

Varieties of Southern Religious History: Essays in Honor of Donald F. Mathews [Review]

By: [Kathelene McCarty Smith](#)

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Abstract:

Varieties of Southern Religious History: Essays in Honor of Donald G. Mathews is comprised of fifteen chapters written by former students of renowned historian Donald G. Mathews. A distinguished Professor Emeritus of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Mathews is known for his pioneering research on the religious and social history of the Southern United States. In a tribute to their mentor's influence and scholarship, these historians address the many complexities that have shaped Southern religious history.

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Article:

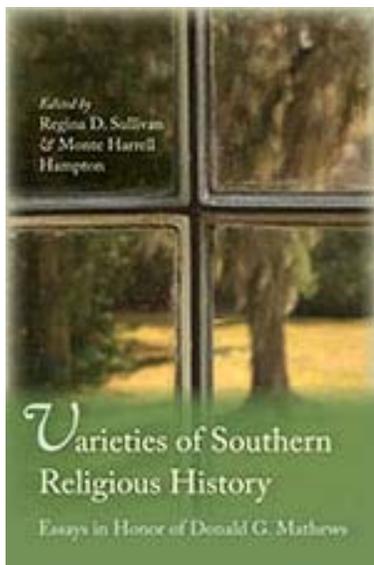
*****Note: Full text of article below**

determined as women are today to “have it all”—a career, a family, a marriage, and financial security. Today’s women are spared the evil Susan Nye Hutchinson saw in the slave owner’s treatment of a slave—man’s inhumanity to man on a scale beyond my imagination. Examining the social, cultural and political times, Tolley documents the stories that can enrich the journal writings for the reader.

This book is an excellent acquisition for any college and university women’s studies collection. Additionally faculty and administrators of colleges and schools will find fascination with the southern educational structures of the times after the Revolutionary War. See pages 195 to 257 for Notes, Bibliography and Index.

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Varieties of Southern Religious History: Essays in Honor of Donald G. Mathews is comprised of fifteen chapters written by former students of renowned historian Donald G. Mathews. A distinguished Professor Emeritus of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Mathews is known for his pioneering research on the religious and social history of the Southern United States. In a tribute to their mentor’s influence and scholarship, these historians address the many complexities that have shaped Southern religious history.

The editors, Regina D. Sullivan and Monte Harrell Hampton, have chosen a wide range of essays that explore topics such as race, gender, politics, regionalism, and death. These offerings are organized chronologically, beginning with the 18th century evangelical experience in early

America and ending with the significance of religion in the ever-changing political climate of the 1960s.

The first essays discuss the political and social consequences of early efforts to deal with race and religion in the South. Attempts by men like Henry Evans to integrate churches had mixed and short-lived results (“*The Greatest Curiosity: Race, Religion, and Politics in Henry Evan’s Methodist Church, 1785-1858*,” Monte Harrell Hampton). Evans, a Methodist minister and free black man, established the Metropolitan AME Zion Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, which recruited both black and white members who appreciated his expressive, emotionally charged style of worship. Yet within a few decades of his death, the congregation would be almost entirely segregated, foregoing its legacy of “racial brotherhood,” as white Southerners sought to maintain racial lines in the years before the Civil War.

Spiritual disillusionment and the hope for a better life often led to the search for charismatic leaders and several essays highlight examples of these magnetic personalities. Born into slavery in Southampton, Virginia, Nat Turner connected mystical visions and unusual natural phenomena with the eminent apocalypse (*Nat Turner and Signs of the Apocalypse*, Wayne K. Durrill). These visions, occurring between 1827 and 1831, were considered by Turner to be messages from God, and inspired him to lead the largest slave insurrection in American history. The same anticipation of the End of Days can be seen in the essay concerning New York Baptist preacher William Miller who was compelled to spread the message that Jesus would soon return, specifically in 1843 (*Neither Cult nor Charisma: William Miller and Leadership of New Religious Movements*, Ruth Alden Doan). Beginning as a regional group, Millerism soon spread throughout the country, resulting in a movement that would ultimately eclipse its founder.

The religious and the social history of the country are reflected in essays that capture the emergence of women as integral parts of the evangelical dialogue. The story of Frances Bumpass, editor of the *Weekly Message*, captures a moment in women’s history that coincided with preconceived notions of women’s roles in religion and the workforce (“*Ladies, Arise! The World Has Need of You: The Widow Bumpass’s Newspaper War*,” Cheryl F. Junk). By encouraging women to take their place in Southern Methodist religious services, she became embroiled in what became known as the “newspaper wars,” pitting the editor of the *Richmond Christian Advocate*, against the clergymen who supported her.

