

Reviews

A Black Women's History of the United States, by Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2021. 252 pages. \$27.95, cloth. \$15.99, paper. \$16.00, electronic.

In *A Black Women's History of the United States*, Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross write black women into the foundation and fabric of U.S. history, showing that black women arrived in North America long before the American Revolution and played crucial roles in every major development since. As “powerful change agents,” Berry and Gross argue, black women helped to construct and reconstruct the nation by mobilizing against oppression and in support of their families and communities (p. 3).

A Black Women's History joins a growing body of scholarship inspired by Howard Zinn's 1980 blockbuster, *A People's History of the United States*. It is the fifth volume in the Beacon Press “ReVisioning American History” series, which makes histories of oppressed minority groups accessible to a general readership. Berry and Gross do not position their work historiographically, though they clearly draw on scholarship that demonstrates black women's importance to major historical events and developments; they identify black women as a vanguard that “paved the way not just for other Black women but for all marginalized peoples” (p. 210).

Individual black women guide readers through each chapter of the book. Angela, captured in Angola in 1619 and subjected to the brutal “Middle Passage,” takes us into the dehumanizing experience of enslavement; Belinda Sutton shows us how enslaved women petitioned courts for their freedom; Millie and Christine McKoy, conjoined twins born into slavery, introduce us to the abuse of black female bodies that gave rise to gynecology; Mary Bowser operates as a Union spy in the home of Jefferson Davis; Frances Thompson, born enslaved and male, fights to live as a black woman alongside those who demanded opportunity, civil liberties, and reparations; Augusta Savage, a Harlem Renaissance artist, imbibes Marcus Garvey's race pride, sculpts his likeness, and produces art for the Works Progress Administration; Alice Coachman, the first black woman to win an Olympic gold medal (1948), applauds other black women who organized in the 1950s to demand respect and equality for themselves and others; Aurelia Shines resists racial segregation on city buses long before Rosa Parks, demonstrating the daily heroics of unknown black women;

Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress (1967) also runs for president (1972) in a race doomed because women and black men failed to unite behind her. More recently, Therese Patricia Okoumou climbs the Statue of Liberty to denounce Donald Trump's policies against the poor and people of color.

Berry and Gross's ambitious text interweaves these stories with those of more well-known black women while helping us understand a major historical development highlighted by the elections of 2016 and 2020: black women have created the most solid and dependable voting bloc in modern United States history (p. 214). Consistently mobilizing their communities, they have demanded that this nation live up to its own ideals by making them available to all.

A Black Women's History will educate readers in and out of the classroom. All teachers should use it to help them integrate black women's history into their courses. High school and college instructors might assign it alongside a traditional textbook to help students compare and contrast interpretations and learn that history is an ongoing conversation, not a settled debate. How, teachers might ask, does this book challenge our historical memory? Why have we not heard the stories presented here? Why did Berry and Gross begin their history in 1600—when Isabel de Olvera, a free woman of African descent, came to North America—instead of in 1619? Are they implicitly challenging the recent “1619 Project” by *The New York Times*, which displaces 1776 as the nation's founding year in order to highlight the role of race-based slavery in its birth? What does it mean to begin this story in freedom rather than slavery—at a time when the future of black people on the continent remained an open question?

This imaginative, lucid text will provide a model for future scholars, even as it incites debate. Should black women's history be separated from mainstream narratives? Does the book's focus on the “everyday heroism of Black women” (p. 163) imply that a history of oppression has made black women more community-minded, righteous, unselfish, and brave? What role have differences of class, education, religion, sexual orientation, and political party played in black women's history? Why does the text capitalize “Black” but not “white,” a choice that has raised considerable debate elsewhere (as explored in Kwame Anthony Appiah's “The Case for Capitalizing the *B* in Black” in *The Atlantic*)? Thus, *A Black Women's History* does not only introduce readers to a new history of the U.S., it will also inspire questions and provoke lively discussions that are as historically grounded as they are timely. This is what the best history books do.

