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Mark R. Schneider. *Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 1890-1920.* Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997. xiii + 262 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55553-295-6; $45.00 (library), ISBN 978-1-55553-296-3.

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The dawn of the twentieth century represented one of the historical low points of the African-American experience. The changes wrought by the Republican Reconstruction of the South had collapsed and faded into memory, and the many black Americans who remained there now faced the loss of their hard-won civil rights. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, southern blacks contended with disfranchisement, segregation, economic repression, and a rise in racial violence and lynchings. With the hardening of the color line in the South, northern whites also retreated from their dedication to the principles of racial equality that had brought about the passage of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution. During this period the U.S. Supreme Court legitimized segregation in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, American political leaders abandoned blacks and black civil rights, and racist currents pervaded even popular culture as the film *Birth of a Nation* became a national sensation. In the words of historian Rayford Logan, the advance of Jim Crow in the New South betokened a "nadir" for African-Americans.

In *Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 1890-1920*, Mark Schneider seeks to illuminate how the residents of Boston, a city with a long antislavery tradition and a historical commitment to improving the welfare of African-Americans, reacted to this phenomenon. Boston's longstanding antiracist reputation stemmed from the antebellum efforts of abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, politicians John Andrews and Charles Sumner, and reform-minded idealists Harriet Beecher Stowe and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Late-nineteenth century Bostonians professed to honor this antislavery legacy through statues and monuments that depicted the antiracist heroes of the past. Yet this myth of Boston as a "bastion of freedom" was not always consistent with the ways turn-of-the-century Bostonians viewed the Jim Crow South.

Schneider's study is divided into seven thematic chapters, each examining a different aspect of the relationship between prominent Bostonians and the rise of Jim Crow. Thus the opening chapter's discussion of the failed Federal Elections Bill of 1890, which sought to protect black suffrage in the South, revolves around the Boston Brahmins affiliated with the measure, Republican congressmen Henry Cabot Lodge and George Frisbie Hoar. Ensuing chapters examine Booker T. Washington's support network among elite black Bostonians, white suffragist Lucy Stone, black militant William Monroe Trotter, the leadership cadre of Boston's branch of the NAACP, the Irish-born Bostonian John Boyle O'Reilly, and finally the careers of three highly prominent "Boston jurists" (p. 187), U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, black attorney William Henry Lewis, and NAACP president and co-founder Moorfield Storey. As Schneider states in his Preface, these disparate subjects serve as "representative types who acted on the race problem in this period" (p. xi). Together, these individual portrayals show "the political and intellectual lives of activists as they looked outward at the race relations of the nation as a whole, and how they relied on their sense of the past" (p. xiii).

In its entirety, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow* is a tale of decline and retreat. Bostonians had played leading roles in abolitionism and Reconstruction, fighting for and attaining black emancipation and civil rights. But in the face of the discriminatory policies of the New South, the heirs to this tradition failed to live up to the model of earlier generations. Boston's wealthy Brahmin class gave up the fight for African-American equality early on, as leading political figures and newspaper editors abandoned black causes after their abortive efforts to pass the elections bill in 1890. Bostonian leaders of the women's suffrage movement not only ignored black women in their efforts, but even embraced white supremacy as a means of expanding their popularity in southern states. Whites in positions of power, including both a new cadre of Irish-American politicians and prominent legal personalities such as Oliver Wendell Holmes showed little inclination to use their influence on behalf of black advancements.

This trend affected Boston's black community, as well. The city's leading African-Americans did very little to counter the rising tide of racism. Elite blacks, already rendered ineffectual by their lack of economic and political clout, mostly took refuge in the accommodationist camp of Booker T. Washington and his Tuskegee Machine. Even black militant William Monroe Trotter undercut his own activist efforts through his divisive and inconsistent behavior. For Schneider, the one bright spot in this dim picture was the creation and growth of the NAACP, a biracial organization whose supporters included key black figures W.E.B. DuBois and Butler and Mary Wilson, as well as white "neo-abolitionists" Moorfield Storey and Francis Garrison, scion of William Lloyd Garrison.

