

Saints in the Struggle: Church of God in Christ Activists in the Memphis Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1968. By Jonathan Chism. (Lanham, MD : Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2019. Pp. xii, 219. \$98, ISBN 978-1-4985-5308-7.)

There is no shortage of research on the civil rights movement, particularly in southern urban areas like Memphis, Tennessee. The promise of books which find a distinctive area of focus, therefore, makes the project even more exciting. Jonathan Chism's book on Church of God in Christ (COGIC) members makes a significant contribution to the intersection of civil rights and religion. Its purpose is "to recover the stories of COGIC grassroots activists that directly participated in the Memphis movement during the 1950s and 1960s" (p. 2). The two major contributions of Chism's research center on the promise of this argument: its focus on oral histories of previously-overlooked activists, and its analysis of Christian activists beyond the well-covered denominations (largely Baptist and Methodist).

The book's main argument is that "saints' hidden activism accentuates local community activists' commitment to galvanizing black churches and pastors" within civil rights history (p. 4). Chism analyzed this engagement to better understand COGIC saints' contributions to "collaborative direct action" within the wider civil rights movement in Memphis (p. 2). COGIC saints are church members who demonstrate their devoutness through dress and behavior (Anthea D. Butler's *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* [Chapel Hill, 2007], p. 65). Chism's incorporation of oral histories conducted with COGIC members in Memphis adds color to the points he raises. With the current historiographical trend to analyze civil rights protests from the grassroots level, there is a large amount of promise with such a strategy, but these excerpts are often in need of further contextualization. Moreover, though Chism is likely constrained by his sources, the individuals focused on the most are male leaders in the COGIC and the community of Memphis. Chism is right to emphasize these men's involvement in Memphis civil rights, but part of the advantage of local studies like this is being able to uncover

different types of activism beyond traditional leadership roles. With the exception of archival references to Memphis National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leader Maxine Smith (who was not a member of COGIC) and interview excerpts with COGIC female members, female experiences and their contributions are largely absent. Instead, the vast majority of examples refer to male leadership and men's roles in the faith and in Memphis politics and activism.

Chism notes that his upbringing in the COGIC has inspired his research, and he conveys an understanding of the Pentecostal faith and how it relates with other major Christian denominations throughout the book (p. ix). More context for readers who are not as well-versed in Pentecostalism would have made the book's contentions easier to follow. It is not until page 108 that a definition for "glossolalia," or the speaking in tongues, is given, for example, and references to congregational members as "saints" may be confusing to those from outside the Pentecostal faith. Again, this may reflect source availability, but with more than fifty COGIC congregations in Memphis, it is curious that the book seemingly focuses on two: Mason Temple, with its notable connection to the 1968 Sanitation Workers Strike, and Pentecostal Temple (p. 94).

Chism's book makes a major contribution to the field of civil rights historiography by adding to our understanding of different Christian denominations, and how activists' faith informed their involvement in the Memphis civil rights movement. This book will be useful for historians of the religious foundations of the civil rights movement, and of Memphis during this period.

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