

# SPEAKING TO AFRICAN METHODISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY:

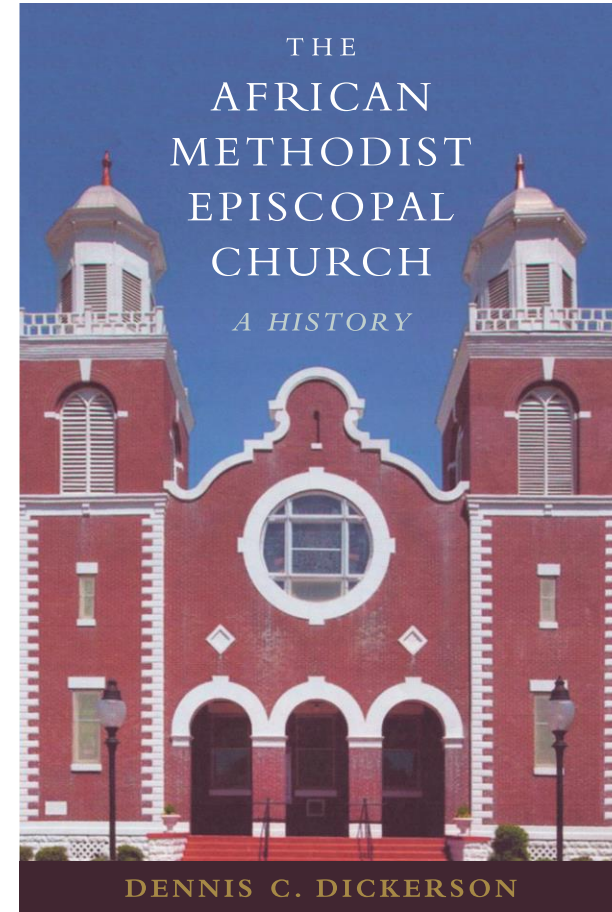
THE RELEVANCE OF RICHARD ALLEN

Second Episcopal District

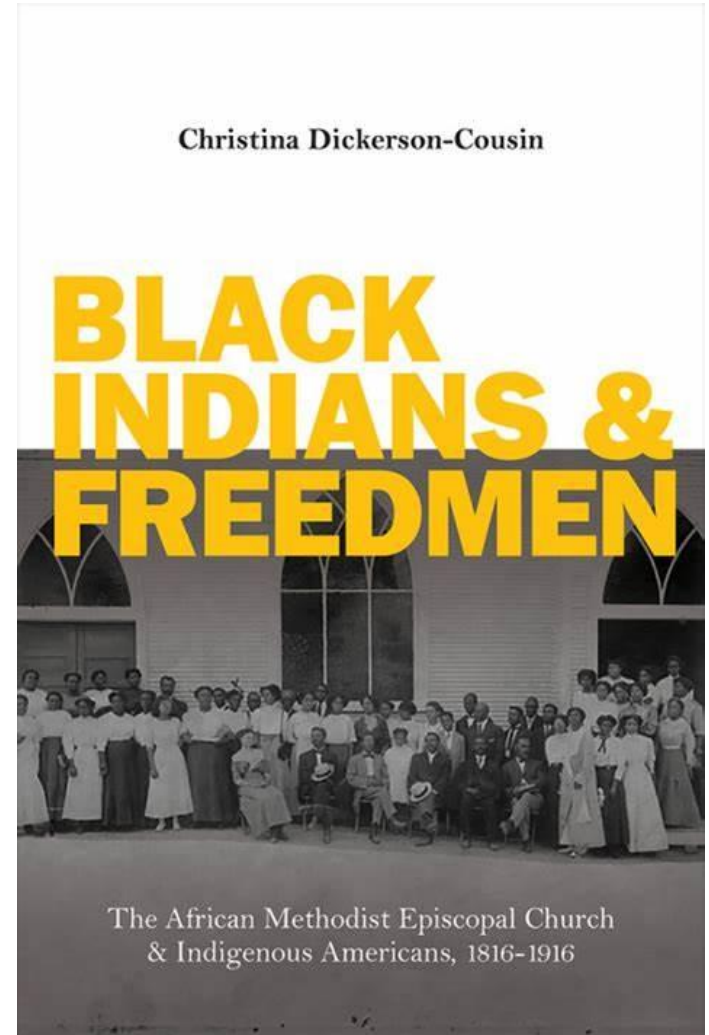
African Methodist Episcopal Church

February 16, 2023

# PRESENTER: DENNIS C. DICKERSON, PH.D.

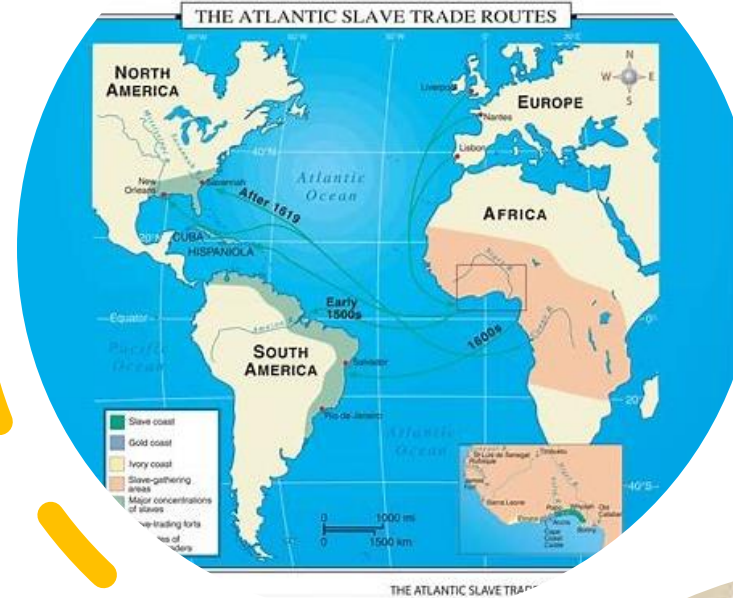


CO-  
PRESENTER:  
CHRISTINA  
DICKERSON  
COUSIN, PH.D.



## RICHARD ALLEN AND AFRICAN METHODISM: AN AEGIS FOR THE BLACK ATLANTIC

- Richard Allen established an ecclesial body that he envisaged as a protector of the spiritual and physical well being of Africans caught in the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, and demographic distribution across Africa and the Americas.
- For Richard Allen, color was not the exclusive criterion for outreach.
- He viewed any population who were marginalized and victimized by Euro-American imperialism and subjugation as God's creation and as his parishioners.





# RICHARD ALLEN: SPEAKING TO AMEs IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY



Portrait by Yvonne Studevan  
(7<sup>th</sup> Generation Descendant)

The reckonings of Richard Allen in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries anchored him in experiences that anticipate 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges that his biography can address. They include:

