

## *Introduction*

My primary reason for accepting the invitation to serve as general editor of the eleventh edition of *The African American Almanac* was the historic election of Barack Obama as the forty-fourth president of the United States. In a small way, I thought my involvement in this premier and long-standing reference work of the African diasporan experience would serve as a contribution to his historic presidency. To that end, I made the request very early in the project that a picture of Barack Obama taking the presidential oath of office be featured on the cover. That request, along with several others, was honored as work began on this historic edition.

Although the almanac first appeared in 1967 as *The Negro Almanac*, edited by Harry A. Ploski and Roscoe C. Brown of New York University, works of this sort chronicling the growth, progress, and development of African Americans date back to the early twentieth century. The 1967 edition set out to “fill the need for a fingertip repository of vital information on the history and culture of the Negro—primarily in the United States, but throughout the rest of the world.” That early volume attempted to realize an exhaustive yet comprehensible account of the progress made by African Americans up to that point, despite the fact that the country was in the throes of dramatic changes brought about by the civil rights movement of that period.

In subsequent editions, the almanac took on a decidedly more scholarly tone, while still maintaining its primary mission to keep the work accessible and user friendly. Instead of relying on a few editors and compilers of data (as was the case with Ploski and Brown), the almanac employed the expertise of professors from many historically African American colleges and universities, including Fisk University, Morgan State University, Alabama A&M University, and Tennessee State University, as participating contributors. We have continued that tradition in the current volume, and expanded the scholarly scope to include professors and consultants from Bowie State University, Coppin State University, Cornell University, New York University, Northern Illinois University, University of Iowa, Indiana University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Virginia State University. This edition has also benefitted from contributors who are not currently affiliated with a college or university yet are experts in some aspect of the African American experience in regard to law, politics, and science and technology. The result is my unwavering confidence that this is the strongest edition of the almanac that has been produced to date.

## NEW FEATURES IN THIS EDITION

This eleventh edition of *The African American Almanac* represents a major overhaul of the work, with updated text, pictures, captions, and tabular data, along with newly added sidebars and fact boxes, plus more than one hundred new biographical profiles. One of the significant changes that will be apparent to readers is a progressive move toward addressing dialogue in regard to slavery. Readers will notice an effort to avoid such words as *slave* and *slavery* in favor of *enslaved Africans* or simply *enslaved*. The condition that was imposed on those of African ancestry throughout the diaspora is associated with an inherent victimhood, which is reflected in the language traditionally used to discuss this history. But the time has come for serious scholarship to move beyond such dated terminology. Therefore, in this edition, we usher in the use of *enslaved Africans* or, in some instances, *forced African labor* to describe that unimaginable and cruel experience. Readers' adjustment to the different terminology will challenge how they view themselves as well as others. However, in the same way that our society (including earlier editions of this very almanac) made the transition from such terms as *colored*, *Negro*, and *black* to the vastly more appropriate and accurate *African American*, *The African American Almanac*, as the premier reference work for that experience, plays a significant role in moving in that direction.

There are several people for whom I wish to express my profound gratitude for their contributions in shaping the eleventh edition of the almanac into what it has become. At the top of that long list is Alan Hedblad, the project manager and a senior editor at Cengage/Gale. He walked me through this process with calmness, courtesy, and grace. I would also like to acknowledge Jessie Carney Smith at Fisk for her encouragement and support. She has already sat in the general editor's chair (for the eighth edition). I had the pleasure of marshalling the combined efforts of several current and former colleagues and advisors, including Robert Sims, Bob Daniels, Barbara A. Lynch-Freeman, Portia Maulsby, Venise Berry, Morris Henderson, Caroline Mbonu, William Hobbs III, and Thomas J. Brown. I would also like to express my appreciation for my students, Katherine Blanche and Christopher Yeamans. Katherine has worked with me on four other book projects and can now add this one to the list.

Without question, I salute the Cengage Learning staff members—especially senior editor Carol Schwartz (who directed the typesetting, proofreading, and indexing processes) and project editor Angela Doolin—for their professionalism and dedication to the production of this volume. I recognize that their efforts, together with the wonderful cast of contributing writers, form the heart of this important work. All of you have my profound gratitude.

**Christopher A. Brooks**  
Virginia Commonwealth University