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Samuel C. Jr.. Hyde, ed. *Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. x + 275 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2577-3.

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Civil Rights Movements

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In the past two decades, scholars have dramatically reshaped the historiography of the civil rights movement. Earlier works in the field focused on the activities of major national civil rights leaders, the work of national organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League, and political battles in Congress in the 1950s and 1960s leading to passage of national civil rights legislation. In the 1980s, books by William H. Chafe, Robert J. Norrell, and David R. Colburn–case studies of civil rights action in Greensboro, Tuskegee, and St. Augustine–demonstrated how much could be learned from studying the movement from the local level.[1] Aldon D. Morris's book, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, was published about the same time. A sociologist, Morris effectively made the case for a civil rights movement built from the bottom up by black churches and community organizations.[2] Since the mid-1980s, an array of new state and local studies has transformed the historiographical landscape. As civil rights historian Charles W. Eagles has suggested, "The local community study has in fact nearly supplanted the earlier emphasis on great men and big organizations operating on the national stage.[3] As a result of this work, it is now clear that the civil rights movement was in reality many civil rights *movements*, innumerable local groups confronting segregation and discrimination, energized by indigenous local leadership and moved to action by local conditions or events. These local action groups generally struggled on their own, outside the national spotlight and with little or no connection to national leaders or organizations.[4] Occasionally, as in Montgomery, Birmingham, and elsewhere, when local movement action reached crisis stage and became newsworthy, national organizations and leaders might move in to provide assistance or even to take control, but this did not always happen. In short, two decades of new research has energized the field of civil rights history, documenting the vital role of local agency in the black freedom struggle.

The original essays in Samuel C. Hyde, Jr.'s *Sunbelt Revolution* illustrate the general historiographical tendencies outlined above. The book pulls together nine separate essays on civil rights action in five Gulf South states–Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. The essays range over time, from the 1860s in New Orleans to the 1960s in Biloxi, Mississippi, and Bogalusa, Louisiana. The long time frame dating back to the mid-nineteenth century provides an important corrective to many accounts which suggest that the civil rights movement sprang into motion in the 1950s and that there was little to write about before that decade. The nine essays also cover a diversity of civil rights actions, from bus boycotts and beach wade-ins to demonstrations against the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision and the Democratic Party's white primary and in favor of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. They place local activists at the center of civil rights action–preachers, church members, community organizations, editors, NAACP activists, union members, and thousands of citizens willing to march, demonstrate, register to vote, participate in boycotts, and otherwise challenge Jim Crow. Each case study, moreover, confirms Aldon Morris's thesis that the civil rights struggle represented a bottom-up phenomenon–one that emerged out of local racial situations with little connection to any national "movement." Collectively, then, the essays in *Sunbelt Revolution* provide a persuasive picture of a civil rights movement marked by continuity, complexity, persistence, and, most importantly, the commitment of local citizens to take risks in dangerous times in the struggle for racial change.

In his introduction to the book, editor Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., argues that the Gulf South states shared a common history shaped by climate, demography, culture, and proximity to the Gulf of Mexico. Although often por-

trayed as a "backwater in the annals of southern history" (p. 1), the Gulf South in Hyde's analysis represents a distinctive region worthy of serious study. This southern sub-region, he writes, was marked by several significant and distinctive characteristics. These included the influence of Caribbean cultural traditions, the emergence of Creole communities that blended racial difference, and the powerful role of the Catholic Church in such cities as New Orleans, Mobile, and Tampa. The Gulf South "once championed racial violence to sustain white supremacy" (p. 15), Hyde writes, but African Americans in the region from the Reconstruction period onward persistently challenged oppression and segregation and struggled for equality. Indeed, the Gulf South, he contends, "can arguably be considered the region most essential to determining the course of the civil rights struggle from its inception" (p. 6). Thus, Hyde's introduction makes several significant assertions: first, that the Gulf South offers an appropriate unit of study; and second, that the civil rights struggle in the region had a crucial impact on the larger movement. These large arguments, however, remain problematic. A careful reading of the essays suggests an alternative interpretation. The big story is not so much how these case studies illustrate something unique about the Gulf South region and the civil rights movement there. Rather, the chief conclusion to be drawn from the separate essays is how powerfully they confirm Aldon Morris's thesis on the local community origins of the civil rights movement.

