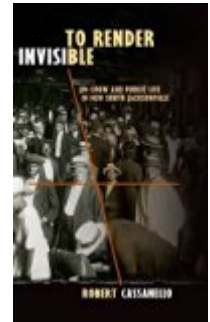


Robert Cassanello. *To Render Invisible: Jim Crow and Public Life in New South Jacksonville.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013. 192 pp. \$74.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-4419-4.



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Published on H-SHGAPE (October, 2013)

Commissioned by Julia Irwin (University of South Florida)

In *To Render Invisible: Jim Crow and Public Life in New South Jacksonville*, Robert Cassanello reveals the development of Jim Crow segregation in the city from Reconstruction through the Progressive Era. In his introduction, he references both Frederick Douglass's and W. E. B. DuBois's discussions of the "color line" that separated citizens of the South by race. This line delineated the black realm from the white realm of society and affected all aspects of daily life. Another way to think of this is in terms of space, or spheres--public and private, and white and black. A major focus of Cassanello's work is the use of space and the contestation of it by both groups. This book is about how, in the process of transitioning from the Old South to the New South, the city of Jacksonville, Florida, transformed from relatively equal access in public space to segregation and marginalization by the 1910s.

Immediately after the Civil War, public space in Jacksonville changed markedly. The author refers to noted sociologist Jürgen Habermas's work on public space. Habermas equated public

space with democracy as did the freedmen of Jacksonville. Abolition "recast public space within the city as new and undefined" (p. 10). It no longer belonged exclusively to influential whites, but also to blacks, as well as northern whites who moved in to support Reconstruction. Thus, public space became both competitive and contestable. Many blacks realized that the end of the war did not guarantee equality, or even the privileges of citizenship. Exercising the right to use public space, and to move freely, became important for freedmen in the early Reconstruction period. This reinforced the reality of freedom not just for freedmen, but also and more important, for white Floridians. Ultimately, access to public space by blacks was critical to their obtaining and maintaining participation in political discourse.

Even black soldiers in the occupying Union army found it necessary to publicly attempt to protect their equality. At the time, a common punishment for serious infractions was publicly "stringing-up" the accused by the thumbs. Black soldiers found this treatment dehumanizing and

reminiscent of slavery. After one such episode, a group of black soldiers, defined as a “mob,” took the victim down, after which a confrontation between the mob and white officers ensued. In what became known as the “Jacksonville Mutiny,” six black soldiers were summarily executed by the army. The episode demonstrates the necessity for blacks to question their public treatment and insist that it be commensurate with their new roles in society. It also points to the predisposition of whites, both northern and southern, to insist on the subordination of blacks. Thus, it is apparent why many blacks questioned the long-term prospects for white acceptance of blacks’ societal and political equality.

Cassanello notes that, after the war, spaces both public and private, were in a state of “flux” (p. 23). Public space constituted a middle ground where sociopolitical equality could at least be negotiated between blacks and whites. Union officials, the army, and the Freedman’s Bureau frequently stepped in to mediate access to public space. The Freedman’s Bureau was especially engaged in these negotiations. The bureau mediated disputes between blacks and employers, businessmen, and other white citizens. The common thread is that all of these disputes occurred within the public sphere. Through the 1870s, Jacksonville’s black citizens made considerable progress in “democratizing” space and gaining access into public office, city jobs, and businesses. Nevertheless, at the same time, they found themselves being pushed to the outskirts of town to live. Physical marginalization soon came to become sociopolitical marginalization as segregation moved from being merely an informal circumstance to a legally enforced reality.

As Jim Crow’s institutionalized segregation and disfranchisement set in, public space was once again redefined. What developed was a white-only “public” and a black “counterpublic” (p. 59). Within this counterpublic, Jacksonville’s African American population maintained its own

public and political discourse. Meanwhile, the city’s white population was either unaware or unconcerned with the wants, needs, or expectations of the black community. When the whites were aware of what was going on in the black community, it was often associated with violence and/or politics. Cassanello notes the existence of a “mob-public” in both the white public and black counterpublic (p. 40). Initially, the mob-public was most apparent at political conventions, which were marked by raucous displays by blacks and poor whites. More ominously later on, it became apparent in the forms of race riots by blacks and lynching by whites.

Particularly interesting is Cassanello’s discussion of Jacksonville’s Orange Park School, a racially desegregated school founded by northern whites soon after the war. The school was meant to be an equal access space from the very beginning. Moreover, there was no separation of the races within the school; all classes and public spaces were completely integrated. Not surprisingly, white southerners opposed the school’s policies and targeted it. The result was the passage of Sheats Law, named after William Sheats, an opponent of the school. The law, passed by the Florida legislature in 1895, “strictly” separated the races in private schools, clubs, and fraternal organizations. By segregating even private spaces, an action seemingly beyond the legal power of the state, whites revealed the near limitless measures that they were willing to take to limit black access to ANY space. Moreover, it reveals the extent to which blacks had been politically marginalized by that time.

Overall, *To Render Invisible* offers a valuable look at the shift from postwar access to Jim Crow exclusion in public life in a fairly typical southern city. It reveals how segregation was not the immediate result of slavery, nor an inevitable outcome. During Reconstruction, there was in fact relatively equal access to public space. In addition, blacks often asserted equal access to space over the

years. Segregation was largely a product of a resurgent white population bent on supremacy. Cassanello's scholarship is excellent. An important source that he uses is the autobiography of James Weldon Johnson, a Jacksonville native who witnessed the process firsthand during his lifetime, 1871 to 1938. Johnson was a well-known scholar and lyricist who penned the words to "Lift Every Voice and Sing," considered by many as the African American national anthem. Criticisms of Cassanello's work are relatively few. Unfortunately, his discourse on black women in the public sphere is reminiscent of other works on the activities of club women. The author's theoretical approach to history and use of space may also bother some readers. Sometimes Cassanello's descriptions of what constitutes public and private space are confusing. At other times, the insistence on talking about "spaces" rather than organizations, communities, etc., seems strained. Nevertheless, *To Render Invisible* tells us much about the development of the segregated South, which far outweighs any minor shortcomings.

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Citation: Mark Stanley. Review of Cassanello, Robert. *To Render Invisible: Jim Crow and Public Life in New South Jacksonville*. H-SHGAPE, H-Net Reviews. October, 2013.

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