

“A Heart to Heart Talk With You Over This Matter”: Richard Henry Boyd, Elias Camp Morris, James Marion Frost, and the Black Baptist Schism of 1915

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This paper explores the race and religion during the Progressive Era by examining the relationships between Richard Henry Boyd and Elias Camp Morris, two leading members of the nascent National Baptist Convention, an African American denomination, and Boyd's relationship with James Marion Frost, the Corresponding Secretary of the white Southern Baptist Convention. Their interactions highlight the contours and limitations of ecclesiastical activity within and across the color line in the early 20th Century.

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On February 2, 1916, Richard Henry Boyd, the African American publishing dynamo and entrepreneur, sent a twelve page epistle to James Marion Frost, the Corresponding Secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention's Sunday School Board, the nascent, but soon-to-be mammoth publishing arm of white missionary Baptists in the South. The professional form of the missive only superficially masked the emotion and message of what Boyd revealed to his white counterpart. The National Baptist Convention, the nation's largest organization of African American Baptists, was in the throes of schism. In writing this letter, Boyd engaged in a “heart to heart talk” with Frost “over this matter,” whereby he offered his version of recent events (Boyd, February 2, 1916).

The Boyd-Frost letter itself is an artifact of race relations among turn-of-the-century black and white Baptists, who could use epistolary communication and the exchange of denominational literature to negotiate the complex terrain of race relationships during the Progressive Era. Even more, the letter provides insight into two important but underexplored themes of the history of Baptists and race. First, the letter provides insight into the underside of denominational growth among African American Baptists in the South, who needed but chafed under the terms of white support. The emergence of denominationalism among black Baptists afforded opportunity for racial uplift, racial pride, and religious development. They fumed, however, under the strictures of white Baptists whose support they needed. Consequently, this letter provides insight into the underside of denominational growth among African American Baptists in the South. Second, the letter provides a glimpse into how institutionalism and professionalism permitted and even facilitated interracial dialog and conversation through lines of demarcation, a fence across which conversation could occur but at the same time preserved racial lines.

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The complex inter- and intra-racial relationships among Baptist religious professionals and the saga of the denominational schism among African American Baptists, augment a rich scholarship about race and religion in the Progressive Era. The growth of the National Baptist Convention and the emergence of its robust publishing enterprise under Boyd reflect both post-bellum racial uplift and illustrate the Progressive Era mania for organization. Moreover, through the relationships between black and white Baptist bodies, Northern and Southern Baptist organizations, and through the personalities of Boyd, Morris, and Frost, one sees how racial negotiations operated to soften some of the effects of societal racism. Finally, Boyd's relationship with Frost permits further analysis of the reality of racial power in the Progressive Era. As educator, activist, and scholar, Benjamin Mays recalled, “If a black boy wanted to live a halfway normal life and die a natural death, he had to learn early the art of how to get along with white people.” (Mays, 1987, p. 22). Boyd used his publishing acumen, as well as his Baptist faith, to appeal to Frost's professionalism and evangelical faith to nurture their alliance, even as Boyd confessed what he regarded as a moral misdeed to his white patron. The letter is a lens on a rich human story (Smith, 2016; Grantham, 1983; Luker, 1991).

The story begins with the complex relationship between two African American men, Boyd and Elias Camp Morris, the first President of the National Baptist Convention. In a 1901 publication, Boyd assessed Morris' life and work. A self-made man, Morris' leadership and administrative skills had yielded growth in Sunday Schools, missionary enterprises, and even greater cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention. The occasion for Boyd's evaluation of Morris was itself the fruit of the National Baptist Publishing Board, which was now publishing Morris' *Sermons, Addresses, and Reminiscences*, a measure of the educational and literary progress of the African American Baptist ministry since emancipation. Boyd concluded his introduction of the work and importance of Morris with these words, “So close has been our relationship that the suggestion has often been made that the two of us were one” (Morris, 1901, p. 15).

Indeed, on the surface at least they seemed like allies. Both men had helped to create the NBC, a body whose official purposes included foreign missions, home missions, and education. The NBC reflected both the growing status of African American Baptists, and especially their desire to have their own denominational body, controlled by black folk, on equal footing with white bodies such as the American Baptist Home Missionary Society and the Southern Baptist Convention. Recent events, such as the Fortress Monroe Conference in 1894, where white Baptists debated the future of their work with African American Baptists, without any African American Baptists being present, illustrated to black Baptist leaders, men like Boyd and Morris and many others that the time had come to create their own national organization. For his part, Boyd wanted the arrangement that had been negotiated at Fortress Monroe “wiped out of existence” and replaced with an African American run organization (Boyd, 1902; Montgomery, 1993; Jackson, 1980; McBeth, 1987).

