

Florida International University
University Graduate School

Doctoral Dissertation Defense

Testimony in Print: Amanda Berry Smith and Transatlantic Reform in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World

Abstract

By

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Amanda Berry Smith (1837–1915) was a formerly enslaved Black American woman who transitioned from a domestic worker to a renowned missionary and temperance reformer throughout the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. This dissertation argues that Smith's advocacy for gender and racial equality, grounded in Protestantism and temperance, laid the groundwork for subsequent Black female activists and preachers in the twentieth century. By applying the interpretive approach I term testimony in print, this work examines strategies that combined storytelling, lived experience, and literary activism to express visions for a better future. Through this lens, power structures of race, gender, religion, and reform, and strategies used to resist them, become clearer. Smith is occasionally referenced in articles and book chapters, yet aside from one biography, historians have produced no full-length study of her life in this century. Spanning more than seventy years and multiple geographical sites, this dissertation draws from archival collections in America and abroad and contributes to the historiography of temperance, Black women's activism, and historical memory in Atlantic history.

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Time: 10.00 a.m.
Place: SIPA, 301

Department: History
Major Professor: Professor Jenna Gibbs