



Geschichte

Franz Steiner Verlag

56

TRANSATLANTISCHE HISTORISCHE STUDIEN

Elisabeth Engel

Encountering Empire

African American Missionaries in Colonial Africa,
1900–1939

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TRANSATLANTISCHE HISTORISCHE STUDIEN

Veröffentlichungen des Deutschen Historischen Instituts

Washington, DC

Herausgegeben von

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Band 56

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Umschlagabbildung:

“C. S. Smith and His Adopted Family of Dwalla Children. [From a photograph taken at Bell Town, Cameroons.]” Source: Charles Spencer Smith, *Glimpses of Africa: West and South West Coast Containing the Author's Impression and Observations During a Voyage of Six Thousand Miles from Sierra Leone to St. Paul de Loanda, and Return Including the Rio del Ray and Cameroons Rivers, and the Congo River from Its Mouth to Matadi* (Nashville, 1895), 179.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über [<http://dnb.d-nb.de>](http://dnb.d-nb.de) abrufbar.

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Umschlaggestaltung: r² Röger & Röttenbacher, Leonberg

Druck: AZ Druck und Datentechnik, Kempten

Gedruckt auf säurefreiem, alterungsbeständigem Papier.

Printed in Germany.

ISBN 978-3-515-11117-1 (Print)

ISBN 978-3-515-11119-5 (E-Book)

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Acknowledgments

I found the topic for this book on some dreary afternoon in the library of the Department of Anglo-American History in Cologne. The phenomenon is familiar to all of us: we plan to quickly grab a specific book and while looking we get immersed in roaming the stacks, forgetting what it was that we initially were looking for, and we leave with a new spark set by all the other books we would probably never have known of otherwise. The contingency of the process has its own peculiar charm. It makes us people of vast reading, and sometimes, as in my case, forms a research question. That day, I left the library wondering about how African Americans reacted to the colonization of Africa. And while looking for answers, I turned from a student, who was vaguely interested in colonial history and profoundly invested in black American rap music, into a historian.

This spark would not have materialized in these pages here if not for people along the way who kept it glowing. At first, there was Norbert Finzsch, who gave me a job at the department that required me to teach critical thinking rather than chronology, and thus taught me how to do historical research above all my own way. Lora Wildenthal, who visited the department at the time, helped me in terrific ways to get my question both straight and out. Hence, my first dissertation prospectus “African American Anticolonialism” was written. The title again suggests that I was looking for one thing and found another in the archives. For getting me under way to this insight I am greatly indebted to both of them.

Once proposed, the project gathered generous support from several great institutions and advisors. I was fortunate enough to write the dissertation as a

fellow at the Graduate School of North American Studies of the John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität Berlin, with a stipend of the German Research Foundation. Even more fortunate was having Michaela Hampf and Sebastian Conrad as my advisors. Their constant support and perfectly balanced mixture of sincere approval and thought-provoking criticism sustained me chapter after chapter. The graduate school, too, was an unparalleled environment that helped me to grow as a scholar and to distill arguments from my ideas. Thinking through the project in its seminars and colloquia, and with the peers of the JFK History Department, Frauke Brammer, Andreas Etges, Gudrun Löhner, Ursula Lehmkuhl, and Simone Müller, I acquired the confidence and diligence to make it happen.

Decisive steps in archival research were supported by the German Historical Institutes in Washington, DC, and London. I always tremendously enjoyed being their visiting fellow, as the institutes provided surroundings that combined essential archival work with the opportunity to instantly digest my findings. The project would hardly have advanced during the usually lonely research periods without the many conversations over coffee I had with Uta Balbier, Martin Klimke, and Benedikt Stuchtey. I thank them for their open ears, authentic interest, and the time they made for me and have continued to make ever since. A good portion of the work was put together during my time as a visiting PhD student at the History Department of Columbia University in New York. My advisors Christopher Brown and Samuel Roberts deeply impressed me with their unconditional readiness to read and shape the work in progress with their expertise. As did the really smart graduate students at the department, some of whom I proudly call friends now: David Marcus, Nick Juravich, Pollyanna Rhee, and Justin Reynolds.

It is impossible to give a list of all the archivists who invested their know-how in the project. I can only trust that they remember me for my impertinence and can tell that this book is their merit. I shall mention specifically Diana Lachatanere, curator at the Schomburg, who gave into my nagging by setting aside the archive's policy to restrict unprocessed material, so that I could work with the AME Church Records at all. Consequently, Steven, the archivist in charge of organizing these fifty or so boxes, has to be credited for putting up with me after permission was granted. I would also like to say thank you to Randall Burkett at Emory, who so perfectly prepared my short visit there that I did not have to file a single request slip myself. Aslaku Berhanu at Temple University must not be omitted from this list. She drew my attention to uncataloged holdings and furnished me with one of my favorite findings: a film of the AME mission in South Africa from the late 1930s. An exercise in patience and redoubled determination was the effort of Alfred Moore. He helped me trace the AME mission in the confused collections of the National Archives of Sierra Leone that had just been moved during the immediately preceding wet season.

For familiarizing me with the peculiar challenge of researching African history, I thank the members of the African Network in Global History and Andreas Eckart. Their reasoning that African history is worth doing precisely because of its wildcards struck me as a choice bit of advice. Last but not least, I thank Dennis C. Dickerson, Johnny Barbour, and George F. Flowers of the AME Church, who generously offered me guidance to locate most of the material on which this study is based, as well as their permission to use photographs. All this was support beyond professional reason.

