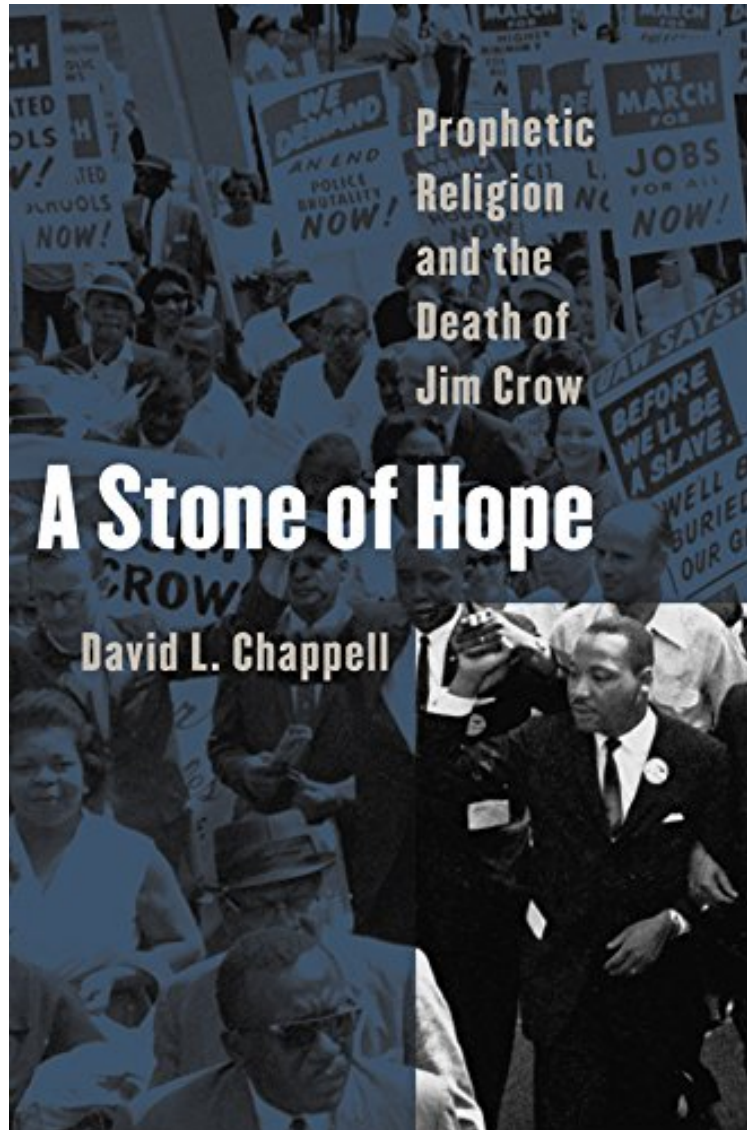


(Read free) A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow

A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow

David L. Chappell

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David L. Chappell : A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow:

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. the third awakening and the second reconstruction By David M. Pence "Approaching this story as an atheist, I was surprised and skeptical to hear so many of my subjects-- whom I admired from afar--expressing what Bayard Rustin called "fundamentalist" views. Even had I been a believer in the sense that most educated folk use the term I doubt that any isolated testimony of miracles could have struck me as

