

identical storefronts might be found in towns separated by hundreds of rail miles and numerous state borders.

Victorian Architecture is the second collection of architectural gems published by Plymat, an accomplished photographer with clear technical skill. Plymat argues that since the mid-1970s, when he offered his first volume of 136 black-and-white images, interest in renovating Victorian architecture has greatly increased. Finding examples of such architecture is easier, too, because of a growing body of literature such as the National Register of Historic Places.

Just as modern elevators loom over Plymat's gingerbread house, so does the bustle of modern life sometimes overshadow our historic streets and neighborhoods. Plymat's beautiful photography celebrates the vintage architecture worth preserving in these often quieter and slower places.

America's First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830-1915, by Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. xiv, 276 pp. Tables, notes, index. \$37.50 cloth.

Reviewer Darrel E. Bigham is professor of history and director of Historic Southern Indiana at the University of Southern Indiana. He is the author of *We Ask Only a Fair Trial: A History of the Black Community of Evansville, Indiana* (1987).

In *America's First Black Town*, Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua explores a small settlement in the American Bottoms that was absorbed into metropolitan St. Louis. Founded in 1830 by black families fleeing slavery, Brooklyn was platted and named by white settlers in 1837. It was chartered as a village in 1873 and renamed Lovejoy in 1891 after the martyred abolitionist. Thereafter the settlement experienced decline. A very small village during most of its history, not really a town, its population apparently peaked in 1910. The end apparently occurred when the St. Clair County sheriff declared martial law there in 1915. It is now at best an obscure place on the map.

Cha-Jua asserts that Brooklyn was distinctive because it began as an antebellum settlement and survived into the early twentieth century. By contrast, most black towns were organized in the West between 1890 and 1910. Given that significant portions of the populace were mulattoes and whites (one in eight were white and an unidentified number were mulatto in 1910), calling this a black town is misleading. Even the author acknowledges that, using such qualifiers as "predominantly" (182).

Cha-Jua, a self-described "Marxist-influenced revolutionary [black] nationalist," claims that Brooklyn's heyday was 1886 to 1894, when

John Evans, the first African American mayor, "led the movement for Black power" (21). Evans—whose life the author reconstructs mostly from public records—is portrayed as promoter of "freedom-conscious political culture" (116) and precursor of such men as Richard Hatcher.

Cha-Jua maintains in the introduction that Brooklyn's history had four periods: 1830–1870 (the era of the black laws); 1870–1885 (social, political, and economic change); 1886–1897 (contradictory processes of black political empowerment and economic underdevelopment); and 1898–1915 (economic decay and political instability). This chronology does not correspond to chronological divisions in the table of contents, and at least three different dates are given for the inception of the community's decline.

Survivors of the lugubrious, 28-page theory-driven introduction will encounter ponderous prose, heavily laden with jargon and pseudo-jargon. There are no photographs or maps, and tables providing such details as population totals and composition would have helped enormously. It is difficult to want to complete reading this book.

Ultimately, insists the author, the fate of Brooklyn depended on external factors—"racialized, capitalist locational decisions, seizure of Black political power, subsequent white flight, and economic dependence" (28). That, he alleges, presaged the fate of black majority cities in the 1960s. This work is redolent of "Black Power" screeds of the 1960s. But the case for "racial capitalism" is not made. Little is said about the whites who arrived after 1830 or about race relations. The author appears to resent the whites' presence in the community, but he nonetheless decries "white flight" after a black mayor was elected. The village serves simultaneously as haven for southern migrants and victim of racist capitalists. Too little attention is devoted, moreover, to internal dynamics—relations between blacks and whites, with their mulatto allies, or among black clergy and educators, on the one hand, and black politicians and businessmen on the other. The effect of flooding (introduced in passing) is undeveloped. Population and economic decline, in fact, characterized most towns and villages in southern Illinois and the southern Midwest after 1890. The abrupt ending of the text in 1915, with no discussion of subsequent events, is also disappointing.

Cha-Jua's extensive use of local records will serve as a model for those seeking to explore little-known places in the Midwest. The book, though, will primarily appeal to a narrow segment of theory-driven academics.

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