As always, research is not all it takes to get a book written. A great many extra pairs of eyes were indispensable. Nicholas Grant and Justin Reynolds were with me in the textual production. They were so knowledgeable in their comments and suggestions that I sometimes felt they understood my argument better than I did myself. Ana Isabel Keilson greatly enhanced their efforts by putting up with the no less significant challenge of refining the wording of my points. More often than not, I had readers who stood by my side in the darker hours. Eva Bischoff, Olaf Stieglitz, and Till van Rahden were inexhaustible sources of advice and every imaginable form of moral support. The same is true of my grad school fellows, who became friends in the process: Boris, Christoph, Emily, Ida, Julia, Katharina, Mahmood, and Tomasz. In addition, there were people who had less to do with the project itself than with me while I was working on it. Jana, Júlio, Juli, and Hanno must be credited for remaining the best companions I could imagine from start to finish. For getting on the phone at unspeakable hours to assure me of their faith in me, I thank David Juliano and my family Michael, Christine, and Reinhard. The book inherits the power of their love.

After its long evolution, the project ended almost where it began: the GHI in Washington. I am greatly indebted to my new colleagues here for having provided an incredibly supportive environment for putting the finishing touches on the book. Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson offered just the right dose of pragmatism, and the reviewers and editors of the THS series gave much needed incentives to get done with the revisions. Every single word of the present manuscript is a testimony of Casey Sutcliffe's proficient and tireless editing. Although she helped me understand that there is no such thing as perfection, I do not hesitate to say as much about her work.

Elisabeth Engel

List of Abbreviations

ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions
ACS	American Colonization Society
AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church
AMEZ	African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
ANC	African National Congress
ASNLH	Association for the Study of Negro Life and History
FCC	Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America
FMENA	Foreign Missions Conference of North America
FCNC	Fraternal Council of Negro Churches
IMC	International Missionary Council
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCBWA	National Congress of British West Africa
NUL	National Urban League
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association
WHFMS	Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the AME Church
WPMMS	Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society of the AME Church
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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Figure 1. “C. S. Smith and His Adopted Family of Dwalla Children. [From a photograph taken at Bell Town, Cameroons.]” Source: Charles Spencer Smith, *Glimpses of Africa: West and South West Coast Containing the Author’s Impression and Observations During a Voyage of Six Thousand Miles from Sierra Leone to St. Paul de Loanda, and Return Including the Rio del Ray and Cameroons Rivers, and the Congo River from Its Mouth to Matadi* (Nashville, 1895), 179. Schomburg Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Courtesy of Dr. Johnny Barbour, president/publisher AME Church Sunday School Union, Nashville, TN.

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Figure 3.4. “Rev. George Decker, Rev. J. R. Frederick, Prof. H. M. Steady, Mr. George Boyle, C. S. Smith. [From a photograph taken at Free Town, Sierra Leone.]” Source: Smith, *Glimpses*, 20. Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Courtesy of Dr. Johnny Barbour, president/publisher AME Church Sunday School Union, Nashville, TN.

1. Introduction

1.1. Encountering Empire: An African American History

In 1927, Hastings K. Banda (c. 1898–1997), the African leader of the movement for independence in British Nyasaland and later president of its successor state Malawi, noticed an increase in his personal correspondence. “I am getting letters ...” he wrote, “telling of the keen interest the people take in the AME Church.”¹ Two years later, Alexander G. Fraser (1873–1962), a renowned Scottish educator of the Church Missionary Society, observed a similar trend in the Gold Coast. “Then come the growing party,” he wrote to his friends, “the African Episcopal Methodists, or Zionists.”² Both remarks echoed earlier concerns of South African administrations. In 1904, British officials began to confer about “a Church ... purely under Native management and control,” known as the Ethiopian movement, which they deemed connected to “the work of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.”³ In response, they enacted new immigration regulations for African Americans.⁴ But there were also favorable

¹ Letter Hastings K. Banda to E. H. Coit, December 24, 1927. SCRBC, AME CR, box 43, folder “Corr. A-B, 1927.”

² Circular, Alexander G. Fraser to friends, May 23, 1929. Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies, Rhodes House, Oxford, Wraith Papers (MSS.Afr.s.1563), file 11, 3.

³ *Memorandum on the Ethiopian Movement and the Attitude Toward It by the Several S. A.-Govts*, 1904. TNA, DO 119/522, no. D 42/1, 1–2.

⁴ According to its own accounts, the AME Church had been granted admission under the British colonial government, while the dominion government, formed in 1910, issued the Immigration Restriction Act of the Union of South Africa (no. 22, 1913) and a general ministerial order prohibiting the entry of colored persons. Both provided ample scope for excluding AME missionaries. For the act, see Office of the International Missionary Council, *Treaties, Acts and Regulations Relating to Missionary Freedom* (London, 1923), 27. For AME staff immigration, see Charles Spencer Smith, *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church ...* (Philadelphia,

reactions. The Colonial Office in London registered AME mission schools among those awarded government grants by local education departments with increasing regularity.⁵ The membership and attendance lists of major European and American missionary organizations concerned with Africa named AME Church members to a growing extent.⁶ Some of those interested in spreading Christianity to the modern world hoped that the AME Church prefigured “a really African church.”⁷ And newspapers of various colonies occasionally drew public attention to AME officials’ “brilliant career[s]” and “wise words.”⁸

The fragments above testify to the encounter that is the subject of this study: the arrival of an African American church in Africa, Britain’s last empire.⁹ Retrieved from the repositories of Western imperialism, these fragments suggest that this encounter involved a broad range of territories and institutions.¹⁰ The AME Church appeared in correspondences of colonizers and their opponents, colonial border controls and funding schemes, educational and missionary statistics, Christian demographics, and public perceptions in an area stretching from Cape Town to the hinterlands of Freetown.¹¹ Despite their vast outreach, the paths that the AME missionaries took on the imperial stage in Africa did not reflect a linear expansion. They tell of ideological inconsistencies, contingent convergences, and systematic exclusion. African American missionaries had moved into core arenas of colonial power – British adminis-

1922), 331–36; and Lillie M. Johnson, “Missionary-Government Relations in British and Portuguese Colonies,” in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, ed. Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport, 1982), 203.

