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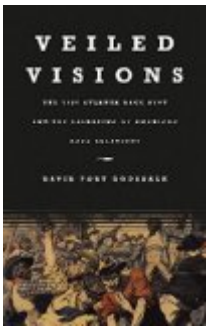
David Fort Godshalk. *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. xvi + 384 pp. $59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-2962-2.



Reviewed by Keith Volanto

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September 2006 marks the hundredth anniversary of the horrific Atlanta race riot. In *Veiled Visions*, historian David Godshalk goes beyond merely retelling the details of the racial massacre. Instead, the author provides the first book-length analysis of this tumultuous riot's far-reaching effects on the city of Atlanta and American race relations.

The book's opening three chapters portray Atlanta in 1906 as a rapidly growing commercial hub, receiving a constant influx of new white and black rural migrants. Along with this frenetic activity came marginalization of the white working class, increased commingling of the races, and a host of local newspapers locked in such a desperate competition for white readership that they resorted to race baiting in order to increase sales. Throughout the summer of 1906, Atlanta's papers continuously reported instances of local black-on-white crime, especially stories of women claiming to have been raped by black men. Oftentimes, mere allegations were presented as determined fact. Further, the papers presented these reports in a deliberately inflammatory style geared towards inciting the emotions of its readers.

In these early chapters, Godshalk also introduces readers to the views of preeminent African American leaders amid the deteriorating racial climate. It was in Atlanta ten years earlier, the author reminds us, that Booker T. Washington delivered his famous Exposition Address outlining his accommodationist approach to the denial of black civil rights: if African Americans focused on hard work, maintained their sobriety, and followed a proper moral code of conduct, white prejudices would gradually dissipate and blacks would gain their proper place in southern society as social equals. This view had already been challenged during the pre-riot years by a group of local black intellectuals led by Atlanta University professor W. E. B. Du Bois. Before the riot, however, their protests were largely limited to the written word and organizing into small groups to spread their message of nonacceptance of the *status quo post-bellum*.

And then the riot came. Godshalk's fourth chapter details all the bitter elements of the con-

flagration. On a Saturday afternoon (September 22), local whites in the Five Points section of downtown Atlanta erupted upon hearing new reports of yet another white woman claiming to have been violated by a black assailant. Young whites, primarily working-class men (though supplemented with many middle- and upper-class adults) began to rampage through Five Points searching for black quarry in an irrational attempt to "impose their own visions of order on a rapidly changing city" (p. 88). The rioters focused special attention on blacks riding the downtown streetcars. From Five Points, the crowd fanned out along side streets and began to attack black businesses and their employees. Throughout the evening, local police were either unable, or unwilling, to turn back the rioters. Order was not restored on this first night of violence until 3:00 a.m. Sunday morning, when the militia finally arrived about the same time as a deluge from a timely rainstorm.

For the next several days, most downtown commerce ceased as blacks refused to return to work, preferring to stay home to defend their families and property. Over the next two nights, gangs of whites continued to roam the streets in search of black victims. On Sunday and Monday nights, armed whites marched into two separate black neighborhoods, but were repulsed in both instances by armed black defenders. The violence finally abated by Tuesday morning. The damage was extensive. Conservative estimates list over twenty-five blacks (and two whites) killed and over one hundred wounded. Untold property and business losses were coupled with a major stain on Atlanta's image as a racially progressive city.

Chapters 5-11 deal with the riot's legacy and make up the core of the book. Godshalk blends secondary sources with a wide array of relevant private papers of the principal players involved to detail how the riot divided the black community, greatly upset many white Atlanta civic leaders, and paved the way for local interracial dialogue, though only among white and black elites. The racial violence hurt Booker T. Washington's agenda nationally among many influential racial progressives. The riot convinced many white northern supporters, especially ***The Nation*** publisher Oswald Garrison Villard, that Washington's accommodationist approach was no longer valid. Villard increasingly criticized Washington and began to support direct agitation for black rights, though always resolutely distancing himself from any advocacy of violence. W. E. B. Du Bois was also radicalized by the event. Though he had been disaffected with Washington's views for some time, Du Bois was so agitated by the rampage that he eventually left Atlanta. Soon, he joined Villard and others to form the NAACP in an effort to agitate for change on racial matters through litigation and federal legislation.

Godshalk convincingly shows that while Booker T. Washington's star was falling among many disaffected black leaders and former white allies, his approach to resolving racial conflict at the local level through white and black elite discourse and deal making began to take hold in Atlanta. The author relates how mob violence appalled many white civic leaders. Destruction of private property, business shutdowns, and fear of negative publicity, not to mention the possibility of black retaliatory attacks, led them to seek out cooperative black leaders. The white leaders pledged to do their part in controlling the roguish elements of their community, if the black elites (in one instance Godshalk refers to them as "collaborators," p. 1) would strive to do the same while forsaking agitation on civil rights matters.

The author focuses on Rev. Henry Hugh Proctor as a prime example of a black community leader with whom the white civic leaders were able to break bread. Though a close friend of W.E.B. Du Bois and a Niagara Movement sympathizer before the riot, Proctor abandoned protest in the post-riot years in favor of interracial dialogue with white leaders. Godshalk shows how

Proctor began to accommodate white elites on law and order issues as well as civil rights matters. In return, he was able to use his access to the white power structure to expand his influence within the black community by acting as a broker on a variety of civic matters (in addition to securing vital funding for his church). Beginning with Proctor, many other local black elites spoke out publicly against black criminals and confrontational forms of civil rights agitation. In return, these black leaders were rewarded with an elevated status and symbolic participation in public affairs, while the black community was largely able to avoid further grand racial conflicts with local whites.

In his final chapter, Godshalk reveals how the Atlanta tradition of biracial elite discourse has worked to dampen racial violence, but at the cost of delayed social integration and persistent poverty. During the 1950s and 1960s, for example, a series of quiet negotiated agreements between white and black elites led to Atlanta avoiding major turmoil during the active phase of the Civil Rights Movement. The city's schools desegregated without violence, but educational integration took place at a glacial pace. Lunch counters and other forms of public accommodations were likewise lethargically integrated before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Further, the wages of racial peace remain high, down to the present day. Atlanta remains a highly stratified city with tremendous economic disparity. It has the highest residential segregation index of any major U.S. urban area, while only four major American cities have a higher poverty rate. Thus, the author concludes: "Atlanta's biracial traditions hushed the white racial hatreds of the past, but only at the cost of veiling promising black visions of America's future" (p. 278).

Overall, both the research and the clarity of argument are solid. The only criticism I wish to register is a minor one involving a rather annoying choice of prose recurring throughout the book. Specifically, there are too many instances when the author uses an individual's race as an adjective when clarification is clearly not necessary. Godshalk often refers to W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, as "the black professor" (p. 160). Other individuals are frequently described as "the white speaker" (p. 128), "the white lawyer" (p. 154), "the black religious leader" (p. 174), or "the black journalist" (p. 174). These word choices reappear so often that it detracts from the narrative.

Nevertheless, this first comprehensive effort to explore the long-term local and national impact of the Atlanta race riot is a solid contribution to southern history and to the history of American race relations.

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