Binghamton University

Zacharey M. Blackmer and Leigh Ann Wheeler

Depression Folk: Grassroots Music and Left-Wing Politics in 1930s America, by Ronald D. Cohen. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016. 201 pages. \$90.00, cloth. \$29.95, paper. \$19.99, electronic.

Ronald Cohen clearly states the subject of *Depression Folk* at the outset, which is “the role of folk music, broadly defined, during the trying years of the Great Depression

in the United States, 1929-40" with a "focus on the role of left-wing political groups and individuals" (p. 1). The book delivers just that, effectively capturing the convergence of folksong collecting, left-wing activism, federal programs, and commercial recording of vernacular music catalyzed by the Great Depression. In the process, the volume summarizes and extends a rich historiography anchored in texts such as Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1996), Benjamin Filene's *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (2000), John Szwed's *Alan Lomax: The Man that Recorded the World* (2010), and, indeed, much of Cohen's own extensive *oeuvre*. The result is a concise primer of 1930s cultural history that works well as an introductory or review text for scholars and students of all levels.

Anchored in the Great Depression, the book proceeds chronologically from the turn of the twentieth century to World War II. The cast of characters is vast and familiar, including Mary Elizabeth Barnicle, Lead Belly, Woody Guthrie, Zora Neale Hurston, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Paul Robeson, Carl Sandburg, Charles and Pete Seeger, Josh White, and many more, with a particular (and understandable) focus on the father-and-son team of John and Alan Lomax. The Lomaxes practically become the protagonists here, guiding the readers through the decade's dizzying cultural and political changes. In Cohen's rendering, folk music could hardly have come to the center of the New Deal order without them. Prior to John Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910), the intellectual project of American folk song fixated on how such music demonstrated American culture's continuity with the British Isles. In looking west to the cattle trails and south to the cotton fields, the Lomaxes celebrated a diverse American vernacular music created in response to American conditions, a soundtrack that accompanied the period's populist nationalism championed by political actors from the Communist Party, to the CIO, to New Deal Democrats. That the Lomaxes and their allies navigated this turn just as the commercial record industry captured and marketed a similarly wide array of vernacular songcraft amplified a new sense of American music. This surging interest by both intellectuals and record executives paralleled folk music's activation both from the grassroots (in labor struggles from Gastonia to Harlan) and from the halls of Washington D.C. (in agencies such as the Federal Music Project, the Resettlement Administration, and the Archive of American Folk Song).

Cohen deftly juggles these various narratives throughout the book, using case studies of individual careers to demonstrate his larger arguments. Folk music's impact in reimagining the American nation in the face of crisis rings clearer with each and every page. By the later 1930s, Cohen argues, this rising chorus also elicited significant resistance as conservatives pushed back at New Deal interventions, CIO organizing drives, and Communist influence. Nevertheless, even as the backlash blunted left-wing activism, left-wing voices continued to sing out. It was in the period between 1938 and 1941, Cohen writes, that Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, Alan Lomax, Paul Robeson, and others gained even greater visibility through radio and other media.

This conservative response could thus mute, but never quite erase, the connection between folk music and a progressive American nationalism, which would be reinvigorated by the coming generation of the Folk Revival. Cohen alludes to these later developments, but the narrative might benefit from greater detail on, say, the

connection between Pete Seeger's People's Songs and the presidential campaign of Henry Wallace, or McCarthyism and blacklisting as a legacy of the Dies Committee. But that could be the subject of another book, and the real strength of *Depression Folk* is Cohen's ability to take an exceedingly complex cultural moment and so successfully distill its essence. In this, Cohen's approach itself has something of a Popular Front bent, producing a book that is usable, accessible, and engaging throughout. *Depression Folk's* powerful narrative at the intersection of crisis and culture and national identity is a compelling read right now. As Cohen quotes Woody Guthrie late in the book: "There's a heap of people in the country that's a having the hardest time of their life just this minute" (p. 133). This sensibility, its urgency, suffuses the history Cohen documents in these pages and connects *Depression Folk's* time to our own every bit as much as "This Land Is Your Land."

