

The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935. By JAMES D. ANDERSON. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988. xiv, 351 pp. \$35.75 and \$12.05.

Some previous histories of southern education, such as Charles W. Dabney's classic *Universal Education in the South*, slighted the role of African Americans in shaping their own education. James Anderson's new book, the best single volume on black education in the *post-bellum* south, commits the opposite error. Anderson exaggerates the power and autonomy of southern ex-slaves during Reconstruction and of southern blacks in general during the Jim Crow era, and correspondingly underemphasizes the significance for their education of the efforts of former free people of colour, northern blacks and whites and white southerners. While meriting praise for its uncovering of the role of ordinary people struggling to improve their educational lot, Anderson's revisionist book almost wholly excludes electoral, legislative and administrative politics. The exclusions and lopsided emphases make it nearly as one-sided and incomplete as the white-centred, bureaucrat-dominated history that it seeks to replace.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, for instance, Anderson pictures freedmen as merely 'accepting' support from northern and some southern whites, but, inspired by an 'ethic of mutuality', providing 'the primary force that brought schools to the children of freed men and women' themselves (p.5). 'Ex-slaves used their resources first in a grass-roots movement to build, fund, and staff schools as a practical right; then they joined with Republicans to incorporate the idea into southern state constitutional law' (pp.19-20). 'Schools on the plantations were usually financed by the ex-slaves ...' (p.22) '... ex-slaves were the only native group to forge ahead to commit the South to a system of universal schooling in the immediate postwar years' (p.26). 'Black leaders did not view their adoption of the classical liberal curriculum or its philosophical foundations as mere imitation of white schooling' (p.29). 'Black southerners entered emancipation with an alternative culture, a history that they could draw upon, one that contained enduring beliefs in learning and self-improvement' (p.281).

Such needless hyperbole deters understanding. Although American slavery did not totally dehumanize its victims, its purpose and effect were hardly to inculcate an undying love of learning. Moreover, ex-slaves had neither the money nor the teachers nor the administrative experience to organize and run the thousands of schools that were established in the south during Reconstruction. They did not 'join with' Republicans; they *constituted* a large part of the Republican party, and black leaders, often drawn from the pre-war free people, struggled alongside white Republicans, carpetbaggers and scallawags

alike, to establish systems of free schools - systems demanded by poor whites as well as blacks. In higher education, African Americans naturally adapted to their own circumstances the institutional patterns of their native country. Classically-oriented education came to prevail at Howard and Fisk, while the manual labour tradition thrived - in exaggerated form - at Hampton and Tuskegee. To recognize all this would not demean the freedmen's struggles, as Anderson's overprotestation seems to imply. It would, however, force the analyst to concentrate more on politics, with its bargaining, its minutiae of laws and reports and its quotidian resistance to romanticization.

Similarly, in treating the turn of the century educational 'crusade', Anderson devastatingly quotes such northern philanthropists as William H. Baldwin and Wallace Buttrick to prove his case that in both beliefs and policy preferences white 'reformers' were deeply racist and profoundly reactionary. His detailed narratives of the sordid tactics of the Tuskegeesites at such black institutions as Georgia's Fort Valley are as convincing as they are scandalous. In such instances, white Yankee money not only talked, it ordered, and tractable blacks were found to replace more independent, academically-oriented Afro-Americans.

Yet as impressive as this jeremiad is, it barely mentions - and, when it does, misrepresents (see, for example, pp.148-50, 177, 183) - changes in allocations to black schools from state or local governments between the 1870s and the 1930s. And it leaves unanswered, because unasked, three crucial questions about the actions and influence of white 'reformers' on southern black education. First, how could forces that controlled such a large proportion of the available money and power ultimately fail to impose on southern blacks the qualitatively different and radically inferior type of industrial education that they favoured, if, as Anderson implies, they all agreed on such beliefs? Second, why did they persist (if they did) in backing the Hampton-Tuskegee county training school formula long after it had become clear that its job training programme was outmoded in the modern economy? In particular, why did they retain (if they did) the largely unacademic and even anti-academic Hampton methods to prepare teachers who had to meet increasingly elevated standards to obtain employment in the public schools? Third, what roles did the philanthropically-supported state directors of 'coloured schools' in each state play in making separate a little more equal after 1914?

Direct black contributions to the increase in expenditures and the building of black schools in the early 20th century were quite important, as Anderson shows better than any previous scholar has. But the nearly two-thirds of the expenditures for black public school buildings (p.153) that came from state and local government during this period remain a puzzle. How did the disfranchised blacks influence these governments? Anderson's suggestion that the threat and actuality of interregional black migration pressured whites to provide more schooling in the south (pp.152, 202) is not satisfying, because whites, especially planters, might equally justifiably have believed that better-educated blacks would just be more likely to leave. In any case, Anderson does not show how or whether this rationale, expressed by a few whites, was translated into law and administrative practice.

In the past decade in the US, the education of Americans of African descent has seriously deteriorated. Central city schools have become ever more infested with drugs and violence, idealistic efforts at urban-suburban integration have been rejected by the Nixonite and Reaganite courts and the active electorate, and college attendance percentages for blacks have plummeted.

Somehow, black education managed to improve a good deal, even relative to that of southern whites, during the second half of Anderson's period; a period that Rayford Logan termed the 'nadir' of race relations in US history. Anderson's study, therefore, might provide useful lessons for our analogously dark time, but because he ignores politics and romanticizes the role and influence of the disadvantaged, it doesn't.

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