



# Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835

*Cedrick May*

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This study focuses on the role of early African American Christianity in the formation of American egalitarian religion and politics. It also provides a new context for understanding how black Christianity and evangelism developed, spread, and interacted with transatlantic religious cultures of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Cedrick May looks at the work of a group of pivotal African American writers who helped set the stage for the popularization of African American evangelical texts and the introduction of black intellectualism into American political culture: Jupiter Hammon, Phillis Wheatley, John Marrant, Prince Hall, Richard Allen, and Maria Stewart.

Religion gave these writers agency and credibility, says May, and they appropriated the language of Christianity to establish a common ground on which to speak about social and political rights. In the process, these writers spread the principles that enabled slaves and free blacks to form communities, a fundamental step in resisting oppression. Moreover, says May, this institution building was overtly political, leading to a liberal shift in mainstream Christianity and secular politics as black churches and the organizations they launched became central to local communities and increasingly influenced public welfare and policy.

This important new study restores a sense of the complex challenges faced by early black intellectuals as they sought a path to freedom through Christianity.

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