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Alison Collis Greene. *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 336 pp. $27.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-937187-7.

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Much has been written about both the New Deal and American religious conservativism. Explored to a significantly lesser degree, however, are the links between the growth of the state in the 1930s and the rise of modern Christian fundamentalism. In *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta*, Alison Collis Greene, a historian at Mississippi State University, examines the religious cultures of the Deep South during the early twentieth century to expose a transitionary role of the church during that period and an increased antagonism between congregations and the national government.

Unique in its deep-seated Protestant devotion, racial tensions, and economic distress, Memphis, along with the Arkansas and Mississippi Delta, offers a constructive case study of the relationship between the New Deal and religion. Once the main regional supplier of charity, churches found themselves financially overwhelmed by the needs of the Great Depression, and in many cases they called for a greater role for the federal government as a relief agent. Nevertheless, as Washington assumed influence that was unprecedented in the American experience, many clergy fought back when they considered the lessening of their own power in their communities and the potential decline of Jim Crow segregation.

Greene emphasizes that there was not one church culture in the Delta, but many, as diverse as the geography they represented. Indeed, congregations in Memphis and the neighboring region were typically defined as rich or poor, white or black, and urban or rural, rather than by a common theology. They were further distinguished as liberal congregations who embraced the social gospel, conservative congregations who resisted it for a focus on redemption, socialist Christians who hoped to eliminate plantation capitalism, and apocalyptic believers who predicted Christ's return, occasionally suggesting that the Great Depression was sign of the coming end of times. Additionally, Jewish and Catholic groups stood out as models for providing for the financial, social, and spiritual needs of their congregations. Far from being homogenous, the Delta was home to a myriad of religious groups, reflecting both social status and differing interpretations of the church's responsibility in addressing contemporary challenges.

Part 1 places the economic history of the Delta in a pre-Depression context. Greene argues that the business culture and racial caste system can be traced to Andrew Jackson's removal of

American Indians from the region, which was soon followed by a migration of whites and their slaves. These eastern transplants established a cotton economy in Mississippi and logging enterprises in Arkansas. The author later presents the post-Civil War Delta as a bastion of poverty and racial segregation, where sharecroppers rarely enjoyed opportunities to escape debt. Furthermore, floods, tornados, and malnutrition made the Delta a uniquely dire place for those who called it home. Memphis, however, provided the chance to escape poverty, and for African Americans to become business owners and live in thriving black enclaves. Still, Memphis's prospects were accompanied by challenges, such as yellow fever epidemics, high homicide rates, and corruption at the hand of the notorious city boss, Ed Crump. Truly, Delta life was ever trying, yet 1930-1932 were exceptionally ruinous years, as a drought plagued the country, hundreds of banks closed in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Tennessee, and credit was often denied to farmers. Consequently, tithing declined, leaving churches void of resources that their suffering congregants needed.

Part 2 examines the influences of race and class on religious culture. The Delta poor, often transient and rarely accepted by their upper- and middle-income peers, often established their own religious traditions. The churches of the impoverished were unique in their resistance to record keeping and building construction, as well as their acceptance of female pastors and lay leadership. Establishment denominations with large middle-class and wealthy congregations (such as Baptists and Methodists) often touted their role as reformers by lobbying for Prohibition, promoting public education, and garnering support for World War I. Many of these devotees to public morality attributed the Great Depression to the 1920s, with its challenge to gender norms, Wall Street speculation, and illegal liquor consumption. They assumed that the pain of the thirties was retribution for the sins of the twenties, so the best remedies for the economic crises were revival and redemption. In contrast, African American and Catholic congregations were more likely to link the Great Depression to Jim Crow laws and immoral plantation capitalism and the inequality it bore.

In part 3, Greene presents the expansive role of the state under the New Deal and religious responses. She draws upon a plethora of letters of correspondence between southern pastors and President Roosevelt and concludes that, despite a general sense of loss of power by the legalization of alcohol under the Twenty-First Amendment, most pastors initially supported New Deal relief, often praising its adherence to Judeo-Christian principles. Jim Crow politics are also prevalent in the letters to the White House, with white pastors seeking to reinforce segregation culture through the distribution of federal benefits and African American preachers voicing concern that New Deal opportunities were not equally accessible for blacks in some instances and not available at all in others. Furthermore, some pastors demanded greater power in administering New Deal benefits as a means to maintain and strengthen regional influence. In response to this perceived threat to pastoral power, even conservative churches that traditionally shunned charity suddenly claimed that the state was moving too far into the religious sphere. For example, a Southern Baptist named Plautus Lipsey protested, "must the government do our religious work for us," even though he was a known critic of the social gospel (p. 12). "The ongoing expansion of the state under the New Deal," Greene ultimately concludes, "forced religious leaders to rethink the place and power of the church and its relationship to the federal government" (p. 133).

The final part of *No Depression in Heaven* reveals that, by 1938, Christian fundamentalists had come to identify the church as the rival of the state. Southern Baptists in particular saw themselves as defenders against government entrenchment into the religious sphere. As a result, South-

ern Baptists fought earnestly to prevent any government money from entering their domain, going so far as to deny their college students any National Youth Administration relief. The denomination also refused to provide church employees with Social Security benefits. In 1939, the Northern, Southern, and National Baptist denominations united to present "The American Baptist Bill of Rights," which according to Greene, "renewed the call for separation of church and state that many Baptists feared denominational leaders had abandoned with the arrival of the New Deal" (p. 191).

Central to church leaders' abandonment of the New Deal was the fear that the growing federal power would challenge Jim Crow segregation laws. "For white southerners," Greene reveals, "claims about the New Deal's encroachment on religious liberty often masked concern over federal interference in their racial caste system" (p. 191). In 1939, for example, the Methodist Church officially established racially specific churches as a matter of doctrine, an attempt to combat potential moves by the national government to integrate the South.

Greene leans on a large variety of sources to examine the rifts between Delta fundamentalism and the state that developed in the 1930s, including oral histories, church records, the Federal Writers Project's works on Mississippi and Arkansas, and US Census records. She utilizes periodicals as diverse as the ***Mississippi Baptist Record***, ***Prophetic Religion***, and ***Baltimore Afro-American***. By appealing to evidence from these sources, along with an impressive array of archival materials from Hyde Park, the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, the University of North Carolina's Southern Historical Collection, and the National Archives she offers a well-written and captivating narrative. Furthermore, ***No Depression in Heaven***'s appendix includes an informative and useful list of religious denominations throughout the Delta, along with their geography, racial makeup, and history.

No Depression in Heaven adds substantially to our historical understanding of political and religious transformations in the Delta during the Great Depression. By exposing the evolution of church reactions to federal aid, from an initial welcoming response to growing skepticism and antagonism, Greene delivers a broader revelation of post-Depression fundamentalism. Because the Delta is arguably the most impoverished, racially divided, and religiously devoted region of the country, it likewise provides the ideal model for social and theological transitions during one of the most consequential periods of American history. Greene's compelling narrative and innovative approach to the roots of modern fundamentalism make ***No Depression in Heaven*** extraordinarily beneficial to political, southern, and religious historians.

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