The first two case studies focus on black activism in New Orleans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, providing extensive new data validating Morris's community organization argument. James G. Hollandsworth's piece uncovers a persistent campaign among New Orleans free blacks seeking voting rights as early as 1862–a campaign launched by editor Paul Trevigne in the pages of the new French-language newspaper *L'Union* serving the city's black Creole community. Over the next few years, during Union occupation of the city, free blacks demonstrated for voting rights and even delivered a petition to President Lincoln demanding black suffrage; as a consequence, Lincoln wrote to Louisiana's Union governor asking "whether some of the colored people may not be let in"–that is, permitted to vote (p. 22). In early 1865, free blacks joined with freedmen in an Equal Rights League to achieve enfranchisement. Later that year, however, President Johnson's amnesty declaration led to the ouster of Union loyalists by former Confederates, dramatically altering the political climate. In 1866, during meetings of a state constitutional convention debating voting rights, racist whites viciously attacked black civil rights demonstrators in what was soon labeled the New Orleans Riot of 1866. Blacks did get the right to vote in Louisiana's constitution of 1869, but a decade later these gains were wiped out as Reconstruction came to an end. The modern civil rights movement, Hollandsworth suggests, can trace its origins back to the mid-1860s, when free blacks from the New Orleans Creole community challenged southern racial patterns.

A second New Orleans essay, written by Joseph Logsdon (and completed by Lawrence Powell after Logsdon's untimely death in 1999), carries the Creole civil rights campaign through the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Logsdon focused on the work of Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, a Creole lawyer and community activist who traced his family roots to Haiti and whose outlook was shaped by ideals of "interracial brotherhood" stemming from the French revolutionary tradition. In the 1880s, Desdunes helped establish several civil rights organizations promoting black voting rights and enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1875. He supported a new bi-lingual Creole newspaper, *Crusader*, which quickly became "an aggressive vehicle for social protest in New Orleans" (p. 52). In the 1890s, in cooperation with a new national organization, the National Citizens Rights Association, Desdunes shaped a legal test case in Louisiana challenging segregated public accommodations. This legal battle over segregated intrastate railroad seating eventually ended up in the U.S. Supreme Court–the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. Creole militancy suffered a setback in *Plessy*, but Desdunes contended that "liberty is won by continued resistance to tyranny" (p. 60). Taken together, the New Orleans essays document an almost-forgotten pattern of Creole activism that predated the modern civil rights movement by almost a century.

Following chronologically, Houston B. Roberson's essay on Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church confirms a revisionist interpretation challenging the traditional view that the late-nineteenth century represented the "nadir"of race relations in the United States. Rather, Roberson contends, between the 1880s and 1920s the Dexter Avenue congregation of middle-class blacks found ways of challenging white power and creating black opportunity through what the author calls "accommodating activism." Given its location across from the Alabama State Capitol building on land that formerly served as a slave trader's pen, the construction of the church itself represented "a dramatic act of resistance" (p. 80), carving out a central public space for black religiosity and political activism within sight of what once served as the Confederate capitol. Robert Chapman Judkins, Dex-

ter Avenue's pastor for a decade after 1905, pursued a "ministry of social justice and racial uplift" (p. 80), but he also founded and edited a newspaper, the *Colored Alabamian*, that advocated black enfranchisement and political equality and that regularly condemned racist practices. Women's organizations at Dexter Avenue provided important social services and health education, raised funds for training black Baptist ministers, and advocated black women's suffrage. In 1918, Dexter Avenue church members helped to organize an NAACP chapter, which promoted black education and demanded state action to curb lynchings. Roberson argues that such actions persistently challenged racist practices–a pattern of resistance that "helped lay the groundwork for the more direct, confrontational activism that characterized civil rights protest in the mid-twentieth century" (p. 74). Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, of course, achieved prominence in the 1950s when its pastor, Martin Luther King, Jr., assumed leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott.

The Montgomery bus boycott is the subject of Raymond Arsenault's essay, "One Brick at a Time," which offers an excellent example of a more complex revisionist civil rights history. Arsenault recognizes the fragmented nature of the 1950s civil rights movement, and especially the cultural divide between northern and southern activists. The Montgomery bus boycott caught northern leaders and national organizations by surprise. It took several months before the Montgomery action was recognized for what it was–a major challenge to the southern Jim Crow system that needed the support of the national civil rights network. Arsenault's main interest is in tracing the impact of the bus boycott on national civil rights organizations centered at that time in New York City, especially the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), both of which pioneered in nonviolent resistance. National organizations reacted slowly to the December 1955 arrest of Rosa Parks and the formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which conducted the boycott. A few months later, however, FOR sent long-time peace and civil rights activists Bayard Rustin and Glenn Smiley to Montgomery to work with MIA. Their key role was to bring the principles of nonviolent resistance to Martin Luther King and MIA–a crucial development for the modern civil rights movement. As a result of the bus boycott's ultimate success, and the consequent validation of passive nonviolence, King became a national figure, the "American Gandhi." Arsenault also argues that the outcome in Montgomery and the emergence of King encouraged national civil rights organizations to focus on the South and, eventually, to collaborate on movement building. This essay, perhaps more than any other in the book, makes clear the complexity of the civil rights movement, especially in illuminating uncertain, emerging links between local action and national organizations.

