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Robinson, Stephen (2016) The New Career of Jim Crow. *Reviews in American History*, 44 (3). pp. 457-464.

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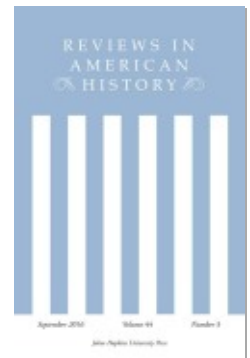
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## The New Career of Jim Crow

Stephen Robinson

Reviews in American History, Volume 44, Number 3, September 2016, pp. 457-464 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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## THE NEW CAREER OF JIM CROW

Stephen Robinson

**Stephanie Cole and Natalie J. Ring, eds.** *The Folly of Jim Crow: Rethinking the Segregated South*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012. xi + 216 pp. Notes and index. \$30.00.

**Robert Cassanello.** *To Render Invisible: Jim Crow and Public Life in New South Jacksonville*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013. xv + 188 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$74.95 (cloth); \$18.95 (paper).

**Stephen A. Berrey.** *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xiii + 331 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 (paper); \$28.99 (e-book).

**Audrey Thomas McCluskey.** *A Forgotten Sisterhood: Pioneering Black Women Educators and Activists in the Jim Crow South*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. x + 181 pp. Notes, chronology, bibliography, and index. \$40.00 (cloth); \$39.99 (e-book).

**William E. O'Brien.** *Landscapes of Exclusion: State Parks and Jim Crow in the American South*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016. xv + 191 pp. Notes and index. \$39.95.

**Ruth Thompson-Miller, Joe R. Feagin and Leslie H. Picca.** *Jim Crow's Legacy: The Lasting Impact of Segregation*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. xvi + 262 pp. Notes and index. \$85.00 (cloth); \$28.00 (paper); \$27.99 (e-book).

The scholarship on the Jim Crow South has had a long career. Dating back to C. Vann Woodward's path breaking book, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955), historians have sought to understand when and why *de jure* segregation was rolled out across the South. Woodward argued that it was the loss of restraining forces by the 1890s—Southern liberalism, radicalism, and Northern intervention—that enabled white Southern lawmakers to find a new way of enforcing strict racial hierarchies. The flexibility and experimentation in race

relations evident in the 1880s gave way to a more rigid system in the 1890s. Path breaking though this book was, it did not take into account earlier forms of segregation, nor did it contain any serious analysis of African Americans' agency—a lacuna that was filled in part by Howard Rabinowitz's insightful *Race Relations in the Urban South* (1978). Over the last fifteen years or so, scholars have sought to extend the contours of the debate. The essays collected in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (2000), edited by Jane Dailey, Glenda Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, fundamentally reshaped our approach to the Jim Crow South. Rather than interpreting this period from the 1870s to the 1970s through a white lens—and thereby implying that the maintenance of white supremacy was the fixed component—these scholars instead argued that it was black resistance to Jim Crow that was continuous. It was white resistance to black political activism (and, later, to desegregation) that was in a constant state of flux.

The books under review in this essay build on the work of Dailey et al. Each explores the fruitful scholarly path of black resistance, and a white counter-resistance that was ever changing. Jim Crow, it seems, had many careers, and was forced to change as a result of the persistence of African Americans' resistance to it. *The Folly of Jim Crow: Rethinking the Segregated South*, edited by Stephanie Cole and Natalie J. Ring, is a collection of essays that emerged from a 2010 conference on the segregation era. This collection reveals that Jim Crow from the very beginning was not a fixed entity. As a result, the contributors argue that the old debate over timing is ultimately a folly. Indeed, the essays in *The Folly of Jim Crow* expand on this essential point. A particular strength of this work—and one that informs to some extent the scholarship that follows—is that it takes the long perspective on Jim Crow. As with scholarship on the modern Civil Rights Movement or, more recently, the Reconstruction era, the chapters in this collection do not simply focus on the early years of Jim Crow, or the period of legal desegregation. Instead, they reframe the story: back into Reconstruction and forward into the post-1960s era. As a result, we get a better sense of how Jim Crow evolved over time, how the color line was constantly challenged by African Americans, and how later activism built on earlier efforts. Mia Bay's chapter on Ida B. Wells, for instance, emphasizes, quite rightly, the imperative of placing African Americans at the center of any analysis of Jim Crow. In so doing, Bay reveals the gendered ways by which elite African American women protested against Jim Crow on the railroads. This, in turn, underscores the need to explore the nexus of race, class, and gender in order to fully understand the discrimination faced by black Americans on public transportation.<sup>1</sup>