Yet, scholars of the history of the National Baptist Convention know that Boyd and Morris became bitter rivals and their feud split the NBC in 1915, resulting in two separate National Baptist Conventions. One was styled the National Baptist Convention, Incorporated, under President Morris, and the other was known as the National Baptist Convention (Unincorporated) or the Boyd Convention. William E. Montgomery attributes the schism to “petty jealousies... senseless squabbings... bitter personal rivalries and disagreements over convention policy” (Montgomery, 1993, p. 335). Evidence abounds to support this view, but there may be more to the story. Historian Bobby L. Lovett, Richard Henry Boyd's biographer, contends that competing views over “relations with white Baptists and the arguments about convention control over the N[atational] B[aptist] P[ublication] B[oard] led to the denominational split of the National Baptist Convention in 1915” (Lovett, 1993,

p. 2). Joseph Harrison Jackson, the longtime and controversial head of the NBC from 1953 to 1982, sees Boyd's acquisition of excessive power and his behind the scenes challenges to the Morris' long presidency as the root of the controversy (Jackson, 1980, pp. 2-3). Beyond that, Boyd had chartered the National Baptist Publication Board in Tennessee in 1898 and the Board was legally outside of Convention control. A majority in the NBC resented Boyd's legalisms, wanting to assert “the will of that body” of black Baptists through the convention to oversee the publication board, to bridle the talents and aspirations of Richard Henry Boyd to convention control (Jackson, 1980, p. 119).

Further investigation into the scattered troves of material suggests even more tangible motives linking the personalities and politics around which historians have framed the storied NBC schism of 1915. Boyd and Morris had long been parties to a devil's bargain, one which neither could expose, squarely centered on the operation of Boyd's National Baptist Publication Board. When individuals within the National Baptist Convention insisted on more convention control over and fiscal transparency from the publication board, Morris could not risk his presidency by openly siding with Boyd. And for his part, Boyd could not expose the real nature of the Morris-Boyd relationship because it would reveal his own role in a questionable arrangement. Ironically, schism protected both men, even if it destroyed the NBC's unity and cost Boyd some of his customer base. This devil's bargain itself sprang from larger issues shaping African American Baptist life in the years after emancipation. Long term personal and institutional relationships with white Baptists north and south, alongside of the growth of an increasingly educated and professional ministry dedicated both to racial uplift and to demonstrating racial progress through publishing, not only animated the formation of the National Baptist Convention, these processes framed its operation down to the schism.

From a scholarly retrospective, the creation of the NBC is a logical expression of an African American desire for racial self-determination, especially given tensions arising out of African American relationships with the American Baptist Home Mission Society, but at no time did the NBC's leadership seek complete separation from white Baptists. Instead, it desired a fraternal relationship that respected African Americans. Black leaders needed white dollars and, especially early on, white Baptist literature, which in the wake of the Civil War came from the American Baptist Publishing Society in Philadelphia.

While missions and Christian education, especially through Sunday Schools, mattered greatly to African American Baptists, religious publishing was an essential ancillary to all of the stated and implied objectives of the National Baptist Convention. An early proponent of a black-run Baptist Convention, William Joseph Simmons, had hoped to create a venue for African American ministers to write and publish. He envisioned a literary uplift and in the mid-1880s helped to found the National Education Society, made up of likeminded ministers, to spur on the effort. This nascent society was one of the three black Baptist groups that melded into the NBC, just shortly after Simmons's death in 1890. And at the time, the American Baptist Publication Society was not encouraging publication by black ministers, especially in its publication for white readers (Jackson, 1980, pp. 57-60). Many African American ministers actually resented the volume entitled *Negro Baptist Pulpit*, which the American Baptist Publication Society published in 1890. Save for the editor's introduction, all writers were black and many black Baptists viewed this as segregated publishing. Black Baptists wished to write material for all Baptists (Brawley, 1890).

