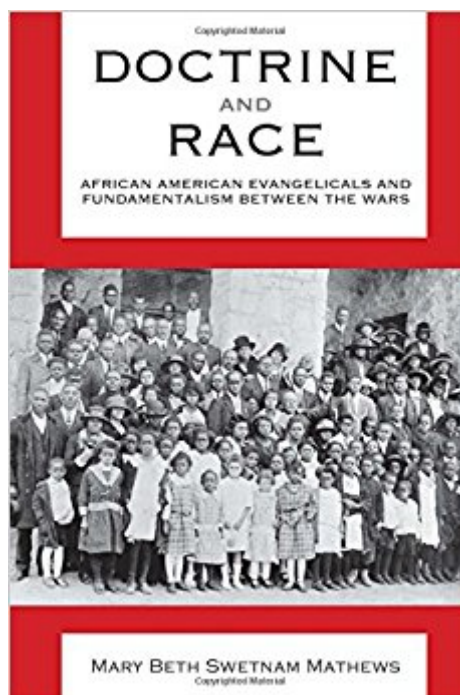


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# Doctrine And Race: African American Evangelicals And Fundamentalism Between The Wars (Religion & American Culture)



## Synopsis

By presenting African American Protestantism in the context of white Protestant fundamentalism, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars* demonstrates that African American Protestants were acutely aware of the manner in which white Christianity operated and how they could use that knowledge to justify social change. Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews's study scrutinizes how white fundamentalists wrote blacks out of their definition of fundamentalism and how blacks constructed a definition of Christianity that had, at its core, an intrinsic belief in racial equality. In doing so, this volume challenges the prevailing scholarly argument that fundamentalism was either a doctrinal debate or an antimodernist force. Instead, it was a constantly shifting set of priorities for different groups at different times. A number of African American theologians and clergy identified with many of the doctrinal tenets of the fundamentalism of their white counterparts, but African Americans were excluded from full fellowship with the fundamentalists because of their race. Moreover, these scholars and pastors did not limit themselves to traditional evangelical doctrine but embraced progressive theological concepts, such as the Social Gospel, to help them achieve racial equality. Nonetheless, they identified other forward-looking theological views, such as modernism, as threats to "true" Christianity. Mathews demonstrates that, although traditional portraits of "the black church" have provided the illusion of a singular unified organization, black evangelical leaders debated passionately among themselves as they sought to preserve select aspects of the culture around them while rejecting others. The picture that emerges from this research creates a richer, more profound understanding of African American denominations as they struggled to contend with a white American society that saw them as inferior. *Doctrine and Race* melds American religious history and race studies in innovative and compelling ways, highlighting the remarkable and rich complexity that attended to the development of African American Protestant movements.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Mathews deals with the connection between African American religion and the quest for racial equality. Her focus is unique: she looks at the subject from the perspective fundamentalism, as practiced by conservative Protestants, both black and white, in the years from 1915 to 1941.

Recommended." [Choice](#) "Mathews accomplishes what scholars of African American Protestantism from E. Franklin Frazier to Barbara Dianne Savage have tended to neglect: careful consideration of the religious values of black theological conservatism."

[Edward J. Blum](#), coauthor of *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* "Doctrine and Race" which considers the evolution of black evangelicals during the interwar period through their struggle with the modernist controversies and white fundamentalism "is an extremely welcome contribution to the study of black religious history." [Clarence E. Hardy III](#), author of *James Baldwin's God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture*

Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews is an associate professor of religion at the University of Mary Washington and is the author of *Rethinking Zion: How the Print Media Placed Fundamentalism in the South*.

Mary Beth Swetnam Matthews has provided a great service to the church and culture by beginning to fill this gap. There is still, in majority white evangelicalism, a questioning of the biblical fidelity of the historic black church. If there is going to be reconciliation, we must come to grips with how this history effects the way we view each other today.

This book is a must a read for anyone who cares about the history of black Baptist and black Methodist history. This is arguably the most significant book on 20th-century black church history

written in 30 or 40 years. The parallels between the way black evangelicals were treated between WWI and WWII by white fundamentalists and the way white evangelicals treat black evangelicals today in The Gospel Coalition, Southern Baptist, National Assoc of Evangelicals related organizations, evangelicals college ministry orgs (FCA, InterVarsity, etc.) is sobering. It will give African Americans in those spaces pause to consider if whether or not history is repeating itself. Mathews uncovers a robust history of black evangelicalism that is rarely, if ever, reported. This book should find itself on any syllabus in a course on Christianity in America. It's a rare opportunity to read fresh, newly discovered history. Simply outstanding! It will raise good questions about the false narrative about the lack of theological orthodoxy in the traditional black church and will call into question the credibility of any book claiming that black evangelical theology was quality controlled by white evangelicals. The book also calls into question any narrative that today's black church needs white evangelical influence in order to "return" to a gospel focus (because the black church has it's own resources and history for those who care about such things). The book will inspire and challenge!!!!

This work clearly paints the paradox of the Black church during the early 20th Century holding on to religious fundamentalism while making progressive moves concerning the social/corporate racial sins of America. This work is important for our understand of the later Civil Rights movement and the social-political climate of the Black Baptist And Methodist churches today. I believe the work could have communicated its thesis well with less words -lots of repetition in the first four chapters but none-the-less an important work.

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