Along with placing African Americans at the center of the Jim Crow narrative, the chapters in *The Folly of Jim Crow* explore another issue that is of contemporary resonance: marriage rights. Indeed, two particularly percep-

tive essays by Peter Wallenstein and Jane Dailey focus on how the issues of education and marriage laws interacted and intersected to reveal a fluid color line that varied across time and space. Daily, for instance, argues that antimiscegenation laws were “the critical legal foundation” of the Jim Crow South, based on a “miscegenation anxiety” that “assumed a new centrality” in the white mind (p. 185). Both of these chapters demonstrate that the scholarship of Jim Crow has always been informed by contemporary concerns. For Woodward, writing in the 1950s, it was to demonstrate how segregation had not been an inevitable consequence of Emancipation but a product of the late nineteenth-century South. By contrast, Dailey’s essay is directly informed by recent debates over marriage equality and the continued debate over the meaning of civil rights in contemporary America.

Pursuing another line of enquiry, Theda Perdue’s chapter forces us to think much more broadly about the impact of segregation on all Southerners and to look beyond the typical black/white binary. Yet it was the aim of the segregationists to create a biracial world—one that for them was at once easier and more challenging to define and sustain. Indeed, the issue of definition, in particular “whiteness,” is an important sub-theme in the book. Mixed-race people were always a “challenge” to white supremacists. Along with the concomitant fear of racial passing, methods of racial classification were constantly remade. As Natalie Ring’s chapter reveals, the health of “whiteness” became crucial to the health of Jim Crow, resulting in the increase in public funding for white schools in order to sustain white supremacy. The biracial nature of Jim Crow had a significant impact on Indians, argues Perdue, for Jim Crow reassigned them as “colored” and created a situation whereby they were “denied their culture and history” (p. 68). A particular strength of Perdue’s essay is to track the role of American Indians across time. In so doing, we are forced not only to think beyond the black-white binary but to rethink the dynamics of Jim Crow as a system that was attuned to the significance of place.

Robert Cassanello’s *To Render Invisible: Jim Crow and Public Life in New South Jacksonville*, is one recent book that takes up this challenge of understanding the significance of place to Jim Crow. Building on the work of scholars such as Paul Ortiz,<sup>2</sup> Cassanello explores the meaning of the color line in Jacksonville, Florida, from Reconstruction through the 1920s. He does this by using Nancy Fraser’s notion of “counter public spheres” (itself an adaptation of Jürgen Habermas’ notion of the public sphere) to argue that, while African Americans were excluded from the democratic public space created during Reconstruction, a “Black Counterpublic” emerged in the 1880s and 1890s that informed the everyday acts of resistance to Jim Crow.<sup>3</sup> This counterpublic operated both within public and private spaces, which are dealt with in separate chapters. Chapter six provides a fascinating account of how African Americans organized to challenge segregation in public transportation, which adds

to the scholarship on the early civil rights activity of black activists that has been identified throughout the rest of the state and region. One may question whether a distinction of public and private spaces is as clear-cut as this book seems to suggest. However, Cassanello's book does good service in reinforcing the point that black political activity did not simply stop with the end of Reconstruction, but continued in response to the changing nature of Jim Crow. Indeed, a particular strength of this book is to trace the emergence of labor and women's counterpublics that ran alongside and intersected with the black counterpublic. The 1920 election is marked as a particularly important moment when white fears over the black counterpublic became clear, especially over the prospect of black women voting.

