

*On Jordan's Banks: Emancipation and its Aftermath in the Ohio River Valley*, by Darrel E. Bigham. Ohio River Valley Series. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006. x, 428 pp. Illustrations, map, appendixes, notes, index. \$45.00 cloth.

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Darrel E. Bigham's *On Jordan's Banks* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of African American experiences in communities along an important section of the Ohio River valley from the 1850s to the 1880s. The author's astute choice to focus on the region defined by the Ohio River, rather than a particular state or community, is one that more scholars should emulate for other parts of the United States, especially those with relatively small and scattered black populations.

*On Jordan's Banks* examines black life in river communities large and small in Kentucky's 25 river counties and in 25 on the northern bank: 6 in Ohio, 13 in Indiana, and 6 in Illinois. Bigham uses an impressive range of primary and secondary sources, including monographs, articles, and theses on particular states and communities, and those mainstays of the local historian—census data, city directories, slave schedules, county histories, newspapers, memoirs, and birth, death, and marriage registers.

The book is organized into three major chronological segments. The first two, dealing with the late antebellum period and the years of the Civil War, respectively, each contain two chapters—one each addressing conditions on the northern and southern banks of the Ohio. These are effective in laying the groundwork for the more thorough and detailed discussion in section three, which addresses the postwar years through the 1880s and comprises fully two-thirds of the book's pages. There the author compares black experiences in communities north and south of the river, with separate chapters on demographics, citizenship, civil rights, suffrage, employment, family and community, social institutions, and education.

Bigham's presentation of this material is rather dry, as he chronicles each topic in turn from one community to the next, usually working along one bank before shifting to the next. Transitions often involve phrases such as "Patterns were similar downstream" (218), or "Circumstances in other cities and towns up and down the Ohio were little different" (189). This comparative analysis of similarities and differences is helpful, though often superficial. We learn that racial segregation became more typical on both sides of the river after Emancipation, though it was more entrenched in Kentucky, which also saw more ra-

cial violence. Other differences were related to population density, blacks' percentage in the population, geography, economics, or cultural factors. Generally, it seems that blacks throughout the region experienced much the same sort of conditions, with only minor variations due to local circumstances. They were constrained in all aspects of civic life, though they worked assiduously to build religious, educational, mutual aid, and social institutions to sustain their communities.

The strength of this book is its meticulous chronicling of black community life within each of the different cities and towns along the Ohio. Future researchers in the region will be grateful to Bigham for the wealth of detail he has drawn from his sources, which provide a strong foundation for deeper analyses of black experiences. Another strength of the book is its regional conceptualization; oddly, however, the author tends to look at each community as if it were an isolated entity, without any significant contact with other communities. There is never any attempt to identify regional networks of activism, organization, or even communication. One would think that African American religious denominations (Baptist or AME, especially) or national fraternal orders such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias—all of whose activities Bigham notes for separate communities—would have been in regular contact with other regional affiliates. Another obvious site for regional interaction would have been the Emancipation celebrations that Bigham identifies as important annual community events in numerous locales. Yet he neither acknowledges the presence of blacks from other communities attending those events nor appreciates the extent to which those events facilitated regional social, economic, and political networking.

This criticism aside, the book's contribution is a large one. The author offers an effective synthesis of a wide range of sources to provide substantial information about black communities along the Ohio. And his regional focus challenges us to push against the boundaries of the narrow community study. Perhaps that is enough to ask. The next essential step is for others to build on this foundation—in the Ohio valley or in other similarly coherent regions—to develop deeper analyses that explore the ways nineteenth-century African Americans envisioned their lives beyond the community and built regional networks in order to pursue their social, economic, and political aspirations.