

Aucoin, Brent J. *Thomas Goode Jones: Race, Politics & Justice in the New South*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016. 248 pp., hardcover, \$54.95.

Review by Allen Mendenhall

Brent J. Aucoin's new biography is a probing treatment of the neglected figure of Thomas Goode Jones. To some, Jones is discredited because of his ownership of slaves and military leadership in the Confederate Army; to others, he's a wounded war hero, distinguished jurist, and revered governor who sought reconciliation with former slaves. The truth, as always, is more complex.

Jones does not fit neatly into simplistic categories; he defies the trite labels of current political vocabulary. He cut across partisan divides even in his own day. His story is not a crude morality tale, nor does it contain clear lessons for posterity. Aucoin calls Jones "enigmatic." He seeks to consider Jones "holistically." His studied reflection on Jones reveals a complicated man who's both congenial and flawed, ahead of his time and yet a definite product of it.

Born in precarious circumstances in what today is Macon, Georgia, Jones had family roots in Virginia. His father, Samuel Goode Jones, worked for the railroad and moved the family from place to place, trying to earn an honest living. They settled in Montgomery when Samuel took a job there as an engineer. Thomas Jones was five at the time. He and his family attended St. John's Episcopal Church, downtown, where the pew in which Jefferson Davis worshipped remains intact, the other rows of pews having been replaced long ago.

A romantic childhood it was not. Jones was sent to Virginia to study at academies that fed into the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). He was groomed to be a soldier. By the time he enrolled at VMI, the Civil War had begun, and he joined the ranks of his professor, Major General Thomas J. Jackson. Jones transferred units and worked his way up the chain of command, barely avoiding death on more than one occasion. Legend has it that, while riding horseback, he saved a wandering child during the heat of battle. This and other tales of heroism earned Jones the reputation as a valiant warrior. General Robert E. Lee himself selected Jones, among others, to deliver the flag of surrender to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox

Courthouse.

After the War, Jones returned to Alabama to begin a new career, or careers. He married, sired 13 children, and enjoyed a rapid rise to fame and distinction, first as an editor of *The Daily Picayune* and later as a speaker, lawyer, and Democratic politician. Believing it was God's will for the South to fully reintegrate into the Union, he championed reunification, receiving honors and awards for his efforts to this end. His celebrated 1874 Memorial Day Address was a reconciliatory precursor to that of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., a decade later.

In our day, Jones is known mostly as a legislator, judge, and governor—and indeed the bulk of Aucoin's book is dedicated to these periods of Jones's life. Aucoin pays close attention to Jones's often contradictory, always multifaceted, and sometimes disturbing views on race and race relations. Following Booker T. Washington, Aucoin says, "Jones eschewed the idea of a political solution to the so-called Negro problem—namely, the passage and enforcement of civil rights legislation—but also . . . opposed the political effort to disenfranchise blacks."

Jones supported segregation of the races under a separate-but-equal scheme, yet he backed the creation of Alabama State University, a black college founded in 1867. He advocated the education of blacks to varying degrees, but his rhetoric on this topic can sound paternalistic and hollow to the modern ear. That he opposed educational prerequisites to voting, however, suggests he was willing to risk clout and status to take an unpopular stand on behalf of former slaves. He also, quite controversially at the time, sought to abolish the exploitative convict leasing system that carried with it the residual features of slavery.

Aucoin describes Jones's politicking in great detail, from probable election fraud to campaigns for higher taxes. As governor, Jones decried the mob violence that had become common in Alabama. Later, as a judge, he attempted to charge a lynch mob under federal law. Jones's popularity waxed and waned. An economic crisis befell the state during his governorship, and workers from different industries began to strike. This once gallant soldier grew tired and frustrated and lost much of his charisma. During one ceremony as governor, suffering from "cholera morbus," he fell from his horse as he tried to dismount. Word of this clumsy incident spread quickly, and Jones was humiliated.

Yet he always drew admirers. His work on race relations, if not always courageous, was at least a step in the right direction. When he died, an unexpected number of blacks attended his funeral, watching solemnly. "Jones may not have been a hero," Aucoin submits, "or someone on the good side who was unflinching in his fight against evil, but there appears to be cause for

concluding that he distinguished himself from the more rabid racist leaders of the South.”

The institution I work at bears the name of this curious man, whose bust is displayed prominently at the top of the stairs of the entry rotunda, looking down on the busy law faculty and students who come and go without the slightest concern for, or even knowledge of, his life. I’ve placed my copy of Aucoin’s biography beneath that bust with a short note: “Free copy. Learn about a fascinating person.”

It seemed like the right thing to do.

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Brice, Tanya Smith, ed., *Reconciliation Reconsidered: Advancing the National Conversation on Race in Churches of Christ*. Abilene TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2016. 218 pp., softcover, \$19.99

Review by Cecil May, Jr.

Sunday morning at 11:00 o’clock has been called “the most segregated hour in America.” While that is unquestionably generally true, since the mid-1960’s the congregations I have known and worked with have welcomed black visitors, black members and have used black Christian men in worship leadership, and in the process have astounded some Methodist and Baptist preacher friends. My experience, therefore, has been different from the editor and writers of this book. That fact does not deny the reality of their experience, but it does serve to remind us that no one set of experiences is universal.

The book begins with an introduction by the editor, followed by twelve chapters by various writers divided into two sections: five under “Historical Realities” and seven under “Contemporary Challenges.” Reviewing a book by thirteen different authors could end up being thirteen reviews.

Overall, the book calls us all, black and white, to reconciliation, to be truly one body, one church, one fellowship. A worthy cause! It urges us to stand for equality of all humans; no one is superior or inferior to another because of race. It calls us to treat racial prejudice as sin, condemning it as we do abortion, drunkenness and sexual immorality. Universally accepted Christian principles, such as “love one another as I have loved you,” “love