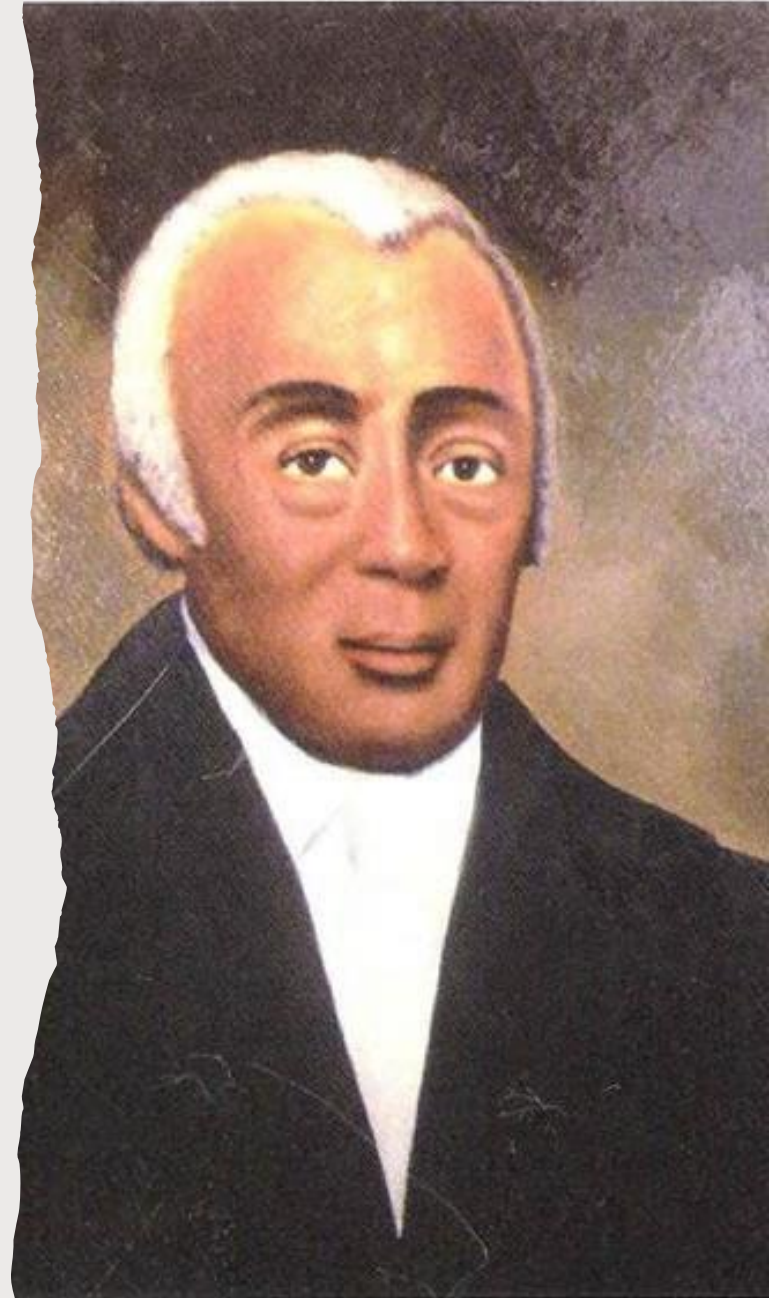
1. An Energized Wesleyan Theology
2. Precedents for a Capacious Outreach
3. Embracing the Danger
4. A Liberationist Hymnody
5. Convening the Diaspora

What Richard Allen encountered provides templates and themes for contemporary AMEs to forge into 21<sup>st</sup> century initiatives.



## AN ENERGIZED WESLEYAN THEOLOGY: SCRIPTURAL AND SOCIAL HOLINESS

- Scriptural holiness refers to the salvific process of salvation, sanctification and perfectionism that results in personal renewal.
- These trinitarian transactions result in the irresistible impulse to accomplish a corresponding renewal of creation through the eradication of slavery, war, and human subjugation.
- This social holiness (societal reconstruction) is intricately tied to scriptural holiness (personal renewal).
- The salvation of self and society is a Wesleyan warrant that both John Wesley, 1703-1791, (on the left) and Richard Allen, 1760-1831 (on the right) espoused.





## RICHARD ALLEN AND A CAPACIOUS OUTREACH TO NATIVE AMERICANS



- Richard Allen's encounter with fellow Methodist preacher, Benjamin Abbott, introduced him to evangelization among Native Americans.
- Allen emulated this evangelistic initiative.





## RICHARD ALLEN AND A CAPACIOUS OUTREACH TO NATIVE AMERICANS

- Benjamin Abbott was born in 1732, became a Methodist in 1772, and evangelized in New Jersey, Maryland, and other locations until his death in 1796.
- Allen first met Abbott in New Jersey during the spring of 1784.
- Allen spent significant time with the patriarchal preacher and attended several of his evangelistic engagements.



# RICHARD ALLEN AND A CAPACIOUS OUTREACH TO NATIVE AMERICANS

- Allen noted that “[Abbott] seldom preached but **what there were souls added to his labor.**” He concluded that Abbott was “**one of the greatest men that ever I was acquainted with**” and described him as “**a friend and father to me.**”
- Abbott is the only religious figure whom Allen described with such effusive language and with whom he formed a fictive kinship bond.
- Their relationship was crucial in demonstrating to Allen that racial egalitarianism was central to the Methodist movement and that Indigenous people must be included within it.





