

households?" he queries, referring to Wright's affair with Mamah Cheney in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1909 (172). His answer comes from the 1976 *Family Memories of Four Sisters*, a source he describes as an "obscure book, a family memoir" written by a "member of the Belknap family, who lived next door to the Cheneys" (172). The author, Margaret Belknap Allen, Hendrickson writes, "got some things factually wrong in the several pages she devoted to Wright and Mamah," adding quickly, "although perhaps she remembers this precisely, for it seems the kind of memory that would have burned into her brain cells" (172). To make his case against Wright, he offers as evidence Belknap's secret as she remembered it some sixty-seven years after it happened: "we children [would] look down into the Cheney living room below to watch the two of them making love" (172). What would "making love" have looked like to a ten-year-old in 1909? How many Wright-Cheney stories had Belknap heard in the intervening sixty-seven years? Is her story here no more than the whopper the present public wants to hear? The evidence is sketchy, yet for Hendrickson, it serves as an indication of Wright's callous neglect and the corrupting influence his careless attitude and perverted character had on the young.

The merit of the book? Hendrickson brings together Wright's great tragedies. Assuming we ignore the author's overly judgmental conclusions, the book presents us with the great depth of Wright's extraordinary life. *Plagued* is a book of anecdotes, real stories seldom proven true; yet the stories give us some idea of the social context in which Wright worked and some idea of the norms of the time that he challenged. Ignoring Wright's triumphs, the stories Hendrickson tells in *Plagued by Fire* illuminate the tragedies that Wright's genius overcame, and in doing so, they underscore "overcoming" as essential to his character.

Not mentioned in the book, Wright built ten buildings in Iowa. Taliesin, Wright's home in southwest Wisconsin and the site of much of the drama that makes up Hendrickson's tale, is sixty-six miles from Dubuque. Go there. You'll find that their stories are every bit as good as Hendrickson's.

The Merchant Prince of Black Chicago: Anthony Overton and the Building of a Financial Empire, by Robert E. Weems, Jr. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020. xii, 210 pp. \$24.95 paperback.

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Anthony Overton was the owner and operator of the Chicago-based Overton Hygienic Manufacturing Company, the maker of High Brown Face Powder and other products. Founded in 1898, Overton Hygienic remained a going concern until 1983. In the 1920s, Overton used strategic networking and marketing to expand his business interests into newspapers, banking, and insurance. The son of enslaved Louisianans, he was the first African American to head a major business conglomerate.

Business historian Robert Weems has written what will no doubt be the definitive study/biography of this important American businessman. Due in part to the lack of company records and Overton's own self-making myths, there has been a great deal of misinformation about him. Weems's main contribution is the incredible historical sleuthing he has done to recreate an evidence-based history of Overton's rise, fall, and unlikely survival as a businessman into the 1940s. This work included tracking down and assessing everything ever written about Overton, interviewing family members, diving deeply into Illinois history, and thoroughly scouring credit reports, insurance surveys, and city directories, which yielded important financial information about Overton's companies.

This is fundamentally a biography, a story of a complicated, talented man, born at "the dawn of freedom," who through hard work and business smarts built an empire and made himself a pillar of Chicago's black community, only to lose almost everything in the Great Depression, due in part to his legally questionable loans to family members. Competing against black businesswoman Madam C. J. Walker, Overton started the *Half-Century Magazine*, the main vehicle by which he advertised his wares, which was operated and staffed by black women and designed to attract black women readers. He was a "race man," who rejected crassly racist advertising and promoted race pride and cooperation. His company hired and promoted women into leadership positions. It would be easy for this story to veer into hagiography, but Weems is at his best in recounting Overton's legal troubles, which arose from Overton's strategic employment of his children and their spouses in his companies, and which also provide a window into the interactions between midwestern power structures and the black business community.

Weems has an eye for compelling details and the reader will not only learn about Overton's life and exploits, but also about black business in the Midwest in the twentieth century—the competition between black banks, the evolution of the black skin and haircare industry, the intersection of racial advancement and economic nationalism, all undergirded by the American apartheid system, which existed even in the

Midwest. Although born in the South and raised in Kansas, Overton was very much a midwesterner, which became clear when he won licenses to expand his Victory Life Insurance Company into New York and New Jersey markets; a fascinating story that reminds us of how regionally segregated markets were at this time. Finally, for people interested in state and local history, there is an excellent extended discussion of how the city of Chicago was able to restore and repurpose the *Chicago Bee Building* (built by Overton) and the Overton Hygienic Building as part of the revitalization of Bronzeville, the center of the Black Metropolis of the 1920s.

When Sunflowers Bloomed Red: Kansas and the Rise of Socialism in America, by R. Alton Lee and Steven Cox. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2020. 324 pp. Photographs, illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Greg Hall is professor of history at Western Illinois University. He is an expert on labor history in the American West and the author of *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Labors in the American West, 1905–1930* (2001).

During the early twentieth century, socialism in the United States was at its peak in popularity. It was as much of an urban movement as it was a rural movement as recent scholarship demonstrates with studies such as David Berman's *Radicalism in the Mountain West, 1890–1920* and Jeffrey Johnson's *"They Are All Red Out Here": Socialist Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1895–1925*. R. Alton Lee and Steven Cox offer their own similar regional study with *When Sunflowers Bloomed Red*. Most students of American socialism are familiar with the *Appeal to Reason*, the longest running and most widely read socialist newspaper in American history, which was published out of Girard, Kansas. Yet, a thorough history of socialism and related radicalism in Kansas has not received substantial scholarly attention until now. Lee and Cox examine socialism in the state thematically. They analyze the movement with a series of distinct chapters in which the authors focus on writers, politicians, women, farmers, and workers. Chronology is present as well in the study, which makes the book an analytically coherent examination of socialism over time in Kansas. The authors caution, however, that a definitive history of socialism in the state would be difficult to create due to many short-lived socialist and radical periodicals produced in Kansas having not survived for researchers to examine. The same is true for a paucity of