Smith, Amanda,

Born a slave, Berry grew up in York County, Penn., after her father bought his own freedom and that of most of the family. She was educated mainly at home and at an early age began working as a domestic. An unhappy first marriage ended with the disappearance of her husband in the American Civil War. In 1863 she married James Smith and eventually moved with him to New York City. An experience of sanctification in 1868 led to her first hesitant attempts at preaching. By 1869 her husband and her children had died, and she was preaching regularly in African-American churches in New York and New Jersey.

Smith's success in preaching before a white audience at a holiness camp meeting in the summer of 1870 led her to commit herself entirely to evangelism. She traveled widely over the next eight years, and in 1878 she sailed for England, where she spent a year evangelizing at holiness meetings. From 1879 to 1881 she was in India, and after another brief stay in England she sailed in 1881 for West Africa. For eight years she did missionary work in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Following another sojourn in Great Britain from 1889 to 1890, she returned to the United States. She preached in eastern cities until 1892, when she moved to Chicago.

In 1893 Smith published An Autobiography. The proceeds from the book, together with her savings, the income from a small newspaper she published, and gifts from others, enabled her to open a home for African-American orphans in Harvey, Ill., in 1899. Eventually she resumed preaching and singing in order to support the home. In 1912, when she retired to Florida, the orphanage was taken over by the state of Illinois and chartered as the Amanda Smith Industrial School for Girls. It was destroyed by fire in 1918.