5 See, for instance, Nyasaland Protectorate, *Report of the Education Department, May 1926–Dec. 1927*. CO 525/125/15. 20; *Annual General Report for Sierra Leone for 1927*. CO 267/626/18. 24–25; and Gold Coast Colony, *Report on the Education Department for the Year 1935–1936*. CO 96/733/23. 19. All TNA.

6 One particularly relevant example, which will be discussed in detail in Part II, was the AME Church’s participation in the first international missionary conference focusing on Africa, organized by the International Missionary Council (IMC), in 1926. See Edwin W. Smith, *The Christian Mission in Africa: A Study Based on the Proceedings of the International Conference at Le Zoute, Belgium, September 14th to 21st, 1926* (London, 1926), 100–101.

7 William David Schermerhorn, *The Christian Mission in the Modern World* (New York, 1933), 247.

8 “The Rev. S.B.A. Campbell, M. A., B. D., Ph.D.: A Brilliant Career,” *Sierra Leone Guardian*, February 7, 1930, 11; and “Wise Words by the Black Bishop,” *South African Outlook*, June 1, 1922, 127.

9 Roy Lewis and Yvonne Foy, *The British in Africa* (London, 1971), 1.

10 Using the archives of Western imperialism, of course, generates a number of problems in it itself, which will be addressed in Section 1.3.

11 According to an IMC survey of 1938, AME missions existed in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and the Union of South Africa, including the Basutoland and Swaziland Protectorates. In its own accounts, the AME Church reported additional activities in Bechuanaland, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. Joseph I. Parker, ed., *Interpretative Statistical Survey of the World Mission of the Christian Church ...* (New York, 1938), 67 and 70; and Artishia W. Jordan, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church in Africa* (New York, 1964), 140–43.

trations, Christian organizations, and public perception – in conflicting ways and with indeterminate outcomes.

The American part of this story is different. In the United States, the AME Church was known best as the first autonomous institution founded, funded, and maintained by black Americans, thus constituting a landmark in the history of African American emancipation. Since its beginnings in 1816, the church enjoyed a large membership among the nation's most destitute and desperate, generous support from the uplifted, and close attention from refined intellectuals.¹² W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), a central voice of black America throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, called the AME Church the “greatest Negro organization in the world.”¹³ Others praised AME founder Richard Allen (1760–1831) as an “Apostle of Freedom,” the leader of the “Independent Church Movement,” and the prime architect of not just a church but a “nation within a nation.”¹⁴ Such voices have remained dominant up to the present. Scholars in the United States have focused on analyzing the AME Church's enduring centrality to African Americans' social and intellectual life, often stressing its preeminent role in the formation of a black race consciousness that guided the African American struggle for emancipation from slavery to civil rights.¹⁵

12 The first account of the AME Church is in Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen ...* (1833; repr. New York, 1960).

13 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago, 1903), accessed September 16, 2014, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/dubois/dubois.html#dubois88>, 197.

14 Charles H. Wesley, *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom* (Washington, DC, 1935); Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC, 1921), 71; and E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*/C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier*, rev. ed. (New York, 1974), 35.

15 There is ample literature on the history of the AME Church in the United States. The following list is sorted by topic and date of publication. The most recent account by the AME Church is Howard D. Gregg, *History of the A. M. E. Church: The Black Church in Action* (Nashville, 1980). For scholarly accounts often focusing on specific periods, see George A. Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism: A Study of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1952); Carol V.R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black Churches, 1760–1840* (New York, 1973); Clarence E. Walker, *A Rock in a Weary Land: The African Methodist Episcopal Church During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, 1982); Will B. Gravelly, “African Methodism and the Rise of Black Denominationalism,” in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, 108–26 (Nashville, 1993); Robert Gregg, *Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890–1940* (Philadelphia, 1993); Lawrence S. Little, “Ideology, Culture, and the Realities of Racism in the AME Foreign Agenda Toward Events and Issues in Britain and France, 1885–1905,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 22 (1998): 128–40; Lawrence S. Little, *Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884–1916* (Knoxville, 2000); and Larry Eugene Rivers and Canter Brown, Jr., *Laborers in the Vineyard of the Lord: The Beginnings of the AME Church in Florida, 1865–1895* (Gainesville, 2001). For works on individuals, see Calvin S. Morris, *Reverdy C. Ransom: Black Advocate of the Social Gospel* (Lanham, 1990); Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville, 1992); Annetta L. Go-

The role of AME missionaries' encounters with Africans and their colonizers has not received much attention in this previous narrative of black self-determination. What AME people did overseas is considered marginalia, at best, and negligible, at worst. This study makes the case that the histories of the AME Church in the United States and its mission in African colonies must not be regarded as divided histories.¹⁶ It undertakes to demonstrate that the AME Church, through its missions, shaped and connected black communities on each side of the Atlantic and thus was an integral part of the much broader transatlantic entanglements that emerged in the wake of African colonization. In order to weave the outwardly distinct histories of the AME Church back together, I reconstruct the paths African American missionaries took from the United States onto the imperial stage in Africa. By focusing on their work, intellectual endeavors, and contacts, we will see that AME people were not disconnected posts sitting on either side of the Atlantic, but were agents who provided and defined a variety of links between African Americans and Africans in the period of late European colonialism.