Thus, publishing was an expression of black Baptist vitality and a necessary component to further the work of spreading the gospel and nurturing Christian development. Morris and Boyd were united in their pursuit of a black Baptist publishing enterprise. Morris had read a paper to a national assemblage of Baptists in

1893 titled “The Demand for a Negro Baptist Publishing House,” and he continued this advocacy through letters in religious newspapers (Morris, 1901, p. 170). Boyd determined to expand his initial enterprises at providing religious literature to African Americans begun in Texas to a nation-wide scale. He hoped to take advantage of some frictions between the new Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and the American Baptist Publication Society to leverage his dream of a black-run publication society. He pitched his ideas to Morris at Morris’ home in Helena, Arkansas, in July 1896. Later that year, Boyd’s Texas Baptist colleagues helped him get elected corresponding secretary of the NBC’s Home Mission Board, boosting his standing in the NBC. Boyd decided to use the Home Mission Board as a base to house a publication enterprise. Boyd’s proposal to establish a NBC publication house was sent to a committee likely to kill it, according to Bobby Lovett, but Boyd enjoyed support from the huge delegation of Texas Baptists at the 1896 NBC convention and they helped Boyd and his allies navigate the committee process to save the publication initiative (Lovett, 1993, pp. 25-29).

Boyd faced mounting opposition from NBC leaders such as S. N. Vass and others who were employed by the American Baptist Home Missionary Society and/or the American Baptist Publication Society. Boyd knew that he had to produce and distribute literature at a profit if he wanted to overcome his opposition. So he used his role with the Home Mission Board to establish a Printing Committee to write and sell Sunday school literature. As Bobby Lovett notes, “Boyd nominated Morris, the president of the National Baptist Convention, to be the editor-in-chief of the new publishing venture.” In retrospect this was the long-term beginning of the corrupt bargain between Boyd and Morris (Lovett, 1993, p. 29).

Boyd located the nascent publication operation in Nashville, already the home of the white southern Methodist publishing house and the American Methodist Episcopal Sunday School Union’s publication enterprise. Nashville was also the home of the newly-established Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and Boyd had already befriended its early leaders, T. P. Bell and James Marion Frost. In fact, Frost provided the plates for Boyd’s first printing endeavor. Things fell into place so quickly for Boyd that he had to maneuver rather dramatically to get the *post facto* approval of the Home Mission Board itself. This involved a train trip where he almost encountered his nemesis, Rev. S. N. Vass, and included manipulating the Home Mission Board committee structure to obtain its imprimatur. It was one of many times that Boyd’s entrepreneurialism overcame his ethical qualms (Lovett, 1993, pp. 33-35).

From this humble beginning, the National Baptist Publication Board grew. Constitutionally, it was an ad hoc operation. It was not authorized by the National Baptist Convention but rather it was a subcommittee, in effect, of the Home Missions Board, a standing board of the National Baptist Convention. Even by the most forgiving of standards, its operations invited scrutiny. It was initially financed on letters of credit from banks in Texas. Boyd hired his family members to work in the operation and, of course, Boyd scurried shamelessly for customers. He also maintained his special relationship with Morris, who used his influence to insure that preachers not only supported Boyd’s business, but also his business methods, which were largely dictatorial and far from transparent. Boyd covered Morris’ travel expenses to and from Nashville, and Morris occasionally wrote for the Publication Board as a paid board member. In this way, the Faustian arrangement between Boyd and Morris continued (Lovett, 1993, pp. 42-45).

By 1898, the National Baptist Publication Board had achieved some important milestones. It now published the proceedings of the NBC at no charge. Boyd’s board had given two reports to the annual meetings of the NBC which were well received. Boyd’s publications made inroads on American Baptist Publication Society sales to blacks. The society responded by accusing Boyd of stirring up racialized troubles or his part,

Morris used his role as NBC president to defend Boyd's operation from northern criticism, pointing out that segregation had been created by whites and white Baptists had already divided north and south. Who were they to criticize the National Baptist Publication Board for roiling racial waters? (Lovett, 1993, pp. 51-55).

But it was obtaining a corporate charter, becoming a legal entity under the laws of Tennessee, on August 15, 1898, just three days after the armistice in the Spanish-American War that was the crowning achievement of the new publication board and its aggressive leader. As an entity with a self-perpetuating governing board, Boyd's enterprise was legally its own property. It did not answer to either the Home Missionary Board or the NBC, which would remain unincorporated until the schism year of 1915. The Publication Board grew in size, publishing literature of all types including books by black authors. It marketed furnishings for churches and, most famously, black dolls for black children. Boyd, himself, became a banker, operating the One-Cent Savings and Trust in Nashville. As a civic leader and race man, Boyd even helped organize a boycott of Nashville's segregated street cars, fifty years before the storied Montgomery Bus Boycott. But the outgrowth of Boyd's crowning achievement was the devil's bargain he made in getting his charter (Lovett, 1993, pp. 55-57).

