

*Episcopalians and Race*, by Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr.

reviewed by [Arthur B. Williams](#) in the [September 27, 2000](#) issue

Seven years in the writing, this is a significant and comprehensive history of African Americans and their quest for recognition in the Episcopal Church. It completes a trilogy that began with George Freeman Bragg's *History of the Afro-American Group* (1922) and continued with Harold Lewis's *Yet with a Steady Beat* (1996).

Shattuck focuses on the church in the South and shatters the myth of the unified biracial society, perpetuated well into the middle of the 20th century by many southern churchmen. His retelling of history describes the Episcopal Church's struggle since the end of the Civil War to share leadership and resources on an equal footing with its black communicants. Shattuck recounts the story of this struggle through many prophetic and visionary voices, both personal and institutional, black and white--Alexander Crummell, Thurgood Marshall, John Morris, Tollie Caution, Barbara Harris, the Conference of Church Workers among Colored People, the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, the General Convention Special Program and the Union of Black Episcopalians, to name a few.

Fifteen pages of photographs (mostly from the Episcopal Church archives) depict some of the movements supporters and detractors. Almost 65 pages of meticulous, well-documented footnotes led this reader to wonder if the author might consider writing another book or two on this subject.

In its closing pages the book asks, "Can the members of the Episcopal Church involve themselves in the spiriual and theological discipline necessary for a radical process of institutional transformation?" Shattuck's epilogue seems to answer no to this question as he laments Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning's decision not to move the 1991 General Convention from Phoenix when Arizona voters defeated a referendum that would have created a holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr.

Shattuck never impugns the motives of those about whom he writes. Always forthright, he conveys a personal affection for his beloved church and its members. He would take comfort in the recent decision of the present presiding bishop to withdraw the General Convention from the Adams Mark Hotel in Denver when evidence of racist attitudes and practices came to light.