Studying how AME missionaries made this connection will open up a new perspective on a number of well-known relations, namely, between African Americans and their presumed homeland in Africa, between white dominance and black resistance, and between race and power – the prime rule of colonial difference and black identity. Briefly put, this perspective will prompt us to think through all of these relations as shaped by the colonial encounter of African Americans, thus foregrounding a novel aspect of the history of black transnationalism. Tracing African American missionaries' colonial encounters in

mez-Jefferson, *The Sage of Tawawa: Reverdy Cassius Ransom, 1861–1959* (Kent, 2002); Albert G. Miller, *Elevating the Race: Theophilus G. Steward, Black Theology, and the Making of an African American Civil Society, 1865–1924* (Knoxville, 2003); Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, 2008); and Nelson T. Strobert, *Daniel Alexander Payne: The Venerable Preceptor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Lanham, 2012). For studies on gender, see Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power, and the AME Church* (Lanham, 2002); Julius H. Bailey, *Around the Family Altar: Domesticity in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865–1900* (Gainesville, 2005); and Julius H. Bailey, "Masculinizing the Pulpit: The Black Preacher in the Nineteenth-century AME Church," in *Fathers, Preachers, Rebels, Men: Black Masculinity in U.S. History and Literature, 1820–1945*, ed. Timothy R. Buckner and Peter Caster, 80–101 (Columbus, 2011). A number of studies discuss AME print culture. See Gilbert Anthony Williams, *The Christian Recorder, Newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church: History of a Forum for Ideas, 1854–1902* (Jefferson, 1996); Stephen W. Angell and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862–1939* (Knoxville, 2000); and Julius H. Bailey, *Race Patriotism: Protest and Print Culture in the AME Church* (Knoxville, 2012).

¹⁶ My argument aligns, instead, with scholarship that understands "divided histories" as "entangled histories." This scholarship considers the separation of certain entities and their respective histories as the result of their interactions. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, "Geteilte Geschichten – Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt," in *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 17.

Africa, I argue, reveals intersections and interactions between African American emancipation and African colonization in the twentieth century that cannot solely be explained as results of the transatlantic slave trade of the previous centuries. It emphasizes instead how the colonization of Africa itself connected the continent not only to European metropolises, but also to the presumably long disparate lifeworld of African Americans in the United States.

In the historical literature, African American missionaries have not yet been considered part of the colonial encounter. They are primarily analyzed as agents who were ‘naturally’ committed to Africa. According to standard accounts, black missionary activities peaked in Africa in the late nineteenth century, when North American mission boards increasingly hired blacks because of their presumed racial fitness to withstand tropical climates. During certain periods of time, African Americans comprised the majority of mission staff in Liberia and Sierra Leone and, to a lesser extent, in Angola, Congo, and South Africa. Some black missionaries even pioneered initiatives that aimed at proselytizing Africans. Major milestones were the labors of the freed slave Lott Carey in Liberia in the first half of the nineteenth century and of William H. Sheppard in the Congo in the latter half.¹⁷ The twentieth century, by contrast, has been described by historians as an interruption of interracial cooperation in missions. The era was, as W.E.B. Du Bois famously put it, the era of a color line that “belt[ed] the world.”¹⁸ Jim Crowism, lynching, and hostility toward blacks in the United States coincided with European powers’ anxieties about Africans’ anticolonial upheaval, while African Americans voiced their discontent increasingly in anticolonial terms, claiming “Africa for the Africans” during the interwar years.¹⁹ In this time, most North American mission boards refrained from hiring African Americans. Once the ‘civilizing’ of Africa was restored to the status of white men’s business, standard accounts have it, black American missionaries “were to pass into history.”²⁰

The approach of this study is different. It explores African American missionaries in colonial Africa in order to argue that pan-African resistance was not the sole response African Americans had to late European colonization initiatives. Although the AME mission in Africa was numerically small, a brief look at colonial government records suggests that it flourished most conspicu-

17 “Lott Carey,” *Western Recorder*, November 8, 1925, accessed February 22, 2013, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/126862607?accountid=10226>; and William H. Sheppard, *Pioneers in Congo* (Louisville, 1925).

18 W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Color Line Belts the World,” *Collier’s Weekly* (October 1906): 30, repr. in *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York, 1995), 42.

19 Marcus Garvey, “Africa for the Africans,” 1923, repr. in *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey: Or, Africa for the Africans*, comp. by Amy Jacques Garvey, centennial ed. (Dover, 1986), 68.

20 William Seraile, “Black American Missionaries in Africa, 1821–1925,” *Social Studies* 63 (1972): 201.

ously once the colonial contest for Africa moved forward, especially in British West and South Africa. AME missionaries differed from their black predecessors in the Christian mission because they acted on behalf of an independent African American church, a condition that meant at once greater doctrinal liberty and greater financial constraints.²¹ They also differed from most African American agitators of the time. Because the liberation of Africa was not their prime aim, AME missionaries established a much wider variety of transatlantic contacts than their militant contemporaries. By leaving the beaten paths of the relationship between African Americans and Africans, they did not pass into history. They rather slipped from the grasp of historians who equate twentieth-century black transnationalism with anticolonialism.²²

Inquiring into the relationship between black missionaries and colonial Africa necessarily means asking how the color line – the organizing principle of race and power in the twentieth century – not only divided people, but also conditioned their transatlantic contacts. In order to discriminate the history of these contacts from that of the imagined pan-African compound of black people, I suggest using the phrase ‘Afro-colonial encounter.’ Borrowed from postcolonial scholarship, the concept of the colonial encounter serves to emphasize that African American missionaries entered environments characterized by highly asymmetrical colonial and racial power relations;²³ at the same time, it does not deny that this entrance always had an interactive and often improvised dimension, easily ignored in accounts of pan-Africanism.²⁴ Encountering Africa meant encountering colonizers and their subordinates, explorers and contempters, redeemers and liberators; it meant establishing a variety of contacts, ranging from ephemeral glimpses and clumsy interactions, to institutionalized relationships and interlocking understandings and practices.²⁵ African American missionaries, I argue, acted in a multiplicity of power

²¹ Other independent black churches active in Africa were the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (1876), the National Baptist Convention (1880), and the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention (1897). Llewellyn L. Berry, *A Century of Missions of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840–1940* (New York, 1942), 223–29.

