

The Historian

Martin Luther King, Jr.: Apostle of Militant Nonviolence. By James A. Colaiaco. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. Pp. x, 238. \$29.95.)

James Colaiaco introduces this slender and modest volume by stating that "this book is not a biography of King, [but] a study of King's contribution to the black freedom struggle through an analysis and assessment of his nonviolent protest campaigns" (2). Unfortunately for the prospective reader, however, Colaiaco's secondary, summary descriptions of the well-known public highlights of the 1955-1968 civil rights era contain no new information, insights or conclusions.

Civil rights scholars and students should note at the outset that *Apostle of Militant Nonviolence* is neither based upon any archival research nor draws upon any interviewing or oral history repositories. Although Colaiaco's bibliography of secondary works is reasonably extensive, neither it nor his footnotes make any references to a number of useful standard works, including L. D. Reddick's 1959 book on King, *Crusader Without Violence*, and two relevant 1987 books, Adam Fairclough's significant *To Redeem the Soul of America* and Alan Anderson and George Pickering's volume on civil rights in Chicago, *Confronting the Color Line*.

Omissions such as those will leave a scholarly reader disappointed if not troubled, and a similar incompleteness mars each of the two explicitly analytical chapters—both previously published by Colaiaco in *Phylon*—that Colaiaco has inserted into his otherwise straightforwardly chronological account. Colaiaco's explication and commentary on King's strategy of nonviolent protest contains no ingredients that would have been novel or unfamiliar even a decade ago; his explication and analysis of King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail" is introduced by a complaint that the letter "has not received the scholarly attention it deserves" (3), but Colaiaco makes absolutely no reference to any of the six prior scholarly articles—by Haig Bosmajian (1967), Richard Fulkerson (1979), Mia Klein (1981), Wesley Mott (1975), Malinda Snow (1985), and Douglas Strum (1984)—that explicitly treat King's letter. That failing is particularly disappointing.

While Colaiaco's summary accounts of familiar events such as the Montgomery bus boycott and the Birmingham and Selma campaigns are generally fair and dependable, significant mistakes nonetheless occur. NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins is consistently spoken of as "Wilkins" throughout the book; recently deceased Chicago civil rights activist Al Raby had been a public school teacher, not a minister (152). Colaiaco also errs in dating the 1966 shooting of James Meredith and the immediacy of civil rights leaders' responses to it (159-60), and offers only a highly incomplete and misleading commentary concerning the 1966 Chicago summit negotiations (172-73).

There are of course many things that *Apostle of Militant Nonviolence* does not get wrong, and in a very limited way Colaiaco's work represents a workmanlike distillation of civil rights scholarship from the past twelve years. Colaiaco's comments concerning Dr. King—including an overemphasis on the influence of Mohandas K. Gandhi—likewise represent no new or intriguing perspective, especially when compared with the ongoing work of scholars who have immersed themselves in original source materials, such as Keith D. Miller. All in all, then, there is nothing new or valuable that a potential reader will find in *Apostle of Militant Nonviolence*, and the book at best will represent a lesson that original

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research, rather than secondary repetition, is the path down which worthwhile academic work should proceed.

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JFK: History of an Image. By Thomas Brown. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988. Pp. 150. \$19.95.)

Midway through his presidency, in a speech at Yale University, John F. Kennedy said, "The greatest enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic." This book concerns the JFK myth, even though its author chooses to describe what he discusses as an image.

The image of Kennedy as a pragmatic liberal developed in the immediate post-assassination period. Family, acolytes and LBJ, for differing purposes, created the image of Kennedy as a young man of reason and practical intelligence, who was the victim of irrational hatred and fanaticism, a man of style, learned and urbane, a non-conformist with class. The real man, however, was a bundle of complexities, a person of profound inner resources.

Soon revisionists began their reinterpretations. Spurred by the times—years of disillusionment with the Vietnam War, of the counter-culture and of the New Left—these writers attacked the president for his "posturing heroics" and "tired clichés." They deplored the great disparity between his rhetoric and performance. Focusing on Kennedy's aggressive foreign policy, which they denounced as a failure, they excoriated him for extending the Cold War needlessly. They also denounced his timidity in dealing with civil rights matters. In sum, they bemoaned the fact that he had been a captive of an American liberal past that even in his day was no longer a valid foundation for public policy.

Since the mid-seventies a "literature of balance" has developed. Based on a longer perspective from which to judge Kennedy and a more sober estimate of the possibilities of positive social change, it stresses how various realities limited Kennedy's actions. This idea of limits is central to much contemporary scholarship about him and clearly subordinates his role to that of the attitudes, ideas and institutions within which he functioned.

Interestingly, the author finds this balanced view to be as flawed as the images. He complains of the centrist ideological bias of these interpreters and their "inability or unwillingness to make intellectual or moral discriminations," when in fact they have. Any writer who can be described as possessing a "centrist ideological bias" has necessarily arrived at that position through intellectual and moral discrimination.

Unfortunately, the balanced view interpretation has not affected the Kennedy myth. American public opinion as reflected in the popular media still assumes that JFK was of decisive importance in recent American history. It also accepts either the pragmatic liberal or revisionists' image as the true assessment of Kennedy.

Perhaps the greatest bane, that which perpetuates the Kennedy image or myth, is the plethora of books about him and his discrimination. This volume is an excellent example of Kennedy overkill. What Professor Brown has to say is interesting, well written, and mostly accurate, but it could have been said more