

A 'Gideon' of the Chicago Slums

by Karen Young

Judges 6:12 says that the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon with these words: "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." (KJV) Though he lived in obscurity, Gideon was stirred up to undertake something great.

In the early 1900s, Mabel Vivian Broome was a "Gideon" of her day in

The Salvation Army. Drawn to the Army by the fervor of its preachers and its relentless social outreach, Mabel became a soldier (member) of a Salvation Army church called Chicago #3 Corps (church). Then she answered the call to become an officer (pastor). After an intense six months of training, Mabel became the first African-American officer in the Army's Central Territory on July 20, 1915, just as World War 1 was heating up.

The 'Slummers'

Perhaps the most challenging of Mabel's assignments was to the "Chicago #2 Slums." The Army set up "slum corps" in the poorest sections of cities. Allan Whitworth Bosch, in his dissertation, "The Salvation Army in Chicago, 1885-1914," provides a vivid account of the Army's slum ministries.

This work, as he describes it, involved house-to-house visitation—and much more. Young women officers, also known as "slummers" or "slum sisters," scrubbed people's floors, cared for new

mothers and their babies, ministered to the sick and shut-ins, mended clothes, and sought donations of food and clothing.

Slum-sister officers also had the full responsibility of church programs—nightly services, frequent open-air evangelistic meetings, visits to brothels and saloons to share the Gospel and to sell *The War Cry*, the Army's national magazine. The officers could count on unresponsive crowds and, often, open hostility. Such a life required perseverance, faith, and a tremendous amount of energy. For Mabel Broome, an African American in a United States that was highly segregated, the duty must have been extremely hard.

In 1918, Mabel resigned as an officer, probably because of delicate health. After a time, however, she returned to the work and accepted a reassignment to the Army's USA Eastern Territory, where she served at the Boston Rescue Home until her early death in 1930.

Like many young Gideons who toiled in obscurity, Mabel Broome paved the way for many who would follow her in The Salvation Army to serve the poor, at any cost, in the name of Jesus.

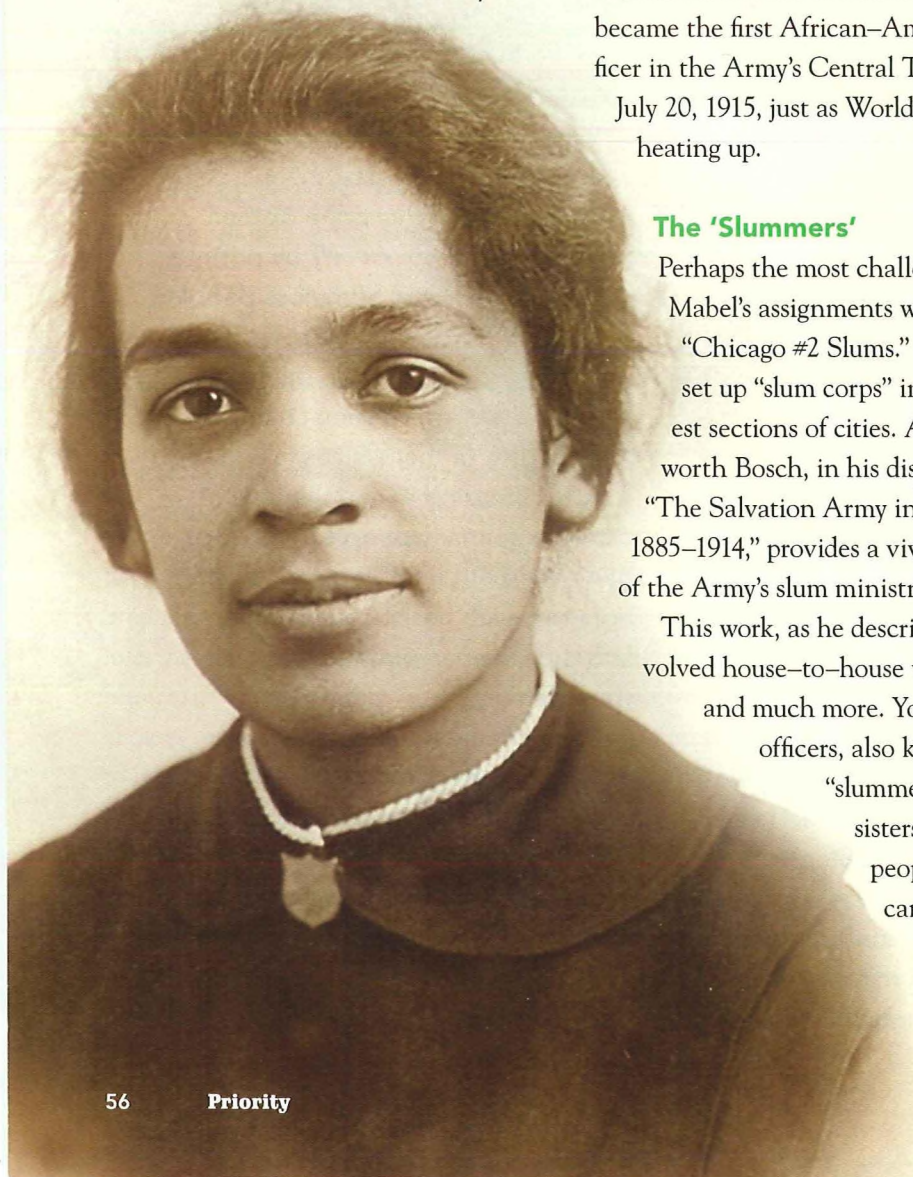


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