²² On African American anticolonialism, see, for instance, Penny M. von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, 1997); and Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-colonial Champion* (Trenton, 1988).

²³ A detailed discussion of postcolonial studies lies beyond the scope of this work. For a good introduction, see Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, 2001).

²⁴ Pan-Africanism is usually associated with the series of Pan-African Congresses held between 1900 and 1945. The congresses aimed to forge alliances among colonized and oppressed people in the black world. George Shepperson suggests distinguishing the Pan-African Congress movement as a political formation from pan-Africanism (intentionally lower case), by which he means the variety of cultural movements that engaged with ideas of Africa. In this study, I will use the lower-case spelling as an umbrella term that encompasses pan-African politics and culture. George Shepperson, “Pan-Africanism and ‘Pan-Africanism’: Some Historical Notes,” *Phylon* 23 (1962): 346.

²⁵ My concept of a contact perspective specifically builds on Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes:*

relations that surrounded the African continent. The impact that resulted from their encounters thus cannot be studied in a way that limits them to any one type of project, be it evangelical, pan-African, or anticolonial.

Finally, I analyze black missionaries' encounters to trace the sites and spaces of their interactions, rather than their impact in a predefined territory, such as the British Empire. While the AME mission focused on British colonies, AME missionaries often began to engage with the continent by reading books, visiting expositions or participating in religious or political events that concerned the representation and colonization of Africa; these encounters took place in the streets of Harlem, the convention halls of international missionary organizations in Berlin, and the offices of colonial administrators in London. In other words, a significant portion of black missionaries' contact with colonial Africa did not happen on the continent, but in a contact zone defined by their engagement with representations of Africa. Such representations concerned the othering of blacks in colonial discourse as much as the dictate of racial identity in African American and African discourses on pan-Africanism.²⁶ Engaging with others' representations of Africa and often also with others' representations of the descendants of Africa, black American missionaries typically fashioned themselves in relation to tensions, contradictions, and possibilities of empowerment not adequately expressed by ideas of resistance to, or collaboration with, imperial initiatives.²⁷ I therefore examine the self-fashioning of black missionaries as a form of autoethnography. Like Mary Louise Pratt, I understand autoethnographies as the self-descriptions others developed of themselves in response to, or in dialogue with, the terms of the colonizers and the colonized.²⁸ In the context of this study, this means analyzing AME missionaries' self-descriptions as resulting from the encounter between colonial others and black American selves. Their mutual engagements and representations define an idiosyncratic contact zone: they guide us beyond the color line and its rules of colonial difference and racial solidarity, and into the fragile margins of empire where such rules were only just negotiated.

By looking at how African American missionaries encountered empire, this study complements prior research that has focused on Africa as a fantasy constructed by African Americans.²⁹ Prioritizing the ways in which African

Travel Writing and Transculturation (London, 1992), 7.

²⁶ For literature on the ways in which African Americans and Africans imagined each other, see Yekutieli Gershoni, *Africans on African Americans: The Creation and Uses of an African-American Myth* (Basingstoke, 1997); and Robert Trent Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, 2012).

²⁷ Cf. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley, 1997), 6.

²⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 91 (1991): 35.

²⁹ Images of Africa are a major, yet controversial, focus in the current historiography. A good

Americans imagined Africa has long been deemed plausible by scholars because “very few American Negroes since the Civil War have had any face-to-face contact with Africans.”³⁰ More recently, advocates of transnational perspectives have noted the absence of empire and the silencing of Africa as the results of such historiographical methods.³¹ They consider these lacunae to be expressions of the “automatic notion that somehow [blacks] were always striving for U.S. nationality” and of “mechanics of diasporic deafness and exclusion.”³² Whether the neglect of empire and Africa in the historiography of African Americans originates in parochial research or diasporic exceptionalism, it obscures a dispersion that remains central to our understanding of the history of black emancipation to the present: the African American struggle for self-determination has not been confined to the United States, but it has also been an undertaking of those who chose to leave the country.³³ To become a missionary in Africa was one way to make this choice. It was a means of seeking self-determination in the colonial empires of Africa as opposed to an ancient African homeland.

Time Frame

The temporal outlines of this study coincide with what is called the “interwar years” in conventional periodization. Whether we look at colonial Africa, the United States, or Europe, the sequence of two world wars bookending the crisis of world capitalism is often described as an era of global transition. Black Americans became African Americans by retrieving their African heritage as “a usable past.”³⁴ The United States became a modern world power. Europe, once the colonial metropole, disaggregated into nation-states. And colonized people adopted nationalist ideology as a way to promote self-determination in a newly emerging, international society. Historical scholarship thus considers

account on the African American Africa image is Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919–1939* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); for a critique of this focus, see Tunde Adeleke, *The Case Against Afrocentrism* (Jackson, 2009).

³⁰ St. Clair Drake, “Negro Americans and the Africa Interest,” in *The American Negro Reference Book*, ed. John P. Davis (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), 664.