On its surface, Boyd's corporate charter looks triumphantly innocuous. He and his peers—good, entrepreneurial ministers—had successfully become a legal entity. And on first inspection, the Boyd-Morris partnership continued because his name was the second name on the list of directors. The charter itself invited no scrutiny, even as the independent status of the Publication Board invited all manner of criticism, both from black Baptists who saw its operation as a threat to their existing arrangements with northern white Baptists and a smaller group who knew that Boyd had a cozy relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention Sunday School Board. But all was not right. Understandably, the publication board's legal standing seemed to violate the populist principles of Baptist polity. It was not subject to the “will of that body” known as the NBC and Morris increasingly ceased to shield Boyd from repeated NBC inquiries about the propriety of his business operations (Jackson, 1980, p. 119). He certainly needed to command support from as much of the NBC membership as possible to secure his presidency. And while the record of exactly when Boyd and Morris became foes is inexact, by 1910 Boyd was backing another candidate, Charles T. Walker of Georgia, for NBC president (Jackson, 1980, p. 102).

In the schism year of 1915, Boyd actually complained to Frost that Morris, now in his twentieth term as president, was turning the NBC into an “oligarchy or episcopacy” (Boyd, October 6, 1915), while turning loose his attack dogs, like the minister and future novelist Sutton Griggs to accuse Boyd of “theft, lying, and fraud.” (*National Baptist Review*, 1910). But Boyd had been hurling unkind accusations at Morris for at least a half a decade in the newspapers of his publication board, especially after Morris began to side openly with NBC demands to investigate Boyd's books and to seize control of the publication board (Coleman, 2007, pp. 24-25).

Certainly, personality, jealousy, and rivalry might explain all this invective. But further investigation makes it appear to be something more. Both men had committed serious ethical breaches in bringing into fruition the National Baptist Publication Board. These ethical breaches potentially threatened the Board's legal charter. Each man knew exactly what they and the other had done and, had their machinations come to light, both men would have been likely ruined in the eyes of their brethren.

In the wake of the 1915 schism, Boyd confessed to Frost his damning version of what had happened. A comparative biography of Boyd and Frost would detail more contrasts than comparisons. Born a slave in 1843, Boyd taught himself how to read and write after emancipation and he learned grammar with the aid of a white

female tutor. He attended Bishop College in Texas for 2 years but never graduated. He entered the ministry in 1871 and served churches in Texas until he moved to Nashville in 1896. Frost enjoyed a far more privileged upbringing (Lovett, 2007). He graduated from Georgetown College in Kentucky and served in several high-profile pastorates in Kentucky, Virginia, Alabama, and Tennessee (Sullivan, 1958, pp. 512-513). Notwithstanding their many differences, Boyd and Frost shared at least two common bonds: both championed denominationally-specific publication and both met stiff opposition when they called for separation from northern Baptist publishing interests.

Boyd and many other black Baptists such as Emanuel K. Love had wanted a black publication house, but the NBC's original charter made no such provision. So Boyd pursued his scheme through the Home Mission Board and began a publishing house without bringing his operation forward for NBC approval. He feared that a majority of the NBC would note that such an operation was outside of the denomination's stated purposes because the Constitution of the National Baptist Convention identified only three: Home Missions, Foreign Missions, and Religious Education.

During the mid-1890s, the need to keep unity and to include those black Baptists with ties to the American Baptist Home Mission Society and especially the American Baptist Publication Society as staunch supporters of the NBC was paramount. It was impolitic to amend the NBC Constitution to embrace publishing or even to vet the details of the *sub rosa* publishing arrangement Boyd began under the aegis of the Home Mission Board. As Boyd told Frost, “I used my office [in the Home Mission Board] to foster this publication plan on the side. We dared not bring it before the convention because it was purely unconstitutional and without authority” (Boyd, February 2, 1916).

Boyd took the matter to Morris and Morris agreed that the publishing operation was unconstitutional. But, Boyd “resorted to finding ... [Morris'] weak spot.” Ethically, it looks like bribery. Morris needed money and Boyd paid him initially \$1000.00 per year to serve on the publication board and Morris used his office to shield the Publication Board from scrutiny and he used his parliamentary powers as NBC president to protect the board from constitutional challenges. For this reason, those people in the convention who disliked the publication board focused on its business transactions rather than risk, a direct confrontation with the president's constitutional authority. But Boyd had a weak spot, too, and Morris used it to his own advantage. Morris' price went up, reaching \$2,600.00 a year in 1903 and the publication board balked when he demanded \$3000 in 1904 (Boyd, February 2, 1916).

