

Bare, Daniel R. *Black Fundamentalists: Conservative Christianity and Racial Identity in the Segregation Era*. New York: New York University Press, 2021. pp. 261. \$30.00 (paperback). ISBN 978-1-4798-0327-9

In an era of racial tension, racial division becomes heightened in social institutions. This is certainly the case in the church. Many congregations, denominations, and ministries are addressing issues of race in America and this challenge has led to instances of division and realignment. It is in this modern context that Daniel Bare's book *Black Fundamentalists: Conservative Christianity and Racial Identity in the Segregation Era* strikes a relevant note for readers by examining how race has played a role in the development of the American church.

Today, controversies, such as the debate over Critical Race Theory, divide congregations, campuses, and other communities, while religious identity is increasingly understood through a racial lens. While this phenomenon is not new, this latest resurgence in racial tension has brought about a renewed interest in studying the racial dynamics of the church. Historically, the theological debate between conservatives and liberals in American Protestantism has been studied as a phenomenon of the "white church." This has been done both tacitly and explicitly.

Study has tacitly focused upon the white church by primarily studying the most prominent and visible figures at the front lines of the debates in the early twentieth century such as Harry Emerson Fosdick and J. Gresham Machen. Naturally, in an era of prevalent racial segregation, these figures constitute and represent what might be called the white church. More explicit study turns an eye toward pro-segregation positions espoused by theological conservatives such as William Bell Riley and J. Frank Norris. These figures more explicitly delineate themselves as members of the white church.

Because of this narrative, the theological diversity of the black community and the debates and varied identities within are often neglected. Furthermore, the phenomenon of Protestant "fundamentalism" has come to be identified as a specifically white phenomenon. In *Black Fundamentalists*, Bare seeks to move past this misconception and shed light upon the history of theological fundamentalism in the black community.

Bare's method for accomplishing this lies in his defining fundamentalism doctrinally rather than institutionally. To do this, he refers to the well-known series of essays published between 1910 and 1915 known as *The Fundamentals*, which are commonly thought to have given the movement its name. From there, he proposes four conditions for identifying fundamentalism: "(1) a su-

pernatural and biblicist worldview, including an attitude of continuity with historic Christian traditions, (2) a personal commitment to the central doctrinal essentials of the movement, consonant with *The Fundamentals*, (3) a readiness to explicitly criticize and overtly condemn modernist theology, and (4) the willingness to utilize expressly fundamentalist language and terminology in defining one's theological positions and religious identity" (18). Utilizing this definition, Bare maps out an account of black fundamentalism over the course of the five chapters which comprise the book.

Chapter one explores the "claims by commentators in the black press (on both sides of the theological divide) that fundamentalism was a widespread force within the black community" (20). This chapter provides primary evidence of fundamentalism as a phenomenon within the black church. Not only did many within the black church espouse fundamentalism, but they also exhibited key characteristics shared with white fundamentalists. Despite these similarities, however, Bare differentiates black fundamentalism from white fundamentalism: black fundamentalists were less willing "to engage in protracted and heated cultural battles against the perceived cultural changes that accompanied modernism" (54). He argues that the key political focus of the black church was necessarily a pursuit of increased social enfranchisement for black Americans rather than conservative social ends.

Chapter two centers doctrinal axioms known as the "five fundamentals," which consists of "biblical inspiration and inerrancy, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, and the physical resurrection and literal second coming of Christ" (60). Bare works through these fundamentals, sharing various historical sources exhibiting black espousal of their validity. Bare notes the congruence between black theology and white theology in this regard; however, he cautions against the notion that this indicates black theology was subject to white theology. He instead posits that these shared tenets indicate that both black and white fundamentalism inherited their teachings from the same historical theological traditions.

Chapter three focuses upon fundamentalism's tradition of overtly polemical anti-modernist preaching. Following the form of the preceding chapters, Bare offers evidence of a tradition of black fundamentalist preaching that closely mirrored the anti-modernist polemics of their white counterpoints. In conclusion, however, he once again points out a key difference in their application as members of the black church. Their polemics were applied toward tearing down social barriers to racial equality, an end neglected or even opposed by white fundamentalists.

Having studied the similarities and differences of white and black fundamentalism in their own respective contexts, chapter four examines in detail an instance of “confluence and cooperation across racial lines worth noting” (22). The chapter studies the establishment of the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee. A unique cooperative undertaking between the white Southern Baptist Convention and the black National Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Theological Seminary tells the story of how the differences in posture between white and black fundamentalists provoked challenges despite shared theological convictions.

Chapter five then shifts attention to friction between black fundamentalism and black modernists by examining the “contested relationship between fundamentalism and Americanism” (23). In this chapter, Bare sheds light on how black fundamentalists’ approach to racial advancement differed from black modernists regarding religious and national identity. Black fundamentalism tended toward a model of Christian nationalism such that they believed their fundamentalist beliefs were key to becoming equal citizens and participants in American society. This differed from the perspective of their detractors who held that fundamentalism itself was a barrier to an equitable society and ought to be rejected. This illustrates that black fundamentalism was a movement whose convictions created friction both with white fundamentalist and black modernists.

This book’s investigation into the neglected history of black fundamentalism is a most welcome addition to the fields of both fundamentalist history and black church history. The introduction provides a useful roadmap to the book’s five well-written core chapters, and the conclusion offers a thoughtful commentary on the book’s relevance in today’s world. The book also contains an excellent array of first-rate sources and is very readable. Overall, *Black Fundamentalists* provides a well-structured and interesting treatment of a timely and overlooked topic and is worthy of readers’ attention.

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