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Daddy Grace: A Celebrity Preacher and his House of Prayer

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This well-documented monograph fills a preexisting gap in African American history by describing the work and historical context for black county agricultural agents in Texas. Reid clearly shows these agents working within a segregated system to try and meet the needs of black farmers. While pointing out the constraints under which these agents operated, she also offers a complex portrait of a group with a sense of mission that sought to promote social and economic change. This study should appeal to those seeking a better understanding of black rural life and the attempts to improve it in the early 20th century.

Peggy B. Gill
University of Texas at Tyler

Marie W. Dallam, *Daddy Grace: A Celebrity Preacher and His House of Prayer*. New York: New York University Press, 2007. Pp. 288. Cloth \$35.00. Paper \$20.00.

Daddy Grace: A Celebrity Preacher and His House of Prayer is the first work to emphasize the important contribution of Bishop Charles Emmanuel "Daddy" Grace to African American church history. Although earlier works included the United House of Prayer for All People in general studies of the black church, Marie Dallam takes a closer look into the leadership, laypeople's lives, and the foundations of the church; and she challenges the reader to understand the legitimacy of alternative religious practices within the African American community. Dallam's work aims to show the impact of the United House of Prayer not only on the African American religious experience, but for the American religious tradition as well.

Dallam begins by showing the complexities of Grace's racial and immigrant backgrounds. He did not consider himself black, but Portuguese, since he was of mixed racial heritage and immigrated to the United States from the Cape Verde Islands off the west coast of Africa. This is essential to understanding how Grace viewed himself in relation to his followers, and lays the foundation for his strategy in establishing Houses of Prayer throughout the South and in the Northeast. Dallam considers how parishioners related and reacted to Daddy Grace, exactly what they believed his relationship was to God, and the internal as well as external conflicts the church faced. Most of her research focuses on the years between 1922 and 1961, when African Americans were constantly migrating to the North and West, and when race relations were extremely volatile in the United States. This was the social context within which Grace and his United House of Prayer flourished.

Until now, most scholars understood Daddy Grace as a flamboyant, charismatic, and eccentric preacher. He was known for his long hair, long nails, and fancy clothes. On the surface Grace exemplified the stereotypical black preacher,

“blessed” with good fortune, while his followers were poor but dedicated, and who often hoped they too would one day receive similar blessings. Dallam, however, notes that Grace was a much more complex figure. One example of this was Grace’s approach to race. Rather than subscribing to American racial definitions, Grace refused to call himself a “Negro” or even African, and believed he was of a higher social status than most of his black followers. He constantly appealed to middle-class African Americans, hoping they would share in his goal of social uplift. Much of this is derived from Grace’s emphasis on class rather than race. It also implies that Grace believed monetary success trumped racial classifications. While many African Americans were embracing their racial and cultural heritage during this time, Daddy Grace ignored issues of racial pride altogether.

Most members of the United House of Prayer never questioned Grace’s ambiguity about his racial identity, but still referred to him as the “Black Christ,” and many even believed he was God incarnate. This is a very important aspect of Dallam’s analysis because it underscores the impact and success Grace had in recruiting members for his church. This also becomes important to the scholar of the African American church when one considers the similarities between the United House of Prayer and other black religious institutions such as the Nation of Islam (NOI). Claude Andrew Clegg in *The Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (1997) argues that in the NOI’s formative years, the followers of W. D. Fard (or Fard Muhammad) believed he was God, especially after Elijah (Poole) Muhammad asked him specifically and Fard supposedly answered in the affirmative. Knowing that laypeople could establish a close or even physical connection with God was most appealing, and this helps account for the increase in church membership, particularly among poor and working-class African Americans.

Dallam places herself squarely in contention with some earlier scholars of black church history, especially Arthur Fauset. In his book *Black Gods of the Metropolis* (1944), Fauset characterized the United House of Prayer as a cult. However, Dallam aims to show that the church, especially after Daddy Grace’s death, moved into the mainstream of black Pentecostalism as an “established sect,” which required a certain degree of formal religious organization. Admittedly, both Fauset and Dallam were outsiders who faced similar limitations in securing the trust of church members to really get an intimate understanding of why they believed so strongly in Daddy Grace. At the same time, Dallam was able to take Fauset’s findings much further and she has compiled an impressive array of primary sources over a much longer period of time to demonstrate how the United House of Prayer was transformed into a much larger and more mainstream institution.

Dallam examines numerous aspects of Daddy Grace’s life and leadership. In addition to his personal style, Dallam explores the more controversial issues such

as Grace's position on sexuality and gender roles. She also explored sex scandals and accusations of impropriety as well as the hostile competition with Father Divine (George Baker) and his Peace Mission Movement. This is also where Dallam proves less critical of Daddy Grace. While he was acquitted of many alleged crimes, including rape, Daddy Grace used the court trials as an opportunity to show his followers that he, like Christ, was protected by the grace of God. This only increased the church membership and allowed Grace to portray himself as above the law.

Daddy Grace is an important addition to the study of the African American church in the United States. It not only provides important details about Daddy Grace's life, but moves the United House of Prayer from the margins to the mainstream of black church history. In so doing Dallam invites new scholarship on other "nontraditional" black religious movements, especially those organized in the early decades of the 20th century when black religious identity was constantly being redefined. The book also broadens our understanding of black Pentecostalism as an increasingly diverse and complex religious phenomenon. Dallam's work paves the way for scholars not only to explore nontraditional church leaders, but also to take a closer look at the followers and their personal religious experiences. Dallam thus removes Daddy Grace from his lofty pedestal where his followers placed him and brings him down to earth.

Marne L. Campbell
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Robert Mann, *When Freedom Would Triumph: The Civil Rights Struggle in Congress, 1954–1968*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007. Pp. 318. Paper \$19.95.

It is with nostalgia that Robert Mann recalls the bipartisan moment in postwar history, when the U.S. Congress finally passed civil rights legislation that was previously thought highly unlikely. As one "hero" of this moment, Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen, has said, "Nothing can stop an idea whose time had come." Mann alters this view somewhat. We have the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964 because of the concerted efforts of the Senate's pragmatists and idealists, as well as the political acumen and legislative expertise of a handful of leaders. The required votes for any civil rights legislation or cloture vote was never a given. Although the title of this book suggests coverage of the Voting Rights and Fair Housing Acts, these receive less attention, as does the history of the passage of civil rights legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

This volume is an abridged version of Mann's earlier book *The Walls of Jericho*: