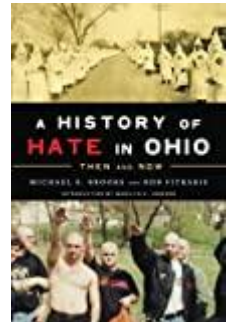


Michael E. Brooks, Robert J. Fitrakis. *A History of Hate in Ohio: Then and Now.* Columbus: Trillium, an imprint of The Ohio State University Press, 2021. 260 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8142-5800-2.



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Hate in Ohio

Since the election of Donald Trump, renewed attention, both academic and popular, has been focused on the origins, history, and impact of racial, gender, and religious intolerance in the United States. There have been several notable additions to this research of late. Two memorable contributions are Sarah Churchwell's *Behold, America* (2018) and Kathleen Belew's *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and the Paramilitary America* (2018). *Behold, America* catalogued the history of the America First cause and its connection to white supremacist movements. *Bring the War Home* is a detailed and meticulous look at white supremacist movements and their militant ambitions across the United States.

Joining these, *A History of Hate in Ohio* by Bob Fitrakis and Michael Brooks is a regionally focused look at the history of White Power movements that connects the history of white supremacy in Ohio with the current state of politics in the

United States. Fitrakis is a political science professor, journalist, election lawyer, and former Green Party candidate in Ohio. Brooks is a historian at Bowling Green University. The book takes a comprehensive look at the groups and individuals that have made up a depressingly long history of white supremacist hatred in the Buckeye State. In addition, the authors directly challenge conventional wisdom in Ohio (and to an extent, the Midwest at large) that, unlike the South, racial hatred and discrimination have not had a continuous presence in the region. Indeed, the most successful element of the book is the extent to which it painstakingly exposes the long, tragic, and pervasive existence (and occasional dominance) of racial hatred and discrimination in the state.

The book is split into two parts. The first, called "Then," is written from a historical perspective by Brooks and is an academic, though very approachable, summary of the history of white supremacist organizations, actions, and

laws in Ohio. The story of racial suppression and violence in the area begins with the 1782 massacre of ninety-six Lenape people by a Pennsylvania-based Revolutionary militia during the immediate post-Revolutionary War period. The whites-only, exclusionary nature of state formation in the Ohio Country meant that as farmers moved into Ohio, principally from Kentucky and Virginia, they at best ignored and at worst annihilated the indigenous peoples they came across. Since most settlers to Ohio Country came "from states where slavery was legal," they moved to prevent Black voting, and after it became a state, Ohio's "Black Laws" limited the rights and freedoms of both free and enslaved Blacks in the state (p. 17). The exclusion and persecution of Black settlers is a theme to which Brooks returns repeatedly in order to demonstrate that Ohio was a white supremacist state at its founding. As revealed in both personal narratives and political history, Ohio's history is replete with white supremacist politics and segregated social arrangements that were, for the most part, either acceptable or popular with the majority population. In short, Ohio's history is not only the abolitionist history that is often suggested.

Despite their support for abolition, Ohioans generally feared freed slaves coming north and supported the movement for emancipation only because they, as Brooks writes, "believed emancipated persons would remain far away in the South" (p. 35). By today's standards, Ohioans were neither accepting nor progressive. Like the population in most nonslave states, they often embraced local exclusionary policies and actions at home while adopting a public anti-Rebel language of emancipation that still dominates much of the state's view of itself today. Brooks brings to light an interesting example of racial tension during the Civil War period in his descriptions of the 1862 Toledo race riot that was triggered by dockworkers' desire to keep longshoreman jobs white. The riot included

random violence and violent threats against Black adults and children alike.

During the twentieth century, Jim Crow-era cultural and social structures like minstrel shows portrayed Blacks as inferior and dangerous, to be simultaneously ridiculed and feared. Brooks describes many instances of the popularity and prevalence of these cultural tropes. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) figured prominently in Ohio, as it did across the United States, immediately after the Civil War, and during the 1920s and 1960s. The KKK and its offshoots in Ohio are the connective thread between the white supremacism of the "Then" section and Fitrakis's "Now" section of the book.

Fitrakis begins his discussion of the white supremacist movement in the 1970s and 1980s with a look at several groups that emerged from the KKK of the civil rights era and other white supremacist movements. Where special attention should be paid, he writes, is to "the Klan-Nazi merger under the guise of white supremacist Christian Identity theology" (p. 110). The internet of the 1990s helped join these two previously separate groups and created the modern white supremacist movement as it is today. The connections between the white supremacists of the late seventies, the Republican Party at the turn of this century, and the Trumpist white supremacists of Charlottesville 2018 culminated in the murder of Heather Heyer by Ohioan James Alex Fields Jr. Fitrakis's section takes on some of the problems of modern historical study and journalism directly. Through the use of primary source research methods and journalistic investigative skills, he paints a complex and mutually reinforcing picture of the white supremacist movement in Ohio that contributes members, resources, and rhetoric to the larger national alt-right movement, of which Ohio, he argues, is one of the most important breeding grounds.

A History of Hate in Ohio accomplishes its primary goals. It is difficult to read the history of white supremacy and not agree that many Ohioans today adhere to a fiction. They were not

immune to the often monstrous convulsions of violence prevalent in the South before, during, or after the Civil War. As a northern state, its geography did not protect the Black population from constant mistreatment and frequent persecution. *A History of Hate in Ohio* might have provided deeper contextualization for its descriptions of the early, pre-twentieth century history of the state's racism and its connections to our own challenges with racists and a regressive alt-right. A concluding chapter where both authors combine their insights and outline common themes and contexts regarding the ebb and flow of white supremacist membership would also have strengthened the book's commentary and conclusions.

Despite this omission, *A History of Hate in Ohio* offers new insights regarding white supremacist movements in the Midwest and nationally. The deep connections between contemporary political leaders and the white supremacist movements of the 1980s and 1990s are especially revealing. Indeed, Fitrakis writes: "[by] consciously ignoring obvious connections to white supremacy groups by political figures or by mislabeling them as 'rock-ribbed' conservatives, the media helps cover up perhaps the key issue in American politics: racism" (p. 142). This important contention will, hopefully, prompt further journalistic analysis, academic reflection, and public outcry.

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