The significance of place is explored in a different context, using an alternative theoretical approach of performance, in Stephen A. Berrey's *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi*. Through an extensive use of the oral histories of the Civil Rights Movement, manuscript collections, and newspapers, Berrey explores Jim Crow Mississippi between the 1930s and 1960s to uncover how white and black Mississippians followed a racialized script of expected behaviors. In so doing, Berrey reveals how the Jim Crow "routine" was re-learned over time. Indeed, Berrey is keen to identify the origins of "the performances of public protest" we associate with the modern Civil Rights Movements within the "daily performances and narratives" that can be traced back into the 1930s and 1940s (p. 6). Berrey therefore situates his study within the perspective of what is termed the "long Civil Rights movement," from the 1930s through the 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

An important feature of this book is to broaden the definition of surveillance to include not only acts of official surveillance, but also of the forms of everyday surveillance by members of a local community. The book posits that the "local means of watching black people has deep roots in the Jim Crow system" (p. 105). Berrey reveals how performance was regulated at the local level, which, by the 1950s, had to adjust to another form of surveillance: the national media. Indeed, most of this excellent book concentrates on the 1950s, a crucial decade in the history of Jim Crow, Berrey contends, when the "routine" was forced to change as a result of civil rights activism in the South and media attention from outside. The result was "a more formal system" of control whereby law enforcement officials would "assume a greater role" in policing racialized relations (p. 220). Berrey tracks this move beyond the Jim Crow era in his insightful epilogue, which challenges the reader to think about how the "narratives of both racial harmony and black criminality" evident during the Jim Crow era "continue to justify and produce racist practices" (p. 230).

For all the insights that can be gained from these single-state monographs, comparative studies still have something to offer, particularly in the case of assessing specific individuals' roles in challenging Jim Crow.<sup>5</sup> Audrey Thomas McCluskey's *A Forgotten Sisterhood: Pioneering Black Women Educators and Activists in the Jim Crow South* is an excellent example of the comparative approach. This study is built around the careers of four black women educators who were influential leaders at the local, state, and, in some cases, national level: Lucy Craft Laney, Mary McLeod Bethune, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and Nannie Helen Burroughs. As a result, *A Forgotten Sisterhood* reveals the significance placed on education as a means of challenging Jim Crow. Indeed, this book expands on McCluskey's earlier co-authored work with Elaine M. Smith on Bethune, *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World, Essays and Selected Documents* (2001): a work that brought much needed attention to this overlooked and influential black leader. *A Forgotten Sisterhood* builds on an existing scholarship on the crucial role played by black teachers in asserting black agency during Jim Crow.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the focus on these four women leaders also moves the scholarship beyond the key black spokesmen. As the title of this book suggests, McCluskey considers these four leaders to be part of a "forgotten sisterhood": a larger network of black women in positions of what the author notes as "activist leadership" (p. 12). The book looks at each leader separately before turning its attention to the larger networks and relationships created and, finally, the legacies of these leaders. Indeed, the final chapter suggests a possible avenue for future research—exploring the legacies of African American leaders in their respective communities, and, in the case of Bethune, more nationally. The commemoration of these women, whether in the form of public memorials or other forms of recognition, reveals the challenge facing any kind of commemoration that focuses on specific individuals. McCluskey notes that these black leaders "defy easy categorization" (p. 153), and while public commemoration can place them "within an idealized, one-dimensional public space," this need not be restrictive and can spark further discussion (p. 142). Lucy Craft Laney, for example, concentrated on the "collective uplift of family and race," and in so doing "revised the nineteenth-century ideal for white women" that focused on purity and submissiveness (p. 141).

The legacies of the Jim Crow era inform the final two books under review. William E. O'Brien's wonderfully illustrated book, *Landscapes of Exclusion: State Parks and Jim Crow in the American South*, focuses on the segregated national parks that emerged in the U.S. South in the 1930s and continued in many areas until the late 1960s. The book charts the history of the Southern parks and theorizes how their emergence during the New Deal as segregated facilities was the result of the broader compromise made to assuage Southern Democrats in the 1930s over matters of race. O'Brien does an effective job of

connecting the ambivalent approach of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal toward issues of race with the desire to provide leisure facilities for all Americans, also explaining what ultimately emerges on the ground. He demonstrates how segregated parks arose as a result of local concerns, reinforcing the significance of place to understanding the extent of Jim Crow. As a result, approximately half the national parks in the region were separate parks in a different location; the other half were what O'Brien calls "dual-type"—with a separate area for nonwhites in an existing "white" park. O'Brien expands on the well-known narrative of the NAACP's legal fight against school segregation in the World War Two era by revealing how this challenge to Jim Crow extended to the Southern national parks. Chapter five traces this story from the late 1940s through the 1950s, when the NAACP became involved in cases relating to equal access to state parks, which were considered the weak point of the Jim Crow system because of their relatively recent introduction. The Southern parks thus became a contested site over the very meaning of Jim Crow "separate but equal"—a campaign that formed an integral part of the larger "Massive Resistance" of Southern whites against desegregation during the modern Civil Rights Movement. O'Brien's book reiterates the important point that public landscapes are never simply neutral spaces but are infused with meaning that is contingent on specific historical circumstances and contexts. Chapter six explores the legacies of the Southern parks' segregated past and highlights the silences that surround this history, which is only now beginning to be fully acknowledged.

