



Black Bishop: Edward T. Demby and the Struggle for Racial Equality in the Episcopal Church (Studies in Anglican History)

Michael J. Beary

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In 1918, the Right Reverend Edward T. Demby took up the reins as Suffragan (assistant) Bishop for Colored Work in Arkansas and the Province of the Southwest, an area encompassing Arkansas, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and New Mexico. Set within the context of a series of experiments in black leadership conducted by the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas in the early decades of the twentieth century, Demby's tenure in a segregated ministry illuminates the larger American experience of segregation disguised as a social good. Intent on demonstrating the industry and self-reliance of black Episcopalians to the church at large, Demby set about securing black priests for the diocese, baptizing and confirming communicants, and building schools and other institutions of community service. A gifted leader and a committed Episcopalian, Demby recognized that black service institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and orphanages, would be the means to draw African Americans back to the Episcopal Church, which they had abandoned in droves after emancipation as the church of their former masters. jurisdictional ambiguity, and the Great Depression, Demby doggedly tried to establish the credibility of a ministry that was as ill conceived as it was well intended. Michael J. Beary skillfully narrates the shifting alliances within the Episcopal Church and shows how race was but one aspect of a more elemental struggle for power. He demonstrates how Demby's steadiness of purpose and non-confrontational manner gathered allies on both sides of the color line and how, ultimately, his judgment and the weight of his experience carried the church past its segregationist experiment.



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