³¹ Spearheading these interventions are Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, 1993); and Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, UK, 1993).

³² Gerald Horne, “Toward a Transnational Research Agenda for African American History in the 21st Century,” *Journal for African American History* 91 (2006): 291; and Laura Chrisman, “Black Transnationalisms Revisited,” *Postcolonial Studies* 9 (2006): 223. See also Laura Chrisman, “Rethinking Black Atlanticism,” *The Black Scholar* 30 (2000): 12–17.

³³ Cf. Horne, “Transnational Research Agenda,” 291.

³⁴ Cf. Corbould, *Becoming*, 57–87.

the interwar years as a period that marked the end of the long nineteenth century.³⁵

This study makes use of this periodization as a backdrop to the analysis without taking the idea of a global transition as its main trajectory. The years between 1900 and 1939 neither frame nor explain the phenomenon of African American missionaries in Africa. Rather, they witnessed the reappearance of black mission work in two circum-Atlantic transformations: the emergence of indigenization as an approach to the Christianization of Africa in the Western missionary movement, and the establishment in British African colonies of indirect rule, a form of government based on existing tribal structures and traditions. For African American missionaries, these developments constituted a crucial modification of twentieth century relations of race and colonial power. Indigenization and indirect rule opened up new ground for black missionaries to engage with the evangelization and colonization of Africa while also triggering several other developments, including the consolidation of the color line, the rise of anticolonial movements, the rapid demographic growth of African Christianity, and the formation of a hub of Africa-centered subjectivity and agitation among blacks in the United States.

From this point of departure, the study chronicles the development of the AME Church's missionary enterprise based on shifting contacts between African and African American church members, international missionary organizations, and British colonial administrations. While the circuits of these groups tended to overlap during the 1920s and 1930s, their confluence was never balanced or linear. Certain structures of interaction were inherited from the nineteenth century, while others were disrupted or irreversibly transformed by war and depression. To foreground such contacts as an explanatory factor in the formation of the black American mission, this study looks at several contemporaneous types and sites of interaction. Zooming into black missionaries' contact zones will require us to include the opening decades of the twentieth century, although the interwar era was the period when the encounter between black missionaries and the British Empire in Africa gained a new intensity and quality. This liaison ended after the Second World War, when decolonization began to erode the conditions of the contacts that are the focus of this study.

³⁵ For the United States, see Lisa McGirr, "The Interwar Years," in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, 125–50 (Philadelphia, 2011); and Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History*, trans. Dona Geyer (Princeton, 2003), 99–108; for literature on the colonies, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007); and Sönke Kunkel and Christoph Meyer, eds., *Aufbruch ins postkoloniale Zeitalter: Globalisierung und die außereuropäische Welt in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren* (Frankfurt am Main, 2012).

1.2. Perspectives on the Afro-colonial Contact Zone: Christian Missions, African American Transnationalism, and Colonial Africa

Historiography of Christian Missions

This study is informed by research that approaches the history of foreign missions as a history of exchange and transculturation. While this literature draws on world evangelization as an inherent idea of missions, it departs from what is often seen as its concomitant effect: the assimilation of the world to Western and usually white concepts of Christianity. Instead, it uses the genuinely global vision of Christianity to underscore the imponderability of missionary practices. In this view, missionary work developed in tandem with processes of “globalization,” the term increasingly used by scholars to emphasize the complex and uneven intertwining of cultural, political, economic, and social processes that shaped the modern world.³⁶

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, missionary globalization followed the routes of Western colonialism.³⁷ The close linkage resulted from the effort to make a Christian way of life the building block of the civilizing mission that Western colonial powers claimed they were pursuing. Indeed, missionary work in colonial territories involved more than proselytizing. It usually encompassed the exploration of unknown territories, the erection of churches, schools, and hospitals, and the establishment of infrastructures for communication and transportation.³⁸ At the same time, as scholars of colonialism and postcolonialism emphasize, missionaries were not necessarily agents of empire. In their studies, they show that Western evangelists also were outspoken critics of imperial enterprises and, more importantly, protagonists in the processes of translation that designated the entanglement between colo-

³⁶ See, for instance, Dana L. Robert, “The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement Between the World Wars,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26 (2002): 50–66; Brian Stanley, “Twentieth-century World Christianity: A Perspective from the History of Missions,” in *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald M. Lewis, 52–83 (Grand Rapids, 2004); Sebastian Conrad and Rebekka Habermas, eds., “Mission und kulturelle Globalisierung,” special issue, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 36 (2010); and Klaus Koschorke, ed., *Phases of Globalization in the History of Christianity* (Wiesbaden, 2012).

³⁷ As Frederick Cooper cautions us, globalization must not be understood as a general increase in worldwide connections and mobility. Colonialism, in particular, consisted of a number of enclosed networks that were again crosscut by other networks of exchange and socioeconomic interaction. As such, he argues, its globalizing effects were rather a “reorganization of space” that involved both “the forging and unforger of linkages.” Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 105.