worth copying down in my notes. But it was repeated so much and perhaps because it was so foreign to me ..I kept copying it down and ultimately it appeared a key to the beliefs... and strategic choices of my sources" David Chappell, author of *Stone of Hope Faith in God* allows a man to see more clearly into the reality of things but apparently it has taken Atheist Chappell to write this penetrating book defining the civil rights movement as a religious revival. He plays the righteous pagan Virgil in guiding Christian Dantes through the biblical prophetic theology and working of the Spirit which signaled the civil rights movement as the third American Awakening. While Chappell is obviously more comfortable with the reasoning and rationales of the Bayard Rustins of the movement, he is also an honest man. All those miracles and fundamentalists kept intruding in his story. He takes religion seriously enough not to study only the protesters but to analyze the inability of the segregationists to mount a serious religious argument against integration. His look behind the "southern white mob" reveals 1) a divided white church, 2) respectable opponents of integration trying to distance themselves from the rabble, and 3) politically potent segregationists unmatched by a similar certitude among religious authorities. American churches are bellwethers for the nation. In the 1840's the Baptists and Methodists split into northern and southern churches. In 1861 the Presbyterians did the same. When the Civil War came, a white man could go to a southern church and hear why a Christian had a duty to fight northern tyranny. When a soldier was buried, his death was seen as part of the Christian tradition of male sacrifice for the community. This kind of religious sanction never became such a force in the South during the sixties. Before the Supreme Court *Brown* decision on school desegregation (1954), the PCUS (Southern Presbyterians) had passed resolutions supporting desegregation. Just after *Brown*, the Southern Baptists overwhelmingly did the same. Since 1954 Billy Graham never allowed segregated sitting at his rallies. All of his rallies throughout the South were integrated and he once complained that national news stations chose to never report that fact. The chapters in Chappell's book that look seriously at the intellectual and religious movements supporting segregation support his thesis that the "The historically significant thing about white religion in the 1950's and 1960's is that it failed in any meaningful way to join the anti civil rights movement. The white southern churches never lived up to the militant image that southern politicians had shown." There was in the post WWII era a more pressing evangelical development being led by such men as L Nelson Bell intellectual leader of the Southern Presbyterians. "Bell was part of a conservative insurgency within southern Protestantism known as Evangelicalism. The evangelical movement emerged during WWII as an aggressive effort to reestablish the popularity, legitimacy, authority and institutional strength of conservative doctrine." Educated Protestant conservatives felt neither the Bryan fundamentalism at the Scopes trial nor the theological liberalism of the Social Gospel adequately proclaimed the Gospel in America or in the foreign missions. That Chappell can see all of this as well as understand that Martin Luther King was not a product of the Social Gospel nor Tillichian Ground of our Being theology shows a remarkable clarity for any reporter. It is downright miraculous from an atheist. There is an especially insightful notation that Rev King rejected the flattening of religion into "ethical religion". The whole anthropology of religion as ethics led to an unwarranted optimism about the nature of man and the struggle needed to confront evil with a more powerful force. Education was NOT the key to prophetic religion. God, judgment, conversion, sin, demons and miracles constitute the vocabulary of the prophets. King's God was a highly personal God--the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob not the god of the philosophers. He could be trusted in times of travail and prayed to in times of danger. Andrew Young was quoted, "the civil rights movement brought a resurgence of religious feeling in the South. When folks start shooting at you--- you do a lot more praying." When Bayard Rustin was asked if King believed in the fundamentalist active personal God, he answered "Oh yes profoundly, it always amazed me how he could combine this intensely philosophical analytical mind with this more or less fundamental--well I don't like to say fundamentalist --but abiding faith." As Thomas Gilmore another civil rights veteran said--"the Holy Spirit guided us. I got strength facing the sheriff he was the biggest man in the county but I felt we were walking next to someone bigger. God is real, man. Years later Gilmore became the first black sheriff of his county. Chappell has little time for the flatteners of history who in the name of "people's history" try to paint the civil rights struggle as the ever present but under reported fight of the common man against oppression. Chappell argues that something happened here that was extraordinary indeed and the people who stepped out of the routines of their everyday lives to enter the political arena and national historical narrative were extraordinary people. He found the source of their courage and hope (that "stone of hope" they somehow chipped from the mountain of despair). What is unique about his study is that he does not stress the easy lesson that the biblical prophetic tradition was a foe to racism. He instead contrasts prophetic religion as a more effective and truthful actor for justice than position paper rationalistic liberalism. What did those Baptist preachers; Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King and Fred Shuttlesworth know and do that eluded Gunnar Myrdal, John Dewey, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Lionel Trilling. Chappell's answer is that the civil rights movement was not the inevitable maturation and triumph of philosophical liberalism. It was not education for progress. Rather it was a Spirit driven melding of characters and events living out the biblical narrative by confronting the soul of a nation. This prophetic witness employed a "coercive non-violence" necessary to confront evil and men wedded to evil. Such nonviolence is much more like war than pacifism and is grounded in a realistic Christian anthropology which saw both struggle and an embrace of "unrequited suffering" as the redemptive route to justice. It was a stunning paradox of this fitting time that there was no group more convicted by this witness--not into

