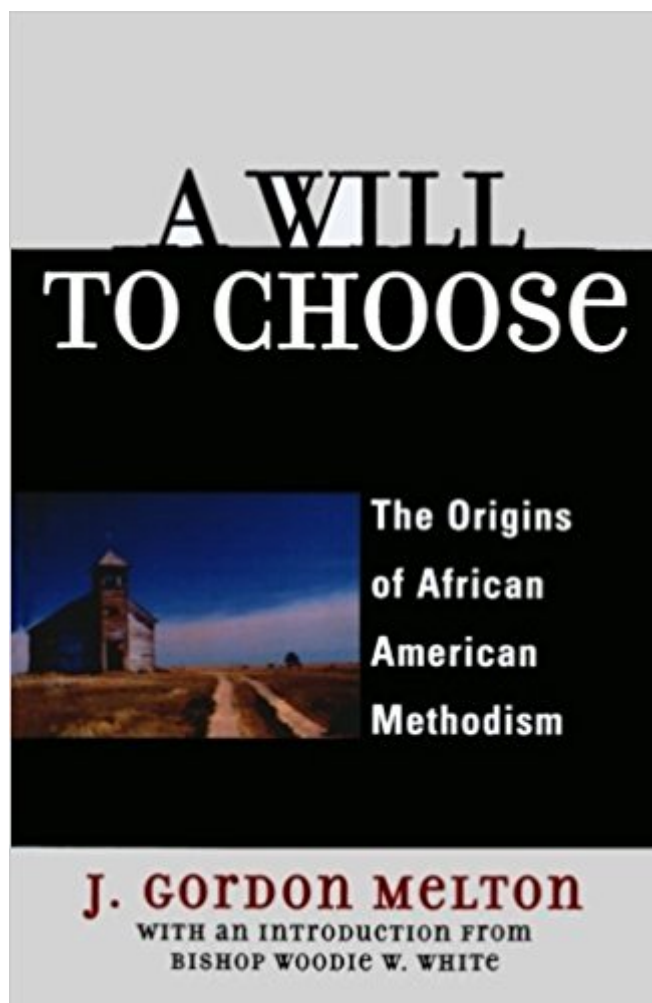


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# A Will To Choose: The Origins Of African American Methodism



## Synopsis

*A Will to Choose* traces the history of African-American Methodism beginning with their emergence in the fledgling American Methodist movement in the 1760s. Responding to Methodism's anti-slavery stance, African-Americans joined the new movement in large numbers and by the end of the eighteenth century, had made up the largest minority in the Methodist church, filling positions of authority as class leaders, exhorters, and preachers. Through the first half of the nineteenth century, African Americans used the resources of the church in their struggle for liberation from slavery and racism in the secular culture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Melton has given us an excellent history of a heretofore scarcely-documented theme. It is light enough that it is hard to put down and deep enough to refer to again and again. This work will be a classic of American church history. (Danyealle Autumn Myst Black History Review)J. Gordon Melton has performed a thoroughgoing research effort in probing the records and publications to present an integrative and inclusive picture of Methodism with African American Methodism seen in its realistic roles and functions at the center of the founding and development of this major denomination in American church and social history. He is to be lauded for his persistence in pursuing over several decades the rigorous goal of bringing together the separate strands of Methodists within their true interactive historical perspective. (Mozella G. Mitchell, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Religious Studies Department, University of South Florida)*A Will to Choose* is the most original and extensive

treatment of early African Methodism produced up to this point. Remarkable for its rich information and the breadth and balance of its interpretations, this book is not likely to be surpassed or superseded. Essential reading for historians of religion and the African American experience. (Lewis V. Baldwin, Author of *Invisible Strands in African Methodism: A History of the African Union Methodist Protestant and Union American Methodist*) *A Will to Choose* gives those who have been unknown to history, prominence; those who have been voiceless, voice; those who have been neglected, attention. In this richly textured narrative, J. Gordon Melton has mined never-used and under-used sources to ensure that the story of African Americans in the first century of American Methodism is fully told and never overlooked again. The inclusion of all the historic African American denominations makes this a critical and welcomed addition to Methodist historiography. (Robert J. Williams, Ph.D., General Secretary, General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church) In *A Will to Choose*, Gordon Melton presents a deeply insightful and well researched chronicle of African American Methodism which he traces from its mid 18th century Moravian roots through the Civil War. He does a masterful job of weaving together the divergent but sometimes intersecting histories of several strands of the Methodist movements as it spread from the North East throughout the South. This book makes a very significant contribution to our understanding of African American religion and spirituality. (E. Lincoln James, Managing editor, *The Western Journal of Black Studies*) Of the writing of books on African American Methodism there will be no end, but this book is well worth paying attention to. This book has been a labor of love, the culmination of a forty-two year project by J. Gordon Melton in searching out and making sense of many scattered and not easily accessible sources....What he [Melton] aims to trace in all of its glory and struggles is a tradition of African American leadership....He succeeds remarkably well....There is much to recommend this work....This book is an important advance in black Methodist historiography. (*Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, March 2008) From one of the most productive scholars of American religions, Gordon Melton in *A Will to Choose* reclaims the lost stories of enslaved and free black men and women who embraced and advanced variant expressions of African-American Methodism from 1770-1870. His narrative sparkles as a moving chronicle of the active and creative presence of these amazing black Christians in the Wesleyan tradition from its very beginnings in North America and functions as a sharp corrective to a scholarship that has more often than not made these African-American Methodists invisible within the largest Protestant movement throughout the 19th century in the US. This book culminates a generation of Melton's devoted research and joins the ever-growing and engaging literature of African-American religious history. (Will Gravely, professor emeritus of religious studies, University

of Denver)This work will be of value to all interested in African American life, American religious history, and American social and cultural studies. . . . Highly recommended. All levels.

(CHOICE)Thoughtful and meticulous. (Journal of American History, March 2008)J. Gordon Melton has produced a very useful and readable examination of African American Methodism....This will be an indispensable book for those with an interest in African American history and the history of religion. (Journal of Southern History, August 2008)Long after the promise of Reconstruction gave way to the closed society of the Jim Crow South, the church remained a crucial site of black self-determination and self-definition. *A Will to Choose* demonstrates that this was always a characteristic of African American Methodism. (The Journal of African American History)

J. Gordon Melton is the director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion in Santa Barbara, California. He is the author of more than twenty-five books, including the *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, *American Religion: An Illustrated History*, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, and the *Encyclopedia of African American Religion*.

very helpful info that has been too seldom researched. I am writing a "History of Methodism" and this book caused considerable revisions in my chapter on "Methodist and the Africans" in the days of slavery as well as African Americans Methodism's various divisions.

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