In this timely book, Adam Bond acquaints the reader with the Reverend Samuel DeWitt Proctor, African American minister, educator, and humanitarian, acknowledging parallels in Proctor's biography and that of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Despite the fact that Proctor did not receive the notoriety of King or other prominent African American peers, Bond maintains that Proctor is perhaps one of the greatest ethicists, scholars, and theologians of his generation.

Following a short biographical introduction, Bond moves through the opening chapter unpacking “Black Public Faith.” Here Bond juxtaposes Proctor’s witness to the black public faith tradition with that of other prominent African American leaders and preachers. Proctor saw himself as a bridge, a pragmatic harmonizer, who represented the values and beliefs that shaped the civil rights movement. Bond demonstrates how Proctor’s theo-political understandings differed from those of black liberation theology, soul theology, rainbow theology, and the womanist and feminist movements. Here the reader gains insights into the works of James Cone, J. Deotis Roberts, Katie G. Cannon, Delores Williams, Jesse Jackson, Jr., Edward V. Hill, and James Melvin Washington. For Proctor and all these leaders, the common enemy was racism.

Where chapter 2 speaks of Proctor’s foundational training as a pastor and preacher, chapter 3 delves into his formation as a public theologian. Bond surveys Proctor’s theological positions on various topics, including orthodoxy and fundamentalism, science and creation, the authority of the Bible, the immanence and transcendence of God, and the church as advocate for society. Chapter 4 discusses Proctor’s defense of black humanity and the notion that everybody is God’s somebody, even in an America where racism and race divide our republic. This chapter articulates the imposing preacher’s preaching voice, a voice now silenced for nearly twenty years, which encapsulated the same issues concerning race and racism as continue to exist in America today. Through these pages, many readers will hear one of the today’s familiar slogans—“Black Lives Matter”—echo in their ears.

As noted throughout the Imposing Preacher, Proctor often lectured, preached, and wrote concerning race and racism in America. Proctor believed “racism is a community thing.” Bond charts out Proctor’s four stages of African American existence in America: disintegration, alienation, imitation (or acculturation), and reintegration. Here, Bond provides a summary review of one of Proctor’s first books, The Young Negro in America (1966). Bond paints a passionate Proctor who spent most of his life preaching, teaching, and advocating for an “integrated, and prejudice-free society that affirms
persons of all races” (p. 123). The final pages of this fourth chapter, titled “Everybody Is God’s Somebody,” offer a lengthy discussion on Proctor’s proclamation of personhood and human freedom as an antidote to what ails America. Proctor asserts that it was the preacher’s responsibility to engage a public theology, a public theology that supports his claim that everybody is God’s somebody.

The fifth chapter describes common practices and nuances of the folk revivalist preaching tradition, college chapel/lecture preaching, and black preaching during Proctor’s time. Bond does an incredible and credible job explaining these complex and broad-reaching preaching concepts in just a few pages. Readers will find these discussions insightful and maybe even at times entertaining. After providing readers a bird’s-eye view of black preaching techniques and practices, Bond looks to Proctor to instruct the reader on the what, how, and why of preaching, examining Proctor’s personal sermon preparation habits and his overarching goals for preaching. The chapter concludes with helpful instructions on what needs to be included in a good sermon, along with Proctor’s four main themes for preaching and his outline for sermon preparation.

The closing chapter discusses Proctor’s remedy for creating a genuine community. Bond asserts that while Proctor agreed with many black theologians of the twentieth century that love is important to build a beloved or genuine community, Proctor felt strongly that education and people of faith would be the primary catalysts for real change in a racially beset America. After defining for his readers genuine community, Bond summarizes Proctor’s view of the necessities for building a genuine community in America: creating a family of justice and love; affirming the parenthood of God; making justice a public issue; practicing selfless love; and eliminating social impediments. Bond goes on to speak to what Proctor believed were the greatest barriers to building a genuine community in America.

In concluding his book, Bond makes the case that American Christianity has, regrettably to a large extent, overlooked Proctor’s life, work, and contributions. This book represents a useful resource for seminarians and students of preaching who can learn much from Samuel DeWitt Proctor. The book is full of helpful pedagogy and insights on preaching, and it provides the reader with excellent footnotes and a bibliography for further study.

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