Texas State University

Jason Mellard

The Allure of Blackness among Mixed-Race Americans, 1862-1916, by Ingrid Dineen-Wimberly. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019. 267 pages. \$60.00, cloth. \$60.00, electronic.

Ingrid Dineen-Wimberly's *The Allure of Blackness among Mixed-Race Americans, 1862-1916* examines why numerous mixed-race, well-educated, upper-class Black folks that could pass as White (and had even done so at points in their lives) chose to embrace Blackness in the half-century after the Civil War. This choice, Dineen-Wimberly contends, was motivated *both* by civil rights activism and by self-interest. "There is, however, significant evidence," Dineen-Wimberly argues, "that a vocal Black identity adopted during the late nineteenth century afforded many people of mixed-race ancestry in the U.S. access to increased economic, political, and social status" (p. 1). Dineen-Wimberly succeeds in demonstrating that our understanding of racial passing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is often too simplistic, which obfuscates the agency of those who found themselves caught between the color line at the precise moment when W. E. B. Du Bois identified it as *the* "problem of the twentieth century."

The book is divided into four chapters, each analyzing the "allure" in different arenas of Black life. Chapter 1 looks at noted Louisiana politician P. B. S. Pinchback. In May 1862, Pinchback was married to a White woman and joined the Union army as a White private. Five months later, however, Pinchback "declared himself a Negro" (p. 2) and as a Captain led the all-Black 2nd Louisiana Native Guard, or Corps de Afrique. Pinchback's sister was outraged by this decision, writing to him that she was "angry to see you classing yourself among the *despised race* [emphasis added]...If I were you...I would take my position in the world as a white man as you are and let the other go" (p. 12). After the war, Pinchback became active in the Republican Party. By the early 1870s, he had served as a Louisiana state senator, became the nation's first Black governor, and was elected (but never seated) in Congress. For Pinchback, Dineen-Wimberly insists, embracing Blackness

afforded the chance to enter the ranks of post-bellum Black political leadership and acquire social status and esteem likely unavailable to him as a White person.

The second chapter explores how, in addition to political influence, embracing Blackness offered some mixed-race men unique opportunities to accumulate wealth via property ownership. Chapter 3 builds upon the author's analysis in the first chapter, but shifts focus abroad to mixed-race U.S. diplomats like Richard T. Greener. Greener graduated from Harvard in 1870, served on the faculty at the University of South Carolina beginning in 1873, and by 1877 was the dean of Howard Law School. By the 1880s, rumors of Greener and his family passing as White began to undermine his ascent in the ranks of Black social and political leadership. Greener eventually left academia and his career in private industry sputtered. Greener then shifted to foreign service, where he held a position as a U.S. diplomat in Vladivostok, Russia. Unfortunately for Greener, he could not outrun the rumors that he and his family passed for White. By 1907, those suspicions among other Black leaders derailed his political career.

The book's final chapter examines how mixed-race women, like Josephine B. Willson Bruce and E. Azalia Hackley, through organizations like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), positioned themselves as uniquely suited to facilitate the racial uplift of Black communities. However, as Dineen-Wimberly asserts, the logic of racial uplift, embodied and disseminated by club women, often reinforced some of the most noxious tenets of eugenics. Nevertheless, here, again, the benefits of these women's embrace of Blackness were also personal. As the author writes, "It was the process of lifting that enabled elite mixed-race leaders to advance their social and, at times, economic status" (p. 194).

At points, "allure" is a difficult thing to prove. Greener, for example, seems to have only begun passing for Black after the profits of his passing as White dried up. The decision, in other words, may not have been "alluring," but the only option for an opportunistic Greener. On the other hand, Dineen-Wimberly's book raises interesting questions about the nature of the decision to pass as Black. Did these race leaders believe, for example, that racial equality—or some form of it—would be achieved in their lifetime? Exploration of such questions could add even more nuance to the author's analysis. Still, Dineen-Wimberly's analysis is at its best when it details all of the nuanced ways that racial categories in the half-century after the Civil War were nebulous and porous. Such insight allows readers to see racial formations in process. While the most of the nation was seeking out ways to bolster the color line, mixed-raced leaders were using its interstices to advance their own interests and those of Black civil rights.