joining the cause but chastened to inaction--than Southern evangelicals who were also seeking a renewal of lived out religion in the daily life of the nation. Returning military veterans of WWII and Korea as well as preachers infused the civil rights movement with the intersecting language and claims of religion, patriotism and righteous warfare. The charismatic soldier-preacher Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham said in 1958, "this is a religious crusade, a fight between light and darkness, right and wrong, fair play and tyranny. We are assured of victory because we are using weapons of spiritual warfare." In 1964 the fire still burned in the man whose eloquence was only surpassed by his courage. "We have faith in America and still believe that Birmingham and Alabama will rise to their heights of glory in race relations. And we shall be true to our ideals as a Christian nation." The civil rights movement "carried the Constitution in one hand and the Bible in the other." This crucial book by an atheist historian should challenge American Christians to distinguish the great religious awakening of the civil rights movement from the contrary spirits of black power and the sexual revolution. These profane pretenders have hobbled our national gait. Black and white evangelicals are now religious brethren separated into the voting army "bases" of two opposing parties. How long asked Elijah can Israel hobble on divided between Baal and Yahweh. Can the third great awakening stir American Christians to be one again promising a second reconstruction more just than the first? Chappell's book gives no answer but he has led us to the question.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Looking At the Civil Rights Movement From a Unique Perspective By Lionel S. Taylor There are countless books that have looked at the Civil Rights Movement from a variety of perspectives. I have read ones that have dealt with everything from a basic biography of the major players in the movement to the relationship with the powers in Washington to the secret surveillance that the FBI was running against them. But none of them have dealt with the deep religious and philosophical issues that motivated the two sides during the struggle and this is a little surprising when one looks at the number of clergy that was involved in the movement. A Stone of Hope looks at the Civil Rights movement from this perspective and makes a very persuasive argument that this is one of the key reasons for its success. The author argues that those who fought for segregation were able to use the black churches and the social networks and moral authority that they provided in a way that the other side could not do despite trying. Interestingly he contrasts this with the struggle against Slavery 100 years previous when the Southern protestant denominations played a much more active and vital role. The author points out several of the inherent contradictions in the Jim Crow system that made it very difficult to defend on theological grounds as well as the class contradictions that existed among the various pro segregation forces. The latter subject has been dealt with in other books but I found it especially interesting when examined through the lens of the fundamental contradictions of the Jim Crow system. In the conclusion of the book that author admits that his general approach to history is the materialist perspective and that he finds himself identifying more with Marx than Weber. But he also says that he thinks that the ideological aspects of social movement should not be ignored that is what inspired him to write this book. I am very glad he did! This book provides a fresh perspective on a very familiar subject and by doing so makes issues that have been raised by other authors much more clear.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Civil Rights Victory: Not Due to Liberal Politics, but to Prophetic Religion By Frank Bellizzi Chappell argues that the incredible success of the American civil rights movement was not a victory created by political liberalism. It was, instead, a victory created by prophetic religion. It was the result of, among other key factors, a new expression of a powerful Western tradition that reaches all the way back to the great preachers of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. In short, prophecy--not in the peculiar sense of predicting future events, but in the more general sense of speaking truth to injustice--goes a long way in explaining how and why the movement achieved headway. The civil rights movement can be seen as a revival whose power was never matched by the religion of segregationists. This monograph is a significant contribution to the historiography of the topic.