Race relations in Florida provide the subject of two essays in *Sunbelt Revolution*. Gary R. Mormino takes a state-wide perspective in his piece on the history of Florida's white primary. Florida's post-Civil War state constitutions reinforced white supremacy and authorized poll taxes and other measures to restrict black voting. In the 1890s, along with other southern states, Florida legalized white-only primary elections to counter the perceived threat of black voting. Mormino notes that despite its image as a tourist playground and vacation paradise, Florida remained "a deeply stratified Jim Crow state" (p. 138) through the first half of the twentieth century–a racial pattern reinforced by lynchings, race riots, and a reinvigorated Ku Klux Klan. A major turning point nationally in race relations came during World War II, when black editors launched the "Double-V" campaign, returning black veterans demanded full citizenship, and civil rights activity intensified. Paralleling these racial shifts, the 1944 Supreme Court decision in *Smith v. Allwright* outlawed the white primary, but in Florida official white resistance to black voting continued for the rest of the decade and into the 1950s. Courageous black activism, especially the work of Florida NAACP leader Harry T. Moore, eventually opened up the political system to African-American voters. In 1944 Moore organized the Progressive Voters League, perceived as a political arm of the Florida NAACP, and launched a voter registration campaign throughout the state. Moore's relentless activism made him, his biographer has written, "[t]he most hated black man in the state of Florida."[5] Consequently, he was targeted by violent white supremacists, who bombed his house in 1951, killing him and his wife. As in New Orleans and Montgomery, local action spurred the civil rights movement in Florida. Moore had ties to the national office of the NAACP, and Thurgood Marshall often traveled to Florida to represent African Americans or investigate lynchings, but the hard work of voter registration and community organization fell to black activists like Moore on the state and local level.

A second Florida essay, written by Gregory B. Padgett, provides a history of the Tallahassee bus boycott during 1956 and 1957. The Tallahassee civil rights campaign had spontaneous origins. Two female students at Florida A. and M. University, tired from downtown shopping, sat in the white section of a city bus because the black section at the rear was completely occupied. They

refused to move when asked by the bus driver and were arrested, thus initiating a year-long racial confrontation in Florida's capital city. It was May 1956; the Montgomery bus boycott was still under way and may have provided inspiration to the two students. The incident galvanized the student community, which held a mass meeting and decided on a bus boycott. Tallahassee's small but cohesive black community was mostly supportive, and under the leadership of a Baptist preacher, C. K. Steele, the Tallahassee Inter-Civic Council (ICC) was established to conduct the boycott and create a car pooling system similar to that used in Montgomery and in an earlier, almost forgotten, 1953 bus boycott in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Steele and the ICC sustained the boycott through bi-weekly mass meetings, despite police intimidation, show trials, legislative investigations, Klan marches, and cross burnings. In 1957, with its profits in severe decline, the bus company itself challenged the legality of the segregated seating ordinance, and the Tallahassee city commission backed off and quietly ended the controversy by rescinding the law. But the bus boycott had energized the black community, setting the stage for future civil rights action in Tallahassee by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s. Padgett's essay provides an excellent example of local civil rights action growing out of local racial circumstances.

James Patterson Smith's essay on civil rights activity in Biloxi, Mississippi, offers still more evidence for this interpretation. Denied access to any of Mississippi's twenty-six miles of Gulf beachfront, black activists conducted several confrontational but nonviolent beach "wade-ins" in the Gulf Coast city between 1959 and 1963. Led by two local black physicians, Gilbert Mason and Felix Dunn, the Biloxi beach action stimulated white violence and intimidation, led to Mason's arrest and trial, and eventually prompted an unusual federal intervention under the 1957 Civil Rights Act to guarantee access to public facilities. It also aroused the local black community, spurred a successful voter registration campaign, gave life to local NAACP chapters in Mississippi, and encouraged black parents to challenge school segregation. Touched off by the first Biloxi wade-in of May 1959, Smith writes, "an indigenous civil rights movement was coming to life without outside help or support" (p. 220).