Dineen-Wimberly's biographical narratives offer undergraduate and graduate students accessible and compelling chapters to explore the nuances of racial formations at the turn of the twentieth century. For the former, the lives of P. B. S. Pinchback and Richard Greener offer in-depth examinations of the ways in which Black folks navigated the color line as Jim Crow took root in American society. For the latter, chapters like that on club women further complicates existing scholarship on the politics of organizations like the NACW.

Behind the Carbon Curtain: The Energy Industry, Political Censorship, and Free Speech, by Jeffrey A. Lockwood. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2017. 280 pages. \$29.95, paper. \$29.95, electronic.

Many of us, even in academic circles, labor under the misimpression that the First Amendment operates unmolested in democratic systems and that no significant barriers are posed to free speech in a place like the United States. That belief appears to be true when compared to news-grabbing headlines about governmental suppression by dictatorial regimes like those in Russia, Saudi Arabia, or China. But the Wyoming writer Jeffrey Lockwood suggests that we might look closer to home, because we are missing out on how deeply censorship is woven into U.S. politics through collusions between industry and government that can be quite blunt and insidious, if mostly unseen.

Behind the Carbon Curtain: The Energy Industry, Political Censorship, and Free Speech makes the compelling case that censorship is a serious concern for the health of American politics. The author takes as his case study the State of Wyoming, a state that in many ways resembles a third-world energy colony. As he explains, Wyoming is singularly dependent on a handful of fossil fuel industries for government revenue, economic development, and support for its lone university. In fact, no less than 60%, and possibly as much as 75%, of the state's revenue derives directly from royalties and severance taxes gained from mineral extraction. Wyoming "produces nearly four hundred million tons of coal per year or twelve tons per second," representing approximately one-sixth of the world's coal (p. 5). On a national scale, the state provides a staggering 40% of the U.S. supply of coal; produces 9% of the U.S. supply of natural gas; "ranks ninth among the states in crude oil production"; and mines "more uranium ore than any other state in the nation" (p. 5). While Americans on the coasts are unfamiliar with western locations like the Powder River Basin or the Pinedale Anticline and Jonah Field or with names like the McMurrays, Arch Coal, or Mark Northram, Lockwood claims they should be familiar with them. These are places and names associated with the biggest surface mining and natural gas operations in the country and, consequently, with national sacrifice zones characterized by miles upon miles of pockmarked earth, toxic sludge ponds, aquifer depletion, chemical fracking residue, and extraction practices that generate some of the worst ozone quality in the nation while contributing to declining deer and grouse populations (pp. 145-152). This is a region and a political regime, Lockwood reminds us, that gave us Dick Cheney's pro-mineral development policies under the Bush Administration in the early 2000s, and it is a place that has only become, if Lockwood is right, more threatening to the functioning of a valid democracy.

Behind the Carbon Curtain centers on several well-researched accounts of the suppression of free speech over energy practices in the state. Any one of the cases presented here could be used to build a meaningful teaching unit on how free speech gets curtailed in the United States through explicit and implicit pressures that include such things as: threats to defund schools—as nearly 75% of the University of Wyoming's base funding is dependent on the energy industry