The civil rights movement was arguably the most successful social movement in American history. In a provocative new assessment of its success, David Chappell argues that the story of civil rights is not a story of the ultimate triumph of liberal ideas after decades of gradual progress. Rather, it is a story of the power of religious tradition. Chappell reconsiders the intellectual roots of civil rights reform, showing how northern liberals' faith in the power of human reason to overcome prejudice was at odds with the movement's goal of immediate change. Even when liberals sincerely wanted change, they recognized that they could not necessarily inspire others to unite and fight for it. But the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament--sometimes translated into secular language--drove African American activists to unprecedented solidarity and self-sacrifice. Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, James Lawson, Modjeska Simkins, and other black leaders believed, as the Hebrew prophets believed, that they had to stand apart from society and instigate dramatic changes to force an unwilling world to abandon its sinful ways. Their impassioned campaign to stamp out "the sin of segregation" brought the vitality of a religious revival to their cause. Meanwhile, segregationists found little support within their white southern religious denominations. Although segregationists outvoted and outgunned black integrationists, the segregationists lost, Chappell concludes, largely because they did not have a religious commitment to their cause.

From Publishers Weekly In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. famously said that the South could hew "a stone of hope"

from segregation's "mountain of despair." This book explores the role that religion played in shaping that hope. In a brilliant chapter on the grassroots character of the civil rights cause, Chappell argues that the movement could be considered less a political protest with religious dimensions than a religious revival with political and social dimensions. The civil rights struggle had many of the elements of revival-miracle stories, mass religious enthusiasm, music, "conversion" experiences, even messianic expectations. Chappell writes engagingly, drawing an important revisionist portrait of the crucial role of religion in defeating Jim Crow. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. It's impossible to read the book without doing some fundamental rethinking about the role religion can play in . . . public life. "New York Times" Intricate, dazzling in its reach into so many corners of black and white Southern life and fascinating at every turn. . . . In its mix of rigor, daring and perceptiveness, "A Stone of Hope" is a spectacular work. "New York Times Book "Chappell's new interpretation of the civil rights movement is a first-rate work of history. . . . The book is a major contribution to civil-rights history: clearly written, prodigiously researched and forcefully argued. . . . "A Stone of Hope" respects the public power of religion, but it also brings Dr. King and his co-workers down from the mountaintop, transfiguring them into human beings. "Wall Street Journal" "[A] pathbreaking study of prophetic Protestantism and the campaign against Jim Crow." -- "Commonwealth" [Chappell's] new interpretation of the civil rights movement is a first-rate work of history. . . . The book is a major contribution to civil-rights history: clearly written, prodigiously researched and forcefully argued. . . . "A Stone of Hope" respects the public power of religion, but it also brings Dr. King and his co-workers down from the mountaintop, transfiguring them into human beings. "Wall Street Journal " Chappell's concern with how the great figures of the civil rights movement, such as King, Lewis, and others, combined an appreciation for the harsh facts of everyday life with a religious tradition formed by intellectual awareness, is the essence of A Stone of Hope. And it is the synthesis that makes Chappell's work an important contribution to the historiography of the black freedom struggle.--H-1960s[A] pathbreaking study of prophetic Protestantism and the campaign against Jim Crow.--Commonwealth A Stone of Hope is a provocative account that may stimulate new directions of research for years to come.--Georgia Historical Quarterly Intricate, dazzling in its reach into so many corners of black and white Southern life and fascinating at every turn. . . . In its mix of rigor, daring and perceptiveness, A Stone of Hope is a spectacular work.--New York Times Book [A Stone of Hope] reads well and is quite accessible to laypersons as well as scholars and students in the field of history, religion, and cultural studies.--Alabama It's impossible to read the book without doing some fundamental rethinking about the role religion can play in . . . public life.