³⁸ For a standard account, see Norman Etherington, ed., *Missions and Empire* (Oxford, 2005).

nies and metropolises.³⁹ While their reports contributed to construct images of otherness for audiences at home, missionaries' day-to-day interactions called into question the binaries and boundaries they helped to create between self and other, heathen and Christian, civilized and backward, home and foreign, as well as via related categories of difference, such as nationality, race, class, sexuality, and gender.⁴⁰ Because of this aspect of their work, missionaries have also attracted scholarly attention beyond the "metropole-colony axis."⁴¹ There are studies that try to use them as a lens to look at the globalization of knowledge, the formation of global religious communities, and even new kinds of empire.⁴² As Ian Tyrrell argues, the set of "transnational networks of cultural communication, exchange and power" that characterized missions could well be a blueprint for studying forms of expansion and dominance that diverge from national and imperial borders.⁴³

39 Concepts of translation and entanglement complicate ideas of unidirectional transfers. On translation, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000), 19. On entanglement, see Conrad and Randeria, "Geteilte Geschichten," 17–22. Scholarship that draws on these concepts is, for instance, Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa," *American Ethnologist* 13 (1986): 1–22; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 2, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1997); Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799–1853* (Montreal, 2002); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Oxford, 2002); and Andrew Porter, *Religion Versus Empire: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester, 2004).

40 The groundbreaking work on the discursive othering of the colonized is Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 3rd ed. (London, 2003). Important studies on the construction of difference through categories of nationality and sexuality are Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993); and Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, 1995).

41 Cooper and Stoler, "Metropole and Colony," 28.

42 Ulrich van der Heyden and Andreas Feldtkeller, eds., *Missionsgeschichte als Geschichte der Globalisierung von Wissen: Transkulturelle Wissensaneignung und -vermittlung durch christliche Missionare in Afrika und Asien im 17., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 2012); Helge Wendt, "Mission transnational, trans-kolonial, global: Missionsgeschichtsschreibung als Beziehungsgeschichte," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte* 105 (2011): 95–116; and Helge Wendt, *Die missionarische Gesellschaft: Mikrostrukturen einer kolonialen Globalisierung* (Stuttgart, 2011).

43 Ian Tyrrell, "Women, Missions, and Empire: New Approaches to American Cultural Expansion," in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812–1960*, ed. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie Shemo (Durham, 2010), 43. A comprehensive version of this argument is also found in Tyrrell's *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, 2010). In U.S. history, empire is increasingly discussed as a concept that frames the interplay between international relations and domestic culture. See Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," in *Cultures*, ed. Kaplan and Pease, 3–21; and James T. Campbell, "The Americanization of South Africa," in *Race, Nation, and Empire in American History*, ed. James T. Campbell, Matthew Pratt Guterl, and Robert G. Lee, 130–53 (Chapel Hill, 2007).

Historiography of African American Missionaries

While the uneasy coupling of missions and empire is a recurrent topic in the historiography, the relationship between African American missions and empire has hardly been studied. At first, this neglect seems to be due to a simple empirical problem. As Wilber Christian Harr shows in his study *The Negro as an American Protestant Missionary in Africa*, blacks were frequently hired by white mission boards and then dismissed as unsuccessful “according to the standards of their sending societies or the standards of governments.” In addition, Harr’s study indicates that the genre of Western missiology tends to omit racial identifications in its surveys altogether. For Harr, this convention suggests racial tensions because it allowed church historiographers to hide African American “representatives of American Protestant missionary societies.”⁴⁴ Notwithstanding this concealment, denominational records on foreign missions de facto tell the history of African American missionary activities.⁴⁵

Harr’s observation has proven consequential for historical research inside and outside of church historiography. To date, racially biased representations of African American missionaries have shaped the field’s methodological difficulties and polemics. On the one hand, a large body of historical literature on North American and European missions in Africa does not specifically consider black American personnel.⁴⁶ Adrian Hastings, a major scholar of African Christianity, boils down such views that slide over African American missionaries as “never very numerous” and “mostly too immersed in the Westernizing orientation of the main American missions to offer any distinctive message.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, a growing number of African American scholars aim to contest this assumption by digging for concealed source material. According to Sylvia M. Jacobs, the leading advocate of such research, the challenge lies as much in the missionary archives as in developing new analytical tools and

⁴⁴ Wilber Christian Harr, “The Negro as an American Protestant Missionary in Africa” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1945), 43 and 59.

⁴⁵ These are usually multi-volume works, such as Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 7 vols. (New York, 1937–1945). There are, however, very few statistics on African American missionaries. Drawing on registered church memberships, Robert Gordon estimates between 1820 and 1980, out of thirty thousand American missionaries about six hundred were black. For independent black churches, he counts roughly eighty sponsored missionaries in Africa and thirty Africans in the United States between 1877 and 1900. Robert Gordon, “Black Man’s Burden,” in *African-American Experience in World Mission: A Call Beyond Community*, ed. Vaughn J. Walston and Robert J. Stevens, 55–60, 2nd ed. (Pasadena, 2009). For AME Church accounts of missionaries, see Smith, *History*; Berry, *Century of Missions*; and Jordan, *African Methodist Episcopal Church in Africa*.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago, 1987); and more recently Robert Jewett and Ole Wangerin, *Mission and Menace: Four Centuries of American Religious Zeal* (Minneapolis, 2008).

⁴⁷ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950* (Oxford, 1994), 418.

paradigms that help to study the African American missionary experience as a subject in its own right.⁴⁸

Since the 1970s, a number of scholars have followed Harr's and Jacobs's call.⁴⁹ Diverging from the methods of missiology, they detail instead African Americans' missionary activities, biographies, and various institutional affiliations.⁵⁰ Rather than adopt Hastings's notion of a Westernizing orientation, they assert the singularity of the case as a new frame of reference: the ancient relationship African Americans had to Africa and the relatively unique experience of evangelizing people overseas who were racially similar. Pursuing these trajectories, historians have gathered anecdotal and numerical evidence that adds up to a black Atlantic missionary movement peaking between 1880 and 1920. This research powerfully defies both the neglect of missiologists and the scholarly notion of blacks' Westernization by dovetailing the history of African American missions with a different, namely, African American, narrative. According to this, African American missionaries made a "significant contribution to a growing awareness of pan-Africanism among ordinary black people in the United States well before the rise of Garveyism and the Harlem Renaissance" – the two most important Africa-centered movements of the in-

48 Sylvia M. Jacobs, "Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa: A Bibliography," in *Black Americans*, ed. Jacobs, 232.

