

tory. Although no cities on the scale of Detroit or Albany sprang up in Iowa in the same period, parallel studies of Dubuque, Des Moines, Davenport, and Burlington would benefit from Greenberg's and, especially, Oestreicher's insights. In both rural and urban settings the Knights of Labor achieved a brief prominence in Iowa in the late 1880s. Aside from studies of railroaders and coal miners, the Knights in Iowa have yet to receive the attention they deserve as the pathbreakers of the Iowa labor movement.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

GREGORY R. ZIEREN

*Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930*, by George C. Wright. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985. xii, 302 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50 cloth.

Like many black Americans during the half-century after Reconstruction, Louisville's black leaders looked to self-help as a path to individual and collective progress. Typically, the journey was a frustrating one. The inefficacy of self-help, George Wright tells us, represents "an indictment of the racism in America, an irrational racism that relegated blacks to an inferior position and then ignored all of their efforts to improve and their significant accomplishments" (175). This indictment twists through *Life Behind a Veil*, as Wright describes the nature and impact of white racism in a border city.

More southern than northern, Louisville nevertheless developed patterns of race relations that differed from most southern cities, if "only in degree" (76). Louisville's black residents were never disfranchised, had little fear of mob violence, and enjoyed access to public education unmatched in the black South and even in many northern cities. When open conflict emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, both blacks and whites expressed surprise founded on a widely accepted myth that denied the centrality of racial discrimination to the city's history since the Civil War.

The "Louisville Way" defines a framework of race relations shaped by the interaction between "polite racism" and accommodationism. Polite racism, aptly defined by the metaphor of "oil and water—the whites at the top and the Negroes at the bottom" (4)—underpinned order and stability by defining a "place" for the city's black population. As long as they accepted that place blacks could enjoy the formal perquisites of citizenship and control their own institutions. The arrangement permitted white elites to claim an ideology of tolerance, while avoiding mob violence and maintaining hegemony. At the same time, it induced blacks to accept the security of a paternalistic segregation

characterized by inferior institutions and a leadership dependent on white philanthropy. They had little choice. For most black Louisvillians, militant agitation seemed foolish: they had been convinced that the privileges they enjoyed were the "best that could be hoped for" (5), especially given the frightening alternatives visible elsewhere in the South.

This equilibrium was not static. It shifted as Louisville experienced emancipation, Reconstruction, the call for a "New South," segregation, migration, economic change, and depression. Wright explains how each of these took a particular form in Louisville, and how that form in turn shaped race relations and the black community. Unlike other southern cities, for example, Louisville was "spared" Radical Reconstruction, permitting continuity in Democratic control. Unlike northern cities, it lost as many black residents as it gained during the Great Migration.

Analyzing race relations and black institutional development in Louisville within influential frameworks in Afro-American urban history, Wright hammers another nail in the coffin of the "enduring ghetto" model that emphasizes a "tragic sameness" in the black urban experience. At the same time, however, Wright's unwavering focus on an unabated racism as the most significant limiting force in the lives of Louisville's black residents suggests the importance of balancing chronological change and geographical diversity with continuity and broad national patterns. Readers of this journal might consider the applicability of the notion of "polite racism" to midwestern cities with modest black populations.

The strength of Wright's emphasis on the dialectical relationship between accommodationism and "polite racism" lies in a largely unstated argument about power. Describing occupational structure more comprehensively than class relationships, Wright has not told us enough about how power was exerted within Louisville's black community, but he has clearly delineated the relationship between power, order, and race relations. During the second decade of the twentieth century a new generation of black leaders emerged—men less committed to the stability and amiability valued by older leaders dependent on white philanthropy or personal ties to influential "white friends." Redefining the doctrine of self-help, these "New Negroes" were more willing to risk attacking the informal protocols that either substituted for Jim Crow laws or eviscerated whatever power blacks might have exercised in electoral politics. This small group of relatively militant agitators found it impossible, however, to overcome the structural dependence of the black community on white funds and political connections. The central issue was empowerment. Any black initiative

that threatened the white monopoly on power—political, economic, social, or even cultural—was quickly and easily turned away. Both the formal privileges of citizenship and the leeway to control such institutions as churches, lodges, segregated leisure establishments, and even schools could be permitted as long as blacks made no attempts to turn these institutions into forces for social change.

This review's focus on broad issues slights the richness of detail that illuminates Wright's narrative. The complex texture of race relations in Louisville emerges clearly; housing, economic opportunity, politics, and protest all receive careful attention. Drawing on an array of sources that is especially impressive to scholars familiar with the difficulties of locating material for such studies, *Life Behind a Veil* affords a view of black Louisville from both inside and outside. Most important, it uncovers the meaning and the content of that veil, behind which black residents of Louisville created a community and struggled against barriers that both limited and stimulated the development of that community.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

JAMES GROSSMAN

*The Rise of the Urban South*, by Lawrence H. Larsen. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985. ix, 220 pp.

*Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930*, by Don H. Doyle. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985. vii, 288 pp.

*Nashville Since the 1920s*, by Don H. Doyle. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985. vii, 330 pp.

During the past decade or two students of the American South have begun to pay more attention than did earlier generations of scholars to the character and importance of the section's towns and cities. Historians such as Blaine Brownell, David Goldfield, Leonard P. Curry, and Howard Rabinowitz have broadened our understanding of the economic, social, political, and cultural life of the region's urban centers. Lawrence H. Larsen and Don H. Doyle have contributed two useful studies to the growing body of literature on the urban South.

Larsen believes that the decade of the 1880s was of "crucial importance in shaping the American urban network and forging a national economy" (ix). In *The Rise of the Urban South* he examines the dynamics of southern urbanization during this critical period. He contends that although southern cities exhibited certain regional characteristics, patterns of urban development there differed little from those in other parts of the nation. However, he believes it is more important to judge

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.