagination saw the day as a way the Convention could discover and develop public speakers for church programs (Gilkes 114). In that position she provided speeches for women from the national office in order to foster the development of public speakers in local organizations—so women could learn to speak for themselves (Gilkes 37). In her roles as an activist, educator, and writer, she shared ideas in ways that foster racial uplift (Gilkes 142). Her feminist imagination can be exemplified in speeches and articles the “righteous discontent” characterized by Baptist women (Hall 52). Another example of her role is as an advocate of African American self-sufficiency and supporter for the rights and needs of the uneducated and poor females. She protested restricting gender roles as well as race and class limitations. Higginbotham writes that she never believed that industrial education alone would end blacks' racial subordination, but she insisted that the real measure of racial progress rested upon the economic and moral of the great mass of laboring people, especially black women (Hall 52).

Burroughs was a leader of churchwomen. As the Corresponding Secretary, She presented the greatest volume of the work of the Woman's Convention. Her work provided some insight into the operating of her office by reporting that:

more literature is sent out by this convention than by any other organization of colored women in the word. The local societies

are supplied with Study Books, Guides, Song Books, Charts, topic Cards and Leaflets on various subjects. The worker is sent to six thousand readers a month (Hall 65).

As corresponding secretary, she was responsible for communicating policy serving under the president, Layten. With her organizing skills, she transformed the Woman's Convention into one of the most successful fundraising organizations in the African American society. Burroughs reported that her office received an average of thirty first-class letters daily—more than ten thousand per year. Burroughs addressed audiences for over 301 organizations and individuals in thirty-one states, for every conceivable cause (Hall 65). The platform of the Woman's Convention and the voice of Nannie Burroughs was one of the most respected in the nation. Her 1920 address included her assessment of the status of race:

The Negro is a human. He is one of the most sensitive and sympathetic of the races. He feels the sting of Southern hatred and injustice. Conditions in the South are unbearable. Christians of the South are planning to build colleges and secondary schools. Such schools are needed but humane treatment is worth more to the Negro than a dozen million-dollar institutions. What the Negro race needs most is men, not money. If we are to be only the passive recipients of such gifts, the initiative within us will die and our race will be set back one hundred years (Hall 69).

Such statements clearly illustrate the priorities and independence of Burroughs, who raised financial support from whites as well as black to contribute to the Training School.

Burroughs was a forerunner in the Woman's Convention endorsement of a group called "Wage Earners" (Gilkes 148). As white women moved into skilled and unskilled positions in industry they would use their political power to fight for decent pay and better working conditions for themselves, yet they would oppose the same for their

domestic workers at home. By organizing their own unions, Wage Earners, black women could make the same demands other groups were making.

Burroughs wrote articles and delivered speeches that pertained to racial and gender issues. As an African-American educator, she was responsible and credited for changing the status of women in black Baptist churches across the country. In her eloquence, she resented the exclusion of women from leadership roles within the church. In one speech Burroughs delivered, she addressed her concern for the female gender role in the Baptist church. This speech was entitled, “How the Sisters are Hindered from Helping” and delivered at the NBC in September 1900 (Hall 51). The response to her speech led to the founding of the Woman’s Convention, an auxiliary of the subsidiary of the NBC. The Woman’s Convention emerged with resistance to an already established male hegemony within the Baptist church. Now prepared and armed with a voice in that of Burroughs, the sisterhood of more than 1 million Baptist women began to assert themselves by setting its own agendas in the National Convention and in churches.

Burroughs maintained interest in the organized resistance to patriarchy within the black religious experience. Much to the active participation of Virginia Broughton and Nannie Burroughs the tradition of religious feminine identity maintained through two ways: by extending women arguments that began in the nineteenth century and then refining these arguments to answer new questions and repel new assaults on women’s leadership. The establishment of Woman’s Day was another realm for religious feminine identity (Gilkes 113-114). As a leader in the black community and in the NBC, Burroughs maintained her religious feminine identity. She described the breadth of her vision for Women’s Day as follows:

A million women praying? A million women singing? A million women desiring. A million women laboring for the coming of the kingdom in the hearts of all men, would be a power that would move God on his throne to immediately answer the petitions. It would mean spiritual dynamic that would blast Satan's greatest stronghold and drive sin to its native health (Gilkes 114).

Despite the funds for Women's Day not used for its intended purpose, Burroughs lived to see the experience of Women's Day initiated in every black religious experience; this idea is not contained to the Baptist churches.

In the history of African American churchwomen, Nannie Burroughs emerged as a hero. Burroughs stated, "We must have a glorified womanhood that can look any man in the face—white, red, yellow, brown, or black, and tell of the nobility of character within black womanhood (Gilkes 142). She was important in developing critical roles models of community leadership. Burroughs wrote a musical comedy, *The Slabtown District Convention*, a play, which took place in the black church, represented and condemned the different dimensions of black religious culture during the early twentieth century. Her play not only offered prescriptions for the roles and relationships of educated women in their communities, but also criticized the misbehavior of male leaders and the collaboration of women in that misbehavior (Gilkes 143). They performed the play in churches into the last decade of the twentieth century, despite its criticisms.

