As historians examine the successes and failures of the civil rights movement, there is a natural tendency to focus upon charismatic leaders whose emotional drive powered black ambitions and accomplishments. Yet behind these well-known figures were less flamboyant, quiet crusaders, men and women whose behind-the-scenes hard work laid the foundation for the movement’s later success.

Linda McMurry’s biography of Monroe Nathan Work rescues one relatively unknown turn-of-the-century black scholar and civil rights pioneer from obscurity. The son of former slaves, Work was born in North Carolina in 1866. His family moved to a Kansas farm, and Work did not begin his formal education until he was 23 years old. After a brief encounter with the ministry, Work put himself through the University of Chicago, earning a master’s degree in sociology. Influenced by the social gospel and progressivism, Work believed that religious, educational, and political leaders should serve as reformers and actively promote improvements for blacks in modern industrial America. Work returned to teach in the South in 1904, moving to Tuskegee Institute in 1908. There he applied his fine mind, disciplined by education and hard work, to solving problems faced by Southern blacks, problems exacerbated by increasing racial tensions and declining economic conditions. A gentle scholar, Work built Tuskegee’s Department of Records and Research into a nationally recognized source of information on black Americans—a record of the black experience. His endorsement of Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee philosophy testified to his faith that all Southerners, black and white, could achieve racial harmony through education.

Yet one of the reasons for Work’s relative obscurity was his adherence to this philosophy, so out of tune with that of the mid-Twentieth Century. Citing Work’s pioneering efforts in teaching Afro-Southerners about their African cultural heritage, his national leadership of campaigns promoting health and sanitation in black communities, and his attempts to improve interracial communication between Southerners on all economic levels, McMurry defends her subject against charges of “Uncle Tomism.” Work was a founding member of W.E.B. DuBois’ Niagara Group, but he failed to join with DuBois in campaigning for a national anti-lynching law. The author notes this, equally dividing the blame between the two men, but one questions how Work, living in the South and personally aware of this evil, could have failed to raise his voice. On the other hand, Work’s published compilation of statistics on blacks lynched in the South during the 20s was a reserved yet potent statement of outrage.

A highly readable narrative, McMurry’s fine study is flawed only by its brevity. Questions about Work’s motivation and movements remain unanswered, leaving room for additional study of this early quiet crusader and recorder of the black experience.

University of Missouri-Columbia

Mary Ann Wynkoop


At the turn of the century, Tallahassee, Florida was fortunate to have a skilled
photographer from Philadelphia take up residence and establish a thriving business until his death in 1911. Not only did Alvan S. Harper create the usual studio portraits but he also traveled around town and in surrounding Leon County, recording the activities of people who might never frequent a photo studio.

One hundred and one of the extant glass plate negatives have been reproduced here as close to the original size as possible and with imperfections intact; treated as archival photographs, they have not been retouched. As such, the list of plates with an extremely sketchy identification (for example, “Woman in a peasant costume and carrying a basket of greens. Negative 706”) is printed at the beginning of the book, apart from the photographs. Joan Morris provides an introduction to Harper and traces the history of the collection from his studio to the Florida Photographic Archives. Warner concludes the book with an essay placing the photographs in historical context.

While the photographs are excellently reproduced and the accompanying introduction and essay complement them, the book is flawed. As a coffee-table art book for people who wish to enjoy the photographs as prints, it works fine. But as a serious study of a period in Tallahassee’s history, the organization of the book leaves historians frustrated. Because each photograph’s identifying caption is on the list of plates at the front of the book, the viewer must constantly flip back to discover who, where, and why only to find the type of aforementioned sketchy and obvious description. Too often the captions reiterate the visual information rather than tell something not apparent. At this price, be forewarned; this is an art book, not a history book.

Florida State University

Susan Hamburger


In this well-written biography, William E. Ellis of Eastern Kentucky State University has explored and explained the many paradoxes concerning the life of Edgar Y. Mullins (1860-1928), who served as president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville) from 1899 through 1928. Fundamentalists often considered him little better than an influential heretic, while liberals at times detected reactionary beliefs. In reality, he was a moderate evangelical trying to walk a “theological tightrope” (218) between both extremes. Leading the fight against anti-evolution laws in the early 1920s, he disavowed any belief in Christian theistic evolution five years later. At the beginning of his career, he displayed many ecumenical leanings; yet after three years as Southern Baptist Convention president, he severed most of his ties with any other denominations. But throughout such contradictions, Ellis has found that Mullins’ basic evangelical beliefs did not change, although most theologians diverged either to the right or left.

This book would be an asset to most libraries. Since no one can thoroughly understand modern southern history without first understanding evangelical Christiannism, this volume provides clear insight into the struggles that moderate Southern Baptists faced in reconciling modern science with ancient beliefs. While many have experienced this inner strife, few have harmonized their views by following the via media—the middle road—as Mullins has done. This book also gives new understanding to other