God and Race in American Politics: A Short History by Mark A. Noll

Religion has been a powerful political force throughout American history. When race enters the mix the results have been some of our greatest triumphs as a nation—and some of our most shameful failures. In this important book, Mark Noll, one of the most influential historians of American religion writing today, traces the explosive political effects of the religious intermingling with race.

Noll demonstrates how supporters and opponents of slavery and segregation drew equally on the Bible to justify the morality of their positions. He shows how a common evangelical heritage supported Jim Crow discrimination and contributed powerfully to the black theology of liberation preached by Martin Luther King Jr. In probing such connections, Noll takes readers from the 1830 slave revolt of Nat Turner through Reconstruction and the long Jim Crow era, from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s to values voting in recent presidential elections. He argues that the greatest transformations in American political history, from the Civil War through the civil rights revolution and beyond, constitute an interconnected narrative in which opposing appeals to Biblical truth gave rise to often-contradictory religious and moral complexities. And he shows how this heritage remains alive today in controversies surrounding stem-cell research and abortion as well as civil rights reform.

God and Race in American Politics is a panoramic history that reveals the profound role of religion in American political history and in American discourse on race and social justice.

My Personal Review:
Author Mark Noll is one of the preeminent historians of religion in American history. That designation is sure to grow with his timely release of "God and Race in American Politics: A Short History."

Could there possibly be a better time for the release of this work than weeks before our nation elected its first African American President? Race, religion, and politics in American history have always alternated between great triumphs and shameful failure. Noll outlines this contradictory history and provides theological and cultural insights into the reasons.
As the sub-title suggests, Noll writes a short history (200 pages). That is not to be confused with an incomplete history. Noll moves through the issues of race, religion, and politics from the origins of American slavery, to the start of the Black Church Movement, to the Jim Crow years, through the Civil Rights years, and onto the present. In doing so, he provides a panoramic view of what he accurately describes as "spectacular liberation alongside spectacular oppression." And he does so not in a dry-as-dust historical style, but in an engaging, appealing, captivating narrative style. Surely this is one of the most important books on religion, race, and politics written to date.

Reviewer: Robert W. Kellemen, Ph.D., is the author of [ASIN:0801068061 Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction.

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