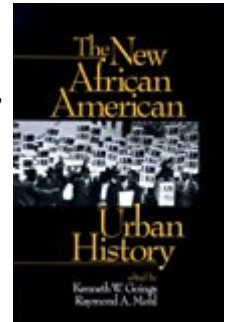


Kenneth W. Goings, Raymond A. Mohl, eds.. *The New African American Urban History*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications Inc., 1996. xviii + 381 pp. \$89.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7619-0308-6.



Reviewed by Henry L. Taylor

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Kenneth W. Goings and Raymond A. Mohl have edited an important book concerning the black urban experience.[1] In it, Goings and Mohl put forth the argument that over the last ten to fifteen years, a "new" African American urban history has emerged.

"Agency" is the defining characteristic of this "new" African American urban history. Early research, Goings and Mohl argue, often portrayed African Americans as passive or powerless victims of white racism or slum pathologies. The "new" African American urban history, on the other hand, portrays blacks as actively involved in shaping their own future and battling for control over their lives. According to Goings and Mohl, recent works stress the experiences of the black working class and examine topics such as kinship and communal networks, class and culture, and the diversity and complexity of the black community. Moreover, these works also tend to highlight the black urban experience in southern and western cities, rather than northern centers.

The essays in this volume were selected by the editors to illustrate, in concrete ways, several of the new directions scholars are taking in exploring African American urban history. The book contains eleven chapters, including an introduction, that grapple primarily with the issues of "place," "infrapolitics," migration, the formation of a second ghetto, a synthesis of literature on industrial city blacks, and historiographical questions concerning the post-industrial city. Three chapters, which explore "place" and the cultural meaning of urban space, approach the topic from a cultural and social history perspective. Meanwhile, the chapters on "infrapolitics" explore the daily struggles waged by blacks against oppression and exploitation. Building on the work of Robin D. G. Kelley, these chapters investigate the notion that "beneath the veil of consent lies a hidden history of unorganized, everyday conflict waged by African American working people" (pp. 146-47).[2]

Darlene Clark Hine's chapter on migration explores the motivation to relocate among African American women, especially their desire to leave the south for non-economic reasons. Included in

this desire is the pursuit of personal autonomy and the need to escape from sexual exploitation by black and white men. Mohl's chapter is concerned with the multiple impulses behind the creation of a second ghetto in the two decades after 1940, while Joe W. Trotter's chapter synthesizes the literature on blacks in the industrial city. In addition, Kenneth Kusmer's chapter provides a detailed assessment of the current state of knowledge about blacks in the city since World War II.

Without question, recent scholarship on the black urban experience has moved in "new" directions and is exploring fresh, unexplained regions of knowledge. The field is growing and developing, but to call this outpouring of scholarship a "new" African American urban history may represent an overstatement. The point is this: when the introduction of new methods, conceptual framework, and knowledge reaches a "tipping point," are we to transform a field of scholarship into something new? In this respect, Goings and Mohl may actually be describing the emergence of African American urban history as a new field of scholarship. That is, the earlier studies by Allan Spear and Gilbert Osofsky, and other historical works in this genre may thus be described as "social histories" of the black experience in the cities, not "new" African American urban history.[3]

At this point, however, the recent explosion of scholarship on the black urban experience does not need to be burdened with the label "new." The great significance of the Goings and Mohl book is that it demonstrates African American urban history is not only alive and well, but is moving in exciting new directions. For now, until the issues of the "new" or "emergence" are resolved, this will have to suffice. *The New African American Urban History* is a marvelous collection of essays regarding the black urban experience. It is must reading for anyone interested in black life in the city, past or present.

Notes:

[1]. This collection is a book version of two special issues edited by Goings and Mohl which appeared in *The Journal of Urban History* in March and May of 1995 and four additional pieces published elsewhere: Shane White's article on African American festivals and parades from the *Journal of American History* (June 1994); Tera W. Hunter's article on wage household labor in New South Atlanta from *Labor History* (Spring-Summer 1993); Robin Kelley's article on infrapolitics in the Jim Crow South from the *Journal of American History* (June 1993); and Darlene Clark Hine's article on black women in the Midwest from Joe Trotter's book, *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective* (1991).

[2]. Kelley attributes the word "infrapolitics" to James C. Scott. For Kelley's treatment of this concept, see Robin D. G. Kelley *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994) pp. 1-13.

[3]. Allan Spear *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967). Gilbert Osofsky *Harlem: The Making of the a Ghetto* (New York: Harper Collins, 1966)

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