## RICHARD ALLEN AND A CAPACIOUS OUTREACH TO NATIVE AMERICANS

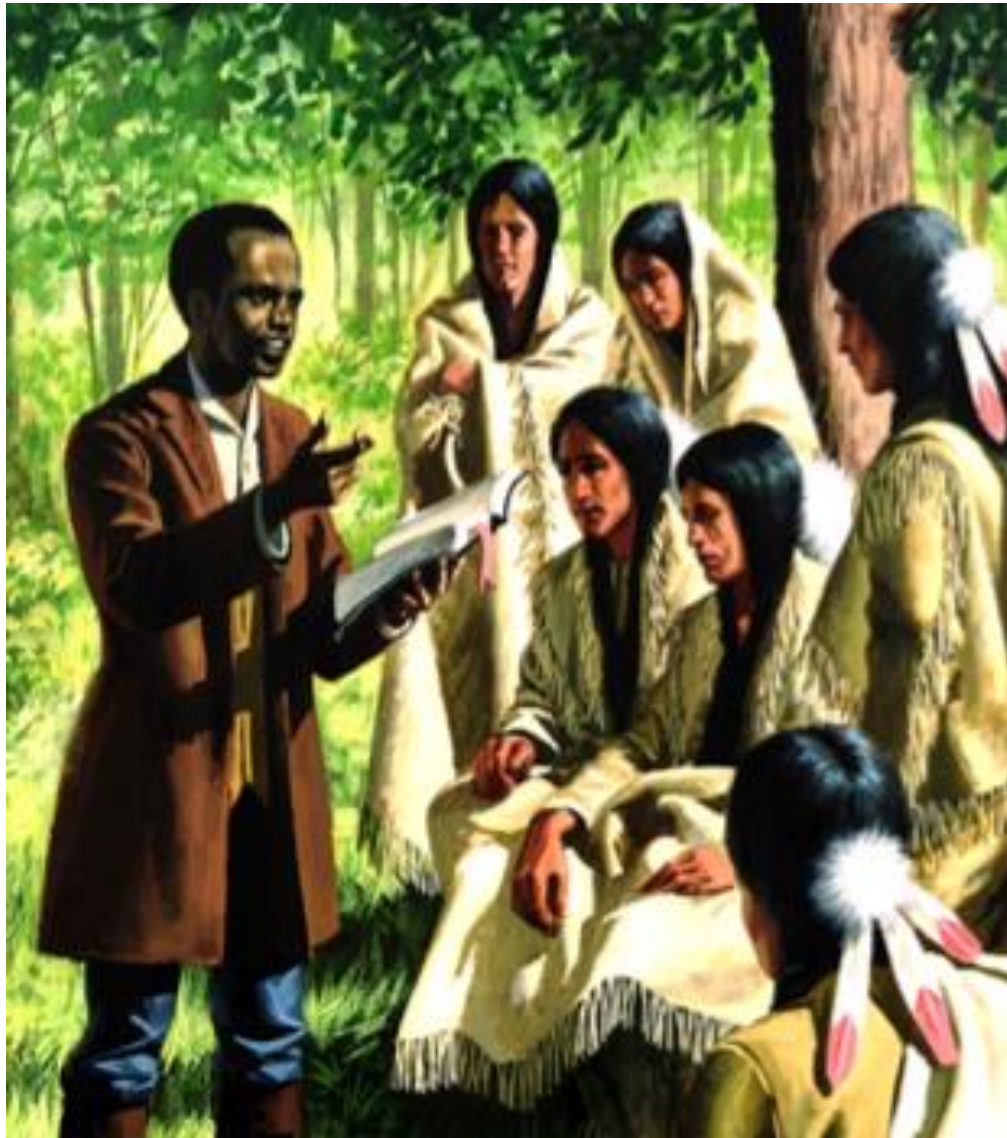
- Abbott regularly preached to racially diverse audiences that included Indigenous people.
- While in New Jersey he accepted an invitation to visit a mixed Black and Indigenous Congregationalist meeting.
- The worshippers responded enthusiastically to Abbott's preaching: **"many fell to the floor; some cried aloud for mercy, and others clapped their hands for joy, shouting, Glory to God! so that the noise might have been heard afar off."**
- This experience led Abbott to conclude, as the apostle Peter had in the Book of Acts, that **"God is no respecter of persons; but all those who fear him and work righteousness, of every nation are accepted of him."**



## RICHARD ALLEN AND A CAPACIOUS OUTREACH TO NATIVE AMERICANS

- Abbott refused to tolerate the bigotry that he saw some Methodists display towards Native people.
- Near Cape May, New Jersey he met with a Methodist congregation that was attempting to expel a mixed-race Native man.
- Abbott explained that **“some of them, having more pride than religion, could not stoop to sit in class with him; and to cloke [sic] the matter a little. They had raised several objections against him, and without supporting anything, insisted on my expelling him.”**
- Abbott, after observing the man’s good character, refused to oblige the discontented white Methodists.
- Two of them were so offended that they quit the congregation.
- Abbott accepted their departure and crossed their names off the list of church members.
- In his view, their racial intolerance was incompatible with Methodism and he preferred to lose their membership rather than compromise his beliefs.