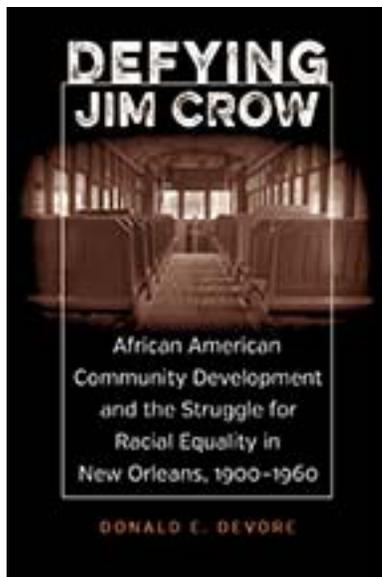
Religion continued to be an important platform for change and several essays illustrate the tug of war between Catholicism and the Protestant church, and how this conflict played out in 20th century politics (*Nationalism, Marxism, and the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba*, Daniel R. Miller and *Preachers and Politics: The Religious Issue in the North Carolina Presidential Campaign of 1960 -- a Footnote on Al Smith*, Gerald Lee Wilson). These accounts reflect the struggle for religious identity and

highlight the cultural and political consequences of denominational choices.

Ultimately this festschrift succeeds in honoring Mathews as a beloved mentor and scholar of Southern religious history. His interest in combining regional culture with the history of a multitude of religious denominations is reflected in the variety of topics covered in the book. By examining how religion has been perceived and practiced in the American South and beyond, *Varieties of Southern Religious History: Essays in Honor of Donald G. Mathews* emerges as an insightful resource for those interested in not only the history of religion, but also in the cultural and political history of America.

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Defying Jim Crow: African American Community Development and the Struggle for Racial Equality in New Orleans, 1900-1960. Donald E. Devore. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8071-6037-4. \$45.00



In his study of the city of New Orleans during the Jim Crow era, historian Donald E. Devore documents the African American community's long fight for equality. Through an examination of the city's racial politics between the years 1900 and 1960, Devore reveals how black educators, churches, social organizations, and businesses laid the ground work for the Civil Rights victories of the 1950s and 1960s. Devore argues that to challenge economic and legal discrimination, the African American community had to be strategic and adaptive in their choice and development of ideologies, social networks, community institutions, and political leaders for their fight for racial equality.

How does a minority community sustain a culture of resistance in the face of government sanctioned segregation and outbursts of violence from the majority population? Devore argues that it was the African American experience of the Civil War and Reconstruction that served as a framework for the community's political activism. During the Reconstruction era, newly liberated and enfranchised slaves lent their support to a coalition of black Creole leaders and white radical republicans. With the eventual defeat of this electoral coalition and the ascendancy of the pro-segregationist Democratic Party in the late nineteenth century, the black community's shared memory of voting and office-holding would help to bolster their future organizing efforts.

At the start of the twentieth century, African American educators and activists in New Orleans concluded that black colleges were a critical element in the fight for equality and community building. These institutions were needed to train primary and secondary school teachers in the principles of self-help and community advancement. Drawing on the micro studies of several black colleges, Devore depicts the heroic efforts of educational leaders who faced down white interference and the threat of violence as they recruited students and faculty, broadened course offerings, built modern facilities, and secured financial support. These education leaders and teachers saw themselves as being responsible for growing an African American professional class as well as an informed and capable modern work force and citizenry.

According to Devore, the black church was one of the most important components of African American community building. Drawing on the example of church leader Robert Elijah Jones, Devore documented how the segregated Methodist Church actively sought out marginalized blacks and stressed self-improvement, community development, and black liberation. For many protestant churches, the push to create separate black congregations and leadership began in the nineteenth century. As a counter-point, Devore examined the black Catholic community's successful resistance to the segregation of services and the creation of all-black parishes. Devore notes that it was only in the second decade of the twentieth century that black Catholics accepted segregation, after calculating that having access to quality parochial education trumped the benefits of an integrated congregation. Despite the racial segregation of all churches in New Orleans, African Americans saw religious institutions as offering a powerful belief system and social space that countered the fundamental premise of Jim Crow.

Devore also discusses community building in relation to secular organizations that sought to advance the group's quest for social, economic, and political equality. Devore's detailed account includes case studies of service organizations, professional associations, local newspapers, civic organizations, and hospitals. Drawing on the experience of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) recruiting efforts in New Orleans, Devore reveals how local leaders struggled to grow membership and compete for the