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No Jim Crow Church: The Origins of South Carolina's Baha'I Community

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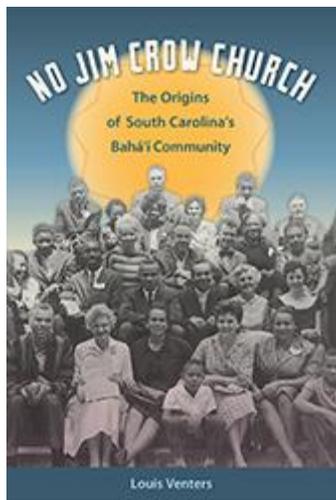
You may be asking: In the world of academia today, what is Transylvania University's mission? <https://www.transy.edu/> I encourage you to view this link and see if it is a traditional liberal arts educational institution now or a mixed set of academic offerings designed to meet the demands of the marketplace and the diverse interests of students and parents of today. What might Horace Holley think?

This is a book that I highly recommend. It is one in which we can see the same on-going debate we have today. How will colleges and universities best frame themselves to be sure they develop active citizens engaged in the service of others? In addition, how do they prepare the students for the demands of the marketplace and earn good will from future employers?

This is an excellent research resource for academic libraries, public libraries and historical societies. A total of 297 pages, with Acknowledgements beginning at page 221, Notes at 225, a Bibliography at 274 and an Index at 291, the book offers black and white portraits and photographs/drawings from 149 to 159.

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No Jim Crow Church: The Origins of South Carolina's Baha'i Community. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015. ISBN 978-0-8130-6107-8 (hardcover; \$74.95); 978-0-8130-5407-0 (pbk.: \$27.95). 344 p.



Choosing to review this book was an adventure into the unknown for me. As a graduate student at the University of South Carolina in Columbia (1995-2000), I grew to love the people, the places and the beauty of the State. Little did I know about the Baha'i community" in South Carolina. I had some deep feelings about "Jim Crow", the laws, the discrimination, the abuse and suffering of people of color in the South and other regions of our country. Pursing a few research sites to learn more about the Baha'i religion, I was

intrigued by this new book on this topic. How is and was South Carolina unique in the history of the Baha'i religion? Louis Venters, an Associate Professor of History at Francis Marion University, gives the reader a personal look at his family's origins within the Baha'i faith. He places himself within the faith and then ventures into a wealth of the beginnings and growth (1910-1968) of the Baha'i religion. Venters provides a rich context from which to view the Baha'i philosophy of a one world religion, one world of equal human beings, and one unification of all peoples of the world in faith and spiritual belief.

The Baha'i faith/religion was born in Iran and spread throughout the world. As it crossed the globe, Venters points out that the tremendous growth of the faith in South Carolina, in particular, was due to the "legal and social system that enshrined racial prejudice and oppression—attitudes and structures that ran directly counter to the faith's cardinal principle of the oneness of humanity". Venters goes on to explain, "its arrival in South Carolina represented a significant, sustained, spiritually based and deceptively subtle challenge to the ideology and structures of white male supremacy and to the Protestant orthodoxy with which they were inextricably linked".

Though we might conclude that once the Jim Crow laws were "dismantled", Venters posits that one might think the Baha'i faith disappeared but that did not happen and an interesting result was that by 1973, "perhaps as many as twenty thousand South Carolinians, mostly rural African Americans had identified themselves as Baha'is, constituting up to one-third of the faith's adherents in the United States". (xiv)

Today Baha'i churches and cathedrals are located in the United States and around the world with congregations working toward a singular mission of promoting the Baha'i philosophy of a one world religion, one world of equal human beings, and one unification of all peoples of the world in faith and spiritual belief. I highly recommend Venters' research and writing for it filled a void in my knowledge of South Carolina and world history I did not know existed.

Venters' research supplies a chronological timeline of significant events in the life of the Baha'i religion in the United States, particularly in South Carolina. Additionally there is an extensive Notes section, a Bibliography and an Index (pages 251 – 322). Recommended for Public Libraries, Academic Libraries, Theological Libraries and Special Libraries.

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