The two men sparred for the next eleven years during which time Morris began working with the growing opposition to the publication board. He backed efforts in 1910 to open the the publication board's books knowing that Boyd would balk and Morris would thus be shielded from discovery. At the same time, Morris worked with Professor M. M. Rodgers and they eventually created a plan to incorporate the NBC and alter its board structure. Legally, they could not seize Boyd's publication board but they could shift business away from it. At that point, the fracas of the 1915 Convention was really about measuring support for Morris. He had a majority and Boyd did not. Nevertheless, Boyd could not publicize what Morris had done because it might result in the State of Tennessee revoking the charter of the Publication Board, since objective of publishing literature for black Baptists was not an official objective of the National Baptist Convention Constitution, which the Tennessee charter assumed.

Both men were party to a devil's bargain and both men used available rhetoric to rally their supporters in pursuit of their interests and invited attention away from their one-time interpersonal chicanery. For Morris, the

independent board offended the democratic polity of the Baptists and Boyd's financial and publication enterprises gave him too much power outside of NBC control. For Boyd, the board was a legal entity and a successful African American business in the heyday of turn-of-the-century white supremacy. And now their relationship reached its nadir with Boyd charging that Morris and his underlings were pocketing offering money given for missions. Their bargain, spawned of necessity, had now birthed hatred between the two men (Boyd, 1916).

In 1915 the National Baptist Convention held its annual meeting in Chicago and when it was over, the NBC found itself fragmented into Boyd and anti-Boyd factions with each faction claiming to be the genuine NBC. The entire mess was heading for court and Boyd wanted J. M. Frost to hear his side of the matter. Even more, he wanted other white ministers to keep an open mind. In some of his confession letter's most poignant lines, Boyd wrote:

I have dealt with the white brethren of the Home Mission Board for fourteen years. I have been dealing with you oft and on for twenty-two years. I have built up for myself a reputation of honesty down in Texas where I lived. I have tried to build up a reputation in Nashville... I know Dr. Frost, that I have made mistakes, for I had no experience in this work, but I have tried to be honest. I wish I had some way to make all of my white brethren understand my honest intention, but I am ashamed to meet them with these charges upon my head. My conscience feels clear, but I suppose these brethren cannot understand it. Now, I wish those of my friends might suspend judgment until the evidence at least has been taken and the courts have looked into matters. (Boyd, 1916,).

Boyd's confession raises two important questions. First, why did R. H. Boyd confess his sordid secret to J. M. Frost? Second, what light might this turn-of-the-century letter shed on early-twentieth century southern race relations? In one of the most thoroughgoing studies to date, Joel Williamson argues that late-nineteenth/early twentieth century white southerners might be grouped into 3 broadly defined categories, liberal, radical, and conservative. As the so-called liberals saw it, African Americans made significant strides both during and after Reconstruction. Consequentially, no one could really place limits on their potential. At the other end of the spectrum, race radicals found no real potential in African Americans and saw no place for them in the emerging south. The conservatives occupied the middle ground between these extremes and tended to be cautiously optimistic about the future of black southerners. Paternalistic at their core, conservatives believed that blacks were inferior to whites. Nonetheless, they were in America to stay and with the right kind of help, they might someday find their place in society (Williamson, 1984).

Conversely, scholars tend to divide post-Reconstruction African Americans along a singular axis that partitions separatists from accommodationists. On one side there were blacks who wanted no help from whites. Separatists wanted to create their own space by paying their own way and managing their own affairs. On the other side of the line, accommodationists courted white favor and money. If they could establish a track record of success in some venture they reasoned, they might prove themselves worthy of a place in a predominantly white society (Harvey, 2016, pp. 118-138; Meier & Rudwick, 1976, pp. 194-231).

Granted, these categories are broad and imprecise but something appears to be missing from each paradigm. Suppose a different kind of category existed or at least a variant of the existing categories that acknowledged racism and segregation, but allowed for—and actually fostered—mutual respect, friendship, and camaraderie across the racial divide. In exploring the contours of voluntary racial interaction one might imagine two friends meeting at the fence that separates their property as an organizational metaphor. Picture two people who live different lives and endure different hardships in different contexts, but they share in each other's

existences at a common place, the fence. Apparently, R.H. Boyd and J. M. Frost maintained precisely that kind of friendship/relationship.

