



This Far by Faith: Stories from the African American Religious Experience

By Juan Williams, Quinton Hosford Dixie

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This Far by Faith is the story of how religious faith inspired the greatest social movement in American history -- the U.S. Civil Rights movement.

America's struggle, rise, and triumph from slavery to equal rights for all is a living testament to the power of deep, personal faith for Americans of all colors. The black experience in America, even black music, is defined by a steady, burning religious faith and the power it offered to people who were viewed as powerless, even less than human, until the flame of faith showed them that they were equal members of God's family. That everlasting faith in God and trust in God's justice, as well as the power of prayer and its appeals to conscience, remains central to the concept of democracy and one nation under God that all Americans value.

Arriving on ships named *Brotherhood* and *John the Baptist*, slaves who had previously embraced tribal religions in their home countries faced the Christianity of their captors. Africans did not simply adopt the religion of the European colonists; they used the power, principles, and practices of Christianity to blaze a path to freedom and deliverance. In the process, the moral fabric of the nation was tested and took on a new texture and strength unique to America.

In the early to mid-twentieth century, black people used organized faith to meet, finance, and plan their struggle for freedom. The church was a living well of strength and comfort for black Americans; the one place where they maintained their public dignity. It was the black church that produced civil rights leaders from Martin Luther King Jr. to Malcolm X. And the white churches and synagogues provided key allies that were necessary to boost the Civil Rights movement to success.

Juan Williams, author of *Eyes on the Prize*, the landmark book on the history of the Civil Rights movement, and Quinton Dixie, a professor of religious studies and African American studies at Indiana University, bring to life the pivotal moments facing men and women of faith in this monumental history. The stories begin with ministers leading rebellions against slavery and towering men and

women who used faith in God to rise above the brutality of being demeaned as slaves. Here are stories of politics, tent revivals, and the importance of black churches as touchstones for every step of the faith journey that became the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Using archival and contemporary photography, historical research, and modern-day interviews, and featuring messages from some of today's foremost clergymen and women, *This Far by Faith* is the first in-depth treatment of this social history and a companion to a major public television series.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Williams, who wrote the companion volume to the award-winning PBS documentary *Eyes on the Prize*, and Dixie, an Indiana University professor, offer a well-illustrated companion volume to the upcoming PBS series "This Far by Faith." They follow the traditional contours of other studies of African-American religious history, beginning with slavery and following the tale through the emergence of free black churches; the nadir of the late 19th century; the Great Migration; the rise of black nationalism and urban religious traditions in the early 20th century; the civil rights movement; and the embrace of alternative religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and the Five Percenters in the 1970s through the 1990s. One particularly interesting segment discusses those mid-20th century black Christian leaders who adopted conservative stances on integration; Williams and Dixie have done a great service by presenting these ministers' views alongside the more familiar stories of civil rights leaders, demonstrating the ideological diversity of the African-American church. At times, the book's writing style can be abrupt and jerky, switching from one historical figure to the next, or between different cities, without transitions to help the reader. The prose is also overburdened with romantic language about heroes who laid their all at the altar of sacrifice, etc.-a device that may work well over six separate installments of a television series, but quickly becomes redundant in print. The real strength here is not the writing but the 76 memorable photographs and illustrations, which powerfully attest to the courage and religious convictions of generations of African Americans.

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From Library Journal

This companion to a six-part PBS special airing in February 2002 examines African American religious life. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

Religion has been and continues to be a sustaining force in the lives of African Americans. This enlightening book offers photographs, historical research, and contemporary analysis of the role of religion in fortifying African Americans from the days of slavery through harsh segregation and racial brutality and the civil rights and black power eras. Williams and Dixie trace the early influence of African religions on the Christianity adopted by slaves, later conflicts in the budding Baptist churches that aimed for a more polished religion, and adaptations of southern emotionality to the urban sensibilities of the North, showing the shifts and splinters in denominations and sects. They highlight well-known and lesser-known figures in the black church from Sojourner Truth to Henry McNeal Turner to Father Divine and Elijah Muhammad. The authors also cite a more current trend among blacks to embrace less-traditional faiths; these blacks, such as Buddhists, Five Percenters, and those listening to hip-hop gospel, continue a search that has persisted since Africans reached American soil for a faith that matches their spiritual and social experiences. *Vanessa Bush*

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Users Review

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