Virginia Broughton, Virginia Cook Parrish, Sarah Layten, and Nannie Burroughs are four esteemed women who attempted linkage with the NBC. In an attempt to examine the situation of African American women at the turn of the century, these women recognized their lives were not primarily tied to the home. These women were not considered traditional or appropriate because of their experiences in slavery and the general belief that they belonged to an inferior race. Women have played a very

prominent role in African American religious groups. As one author, assert, “Irrespective of their prestige, access to authority, or levels of power, black women play a most important role in the maintenance and mobilization of religion in black America” (Ruether 82). This is evident from the women active in the Baptist convention movement; they were the educated elite of the community and became leaders in secular organizations as well. The convention embraced secular reform activity, which complemented and gave meaning to their church work, as church and secular organizations worked together. Yet the leaders and officers are invariably men. We see a continuation of this pattern in Baptist churches even today.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

The black church was born amid a painful process and the patriarchy of the black church had never been peaceful. The content of that patriarchy—patriarchy that can be labeled ambivalent in its various expressions—has been severely modified by the persistent tradition of conflict that black women have maintained within black religious structures (Gilkes 108). In this context, women remain inferior to men who hold most of the higher positions in the Baptist church. Women were not appointed to positions that were traditionally held by men. Many of the men argued that women were not competent individuals and supported it with events that occurred during the nineteenth century. To interpret any conflicts within the African American religious tradition, however, it is critically important to remember that they took place in organizational settings where the operating metaphor and ideology for human relations is family. They took place among “brothers” and “sisters,” between “fathers” and “mothers” and between “sons” and “daughters” (Gilkes 108).

The earliest formation of the African American church researches described as “hush arbors” (Hall 123). The term “hush harbors” makes reference to the secret religious meetings that took place away from the plantations to avoid detection. Secretly in those meeting the slaves freely expressed the pain of slavery and consoled one another. They overcame as a result of developing their inner strength through their faith in God and identifying themselves as the children of God. There in the secret meetings they believed that slavery, for the most part, was against biblical principles. It was there in those meetings they realized that God intended for them to be free. While they gathered

secretly, the African American Christians initiated moves to overcome the oppression of slavery.

The secret meetings had risks. Even with deep commitment to God, the slaves were at risk of severe punishment such as death if they were caught by their masters. After emancipation, the slaves gained the freedom to worship within independent black churches similarly to those in the north. The black church constituted the central institutional sector in black communities. Reliable investigators have consistently understood the fact that black churches were one of the few stable and coherent institutions to emerge from slavery (Lincoln⁷). The black church was and is the central focus of the black experience.

The tendency for black men to monopolize the ministry is first in part a reflection of religious leadership and is second in part a response to patterns of racism in the larger society. During slavery, the black male role model was the white man; the “master” of the plantation the epitome of control, leadership, and superiority. Not only did he control the slaves but he also controlled his wife. The wife had little say on the management of the plantation. The master treated his wife with little respect as if she too was property. Her voice was seldom heard. White male dominance was a learned behavior that affected the black males even after slavery ended. For the most part, that learned male dominance became evident within church and community organization. Even with challenges, the church has served the black community socially, politically, economically, and religiously throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

With the separation of the black Baptist from white churches in the nineteenth century, the development of a national convention was not without difficulty. The black

Baptist had made previous attempts to organize nationally. The National Baptist Convention was birthed in 1895, at a crucial time for the African American society. It was during that time when the rise of crime against blacks from white supremacists, blacks turned to the church for help.

The National Baptist Convention emerged as one of the first united Baptist denominations. The Convention heavily invested in education provided for African missions. The NBC and its antecedent organizations were expressive of the movement for self-help, self-sufficiency and self-determination among black people (Hall 271). During the post-reconstruction period the programs of black development was lost without the help of the NBC, which spoke out against racial violence and crusaded against segregation to help improve the black community. At a time when tensions were high between whites and blacks, the black Baptist church became a refuge and a place to re-define their identity.

Within African American culture, the religious roles of black women have been varied. Unlike, when the African American women were in Africa where they served in leadership positions. Long before slavery ended some black woman worked for racism and gender reform. Women such as Phillis Wheatley, African American female poet; Sojourner Truth, preacher; Harriet Tubman, conductor of the Underground Railroad; and Callie House, a political lobbyist played major roles to advance black people. This research did not find literature to support but one assumes the work of the aforementioned African American women influenced the work of the four leaders of the Woman's Convention. Their work set an empowering precedent of faith and courage for the black race that continues today. Their work will never be forgotten as it sends this

powerful message; “Never underestimate the power and intelligence of a black woman.” Women remained in secondary roles despite their accomplishments within the Woman’s Convention. These women never gained equal to the men of the National Baptist Convention.

Slavery did not diminish the role of black woman in society, once black women gained freedom, they continued to play an active part in their community and church. With the church serving as the center of the African American community, it follows that women actively pursued leadership roles within it. These roles and the degree of leadership available to them varied according to the era and the religious denomination. The leaders in the Baptist churches viewed women as subordinate to men. The advances the women leaders made did not diminish the male view of subordination in the NBC

In examining the plight of African American women at the turn of the century, it is easy to recognize that their lives were not primarily tied to the home. These

Four women, Broughton, Parrish, Layten, and Burroughs were not considered traditional or appropriate because of their experiences and general belief that they belonged to an inferior race. Nonetheless, women have played a most prominent role in African American religious groups. These women who were active in the Baptist convention movement were also the educated elite of the community and leaders in secular organizations as well. The convention embraced secular reform activity, which complemented and gave meaning to their church work, as church and secular organizations worked together. They played a very prominent role in African American religious groups. Yet the leaders and officers are invariably men. We see a continuation of this pattern in Baptist churches even today.

As most of the leaders of the Woman's Convention were social workers, teachers and were educated and well read. They read books and articles and transformed them into language women of limited education could understand. Virginia Broughton was an educator, Mary Cook Parrish, a Latin teacher, Sarah Willie Layten, a trained social worker, and Nannie Burroughs, an educator. These four influential women leaders of the Woman's Convention took their work seriously, while being aware of the many dangers that plague them as black women. These women leaders used education as a tool while positively empowering women; and with this power, women were able to carve out a sphere of relatively unambiguous autonomy within a very patriarchal church (Hall 290). Through their work with the Woman's Convention, women excelled in many areas of work and in society. Their work in missions, the club movement, and the Training School did not only affect the Woman's Convention, but the National Convention as a whole. They received national status representing the Woman's Convention. Unfortunately, this national status did not influence the male dominant structure of the NBC.

The leaders of the Woman's Convention were aware of the state of attack the black women encountered and prepared to fight against that oppression. Their work was one of duality: they lived out their spirituality inside the Baptist churches and they worked for reform outside their churches, often encountering great challenges and taking on large tasks. They were convinced that their mission was critical to the survival and development of the African American people, not just women. The movement gave women an individual and group pride that resisted ideologies and institutions upholding gender subordination. Despite the limits of their movements, black Baptist women left an impressive record of protest against racist and sexist proscriptions of their day (West 200).

Women were responsible for accounting within the National Baptist Convention, yet had to fight for the right to be in charge of accounting for their own convention. The Women's Convention was the NBC's main source of income for Foreign and Home Missions. They contributed to the NBC and supported all programs within the denomination. The Woman's Convention never failed to meet the financial needs of the NBC, even at cost of their own associations needs. The Woman's Convention was instrumental with projects such as the National Training School for Women and Girls. The leaders of the NBC and the Woman's Convention authorized and supported the Training School, but the school still had a myriad of challenges. Some NBC leaders opposed a school whose curriculum would train women to become breadwinners as well as missionaries. Despite challenges, the school opened in 1909 under a separate Board of Trustees who were members of the Woman's Convention as a successful institution.

Within the National Baptist Convention, male dominance prevailed. Even with the constructive work by women like Virginia Broughton, Virginia Cook Parrish, Sarah Layten, and Nannie Burroughs within the Woman's Convention remained only a subsidiary of the NBC with no voting rights within the NBC. The society did not value women, but that concern were almost always stated by women. The men tended to praise the works of womanhood and roles of the women through sermons and lectures. The history of slavery revealed the dynamics of oppression, whether racist, sexist, or religious facing the African American women. Women's works were wonderful as long as they followed the rules of male leadership. The Woman's Convention was always subject to the authority of the male dominant NBC. During the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century women of the Woman's Convention never received equality

among leadership within the NBC. Though gender inequality remained, the women leaders made positive racial advances for the black race as a whole not just for woman advancement.

Women were voicing their displeasure at their subordinate roles. Men, however, were not even willing to see the disparity. In the male opinion, women are complainers about social position that does not even exist. In the dominant view, Women are supposed to be subordinate. In this structure, where men are oblivious to an alternate gender construction, then women by default are deemed to be agitators and disrupters of Gods plan for the family, community, and church.

The movement to increase the acceptance of women as decision makers and leaders in church and community would go on for a long time. The first-century Biblical account of women's silence in the church (as equal to men) has continued into the twentieth-first century, as evident in current leadership dynamics within the NBC.¹⁶

¹⁶ Let your woman keep silence in the church: for it is not permitted unto them to speak. 1 Corinthians King James Version: 14:15.

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