

BOOK REVIEW

Edward L. Wheeler, *Uplifting the Race: The Black Minister in the New South 1865-1902*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986. xxi + 146pp. \$12.50

Uplifting the Race is Edward Wheeler's revision of his 1982 Emory University dissertation of the same name. Wheeler's thesis is that the work of those who have attempted to understand the black church has been incomplete to the extent that the concept of uplift has been neglected. By uplift, Wheeler means self-help and self-improvement as means of eliminating prejudice.

By stressing the concept of uplift, Wheeler is distancing himself from scholars such as James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore who view the post-Civil War black church as characterized by accommodation. While admitting that accommodation was part of what uplift meant, he contends that it was also an affirmation of black possibility. As a result, the ministers initially saw politics as a way of effecting black progress. When this no longer seemed tenable, they turned to the temperance movement and education.

The study is based on the thought and activities of an "elite group" of seventy-eight ministers—twenty-seven of whom were members of Methodist denominations—who lived in the south for at least five years during the period. An additional group of one hundred seventy ministers is drawn on in a more limited way.

Of particular interest is the chapter on the theological foundation of uplift. In it Wheeler argues that uplift was grounded on a mix of traditional southern evangelical Protestantism and nineteenth century liberalism. From the latter the ministers borrowed the themes of the "fatherhood of God" and the "brotherhood of man." Also of interest is an appendix on the ministers of the study, giving personal information such as date of birth, education, church and political activities, and denominational affiliation.

Uplifting the Race represents an important contribution to black religious scholarship, and should be of interest to those interested in Methodist studies as well.

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