

Bryant, Franklin Henry (1877–1909)

KEVIN L. MORGAN

Kevin L. Morgan is a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, researcher, and book editor. He has a B.A. in theology and a Master's degree in homiletics from Southern Adventist University. He studied history at Appalachian State University and has written and contributed to several books on the Sabbath, Ellen White's literary productions, and Adventist history; he has also written articles published in *Ministry* and at Academia.edu; he has edited books on various topics.

Franklin Henry Bryant was the first African American Seventh-day Adventist to author a book and the first African American to earn a law degree from the University of Colorado. In August 1898 he accepted Adventism as a young man in Yazoo City, Mississippi, where he joined the crew of the missionary steamer *Morning Star*, serving as a stenographer to J. Edson White.

An invalid because of lung problems, Bryant applied himself in school and served as editor for a local paper.

¹ While living onboard the *Morning Star*, he studied “the principles of present truth” in order to “soon become an active missionary to his own people.” ² He received baptism at the boat landing near the Issaquena Church in 1899. In March 1899, he left the *Morning Star* to visit family in northern Mississippi and then his father in Colorado before going to North Carolina to begin mission work. In conjunction with D.T. Shireman, head of the Adventist school in Hildebran, Franklin worked as a Bible instructor and teacher among African Americans in nearby Hickory.³

In 1901, he went to Battle Creek to receive treatment for “a difficulty with his face.”⁴ While there, he published two poems in a Washington, D.C. newspaper entitled, “Hail Columbia,” and “To Alabama, Et Al.”⁵ The poems reveal Bryant's disenchantment with the Republican Party for its failed promises to black Americans. While at Battle Creek, Bryant was disappointed by the cool reception he received. ⁶ Edson White wrote his brother, W.C. White, asking him to intercede on Bryant's behalf and telling his brother that he had offered to put Bryant through medical school in Nashville.⁷

In 1903, Bryant published *Black Smiles*, a book of poems, “descriptive of the Southern negro life, character, and dialect in slavery time.”⁸ It was the first book published by an African American Seventh-day Adventist author. He planned to support himself in medical training at Meharry Medical College in Nashville through book sales.⁹

In 1903, Bryant wrote an article in *The Tennessean* entitled, “Good Advice to the Colored People.” In it he addressed American whites, “We are inseparable from you. Your success, your interests, your land, your God is ours.” Then he addressed American blacks, “demanding rights ... is not worth half so much to us as a race of people as is that other principle of being right.”¹⁰

Bryant went on to study at Northwestern University in Chicago and at the University of Colorado in Denver, where he graduated in 1907 as the university's first black student to earn a law degree.¹¹ While in Colorado, Bryant's political views continued to change. As a student, Bryant was arrested while participating in a socialist march. He later lectured on socialism and other social issues and ran for county judge as a socialist.¹² He lived with his father in Denver until 1908 and practiced law there and then in Boulder.

Franklin Bryant died on February 4, 1909, after filing briefs in the Colorado Supreme Court against the state board of medical examiners for the unconstitutionality of a Colorado law.¹³ After his death, Edson White obtained the rights to *Black Smiles* from Peter J. Rennings, the book's illustrator and first financier, and republished the book for the benefit of the Southern Missionary Society.¹⁴



Franklin Henry Bryant.
Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

SOURCES

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Bryant, Franklin Henry. "Hail Columbia." *The Colored American*, August 24, 1901.

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Review of *Black Smiles*. *The Inter Ocean*, October 26, 1903.

NOTES

1. James Edson White to W. C. White, October 30, 1901, Ellen G. White Estate, accessed April 4, 2019, ellenwhite.org; Review of *Black Smiles*, *The Inter Ocean*, October 26, 1903, 7; "Notes By the Way," *The Gospel Herald*, March 1899, 67.?
2. "Morning Star Group of Southern Missionary Workers," *The Gospel Herald*, March 1899, 68; James Edson White to Ellen G. White, March 22, 1899, Ellen G. White Estate, accessed April 4, 2019, ellenwhite.org.?
3. "Notes By the Way," *The Gospel Herald*, March 1899, 67; Untitled News Note, *Gospel Herald*, December 1899, 107; "Frank H. Bryant" is listed as a "lecturer" renting a house in Hickory, North Carolina, in the 1900 U.S. Federal Census. *The Gospel Herald* reported Bryant as giving Bible readings, teaching school, and looking for a school site: "At Hickory, N.C.," *Gospel Herald*, June 1900, 46.?
4. James Edson White to W. C. White, October 30, 1901.?
5. Franklin Henry Bryant, "Hail Columbia," *The Colored American*, August 24, 1901, 10, and "To Alabama, Et Al," *The Colored American*, September 7, 1901, 7.?
6. James Edson White to W. C. White, October 30, 1901.?
7. James Edson White to W. C. White, October 28, 1901 and James Edson White to E. G. White, October 30, 1901, Ellen G. White Estate, accessed April 5, 2019, ellenwhite.org; "Graduates of Negro Colleges to Meet Here," *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, June 4, 1907, 13.?
8. "Black Smiles," *The Gospel Herald*, April 1912, 27; see Franklin Henry Bryant, *Black Smiles* (Nashville: Southern Missionary Society, 1903, 1909), accessed May 6, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/blacksmiles00brya>.?
9. Review of *Black Smiles*, *The Inter Ocean*, October 26, 1903. In his April 9, 1903 report to the General Conference, Edson White mentioned sending two young men to Meharry; see *General Conference Bulletin*, April 14, 1903, 200.?
10. Franklin H. Bryant, "Good Advice to the Colored People," Letter to the Editor, *The Tennessean*, March 5, 1903, 4.?
11. "Chicago," *The Appeal* [St. Paul, Minnesota], September 26, 1903, 4; University of Denver & Colorado Seminary Catalogue, 1905, 167; *The Coloradoan*, vol. 10 (1908), 37, available at <https://books.google.com/books?id=daBIAQAAMAAJ>, accessed May 14, 1917.?
12. "The Crisis in Colorado," *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, August 19, 1906; "The Mission of Industrial Unionism," *Denver Post*, May 29, 1906, 2; October 13, 1907, 2; "Negro Question, and its Solution," *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, August 10, 1907): 11; Franklin Henry Bryant, "Spirit of the Age," *Appeal to Reason* [Girard, Kansas], June 27, 1908, 4; "Socialism," *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, December 20, 1908; Ballot showing Bryant as the Socialist candidate for County Judge, *Denver Post*, October 29, 1908, 9.?
13. "Faithful Negro Janitor Forced to Take Vacation," *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, February 11, 1910, 9. The article mentions Franklin's recent death in its profile of his father, Henry Bryant, a respected janitorial supervisor who had not taken a vacation for 22 years but was now doing so at the insistence of physicians.?
14. "Black Smiles," *The Gospel Herald*; J. Edson White to W. C. White, March 30, 1909, Ellen G. White Estate, accessed April 4, 2019, ellenwhite.org.?

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