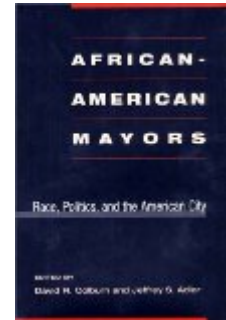


**David R. Colburn, Jeffrey S. Adler, eds..** *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001. viii + 266 pp. \$32.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-252-02634-8.



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African-American Mayors: Elections and Administrations

This volume which includes chapters from ten historians is a welcome addition to the literature for those who teach urban politics, urban history, or any classes that deal with the struggle for political power by racial minorities. For those thinking about a text for classroom use, the only shortcoming of this volume is that it is not available in paperback. The cases vary by region, span the last thirty years, and include cities with minority and majority black populations. The book does not really present much in the way of new scholarship, however. Many of the chapters present data and analysis that is widely available. For instance, chapters on Chicago, New Orleans, New York, Los Angeles, Detroit and Atlanta offer analyses of the elections and administrations of African-American mayors that reprise works long available to students and scholars. Three other chapters, on Gary, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C., round out the case studies presented in this volume. The chapter on Marion Barry and D.C. politics by Howard Gillette, Jr. (Rutgers University,

Camden) is a particularly impressive discussion of a mayor who has not received the same depth of scholarly attention as Coleman Young, Tom Bradley or Harold Washington. Gillette's chapter goes beyond historical recapitulation to offer a provocative interpretation of Barry's administrations that does not allow his personal failings to completely obscure his mayoral achievements. The chapters on Gary and Cleveland are a strength of this volume simply because they are included. The histories of both cities prefigure a number of important patterns in African-American mayoral politics including the splintering of established Democratic party organizations that presents the opportunities for black insurgents, the defection of white Democrats to a white Republican candidate rather than Richard Hatcher or Carl Stokes, the impediments to governance that entrenched urban bureaucrats presented to these two mayors, the importance of federal urban aid dollars for mayors that are trying to expand the coalition of beneficiaries, and the class divide that would emerge among blacks after the unifying battle of electing a first mayor had been won. Both of these cities are rich in data for com-

parisons, particularly with other Eastern and Midwestern cities in which African-American politicians rose as anointed and coopted members of a white dominated, Democratic party, patronage organization and were challenged by relatively independent African-American progressives. Inclusion of these two important but often neglected cases is another strength of this book and James B. Lane (Indiana University, Northwest) and Leonard N. Moore (Louisiana State University) give readers enough information about Gary and Cleveland respectively that they will not be driven to additional sources by necessity only by curiosity.

The opening two chapters are excellent overviews for those not steeped in the study of minority empowerment; undergraduates and graduate students will be rewarded by a careful reading. Jeffrey Adler's comprehensive discussion of the variables that help to explain the advance and limitations of African American political power in American cities is alone worth the price of admission. He discusses in turn the role of the civil rights movement, the urbanization of the African-American population due to the Great Migration, both the tax base impact and the reshaping of the electorate caused by subsequent white outmigration, deindustrialization's impact on the urban economic opportunity structure, the urban concentration of African-American poverty, the role of the federal dollars spigot, and the remnants of political machines that subordinated black communities and battled black mayors. The chapter also discusses racially polarized elections and the pressures on African-American mayors to shift from a reformist strategy to a pro-business, growth agenda. Each of these topics is accompanied by enough citations to satisfy the most inquisitive of students. For scholars who are new to the field, both Adler's chapter and the chapter by coeditor David R. Colburn (both at the University of Florida) show how the subdiscipline of minori-

ty politics is linked to large issues of political economy, federal politics, and poverty policy.

As with so many edited works, this volume suffers from a lack of common subject matter across articles. The absence of a concluding chapter that offers cross-case comparisons exacerbates this shortcoming, although it does offer a ready made opportunity for a student assignment. Quite often one author will make an interesting observation that leads the reader to wonder about the relevance of this phenomenon in the other cases. For instance, the chapters on Los Angeles and New York (by Heather R. Parker, Hofstra University, and Roger Biles, East Carolina University) both point to the way opponents of African-American elected officials will call on them to condemn Louis Farrakhan. This creates a no-win situation in which these leaders must either risk alienating some of the more nationalist segment of the African-American electoral base by condemning Farrakhan or risk alienating potential white liberal support by refusing to condemn Farrakhan. In some cities, homegrown nationalist or separatist African-American leaders play a similarly polarizing role. Yet we hear nothing about this tactic either from the editors in the overview chapters or in the other case studies. Similarly, Ronald H. Bayor's (Georgia Tech) chapter on Atlanta mixes electoral analysis with a fine discussion of how growth machine interests represent an unelected power base with which mayor's must contend and shows how these developmental interests set the agenda to which mayor's must respond. Similar dynamics most likely exist in the other cases but none of the other authors are nearly as explicit in their theorizing about the autonomy of elected officials from the clout of capital or whether African-American mayors are more susceptible to such pressure because of tenuous legitimacy. Arnold Hirsch's (University of New Orleans) discussion of Chicago politics is one of the few chapters that includes analysis of the roles of Latinos and Asians in contemporary coalitions. Particularly because these groups have taken positions that

ranged from tepid support to opposition to African-Americans in recent years in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, the absence of in-depth discussion is unfortunate. A final variable that is handled unevenly is the changing level of federal aid to cities and how this impacts African-American administrations and minority constituencies.

These few problems notwithstanding, this edited volume represents a useful primer on the struggle for urban political power by African-Americans. It covers a good range of cities and offers readers some insightful theoretical analysis about the electoral battles of African-American mayoral candidates, and the dilemmas of African-American administrations. When it is released in paperback it will be an excellent choice for classroom use.

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