

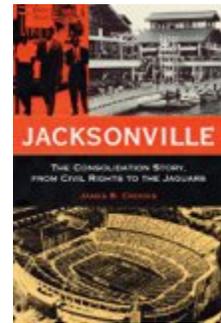
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

James B. Crooks. *Jacksonville: The Consolidation Story, from Civil Rights to the Jaguars*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004. xx + 274 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2708-1.

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## Bold New City of the South: Considering Twenty-Five Years of Consolidation in Jacksonville

James Crooks, professor emeritus at University of North Florida, is a long-time observer of the river city. Historian-in-residence during the administration of Mayor Tommy Hanzouri in the late 1980s, Professor Crooks calls upon his vast personal knowledge to craft a dramatic portrait of consolidation in this “Bold New City of the South.” Crooks happened into a remarkable collection of municipal files discovered in an old parking garage during his stay in city hall. These never-before-utilized mayoral files, extensive research in other, more accessible public documents, as well as a substantial series of interviews, allowed Crooks to create a complex yet engaging look at the inter-workings of a growing Sunbelt city. Beginning with the 1950s, Crooks takes us through the decision to merge downtown Jacksonville with surrounding Duval County, into the early 1990s, while focusing on the pressing issues of downtown development, race relations, and environmental conservation. The majority of the book centers on the mayors who shepherded Jacksonville through consolidation and its aftermath: Hans G. Tanzler, Jake M. Godbold, Hanzouri, and Edward T. Austin.

Jacksonville’s consolidation story makes it unique among other Florida cities at this time. Many southern cities, including Miami-Dade County, chose a two-tiered system of local and metropolitan governments to control and create consistent services across spreading suburbs. The consequences of those decisions can be read now in decayed downtowns and ever-widening greater

metropolitan areas. However, in the late 1960s, Jacksonville decided that consolidation could reform its complex and “unwieldy” government (p. 36). Decentralized power had contributed to enormous costs and political divisiveness among all levels of the city bureaucracy. Rampant corruption had soured voters on the system. These factors, combined with the accelerated growth of the Duval County population, created a remarkable outcome: suburban voters, as well as the increasingly African-American majority center city, agreed to drastically expand the local government, thin the tax base, and make a change, at what was acknowledged to be great financial and for some, political, cost.

At the heart of Jacksonville’s fight to implement consolidation lay its cost and the business interests of city boosters. Long known for low taxes and a pro-business outlook, the city struggled to attract and keep industry while responding to changing perimeters of race relations, environmental pollution, and downtown decline and redevelopment. Business growth management would be a constant stumbling block for city government from consolidation in 1968 through to the 1990s. Each new mayor would have to strike a balance between business and pollution, the effects of urban renewal, and a healthy city center. Yet private investment contributed to the new government’s success. Crooks highlights the important legacy of business leaders in the area—their vital role in the first wave of the desegregation struggle, as in many other southern communities, as well as their pro-

motion of the city's image. From Jacksonville Landing to the recently acquired Jaguars NFL franchise, city leaders tempered business interests with the desire to shape a lively city.

Crooks off-sets this assessment of downtown revitalization with a clear discussion of the debates for and against consolidation among black citizens of central Jacksonville. Concerns over the loss of political leverage are especially illuminating when considered in contrast to other southern cities such as Atlanta and Birmingham. Crooks soberly assesses the city's compliance with affirmative action and equal hiring mandates. He also does a good job of tracking city hall's reaction to civil rights concerns, including police-community interactions. Students of race in the city could read this work in conjunction with Able A. Bartley's recent study, *Keeping the Faith: Race, Politics, and Social Development in Jacksonville* for an illuminating look at how civil rights organizing functions in relationship to local government. The sections dealing with race relations can be a bit frustrating to read, in part due to the nature of municipal management: grievances are met with the creation of a commission, which then makes recommendations that may or may not be implemented. Those who study politics, however, will find this all-too-familiar. Although Crooks tends to downplay the effects of urban renewal and highway construction on downtown black communities, his assessment that "Governing Jacksonville, like other American cities, was a continuing challenge to play catch-up with urban problems while avoiding community crises," succinctly characterizes the nature of city governance (p. 146).

An interesting and unique feature of Crooks's study is its concern with environmental policy. Jacksonville observers will not be surprised, as the revitalization of the riverfront has been an important project since the

1970s. Crooks rightly considers downtown development, race relations, and environmental responsibility as linked and crucial for the functioning of a city. In combating what had become a signature odor from heavy industry in the area, as well as water pollution, mayor after mayor weighed environmental concerns against business growth. Again, Crooks's in-depth portrait of city government will be an eye-opener for anyone working for local change as well as those interested in late twentieth-century environmental history.

Consolidation seems to have been, for Jacksonville, a generally positive solution to the problems facing the modern urban center. More efficient management of services, a sense of broader community, a rekindling of civic pride have helped to keep Jacksonville a livable and prospering city. While challenges continue in terms of environmental regulation, school re-segregation, and balancing the needs of various constituencies, twenty-five years later, Crooks concludes, "For Jacksonville, consolidation proved to be the right move" (p. 222). Crooks's detailed charting of forty years of Jacksonville city government is a welcome addition in the often dry field of urban studies. The comparisons drawn with Miami and Tampa are a great starting point for scholars to ask: how is the fate of Jacksonville related to the decline and revitalization of other cities throughout the nation? How do these problems, here so carefully spelled out, once studied, illuminate possibilities for other municipalities and their management? Professor Crooks has been a part of on-going community discussions of the city's history for many years and his experience and love of Jacksonville shine through. A careful look at the city, *Jacksonville* proves that the intricacies of local governance—its languorous pace, interminable committees, and possibilities for change—make an excellent primer for our modern condition.

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