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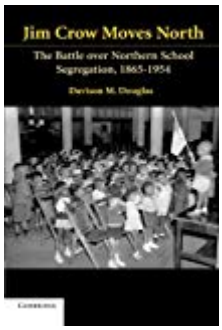

Davison M. Douglas. *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Desegregation, 1865-1954.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. x + 334 pp. $23.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-60783-4.

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May 2004 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Attempts by politicians and the media to commemorate *Brown* proved to be more awkward than those associated with more typical historical anniversaries. Observers--from the left, right, and center--struggled to make sense of the degree to which the nation's schools had in fact been integrated over the past half century. Eric Foner and Randall Kennedy introduced a special commemorative issue of *The Nation* by reminding readers that "Brown's promise remains, to a considerable extent, unfulfilled. Jim Crow schooling is not a wrong inflicted in ancient times on people long since dead; it is an all too recent injustice that created unhealed wounds."[1] Confronted with a public school system marked by enduring patterns of racial separation, *Brown* presents a particularly mixed legacy for scholars and citizens in the twenty-first century.

Davison M. Douglas's new book--*Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1954*--explores the history of the public schools in the North in the century and a half before the *Brown* decision with particular attention to the complexities of race and public education. By pushing the story back well before 1954, and even before 1865 (the book's putative starting point) and by shifting his focus from the segregated South to the North, Douglas manages at once to remap the field of *Brown* scholarship and to make a strong case for the impact of northern precedents on the work of Thurgood Marshall and the postwar National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). A law professor with a Ph.D. in American history, Douglas's approach to legal history skillfully brings together social, cultural, and political realms to make sense of the paradoxes of segregated public schools. This careful reconstruction of *Brown*'s backstory is a useful corrective to a good deal of the confusion articulated in May 2004. While Douglas's subtitle suggests the end of the Civil War as his starting point, his opening chapter on antebellum northern communities is in some ways the most powerful. Documenting the range of practices and innovations that emerged in the decades before the Civil War, the North is portrayed as a region wrestling with the implications of public school-

ing in an era of deepening sectional division. Douglas succeeds in undermining ideas of any unitary, "free" northern approach to the issue of race and schooling. The ***Roberts*** case in Massachusetts is read against the backdrop of a generation of legal and political disputes over African American access to the region's new schoolhouses. This study reminds us often just how difficult it is to generalize about a typical northern approach to race and schooling, whether in the early nineteenth century or in the aftermath of World War II.

Jim Crow Moves North retraces the state-by-state legislative embrace of school integration in the aftermath of the Civil War and then proceeds to narrate the history of how communities and states, slowly but steadily, undercut much of that progress in the years after 1900. Immediately after the Civil War and for several succeeding decades, northern African Americans scored significant victories in gaining access to integrated public schools. Many postbellum northerners--black and white--worked to remake the segregated system which had been erected before 1860. In time, though, such changes would be undone. The impact of the Supreme Court's decision in ***Plessy v. Ferguson***, it seems, was not limited to the South; across the Northeast and Midwest, a generation of whites committed themselves to a separatist system of public education after 1896. Alongside J. Morgan Kousser's work on school litigation in the nineteenth-century North, Douglas's book helps to make sense of the struggle for black equality in the North between 1865 and the end of the century.[2] The first four decades of the twentieth century witnessed a historical reversal, as Douglas writes, that where "African Americans had made substantial strides toward full inclusion in the public education systems of the North during the late nineteenth century, ... the migration of hundreds of thousands of southern blacks into northern cities during the early twentieth century provoked renewed white insistence on racial separation in much of the North" (p. 166). This twentieth-century insistence on separation was not simply the result of residential segregation but the product of specific, intentional acts of public policy.

Douglas documents conflicting African American responses to the problem of segregated schools across the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Chapter 5, "Responding to the Spread of Northern School Segregation: Conflict within the Black Community, 1900-1940," highlights the era of the Great Migration as a period of particularly divisive debate within black communities. Groups like the Pennsylvania Association of Teachers of Colored Children provided ideological and organizational support for separate black schools. By taking such separatist voices seriously, Douglas both locates the origins of some more recent African American arguments for separate schools and provides a fuller context for the NAACP's embrace of school desegregation in the interwar years. Conflicts over race and northern public schools, Douglas argues, intensified in the decades leading up to ***Brown***. This study of the politics of public schools offers a bracing, troubling account of "the role of law in accomplishing racial change" (p. 6). The prehistory of ***Brown*** alerts us to the limits of judicial power.

For all of Douglas's success in making sense of the history of racial segregation in the North, it is misleading to argue, as does the book's title, that the story here is one of Jim Crow moving North. As David N. Gellman and I have argued elsewhere, northern politicians and ordinary citizens in the first half of the nineteenth century were responsible for crafting, maintaining, and defending a variety of practices which we have traditionally identified as constituting "Jim Crow."[3] Much of Douglas's evidence supports the idea that the nineteenth-century North pioneered new forms of racial division in the very public schools that were central to democratic public life. Rather than Jim Crow being the exclusive province of any one region, Douglas's history suggests a recurring process of interregional borrowing and innova-

tion across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with white northerners and southerners learning from each others' experiences.

This leads to a final question about the relationship between two contemporary processes in the mid-nineteenth-century North: the emergence of public schools and the refinement of forms of racial separation. The rise of a northern culture of segregation--perhaps most prominent in many of the region's schoolhouses--might be interpreted as being inextricably linked to the creation of and support for an extensive system of public schooling in many parts of the North in the decades before the Civil War. Exclusions by race could thus be conceived of as not coincidental to the expansion of schooling for masses of American children but perhaps central to many Americans' understanding of public education. As in the case of racial limits on suffrage in the antebellum North, it seems that racial limits on "public" education came naturally to many white northerners.

Notes

[1]. Eric Foner and Randall Kennedy, "Brown at Fifty," *The Nation* 278 (May 3, 2004): 15.

[2]. J. Morgan Kousser, *Dead End: The Development of Nineteenth-Century Litigation on Racial Discrimination in Schools: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 28 February 1985* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[3]. David N. Gellman and David Quigley, *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

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