In an essay on civil rights action in Louisiana, Roman J. Heleniak details racial confrontations in Jonesboro and Bogalusa in the 1960s. Young black activists in both places built bottom-up movements, namely chapters of the militant Deacons for Defense and Justice–a group that preferred armed self-defense instead of nonviolence and passive resistance. However, some blacks in Bogalusa rejected the aggressively militant approach of the Deacons and formed the Bogalusa Negro Voters League, which demonstrated for an end of segregated public facilities and job discrimination. But black activism in Louisiana is not the author's primary concern. Rather, Heleniak centers his essay on the role of Governor John McKeithen, a moderate segregationist who sought to avoid the defiant actions of his counterparts in Alabama and Mississippi. Heleniak situates McKeithen's racial decision-making in the context of Louisiana's Democratic Party politics, President Lyndon Johnson's vigorous support of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (announced in a speech in New Orleans), Louisiana's on-going dispute with the federal government over offshore oil revenues, and the vicious attacks on civil rights demonstrators in neighboring states. Thus, McKeithen intervened in Jonesboro to defuse a tense racial standoff, and in Bogalusa he used state police to protect civil rights marchers. On one occasion in 1967, in a rare turnabout, state troopers used their clubs on racist whites who were attacking demonstrators marching from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge–quite a contrast to what had happened in Selma and Birmingham. Later that year, the governor ordered the hiring of black state policemen. This essay, then, takes more of a top-down approach to the civil rights story in Louisiana, although all of the elements are there for a bottom-up analysis, as well.

One final essay, written by Rebecca Montes, analyzes labor union activity on the docks in Texas during the Great Depression, but it, too, documents local initiative in promoting civil rights goals for both black and Mexican workers. Historically, blacks were heavily represented among longshoremen on the Texas Gulf; blacks and whites had separate locals of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) in the region and shared equally in available dock work. An AFL affiliate, the ILA recruited Mexican-American workers during the depression years to achieve greater control of on-shore warehouse labor, where most Mexicans worked, but also to fend off the growing influence of CIO waterfront unions. As Montes writes, "this multiracial cooperation challenged the strict segregation of the Gulf South in the first half of the twentieth century and the virulent racism of many other unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor" (p. 103). But because each group had differing expectations, perceptions, and goals, the ILA in Texas had its problems: whites "felt stigmatized by working in a predominantly black profession" (p. 105), blacks saw the union primarily as a means of demanding

equality on the job and in the community, and Mexicans joined to enhance their identity as Americans. In fact, the ILA in Texas actively supported some civil rights issues, such as voting rights and a Congressional anti-lynching bill, but because of white opposition the union ignored the issue of the white primary. Mexican-American dockworkers eventually recognized their second-class status in the ILA and shifted their loyalties to a competing CIO-affiliated union. The essay makes clear the complicated racial environment in depression-era Texas, concluding that the ILA's promising experiment in racial cooperation foundered on the shoals of union exploitation and rank-and-file racism. Unlike the other essays, this piece does not place civil rights activism front and center.

Taken together, these essays reveal many different civil rights movements over space and time. Local circumstances differed from state to state and city to city, but black agency and activism provides a powerful common thread over more than one hundred yeas of civil rights struggle. As noted at the beginning of this review, the editorial effort to squeeze these separate civil rights case studies into a somehow unique Gulf South regional experience remains unpersuasive. New Orleans best fits the Gulf South regional characteristics identified by Hyde: it had some recognizable Caribbean cultural characteristics, the racially mixed Creole population was influential, and both the white and black population was heavily Catholic. But several of the other case study cities, such as Montgomery and Tallahassee, had different histories and different cultural and religious patterns. And much of what happened in the way of civil rights activism in the five states considered here also happened in other places south and north, which undercuts the argument that the Gulf South had a separate or different history. In the context of several decades of civil rights historiography, what stands out most strikingly in this book is the way in which communal activism bubbled up from the local level–civil rights movements each unique in many ways, yet very similar, derivative even, in their protest techniques and in the ways in which they articulated the hopes and aspirations of black Americans.

Notes

[1]. William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Robert J. Norell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); David R. Colburn, *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

[2]. Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984). See also Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan, eds., *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991). It should be noted that valuable civil rights studies with a national focus continue to be published, as well. For a sampling, see Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960-1972* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Mark V. Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Viking, 2001); Carol Polsgrove, *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Norton, 2001); and Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).

[3]. Charles W. Eagles, "The Civil Rights Movement," in *A Companion to the American South*, ed. John B. Boles (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), p. 467.

[4]. For examples of such state/local studies, see Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); James R. Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Kim Lacy Rogers, *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Genn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Glenda Alice Rabby,

The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999); J. Mills Thornton III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Peter B. Levy, *Civil War on Race Street: The Civil Rights Movement in Cambridge, Maryland* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); and Raymond A. Mohl, *South of the South: Jewish Activists and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

[5]. Ben Green, *Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore, America's First Civil Rights Martyr* (New York: Free Press, 1999), p. 4.

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