Author Mark Schneider (who teaches American History not in Boston itself, but in nearby Cambridge at Lesley College) writes in a clear, fluid prose. His detailed depictions of the book's particular "representative types" creates a sense of inclusion, in which the attitudes of Boston Brahmins can be examined alongside those of elite blacks, immigrants, and feminists. There are moments, however, when this works to the book's detriment. While chapters on elite white and black Bostonians are entirely relevant to Schneider's argument, the lengthy chapter on Irish-Americans is less germane. Much of its focus is the experience of two Irish-born activists, neither of whom was even alive during the period under discussion (Catholic Emancipator Daniel O'Connell, referred to as "the Martin Luther King of Irish politics" on p.163, never even came to America prior to his death sometime around 1850–Schneider does not furnish the specific year–and immigrant John Boyle O'Reilly died in 1890). The full chapter devoted to these men and later generations of Irish-Americans, who had little apparent reason to concern themselves with the race question and thus essentially ignored it, seems superfluous.

Some of the author's other individual chapter choices are also questionable. The book's final chapter, which examines three of Boston's best-known legal figures, is one such example. Each of these men had a story that could easily be subsumed within the flow of earlier, broader chapters: Oliver Wendell Holmes' racial inaction fits squarely into the Boston Brahmin class examined in Chapter One, African-American attorney William Henry Lewis is a prime example of Chapter Two's discussion of the ineffectiveness of elite blacks, and Moorfield Storey, co-founder of the NAACP, could and should have been incorporated into the chapter devoted to the early history of that organization. A separate chapter on the suffrage movement, subtitled "The Legacy of Lucy Stone," begins with a feminist and former abolitionist who actually died in 1893, at the outset of the period covered in the book. While much of the chapter offers an informative discussion of how later suffragists came to embrace white supremacy, that argument is not advanced by the juxtaposition of two black elite women, neither of whom were active suffragists, with Lucy Stone and her heirs. While these female figures had their gender in common, there is little other reason to lump them together in a chapter on suffrage. Although its attempt at inclusiveness is admirable, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow* suffers from its desire to leave no one out of the story.

At times, the author's decision to structure the book in self-contained thematic chapters proves to be less than ideal. The first chapter on the Federal Elections Bill of 1890 begins with a tight focus on the last decade of the nineteenth century. Yet subsequent chapters encompass the entire era of 1890-1920, while some individual chapters jump back and forth in time. The chapter on Booker T. Washington, for example, begins with a brief recapitulation of Washington's famed Atlanta Compromise speech of 1895. After a fleeting mention of a speech Washington delivered in Boston in 1899, the chapter examines, in order, the 1900-1904 tenure of the black-published *Colored American Magazine*; the history of a second black Bostonian publication, *Alexander's Magazine*, which lasted from 1905 through 1909; the story of the Bookerite National Negro Business League beginning back in 1900 up until 1915; and finally the white Bostonian supporters of Washington from 1895 through Washington's death in 1915. Schneider's piece on William Monroe Trotter shares this disjointed approach toward chronology. After discussing Trotter's life and career from his birth in 1854 through 1920, the chapter backtracks to examine the period from 1902-1907 in greater detail. A chronologically-arranged narrative might have mitigated some of the confusion created by the book's thematic structure.

Furthermore, despite its inclusiveness *Boston Confronts Jim Crow* is notable for some of its exclusions. That two marginal Irish figures merit their own chapter while W.E.B. DuBois, regarded as a linchpin in Schneider's discussions of Washington, Trotter, and the NAACP, does not is inexplicable. The chapter on Trotter, "perhaps the single most important figure in all of Boston's African-American history" (p. 109), is unaccountably the shortest in the book at only twenty-one pages. In it, Schneider gives only a perfunctory examination of the "Boston Riot," which he identifies as a seminal event in the history of race relations in Boston; such important details as the

date of the "Riot," an explicit description of Trotter's disruptive behavior and the ensuing melee, and some indication of Trotter's intentions in precipitating the "Riot," are all omitted.