(p. 75) and the favored phrase is “don’t bite the hand that feeds you” (p. 31); outright censorship of art and public speech (pp. 116-130); intimidation of citizens through SLAPP lawsuits (p. 76); defunding of scientific research critical of the industry (p. 160); and—perhaps most insidious, to use Lockwood’s term—the ever-present self-censorship that comes with knowing that one’s job, one’s supervisors, and one’s future prospects count on a person remaining silent (p. 111). Lockwood demonstrates quite persuasively that censorial pressures based on a tight collusion of government officials and captains of industry have put a systematic chill on the ability of activists, artists, educators, scientists, administrators, and employees in the state to speak and research freely in a way that is not so unlike a banana republic. Perhaps most interesting is the case of an art installation entitled *Carbon Sink: What Goes Around Comes Around*, which connected coal burning to bark beetle infestations and climate change, and which so riled up local industries and legislators that the state passed a bill determining that all future art to be funded and displayed at the state’s university “shall be submitted to the university’s energy resources council and governor for approval” (p. 29). The cases are so frank and so stunning that one wonders where the line gets drawn between autocratic regimes and those regimes we deign to call democratic.

National University

Bob Johnson

Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s, by Traci Parker. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019. 313 pages. \$90.00, cloth. \$27.95, paper. \$21.99, electronic.

In February 1960, four African American students sat the Woolworth’s lunch counter reserved for white customers in Greensboro, North Carolina. This sit-in often serves as a significant turning point in the history of the Civil Rights Movement, used to mark the initiation of student-led, non-violent, direct action campaigns. These narratives follow the sit-in movement across the South, culminating in the organization of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement*, Traci Parker keeps our focus on the lunch counter, or, more specifically, in the department store. Parker argues that 1960s-era sit-ins were part of a longer history of “a potpourri of campaigns that varied across time and space in leadership, size, tactics, and organization” (p. 4). Beginning in the 1930s and extending into the 1980s, this department store movement linked labor and consumer concerns and “promised to not only dismantle Jim Crow but also facilitate the growth of a modern black middle class and advance black economic freedom and well-being” (pp. 4-5).

Parker’s research illuminates how and why the department store served as a central site for activism. In the 1930s and 1940s, store employment offered an alternative to exploitive domestic service or manual labor. Relegated to menial

positions in stores, African Americans consistently pressured owners to open higher-paying sales and management positions that would acknowledge equal skills within the store's workforce and confer middle-class status in the broader community. At the same time, African Americans used growing consumer power to end Jim Crow practices that included prohibiting black customers from using store dressing rooms, ignoring black customers in order to serve white customers, and keeping black customers under scrutiny while they shopped. As Parker argues, in a nation defined by consumer economics, equal employment and equal treatment in department stores was an important marker of equal citizenship.

Parker's analysis locates a consistently active movement with roots in the 1920s and 1930s and continuing through the conspicuous consumption of the 1980s. Leadership was not centralized and, as a result, Parker pieces together a series of case studies that move from early "Don't Buy" campaigns; to organized moral suasion efforts designed to convince store owners to change policies; to the sit-ins, picket lines, and boycotts of the 1960s; and ending with complaints filed with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the 1970s and 1980s. As Parker's analysis reveals, efforts to extend employment opportunities and to remove markers of segregation were most successful when activists linked labor and consumer issues and when activists employed direct action tactics.

Parker's accounts of her own family's shopping trips and her mother's employment add personal connections that will resonate with readers of a certain age. Undergraduate students will likely see parallels between Parker's descriptions of campaigns to remove racist images from products and store displays with more recent decisions to change brand names such as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben's. Parker's analysis shows that these efforts have a longer history, that removing these images and labels is not a frivolous gesture, and that change happens when people organize and force the change. Undergraduate readers, particularly those working in retail, will also likely relate to Parker's analysis of the decline of the department store. As big-box discount stores and online retail siphoned customers away from shopping malls and department stores, store employment was increasingly deskilled, so that working a cash register trumps an ability to deliver personalized service. As Parker explains, these broader changes eroded the foundation for the department store movement by decoupling African American labor and consumer activism. The decline of department stores closed an avenue to the middle class for American workers, and African Americans in particular. Parker's analysis shifts discussions about the impact of big-box and online stores on local retail to examine the broader implications for the black freedom movement.