--New York Times [A] splendid history of the civil rights movement.--Wall Street Journal One of the three or four most important books on the civil rights movement. . . . This unusually sophisticated and subtle study takes an unconventional and imaginative approach by examining both sides of the struggle. . . . [Chappell] argues persuasively that revivalism engendered the civil rights movement's solidarity, leadership, worldview, and rhetoric . . . [and] that the struggle against segregation triumphed owing not only to the religious views of southern blacks, but also to the religious views of southern whites.--Atlantic Monthly For those who care about the role of religion in public life, this book offers not only a reckoning, but an awakening.--Word World Not 'just another civil rights book'; it's something of an event, and one sure to fodder for continued discussion and . . . fruitful dialogue. . . . Well-researched and written with originality and verve. . . . Leave[s] you with a fresh and invigorating perspective on the most important social movement of twentieth-century American history.--The North Star David Chappell convincingly likens the civil rights movement to a religious revival, showing how black Southerners inspired by the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament spearheaded the drive to abolish 'the sin of segregation.'--The Nation The effort [of reading] will be worthwhile, given the fresh and provocative arguments the author makes about issues still central to Americans in a new century when racial harmony and equality remain beyond easy grasp.--Arkansas Democrat-Gazette Chappell argues that the [civil rights] movement could be considered less a political protest with religious dimensions than a religious revival with political and social dimensions. . . . Chappell writes engagingly, drawing an important revisionist portrait of the crucial role of religion in defeating Jim Crow.--Publishers Weekly, starred review David Chappell raises refreshing new questions about liberalism, civil rights, and the relationship between them. This book does more than any yet published to remove civil rights scholarship from the easy moralism and often unthinking romanticism that have dominated it for decades. Too many authors have looked in the mirror when contemplating the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s. Finally we have an effort here, as Chappell says, to see civil rights activists of that era--and their opponents--"as they really were." The conclusions Chappell advances may not inspire universal agreement, but his analysis is sure to provoke searching debate for years to come.--Clayborne Carson, Stanford University A Stone of Hope is an important and wide-ranging book that asks essential, original and provocative questions about the Civil Rights Movement. With passion and verve, David Chappell shifts the focus of civil rights historiography by asking how a relatively small group of people managed to topple a massively discriminatory social and political system, and why their opponents were unwilling to go to the barricades in Jim Crow's defense.--Jane Dailey, Johns Hopkins University, An arresting new perspective. . . . Few have matched Chappell's sure and subtle understanding of [King's] underlying Christian conviction of human sinfulness. . . . Readers will encounter a King who, in essential ways, appears even more complex and interesting than they had suspected.--Books Culture [An] unusually thought-provoking book. . . . Refreshingly unconventional. . . .

Chappell merits considerable praise for reminding us that to understand the freedom struggle, we must do more than focus on the impact of religion--or even the failings of liberalism.--Newsday
A Stone of Hope delivers a sweeping reinterpretation of the significance of faith to the black freedom struggle. An interpretative breakthrough, Chappell's work is certain to reshape the landscape of civil rights historiography.--Gulf South Historical Quarterly
Innovative. . . . A revelation--and a surprise.--Associated Press
With its focus on the explicitly religious content of the civil rights movement, this book makes an unusually powerful contribution. It is every bit as good on the pro-segregationists for whom traditional religion failed as for the integrationists (white and black) for whom it did not.--Mark A. Noll, Wheaton College
[A] stunning reinterpretation of the American civil rights movement.--Los Angeles Times
Book [Chappell's] new interpretation of the civil rights movement is a first-rate work of history. . . . The book is a major contribution to civil-rights history: clearly written, prodigiously researched and forcefully argued. . . . A Stone of Hope respects the public power of religion, but it also brings Dr. King and his co-workers down from the mountaintop, transfiguring them into human beings.--Wall Street Journal