



We've Come This Far: Abyssinian Baptist Church

Robert Gore

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They come each Sunday, three thousand strong. They fill the pews, then raise the roof. They are the congregation of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, where worshippers from all walks of life gather together to praise the Lord. From its founding almost 200 years ago, Abyssinian has flourished as the most influential center of black spiritualism in the United States. Its popularity among tourists visiting Harlem has also given Abyssinian an international reputation. In *We've Come This Far*, parishioner and photographer Robert Gore documents the daily routines and dramatic events of this diverse, living church. As much a house of progress as a house of prayer, Abyssinian has faithfully served its community since its inception in 1808, fortifying its members from pre-Civil War to post-Civil Rights America. Four maverick pastors shepherded the flock through the social and political turmoil of the twentieth century, Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., helped congregants through the construction of Abyssinian's current building, completed in 1923. His son, the charismatic and socially conscious Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., brought a spirit of public activism to the pulpit. The masterful orator Reverend Doctor Samuel Proctor mentored many of the Baptist ministers who came of age in the sixties, including Calvin O. Butts III, the current pastor. Under their leadership, Abyssinian has set the standard for church-based community involvement. For the past decade, Robert Gore has been Abyssinian's official photographer. *We've Come This Far* reflects both his personal connection and unparalleled access to the church. Drawing on archival materials in addition to his own private library, Gore provides an intimate, exclusive look into this most powerful parish.

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