Parker's work is firmly grounded in historiography about post-war consumer culture and the labor movement. At times, she allows these historians to state her analytical conclusions. More attention to attributing these quotes in the text would help the reader to identify the source and clarify Parker's original contributions to the fields of labor history and post-war consumer culture. Overall, Parker's careful research restores a significant component to the history of the black freedom struggle.

Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America, by Joe William Trotter, Jr. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021. 296 pages. \$29.95, cloth. \$24.95, paper. \$29.95, electronic.

Joe William Trotter, Jr., a leading scholar of black working-class history for decades, has now written a comprehensive and cogent synthesis of African American, labor, and urban history that should be widely read in undergraduate and graduate history classes. Trotter's book focuses on black urban labor from its emergence in the colonial era through its flourishing in the twentieth century. With a well-structured framework, tightly written chapters, and prose that is crisp, if not always glowing, Trotter offers a history of resilience and resistance in the enduring struggle for racial justice—a history that speaks directly to our present moment of reckoning with systemic racism across our nation.

Trotter finds the roots of the black urban working class in the transatlantic slave trade and colonial America's port workers. With the increase in European immigration in the nineteenth century, urban black workers were often confined to fewer and lower-skilled occupations. Nevertheless, Trotter shows how black men and women, as they often did in the face of virulent racial prejudice, strived to carve out some space for black lives to matter. Black men nearly monopolized trades such as barbering and catering, and used their entrepreneurial skills to acquire commercial and residential property in many cities.

Turning to the twentieth century, Trotter reminds readers that the history of housing and residential neighborhoods is crucial to understanding the modern black urban experience. Black communities were shaped physically (especially in the North and West) by restrictive covenants in land deeds and equally constrained banking practices through "redlining." Picking up on the classic sociological term of "Black Metropolis" rather than the more condescending and pejorative "urban ghetto," Trotter again shows how African Americans resisted such limitations wherever possible and built complex, enduring networks of churches, newspapers, fraternal organizations, political clubs, civil rights organizations, and labor unions.

In the crucial decades of the 1930s and 1940s, African American workers willingly put their lives on the line, literally, to organize industrial unions in the CIO, even as many craft unions in the AFL continued to protect white privilege wherever possible. Black workers embraced interracial organizing, along with some progressive white workers, as both a necessary strategy to preserve workplace solidarity in the face of management's divide-and-conquer tactics, and a deeper commitment to the principles of racial justice and equality. The stony path from A. Philip Randolph's threatened March on Washington during World War II to Dr. King's speech at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 demonstrates the centrality of the dual struggle for jobs and freedom—civil rights and workers' rights are inextricably bound together in the American experience, and black workers have known that fact for literally centuries. Today, black workers form the core of many unions as those organizations struggle to survive in a hostile legal and political climate.

Trotter's book concludes with the rise of the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party as deeply embedded in modern urban economics, politics, and protest. He also traces carefully how the black urban working class, just

when the nation finally broke down much of the legal framework of Jim Crow and began to open up more employment opportunities for workers of color, also witnessed the sharp decline of the American manufacturing sector and the loss of many good paying union jobs. Black men and women, and their neighborhoods, saw whatever tenuous hold they may have had on a stable working-class life (let alone a middle-class one) slip into a long descension punctuated by a sharp increase in long-term unemployment, grinding and seemingly unending poverty, grotesque maldistribution of income and wealth, collapse of urban infrastructure and commitment to public schools, intrusive violent policing, and the incarceration of millions of black men.

Workers on Arrival is both a timely book, and one that should stand the test of time and be in many classrooms for years to come. It offers a narrative of black resilience and resistance to racist oppression in the U.S. across centuries, along with crucial historical perspectives on what seem to be (but should not be) intractable problems of systemic racism in our nation today. Moreover, its appendix is a capacious historiography of literally hundreds of scholarly sources on the complex intersections of African American, labor, and urban history—a compilation that will benefit teachers and students alike. This thoughtful and eminently readable synthesis will guide students to a deeper understanding of the long struggle for black freedom and justice, and give all those who want to work toward a more inclusive and just future an essential and broad foundation of historical knowledge for the important work ahead.

