

🌿 PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION 🌿

Martin Marty said of the first edition of this documentary witness, published nearly fifteen years ago, that it helped establish the canon of African American religious studies. This and similar accolades warmed the heart, but perhaps the most enduring words of encouragement have come from the many students with whom I have shared the original edition of the anthology. Students have told me that the readings gave them a surety, a historical warrant, as it were, to speak of their own faith and religious background. Some have gone back to their families and home congregations with a renewed appreciation of the religious legacy bequeathed to them by their parents and grandparents. Others, some of whom acknowledge no traditional Christian identity or who have embraced the tenets of alternative religious cultures (for example, Islam), tell me of the rewards they obtained from finding in the collection you are about to read a better picture of the diverse contributions peoples of African descent have made to the pluralistic religious landscape of America.

The first edition of the anthology has been used in varied venues. University and college professors, notably those in departments of African American studies, variously named, history, and religion, have employed the anthology as a text. One professor told me that he taught a course on African American history with the documentary source book as his principal text, a choice I'm not sure even I would have made, but one that underscores Carter G. Woodson's thesis that a thorough examination of the religious history of black Americans is tantamount to studying African American history. On perhaps a dozen occasions since the publication of *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* in 1985, pastors of predominantly African American churches have told me that they purchased the volume for their own libraries and were attempting to employ it in educational forums within their congregations. Further afield, a Japanese professor of American studies when a Fulbright scholar at Syracuse University took several volumes home with her, and I have learned that the anthology is also in use in Denmark, Italy, Germany, England, and other European countries. African scholars visiting Syracuse also tell me that the 1985 edition is in use in their home institutions.

Given the generally positive reception to the first edition of this anthology, I have struggled with how to improve it without adding inordinately to its length and, ultimately, cost. This second edition includes more documentary witnesses

authored by women or about women, though the number might have been tripled had I not developed an affectionate attachment to the voices in the 1985 collection during many hours of classroom instruction. I have also introduced new documents on African missions and on the church response to the Great Migration of 1916–18. Colleagues here at Syracuse University and elsewhere have argued for a less domestic perspective on African American religion, and my own work on the early twentieth-century exodus from the South has convinced me that the rural-to-urban migration was a significant watershed in the African American religious experience, one deserving of greater documentary attention. The new readings underscore the need to add and highlight three additional interpretative themes to the six discussed in the original introduction, which I've chosen to reproduce in this second edition. Readers will want to be conscious of questions of gender, of the rural and urban dichotomy, and of the place of Africa, and specifically African missions, in the life of African American religious groups. This second incarnation also corrects factual errors brought to my attention in the original headnotes and updates the suggested readings in harmony with the groundswell of scholarly literature in the last decade and a half.

At the risk of disappointing others, I mention but several of the complementary studies produced in the last fifteen years that have advanced the field of African American religious history. I refer often to the comprehensive survey of contemporary black Christian life by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya and published as *The Black Church in the African American Religious Experience* by Duke University Press in 1990. I also find the *Encyclopedia of African American Religions*, edited by Larry G. Murphy, J. Gordon Melton, and Gary L. Ward (Garland, 1993), essential as a reference tool. Important and groundbreaking works on the religious pilgrimage of African American women have appeared in recent years. I am partial to the essays edited by Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman under the title *This Far by Faith: Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography* (Routledge, 1996).

Finally, I entrust this second edition to a hopefully expanded readership who will make the transition to the next millennium. As we enter into the year 2000 and beyond, it is all the more important to safeguard the legacy of the African American past. If this second edition of the anthology contributes in any way to the preservation of the rich tapestry of the African American religious experience, I will reckon its mission accomplished.

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