There are at least two considerations guiding this assumption. First, *professionalism* afforded Boyd and Frost opportunities to meet at the fence. Both were professionals at the top of their respective organizations. Both men headed up substantial publishing ventures and thus assumed great responsibility. They were CEO's before the term was even coined and at a time when American businessmen were gaining in public stature. Both were risk takers of a sort—Frost allegedly cashed in his wife's dowry for the start-up money to fund the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and you have heard all about the National Baptist Publishing Board's genesis. True, they did not supervise the same kinds of organizations; Boyd made it clear that he did not do the same things that Frost did but each man was accountable for significant amounts of money and they both faced well-defined denominational constituencies. As such, they met as one peer to another peer because their respective businesses facilitated interaction. Briefly stated, they faced common concerns born of professionalization, a mania of the Progressive Era (Wiebe, 1967).

Yet, professionalization alone cannot be the only bond between Boyd and Frost. If it was, surely there would be more stories like theirs, no doubt explained in sumptuous detail by enterprising grad students. While their respective professions created a specific context that shaped their interactions, their relationship reflects a *personal* dimension that is at least as important as their common profession. Consider Boyd's admission that he made mistakes but that he had tried to be honest. After that he said, “I wish I had some way to make all of my white brethren understand my honest intention, but I am ashamed to meet them with these charges upon my head.” (Boyd, February 2, 1916). Boyd had given Frost his version of recent NBC doings and he wanted “white brethren” to know his side of the story. Moreover, he wanted to be known as an honest man among both blacks and whites. Boyd could plead his own case to African Americans but first and perhaps foremost, he wanted Frost to believe him. Frost had invested heavily in Boyd's venture, especially in good will and Boyd did not want to lose his friendship and respect. Moreover, Boyd trusted Frost and he wanted him to be his advocate before white ministers. The National Baptist Convention was headed for schism but as much as possible, Boyd wanted to maintain open relations with Southern Baptists. Who is better than J. M. Frost to keep those lines of communication open?

Some fences are less restrictive than others but a fence remains a fence. If C. Vann Woodward is correct, segregation became increasingly commonplace throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Woodward, 1974). Likely, Boyd and Frost met to discuss business concerns from time to time but there is no way to gauge their personal interaction. The existing evidence only demonstrates that they communicated extensively through written correspondence.

The point of this story is not to mark anyone's failure to scale the race barrier, but rather to spotlight an unusual friendship born from professionalization and institutionalization. There are probably other, similar stories of black and white elites who met at the fence and formed bonds of true friendship. In the height of ironies, it is possible that the institutions that originally fostered open communications between the races ultimately played into the increasingly rigid segregation of which Woodward spoke; such an outcome would certainly illustrate another irony in the history of race in the United States.

Boyd continued to communicate with Frost during the remainder of 1916, the year of Frost's death. The thin epistolary record suggests that their relationship continued after Boyd's confession. Indeed, Boyd was comfortable in expressing his frustration with efforts by agents of both the NBC and the ABPS to pull Boyd's

literature from NBC churches and Frost continued to support Boyd’s efforts to advertise his many publications and wares, noting that “it has been a great satisfaction and joy to back you up in the work you are doing” (Boyd, August 9, 1916; Frost, August 8, 1916).

It seems fitting that Boyd and Morris, the erstwhile allies, died embittered enemies within fourteen days of each other in the late summer of 1922. In their own way, each had been successful. They had supported the creation of a denomination and had worked to ensure its continued growth. In the years after the Fortress Monroe Conference, each had worked successfully with white Baptist allies, north and south, in arrangements that they helped to negotiate, rather than to have negotiated for them. There is no doubt that each cared for the spreading of the gospel, and especially for the “doctrine of the [Baptist] church.” They favored racial uplift and worked to create black religious writing for freed people and their children. But each man had cut corners and each knew the other had, too. This devil’s bargain consumed their relationship and divided their convention.

The saga of Boyd, Morris, and Frost bring together various strands of Baptist, southern, and racial history in a revealing fabric. The need to express themselves as African Americans and as Baptists led Boyd and Morris to create a denomination and a publishing house, even if the means by which the latter was woven tore the garment of African American Baptist Unity. To launch and maintain his enterprise, Boyd appealed to his white counterpart and received support, and this succor was made possible but also limited by the realities of race.

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