

This article, authored by Rev. James S. Griffing, appeared in The Kansas Methodist on March 31, 1881. Titled "The African Problem", it was an appeal to all Christians, and particularly those in the Methodist Church, to provide aid to the thousands of black emigrants relocating to Kansas after the end of Reconstruction. In his book, "In Search of Canaan", author Robert G. Athearn described this exodus saying that "in a narrower sense" it was about "black emigrants who sought frontier farms, but in the main it told more about a nation whose wounds had been bound but had not yet healed. The Republicans, without any issues of consequence in 1880, gave the flight national importance in the hope that it would gain votes for them and, at the same time, reduce the South's population and hence its representation in Congress. Thousands of blacks, many of them former slaves, were deluded by false promises made by individual interests. As the hawkers of glad tidings beckoned to the easily convinced, the word 'Kansas' became equated with the word 'freedom.'"

Source: The Kansas Methodist, March 31, 1881

### The African Problem

What is the best solution that can be given to this important question at this hour? God in his providence has thrown upon the church a weight of responsibility she can not well evade. Vast multitudes of our fellow beings, ignorant, degraded, pauperized, are thrown into our midst under circumstances that should awaken the deepest interest of every philanthropist, but more importantly of every lover of Jesus. Nearly all these multitudes were in a bondage worse than Egyptian, and the world was wondering when all along down the centuries it would be possible for these groans to cease, or any permanent help to reach them. Just about then, He, whose thoughts are not as ours,

Who moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
Who plants His footsteps on the sea,  
And rides upon the storm;

...was pleased to concentrate in the person of one man a power that enabled him, with a single stroke of his pen, to break the galling chains from over four millions of our fellow men. This seemed to be a speedy answer to their piercing cries and sent a thrill of joy throughout the heart of the nation, and will compare with any achievement since the advent in Bethlehem. But this great fact rolled upon the church a duty toward them demanding most intense, yet judicious action. This vast population are to be citizens among us and indifference to their interests just at this time may not only be at their peril but may imperil the entire nation. Their release from bondage left them in deepest ignorance and degradation, no way qualified to manage and care for themselves, and directly exposed to all injuries which heartless, imbruted taskmasters might impose upon them. Cruelties made doubly intense because now the victim of their abuse had ceased to be their own property. Now in deepest poverty and ignorance, without any means of escape, they are stretching out their hands crying for help. He who hears the ravens when they cry has been

pleased to impress them that in Kansas they have a friend; that she is a state never to go back on her past record. For days and nights, months and years the resistless tide of emigration of these abused ones has been in this direction, and it has apparently just begun. They feel that they are escaping for their life and coming where they may find a refuge. The question is, what is the duty of the church, and of ministers of Christ's gospel especially? Can their final account to the Master be satisfactory if they fail to lend a ready, helping hand or speak a word of cheer whenever and wherever opportunities offer themselves? Cruel sharpers and wicked, designing men are on every hand disposed to take advantage of their ignorance and impose upon them most grievous injuries. Add to this the deep-seated prejudice existing in the breasts of many of the white population against color, causes the multitude to act the part of priest and Levite and pass by on the other side, giving no response to the cry of distress. In our ministers they must find the good Samaritan ready to help just as their case demands. Their cry for help is the cry of the Master himself in the shape of his suffering ones, and if ministers will but do their whole duty fearlessly, it will be their joy after a time to hear, "Inasmuch as ye have done unto the least of these, my little ones, ye have done it unto me, enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

But my communication is already too long. In my next I will allude more especially to the duty of our own church just at this juncture, and some of the difficulties she has to meet.  
Yours, J. S. Griffin.