author offers a paucity of citations on the more recent literature on spiritualism, specifically material focused on spiritualism and politics. He places overreliance on the published work of spiritualists, whose works are too often used uncritically. Finally, in terms of the controversial assertion that Lincoln was an active spiritualist, one of the key pieces of evidence supporting this idea comes from the memoir of Lincoln’s housekeeper, Mariah Vance, but Lincoln scholars have discredited that work and noted that some of it was forged. Overall, the book raises interesting questions about spiritualism and Republican politics in the Civil War era and should inspire further research.

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The End of Days: African American Religion and Politics in the Age of Emancipation
By Matthew Harper
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2016. Pp. 211. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $29.95.)


This said, Harper also makes some problematic contentions. The claim that The End of Days provides historians a “new way for understanding” the intersections between African American political and religious thought during post-emancipation is an overreach. Historians including Eugene Genovese (Roll, Jordan, Roll, 1972), Kenneth Stampp (The Peculiar Institution, 1989), Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (Righteous Discontent, 1994), and
Robin D. G. Kelley (Freedom Dreams, 2002), among many others, have used the secondary ethnographic data method that Harper employs to document the relation between religious thought and politics within African American political history. Another significant issue within the book is its implicit contention that the African American eschatology of hope evolved from Protestant rather than African cosmology. This assumption falsely assumes that before their enslavement, Africans possessed no theology. Philosopher John Mbiti established in African Religions and Philosophy (1992) that Africans in the Americas possessed the view of the divine at work in human history prior to their enslavement. For Africans, God was assumed to be actively involved in securing their material and spiritual well-being. Historian Joseph Holloway’s Africanisms in American Culture (2005) argues that this belief did not simply disappear when Africans were forcibly uprooted and enslaved in the Americas. He convincingly demonstrates how the collective memories of African religious cosmology were selectively filled by homologous similar Christian theologies in the United States. Thus, Harper’s contention that U. S. historians neglect to consider how religious beliefs informed enslaved African people’s political decision-making during and after Reconstruction does not cohere to existing literature.

Despite this shortcoming, The End of Days’ most salient contribution is its evidentiary presentation of how African American Christians prophesied their emancipation in ways that convinced them they were living through the end of days when God returns to inaugurate a new era. Given that African Americans believed that God was active in human affairs and history, the book reveals how such a view informed their approach to post-emancipation politics—be it a question of voting rights, land reform, temperance, Populism, migration, or segregation. Harper argues that it is virtually impossible to make sense of African American politics during post-emancipation without accounting for the theological meaning African Americans gave the era. His conclusion is consistent with the findings of prior historical, theological and sociological literature. More troublesome is his claim that historians have been revealing the history of African Americans response to Jim Crow “from both ends”—uncovering African American political organization at progressively earlier dates before the civil rights movement and later dates than Reconstruction. The historical literature includes numerous studies documenting how African Americans’ eschatological expectations consistently informed how they fought for their freedom.

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