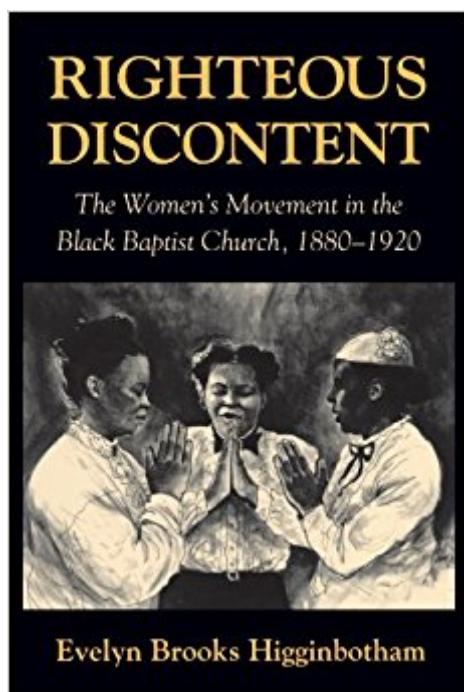


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# Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement In The Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920



## Synopsis

What Du Bois noted has gone largely unstudied until now. In this book, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham gives us our first full account of the crucial role of black women in making the church a powerful institution for social and political change in the black community. Between 1880 and 1920, the black church served as the most effective vehicle by which men and women alike, pushed down by racism and poverty, regrouped and rallied against emotional and physical defeat. Focusing on the National Baptist Convention, the largest religious movement among black Americans, Higginbotham shows us how women were largely responsible for making the church a force for self-help in the black community. In her account, we see how the efforts of women enabled the church to build schools, provide food and clothing to the poor, and offer a host of social welfare services. And we observe the challenges of black women to patriarchal theology. Class, race, and gender dynamics continually interact in Higginbotham's nuanced history. She depicts the cooperation, tension, and negotiation that characterized the relationship between men and women church leaders as well as the interaction of southern black and northern white women's groups. Higginbotham's history is at once tough-minded and engaging. It portrays the lives of individuals within this movement as lucidly as it delineates feminist thinking and racial politics. She addresses the role of black Baptist women in contesting racism and sexism through a "politics of respectability" and in demanding civil rights, voting rights, equal employment, and educational opportunities. Righteous Discontent finally assigns women their rightful place in the story of political and social activism in the black church. It is central to an understanding of African American social and cultural life and a critical chapter in the history of religion in America.

## Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; Revised edition (March 15, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674769783

ISBN-13: 978-0674769786

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #604,550 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #138 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Baptist #1808 in Books >

## Customer Reviews

Examining the black church as the domain not only of religious expression but also of the emerging "pursuit of a black collective will and identity," Higginbotham (history, Univ. of Pennsylvania) analyzes the contributions of African American women between 1880 and 1920. Her work addresses a neglected area by clearly documenting the lives of women whose vision, sacrifice, faith, and intelligence served the poor and built schools, promoted self-help, and shaped the forces that would challenge racial and gender subordination. In her account of the women's interaction with black men in pressing for racial equality and with Northern white Baptist women in championing gender equality, Higginbotham insightfully interprets complex gender, race, and class issues, enhancing this book's value to scholars as well as lay readers interested in feminism, racial politics, and church history. Highly recommended.- Cynthia Widmer, Downingtown, Pa.Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If the period was so important for women but simultaneously a low point for black Americans as a group, then how should we understand the apparently contradictory politics of that time? Righteous Discontent accentuates the positive, finding in the contradiction 'a creative tension that both motivated and empowered black women to speak out.' Ms. Higginbotham moves beyond the dichotomous thinking that has often short-circuited our attempts to understand the situation of black women...An important, sophisticated, and richly instructive book. (Suzanne Lebsack New York Times Book Review)Higginbotham's book is populated with fascinating and accomplished women...[Her] research is impeccable and her work both ambitious and important. Righteous Discontent contributes significantly to the still underappreciated history of the black church in America. (Adele Logan Alexander Washington Post Book World)Higginbotham has pioneered a study of a long-neglected component of the African-American experience. This book is a powerful and compelling story of the religious life of African-American women and their resistance to racism and sexism. Through Higginbotham's work, the voices of African-American women, which have remained silent too long, emerge distinct and bold. (Jill Watts Journal of American History)A landmark contribution to American religious history. (Choice)

Solid, and essential for anyone who wants to understand women's social activism in North America.

In my opinion the book was in better condition than it was rated.

Dr. Higginbotham's book is essential reading for everyone who believes that the Civil Rights Movement started when Ms. Parks got on a bus in Montgomery. I hope Dr. Higginbotham writes a sequel following these formidable women and their organizations from the 1920's through the 60's.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham asserts that southern black women, through their participation in the National Baptist Convention fostered agency, activism, women's rights and racial dignity during the post-Reconstruction era of Jim Crow. Intrinsic to her thesis is that while black women utilized the Baptist church as a support structure against racism and poverty, they also worked to raise the status of the black race as a whole and black women specifically. One of the most important insights in this book, is an in-depth analysis of the feminization of religion. However, while Higginbotham's thesis is strong and engaging, altering the hereto academic focus away from prominent black Baptist activists to a wider, regional phenomenon of group participation, ultimately her study contains a few theoretical holes. There is little critical analysis of the opposition that black women faced in their endeavors, such as the creation of the Women's Convention, a subsidiary of the larger National Baptist Convention. Also, there is no sense of the black "masses," consistently referred to as such, that these women tried to help. "Masses," in this case indicates a monolith rather than an increasingly diversified group of people. Elaboration on both of these points would have greatly improved the complexity of Higginbotham's study, as well as left the reader a great deal more informed. Overall, *Righteous Discontent* is a valuable source for anyone seeking information on race, gender and religion at the turn of the century. Higginbotham's treatment of the subject is tactful and engaging, uncovering a little known but important facet of African American history.

Evelyn Higginbotham shows us that this is not a man's world anymore with her book on the role of women in the Black Baptist Church. Her writing is fluid and detailed, and she provides various examples to illustrate her points. This is the definitive text for learning about the roles that the Black Baptist church in African-American society.

This book is very interesting. Because it is from the women's in the church this is something Christian should have in their library.

If I could give this book zero stars, I would. Higginbotham is not the feminist scholar she once was, and her writing needs more perspective. The book suggests that she's spent too long in the ivory tower. Too much post-modern psycho-babble in this volume.

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