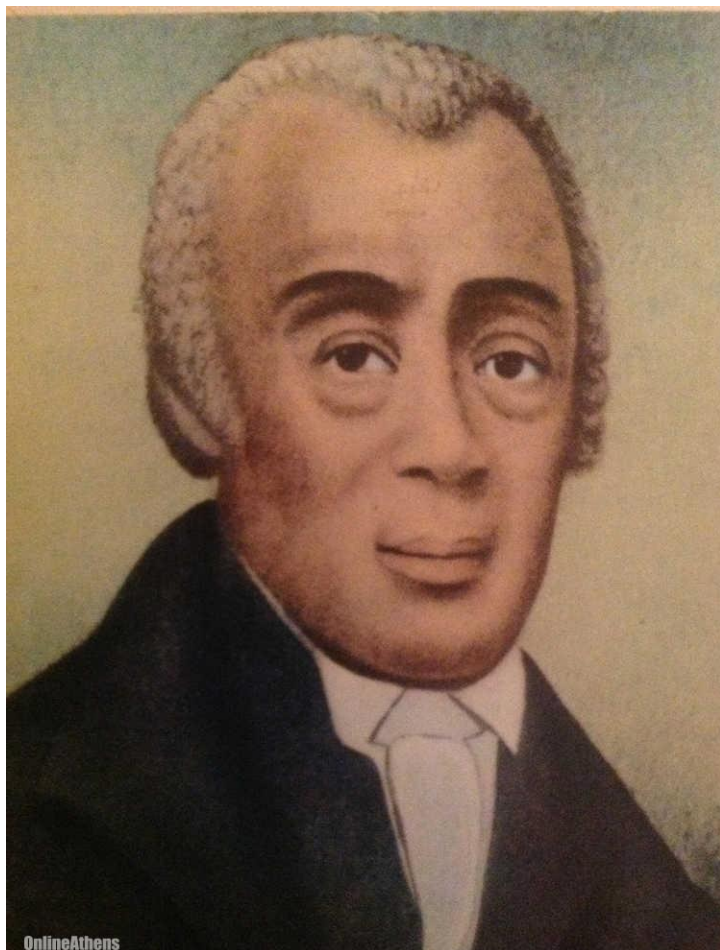




## RICHARD ALLEN AND A CAPACIOUS OUTREACH TO NATIVE AMERICANS

- Allen probably remained in contact with Abbott throughout the 1780s and the 1790s, each man reinforcing the other's belief in the racially inclusive message of Methodism.
- Abbott's continued efforts among Native populations, of which Allen was surely aware, encouraged him to view Natives as potential converts.
- Likely inspired by Abbott, Allen spent two months evangelizing among Native people.
- Extant evidence reveals nothing about which tribes Allen visited, perhaps the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) or the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois).
- Allen's relationship with Abbott would make the behavior of white Methodists in 1787 at St. George Methodist Church in Philadelphia all the more jarring.

# EMBRACING THE DANGER: SAVING MORRIS BROWN



- Richard Allen rescued Morris Brown after he fled from Charleston to Philadelphia after an aborted slave revolt, planned by his local preacher, Denmark Vesey, planned.
- Morris Brown, in 1828, joined Allen in the AME episcopacy.



# A LIBERATIONIST HYMNODY

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- And the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. (Acts 12:7 KJV)
- Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night: Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke; the dungeon flamed with light; My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee. ("And Can It Be" Charles Wesley, 1738)
- "I cried unto Him who delighteth to hear the prayers of a poor sinner, and all of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains flew off, and glory to God, I cried. My soul was filled" (Richard Allen's conversion narrative drew from scripture and hymnody)





PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
**FIRST ANNUAL CONVENTION**  
OF THE  
**PEOPLE OF COLOUR.**

CONVENING THE DIASPORA

- Allen, who dispatched a minister to Haiti in 1824, authorized the spread of African Methodism to Canada, and presided in 1830 at Bethel Church in Philadelphia at the Colored Convention to debate the future of African Americans.