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A History of Education in Kentucky by William E. Ellis
(review)

Taylor Sanders

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Christ” (a title used somewhat problematically throughout the text) was appropriated theologically among various groups. And at times the concept of “The Sacred” was treated as a reified, objective reality belying its status as a hotly contested category. But these criticisms cannot detract from this exceptionally well-researched book. *The Color of Christ* provides readers with a treasure trove of obscure historical gems that successfully advance its argument. No scholar interested in the interplay of racial and religious imagination in America can afford to ignore it.

CRAIG PRENTISS is a professor of religious studies at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri. He is the author of *Staging Faith: Religion and African American Theatre from the Harlem Renaissance to World War II*, forthcoming by NYU Press in the fall of 2013.

A History of Education in Kentucky. By William E. Ellis. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011. Pp. 515. \$40.00 cloth; \$40.00 ebook)

Kentuckians will thank the eminent scholars who urged Professor William E. Ellis to expand his proposed project on higher education into a wide-ranging study of all levels of private and public schooling in the commonwealth. His book, *A History of Education in Kentucky*, is a comprehensive, lively, realistic, and wise analysis of Kentucky education from pioneer days to the present. The author is both a product and a shaper of education in Kentucky. He commands a wide range of primary and secondary sources and enriches his survey with his own personal experiences.

Dr. Ellis is a distinguished retired historian at Eastern Kentucky University and a progressive pragmatist who strove to reform the stubborn Kentucky system of education. He has been exasperated by its resistance to change, yet he recognizes the heroic accomplishments of Kentuckians who struggled with a system that was plagued by many roadblocks.

His catalogue of woes is daunting. These frustrations include populism, which championed small counties and local control, ruthless competition among competing regions, special interests, poverty, a meager tax base, and even theological disputes. Nepotism and violence took its toll, and many influential Kentuckians distrusted public schooling. Would-be reformers confronted the perennial problems of partisan politics, strong personalities, and petty interests that led Kentucky to lag behind its neighbors.

Yet Ellis also highlights bright spots. The problems were rarely hopeless. In the early republic, Kentucky took the lead in building excellent private colleges, academies, and medical schools. It was an early pioneer in female education. In 1900, Louisville was a leader in comprehensive public schools, and, during the early twentieth century, mining companies provided some first-rate schools. Later, Kentucky was a leader in peaceful integration. But too often crises stymied hopeful progress—Civil War, floods, depressions, and small-minded wrangling among its leaders. Idealistic reforms, hopeful government policy papers, and task-force goals were mere mirages.

This book is a valuable text for educational leaders and reformers as they confront an unfinished task. Its rich catalogue of heroes, reformers, visionaries, and scoundrels offers a lively tapestry that will entertain and inform any reader interested in the social history of Kentucky education.

TAYLOR SANDERS is a retired professor and former university historian at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.

Then Sings My Soul: The Culture of Southern Gospel Music. By Douglas Harrison. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012. Pp. 228. \$80.00 cloth; \$28.00 paper)

The University of Illinois recently published as part of its acclaimed “Music in American Life” series Douglas Harrison’s *Then Sings My Soul: The Culture of Southern Gospel Music*. In its promo-