North Carolina State University

David A. Zonderman

Caribbean New Orleans: Empire, Race, and the Making of a Slave Society, by Cécile Vidal. Williamsburg, VA: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, and Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019. 552 pages. \$49.95, cloth. \$29.99, electronic.

Cécile Vidal places race at the heart of the French colonial project in New Orleans. Founded later than other French colonial ports, and in frequent contact with places like Saint-Domingue, residents of New Orleans adopted laws that codified race and internalized racial hierarchies that had developed in the Caribbean. Creating a “relational history of urban slavery” that “takes into account all sides of the organic relationship between slaves and masters” (p. 500) in an urban context through an exhaustive examination of legal records, correspondence, official reports, and judicial archives, Vidal finds that racial ideas and practices “inform[ed] all its social institutions and relations” (p. 23) from its founding in 1718 and onward. The argument of *Caribbean New Orleans* places it at odds with prevailing views of the process of racialization, demonstrating that it occurred (1) much earlier in the eighteenth century than typically represented in the Atlantic world, and (2) prior to the emergence of a substantial population of free people of color. Returning

to her analytical category of the *ville* of New Orleans, Vidal credits the social complexity and mobility inherent in the urban space of the port city in part from these developments. Slaves could move about the city without the restrictions imposed by remote plantations, and the presence of transient populations of sailors, soldiers, and others created opportunities for class-based solidarity that reinforced the importance of grounding the social hierarchy in racial terms.

As befits its form—*Caribbean New Orleans* emerged from Vidal's *habilitation à diriger des recherches (HDR)* (p. vii)—the book is dense both in terms of its sources and its arguments. As a self-described “cisatlantic history” (p. 35), Vidal's study places New Orleans in its Caribbean context, but not, pointedly, in comparison. Helpful for not distracting from its intense focus on New Orleans, it also means that those less familiar with the Caribbean may miss some of the implicit, but powerful, arguments throughout. The density of the evidence coupled with the depth of the argumentation pose challenges to incorporating the text into classrooms below the level of a graduate seminar. While the text itself might prove daunting for all but the most advanced students, the insights contained therein should inform how slavery and race in the eighteenth century are taught.

Vidal contests the strict dichotomy most historians have posited between a rigid two-tiered biracial society in North America and a more fluid three-tiered social order in the Caribbean. Perhaps the most important insight delivered by the author concerns the chronology of racial formation. Vidal argues with ample evidence that, contrary to most common conceptions, ideas of race do not necessarily precede acts of racial discrimination. Throughout eighteenth-century New Orleans, the formation of ideas of race and the use of race as a means of discrimination and social control proceeded in tandem, each informing the other. Moreover, the focus on slavery in an urban context, rather than on plantations, demonstrates that the survival of the system of slavery rested on more than just the power of slaveholders over their slaves. To survive in the complex social environment of a port city that acted to “weaken the boundaries between slavery and freedom,” slavery required a “regime of collective governance” (p. 501) where whites—both those who owned slaves and those who didn't—cooperated to monitor and police the actions of slaves.

The book's exploration of the entire New Orleans white population's complicity in the production and reproduction of slavery throughout the eighteenth century should merit discussion in the classroom, especially in light of recent reassessments of the prevalence of structural racism in American society. Vidal's work demonstrates how even white residents who stood to benefit little from the perpetuation of slavery could still become complicit in its defense by helping to produce and enforce notions of race.

While the length and complexity of *Caribbean New Orleans* may limit its direct classroom use, its comprehensive examination of the evidence and innovative arguments about the production of race in the eighteenth century make it an invaluable resource for any educator interested in extending nuanced discussions of race and the legacies of slavery back to the eighteenth century.



The History Teacher

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By 1967, the expanding collaboration of educators reorganized as the **History Teachers' Association** and decided to transform the bulletin into an academic journal—*The History Teacher*.

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The Society for History Education, Inc. (SHE) was recognized by the State of California in 1972.

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