

Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South (Politics and Culture in Modern America)

By Steven P. Miller

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While spreading the gospel around the world through his signature crusades, internationally renowned evangelist Billy Graham maintained a visible and controversial presence in his native South, a region that underwent substantial political and economic change in the latter half of the twentieth century. In this period Graham was alternately a desegregating crusader in Alabama, Sunbelt booster in Atlanta, regional apologist in the national press, and southern strategist in the Nixon administration.

Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South considers the critical but underappreciated role of the noted evangelist in the creation of the modern American South. The region experienced two significant related shifts away from its status as what observers and critics called the "Solid South": the end of legalized Jim Crow and the end of Democratic Party dominance. Author Steven P. Miller treats Graham as a serious actor and a powerful symbol in this transition—an evangelist first and foremost, but also a profoundly political figure. In his roles as the nation's most visible evangelist, adviser to political leaders, and a regional spokesperson, Graham influenced many of the developments that drove celebrants and detractors alike to place the South at the vanguard of political, religious, and cultural trends. He forged a path on which white southern moderates could retreat from Jim Crow, while his evangelical critique of white supremacy portended the emergence of "color blind" rhetoric within mainstream conservatism. Through his involvement in the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations, as well as his deep social ties in the South, the evangelist influenced the decades-long process of political realignment.

Graham's public life sheds new light on recent southern history in all of its ambiguities, and his social and political ethics complicate conventional understandings of evangelical Christianity in postwar America. Miller's book seeks to reintroduce a familiar figure to the narrative of southern history and, in the process, examine the political and social transitions constitutive of the modern South.

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Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South (Politics and Culture in Modern America) By Steven P. Miller Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2615100 in Books
- Published on: 2011-07-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.98" h x .96" w x 6.04" l, 1.04 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 320 pages

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Billy Graham, prominent evangelist, is reintroduced here for the important role he played in creating the latter-day American South. Miller studies Graham's behavior and rhetoric within the overlapping themes of religion, politics, and race during the decades since 1950 and Graham's part in the story of the post-civil rights South. Miller relates Graham's evangelical universalism, spread through his signature crusades, containing clear political meanings such as acceptance of existing civil rights laws, condemnation of racial violence, and dismissal of the need for further protests or legislation. Not everyone agreed with him, but Graham did muster regional support for political realignment, especially from Presidents Eisenhower, Nixon, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton. Graham's career spanned decades, and his role as a political and ministerial counselor to political leaders well positioned him quietly to influence political, religious and cultural trends and ease racial tensions. Recommended for political science collections in academic libraries.—Leo Kriz, West Des Moines Lib.

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Review

"Beautifully written, well argued and carefully researched . . . Thanks to Miller's engaging and provocative book, Billy Graham and modern conservatism will never look the same."—*Social History*

"A political biography that shines fresh light on Graham's political machinations, navigation of the civil rights movement and boosting of the Sunbelt South."—*Christian Century*

"Wonderfully readable, engrossing . . . A captivating history and a profound work of scholarship. Miller ably shows how evangelicalism aided the new conservatism long before the Christian Right exploded onto the scene."—Randall J. Stephens, *Journal of American History*

"Miller demonstrates a keen eye for the telling phrases in conversations or letters and incorporates them in a swiftly flowing narrative that pulls the reader along."—*Journal of Church and State*

"Billy Graham, prominent evangelist, is reintroduced here for the important role he played in creating the latter-day American South. Miller studies Graham's behavior and rhetoric within the overlapping themes of religion, politics, and race during the decades since 1950 and Graham's part in the story of the post-civil rights South."—*Library Journal*

"With this book, Steven P. Miller emerges as a significant new voice in the history of evangelical Christianity. . . . The book opens new territory for modern American religious and political history, and for this reason it should be considered essential reading."—Donald T. Critchlow, *Reviews in American History*

"*Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*, a study of the evangelist's relationship to the cause of civil rights on the one hand and the cause of conservatism on the other, does justice to the tensions and complexities involved—for Graham, for the South and for the country."—Ross Douthat, *New York Times*

"Fascinating . . . Miller is a valuable and sophisticated guide to how Graham—a man interested in both saving souls and playing golf with presidents—helped shape today's South."—*Raleigh News and Observer*

About the Author

Steven P. Miller earned his Ph.D. degree in history from Vanderbilt University. He has taught at a number of institutions, including Washington University, Webster University, and Goshen College.

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