Boston Confronts Jim Crow also restricts itself in terms of its historiographical approach. Following the example of Rayford W. Logan, Schneider examines the topic of Bostonians and race strictly within the contexts of politics and the law. Yet this holds the book back from contributing to a wider discussion of the meanings of race at the turn of the century. The book's Bibliography leaves out several works on nineteenth-century conceptions of race that would have grounded and enriched Schneider's presentation, including Eric Lott's provocative *Love and Theft*, Ronald Takaki's *Iron Cages*, and David Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness*. Without taking deeper issues of social constructions of race into consideration, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow* passes on the opportunity to demonstrate the larger significance of its subjects.[1]

Finally, the near-total absence of most of black Boston from this book is a serious deficiency. In his Preface, author Mark Schneider cautions that "much is left out here that pertains to Boston's African-American history in this period" (p. xiii). This proves to be true, as the thousands of black Bostonians consigned by Schneider to the "rank and file" make only rare appearances in this book devoted to the history of their leaders. This undermines many of the points Schneider seeks to make. Assertions of the influence of William Monroe Trotter and the NAACP rest on their support among the masses of blacks; yet this support is often assumed without direct proof. If leadership in black Boston is to be judged by the number of attendees at a mass meeting or by membership figures, it is crucial to show that most of the people involved were in fact from Boston. What were the circulation figures for black newspapers in Boston, especially Trotter's *Guardian*, which is held up as evidence of Trotter's leadership (p. 125-127)? Who were the black members of Boston's NAACP, and how active were they within the organization?

While Schneider rarely deals with ordinary black Bostonians, when he does so he uses the conclusions offered by Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck in her 1979 study *Black Migration and Poverty: Boston 1865-1900*. This is understandable, as Pleck's is the only comprehensive work yet published on black Boston during this period; nevertheless, historian Elliott Rudwick's detailed critique of *Black Migration and Poverty* suggests that caution must be taken with some of her findings. While Schneider does use one other historical work, James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton's *Black Boston*, as background for a short summary of the history of blacks in Boston, his Bibliography neglects to cite two other recent books on the subject by Carol Buchalter Stapp and George Levesque.[2]

In fact, the history of black Boston is vital to understanding the broader historical context of *Boston Confronts Jim Crow*, most notably with regard to the exceptional traditions of antiracism and antislavery that Schneider ascribes to the city. While Boston surely was a hotbed of antebellum abolitionism, it would be inaccurate to ignore the counterbalances of racism and discrimination that were also a part of the city throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1800's blacks did dwell in "the Copp's Hill area of the North End" and the "north and west slopes" of Beacon Hill, as Schneider notes (p. 5); but the popular names for these neighborhoods, "New Guinea" and "Nigger Hill," suggest a racial intolerance that Schneider is reluctant to identify. Black Bostonians celebrating the 1808 ban on importing slaves endured the attacks of derisive spectators and journalists heckling their "Bobalition" parades. It was in Boston, "the home of abolition" (p. ix), where mobs gathered in opposition to abolitionist speeches, and where William Lloyd Garrison was dragged through the streets at the end of a rope in 1835. And less than a decade before the Civil War, Boston remained the only community in all of Massachusetts to maintain the legalized segregation of black high-school students. Schneider asserts from the outset that Boston had a great "investment in its past" (p. ix). Yet there were many aspects to that past, and all of them contributed to the way Bostonians viewed race at the turn of the century.[3]

Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 1890-1920 delivers a basic introduction to some of the major personalities, events, and issues surrounding turn-of-the-century Boston's attitudes toward race. However, the scope and structure of this book will limit its usefulness to scholars seeking a broader understanding of the subject and the period.

Notes

[1]. Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Press, 1991); Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

[2]. Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty: Boston, 1865-1900* (New York: Academic Press,

1979); James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979); Carol Buchalter Stapp, *Afro-Americans in Antebellum Boston: An Analysis of Probate Records* (New York: Garland Press, 1993); George Levesque, *Black Boston: African-American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860* (New York: Garland Press, 1994). Elliott Rudwick is sharply critical of both Horton and Pleck in his review essay, "Black Urban History in the Doldrums," *Journal of Urban History* 9, 2 (February 1983), 251-260.

[3]. For white hostility toward "Bobalition," see Shane White, "'It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," *Journal of American History* 81, 1 (June 1994), 13-50; anti- abolitionism among Boston whites, including elite Brahmins, is described in Liva Baker, *The Justice from Beacon Hill: The Life and Times of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 57 and 95; see the fifth chapter of Levesque's *Black Boston* and Arthur O. White, "Salem's Antebellum Black Community: Seedbed of the School Integration Movement," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 108, 2 (April 1972), 116-118 for segregation in Boston schools.

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