

Review: A Higher Mission

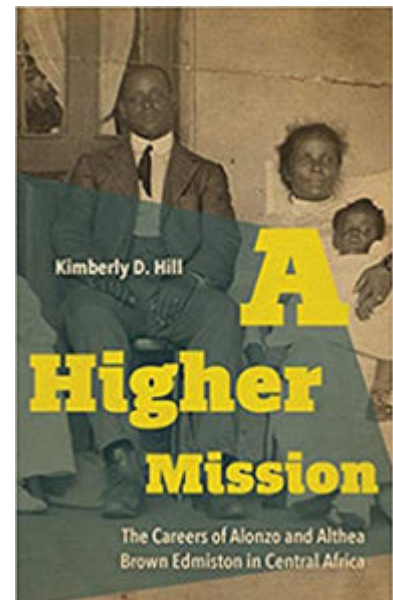
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A Higher Mission: The Careers of Alonzo and Althea Brown Edmiston in Central Africa

By Kimberly D. Hill (University Press of Kentucky)

A Higher Mission is a multi-faceted account of history, missions, education, colonization and decolonization, global politics, racism and more.

Kimberly D. Hill, assistant professor of history at the University of Texas at Dallas, examines the reach of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington's academic dispute beyond African American communities in the United States. She shows how, within the context of Christian missions, their differing educational philosophies were implemented among some of the most vulnerable people in Central Africa.



Much of the dispute between DuBois and Washington was about which education was best suited for raising oppressed people—namely, African Americans—out of poverty. Washington argued for vocational training, while DuBois argued for sharpening the intellect.

Beyond the United States, the question was which form of education was

best suited for civilizing colonized people according to Western standards and which would make colonized people most productive for European and American aims.

At the time, many in Europe sought the natural resources abundant in Africa. Many in America eyed sending formerly enslaved African Americans and their descendants to Africa. There was bound to be a clash, and Christian missionaries often lived and worked in the middle of such conflict.

Alonzo Edmiston and Althea Brown served the American Presbyterian Congo Mission in the Congo Free State, previously the Belgian Congo. Edmiston, educated at Tuskegee Institute and Skillman Institute, was the director of the first industrial school in the Congo Mission from 1905-08. Brown, a graduate of Fisk, created a dictionary of the Bushoong language spoken in the Central African Kuba kingdom.

Brown and Edmiston met on the mission field. They married and honeymooned in the ruins of the mission station that brought them together. Such was their devotion to missions in a volatile place, which they saw as more home than the United States. Both saw part of the role of missions as confronting and alleviating poverty. Not far removed from slavery in America, they evangelized and worked alongside tribes enslaved by others in Africa.

Hill's account of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission shows how governments sometimes co-opt the work of Christian missionaries to serve their own purposes. A reader might wonder how often Christian missionaries served government interests as much or more than the interests of global evangelization.

A Higher Mission is unique for its analysis of the work of African American missionaries. At the same time that American Presbyterian Congo Mission

missionaries were navigating the dispute between differing pedagogies and between colonizers and the colonized, the Edmistons and other African American missionaries also were navigating the racial tension within their denomination back in the United States. Such tension affected the support of white churches vital to missionaries serving on foreign fields in the 20th century.

Though Hill's treatment is intended for an academic audience, anyone interested in missions, geopolitics, racial justice, education and their interplay in the 20th century will benefit from reading *A Higher Mission*.

*Eric Black, executive director, publisher and editor
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