49 For monographs, see St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion* (Chicago, 1970); Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion* (Metuchen, 1978); Walter L. Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877–1900* (Madison, 1982); J. Mutero Chirenje, *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883–1916* (Baton Rouge, 1987); Sandy D. Martin, *Black Baptists and African Missions: The Origins of a Movement, 1880–1915* (Macon, 1989); Pagan Kennedy, *Black Livingstone: A True Tale of Adventure in the Nineteenth-century Congo* (New York, 2002); and William S. Phipps, *William Sheppard: Congo's African American Livingstone* (Louisville, 2002); for essay collections, see Jacobs, ed., *Black Americans*; and David W. Wills and Richard Newman, eds., *Black Apostles at Home and Abroad: Afro-Americans and the Christian Mission from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (Boston, 1982); for articles, see Seraile, "Black American Missionaries"; William H. Becker, "The Black Church: Manhood and Mission," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (1972): 316–33; Katja Füllberg-Stolberg, "African Americans in Africa: Black Missionaries and the 'Congo Atrocities,' 1890–1910," in *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*, ed. Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Carl Pedersen, 215–27 (New York, 1999); Kenneth C. Barnes, "On the Shore Beyond the Sea: Black Missionaries from Arkansas in Africa During the 1890s," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 61 (2002): 329–56; Sylvia M. Jacobs, "Three African American Women Missionaries in the Congo, 1887–1899: The Confluence of Race, Culture, Identity and Nationality," in *Competing Kingdoms*, ed. Reeves-Ellington, Sklar, and Shemo, 318–41; and Mark Ellingsen, "Changes in African American Mission: Rediscovering African Roots," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36 (2012): 136–42.

50 Perhaps the most ambitious project in this regard is Sylvia M. Jacobs's effort to compile a bibliographical dictionary on African American missionaries covering the years 1820 to 1970. The project was not completed before her death in 2013 and awaits publication. For details on the planned volumes, see Jacobs's obituary, accessed February 25, 2013, <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/ASALH-Mourns-the-Loss-of-Dr--Sylvia-M--Jacobs.html?soid=1101668597064&aid=AorlHOgf79s>.

terwar years.⁵¹ That the impact of black American missionaries in Africa remains “somewhat illusive” and that black religious movements seem to have been simply replaced by a secular pan-Africanism in the twentieth century have been approved as acceptable corollaries.⁵²

The question of whether black missionaries are framed as a Westernizing or pan-African force is significant for the longstanding and ongoing struggles for black recognition within American academia.⁵³ In fact, digging up black history – including that of missionaries – was a strategy African Americans themselves developed in the 1920s and 1930s to contest the imperial dictum that Africa had no history and that blacks had no human qualities.⁵⁴ Analyzing the role of African American missionaries primarily in the context of pan-Africanism nonetheless presents problems. First, the pan-African frame is questionable from a historical point of view. Critics of pan-Africanism refer to turn-of-the-century black evangelism to show how little solidarity the idea of shared African roots engendered.⁵⁵ Instead of affirming unity, African American Christians often considered themselves to be superior and to have the duty to civilize Africa. By taking on the “black man’s burden,” they took on an imperialist gesturing toward the continent and helped to ground notions of masculinity, elitism, and middle class values in the idea of racial uplift.⁵⁶ Tunde

51 David Killingray, “The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s–1920s,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33 (2003): 23.

52 Sylvia M. Jacobs, “The Impact of Black American Missionaries in Africa,” in *Black Americans*, ed. Jacobs, 225. For studies that suggest that the influence of African American missionaries lay primarily in paving the way for political movements, see George Shepperson, “Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism,” *Journal of African History* 1 (1960): 299–312; and Milfred C. Fierce, *The Pan-African Idea in the United States, 1900–1919: African-American Interest in Africa and Interaction with West Africa* (New York, 1993).

53 Most of the partisan literature on African American missions emerged during the revival of African diaspora studies and the culture wars of the 1980s. Joseph E. Harris, ed., introduction to *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, 3–14 (Washington, DC, 1982).

54 Corbould, *Becoming*, 57–87; on the formation and development of black history, see August Meier and Elliot M. Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915–1980* (Urbana, 1986).

55 Cf. Elias Farajajé-Jones, *In Search of Zion: The Spiritual Significance of Africa in Black Religious Movements* (Bern, 1990), 41–43.

56 The phrase is appropriated from Rudyard Kipling’s poem the “White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands” (1899). It was modified to the “Black Man’s Burden” by numerous black authors. Among them was the AME churchman H. T. Johnson, who published a poem by the modified title in the AME Church’s *Voice of Missions* in April 1899. Scholars have extensively discussed the nexus of imperialism, black religious manhood, and racial uplift. Examples include Michele Mitchell, “‘The Black Man’s Burden’: African Americans, Imperialism, and Notions of Racial Manhood, 1890–1910,” *International Review of Social History* 44 (1999): 77–99; John G. Turner, “A ‘Black-white’ Missionary on the Imperial Stage: William H. Sheppard and Middle-class Black Manhood,” *Journal of Southern Religion* 9 (2006), accessed March 5, 2013, <http://jsr.fsu.edu/Volume9/Turner.htm>; Kevin Gaines, “Black Americans’ Racial Uplift Ideology as ‘Civilizing Mission’: Pauline E. Hopkins on Race and Imperialism,” in *Cultures*, ed.