

Good News Department

Spreading The Word

(NAPSA)—The Bible plays a vital role in a number of African American communities—but many may not know the story of how word of the Good Book was spread.

It's the story of African Americans working together to spread spirituality and literacy skills, and of a little-known group of dedicated men and women called colporteurs who helped countless people connect.

The term “colporteur” refers to those who travel to sell or distribute Bibles and religious writings. In 1900, a group of African American colporteurs was commissioned as home missionaries in the South. The door-to-door standard method of distribution, enriched by the cooperation of black churches, played a significant role in furnishing the Scriptures to urban blacks.

The group was commissioned by the American Bible Society, after it launched the “Agency Among the Colored People of the South,” an organization devoted solely to the distribution of the Bible among Southern African Americans. The agency was created in response to the Supreme Court’s “separate but equal” decision and the uneven Bible distribution in the Southern states.

Gathering Together

Most people received the colporteurs warmly, gathered their families together and requested them to read selections aloud. A colporteur’s arrival was a special event, which helped overcome feelings of separation and isola-



A group of African Americans called colporteurs helped spread the Bible and literacy in the South.

tion for rural families. In the cities, colporteurs found established African American neighborhoods with thriving local institutions. The local African American church usually provided a focal point for introducing and carrying out the work of the Bible Society.

Changing Hearts And Minds

The work of the colporteurs eventually led the Bible Society to reconsider its approach to sharing God’s Word with the world. The group moved to banish discrimination and any aspects of its operation that bore “any semblance to segregation.”

To this day, the Bible Society works to keep its commitment to building strong relationships with America’s African American communities in carrying out the mission of sharing the good news.