The legacy of all this is that visitors to national parks in the South remain predominantly white (a trend that can be traced to other parks in the country), in large part because of the discrimination encountered in the past (p. 156). In some areas in the South, national parks and forests are associated with violence; certain remote areas have a lasting resonance because they are precisely the sites where memories of lynchings are at their rawest. Legacies such as these are perceptively explored in the sociological work *Jim Crow's Legacy: The Lasting Impact of Segregation*. The authors of this work—Ruth Thompson-Miller, Joe R. Feagin and Leslie H. Picca—have produced a book that takes the scholarship on Jim Crow in a new direction. Basing their conclusions on ninety-two interviews with African Americans between the ages of 52 and 95, *Jim Crow's Legacy* reveals the significance of what they term "segregation stress syndrome" (p. 12) to those African Americans who live with the memory of Jim Crow. Indeed, the key point of the book is to reveal the significance of "intergenerational transmission of racial oppressive [sic] and its countering strategies" (p. 2). The book seeks to understand four key areas: the realities of Jim Crow; the coping mechanisms adopted by African Americans; the long-term impact of Jim Crow, psychological or otherwise; and the impact of trauma that is passed down through generations.



*Jim Crow's Legacy* begins with the historical origins of Jim Crow before turning to its legacies of systemic economic inequality between white and black Americans—an issue that is returned to in the final chapter's discussion of reparations. The bulk of the book, however, focuses on the two major means of white control that underpinned Jim Crow—surveillance and violence—that feature heavily in the memories of the interviewees. The book makes effective use of the interviewees' recollections, which adds depth to this book in its exploration of the surveillance, control, and abuse of African Americans during the segregation era. This emphasis challenges the still-dominant white discourse over the legacy of Jim Crow, in which the extent and depth of oppression faced by African Americans during the segregation era is still downplayed—including in school textbooks. Indeed, the extent of Jim Crow's "violent sexual reality" (p. 104) has only recently begun to be explored by historians to the extent that it needs to be.<sup>7</sup> Another particular strength of this book is to trace the historical origins of the contemporary issues of racial profiling, violence, and segregated space—reinforcing the fact that, while laws might change, attitudes take longer to follow suit.

*Jim Crow's Legacy* suggests the direction that now needs to be taken in studies of the segregation era. As we move further away from the 1960s, we need to assess the moment of legal desegregation in its historical context. And if Woodward's work was informed by the modern Civil Rights Movement that was emerging around him, then scholarship today cannot help but be informed by the "Black Lives Matter" campaign currently taking place. There are signs that the civil rights struggle today—of which marriage equality is but one facet—is beginning to inform our understanding of past struggles, as Dailey's chapter in *The Folly of Jim Crow* and Berrey's work on Jim Crow's performance reveals. Taking our cue from the many local studies of slavery, Reconstruction, and the modern Civil Rights Movement, perhaps now is the time to explore further the *legacies* of Jim Crow since the 1960s, both in the South and elsewhere. As a result, we might better understand the long history of race in the United States, and thus find ways to fully acknowledge that past and move forward.

Stephen Robinson is Lecturer in American Studies at York St. John University, U.K. He is currently working on a book project entitled *The Jim Crow South in History and Memory*.

1. For a seminal essay on the central role played by African Americans in everyday forms of resistance to Jim Crow, see Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Re-thinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80 (June 1993): 75–112. See, also, Blair L. M. Kelley's excellent *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (2010).

2. Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (2006).

3. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (1992), 109–42.

4. This turn in the scholarship was influenced by Jacqueline Dowd Hall's 2005 essay: "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233–63.

5. For an excellent example of the possibilities provided by a comparative approach, see R. Volney Riser, *Defying Disfranchisement: Black Voting Rights Activism in the Jim Crow South, 1890–1908* (2010).

6. See, for example: Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (2007).

7. See especially Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (2011).