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Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction
(review)

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Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction. By Patrick G. Williams. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007. Pp. 244. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 1-58544-573-8. \$29.95, cloth.)

As Reconstruction came to an end, Southern Democrats, also known as Redeemers, engaged in political strategies designed to help them reclaim their prewar status as members of the dominant party in the South. By the early 1870s, they had accomplished their goals and Reconstruction came to a crashing halt in all but three Southern states. Like their Southern brethren, Texas Democrats successfully ousted Radicals from state offices and began making plans to dismantle Republican reforms passed during Governor E. J. Davis's administration. Scholars have examined in detail the demise of the nineteenth-century Republican Party in Texas, but few of them have studied the rise of the Democratic Party during the post-Reconstruction years. Patrick Williams's *Beyond Redemption: Texas Democrats after Reconstruction* fills this gap in Texas historiography by carefully examining the Democratic Party's reemergence in Texas during the late nineteenth century.

Williams divides his study into two distinct parts. Part I, "Making Texas Safe for the Democracy," focuses on how Democrats seized control from the Republicans between 1872 and 1876 and solidified a power base that made them the most powerful political party in Texas for the next century. In this section, the author makes clear that the only factor uniting the Texas Democrats during the years of Reconstruction was their intense hatred of Radical Republicans. Beyond their disdain for Republicans, Democrats were divided into various regional factions; a characteristic that made Texas unique among the former states of the Confederacy in the post-Reconstruction era. Williams reveals that the state was basically comprised of four different sections: North Texas where Anglos made up the vast majority of the population; East Texas where the population contained a large population of African Americans; the West Texas frontier where Anglo settlements continued to suffer from frequent Indian raids; and the southern borderland region where Mexican Americans made up a significant part of the population. Each region had its own unique set of needs and problems, forcing Texas Democrats to deal with issues beyond the typical black and white racial tensions that existed in other Southern states. Yet, despite these differences, Texans could not escape their Southern roots. As a result, state Democrats had to address the issue of black suffrage and the spread of the cotton culture that followed the Civil War.

Part II, "The Political Economy of Redemption," examines the policies that Democrats embraced after Redemption, focusing on how they shaped the Texas government's authority to tax and spend, cultivate economic growth, and promise social well-being. In his final analysis, the author reveals that continued divisions among Texas Democrats effectively compromised their abilities to govern the state. As a result, Texans suffered from a stagnant economy, a locally funded public educational system that produced low student achievement and high drop-out rates, limited public services, and citizenship rights that supported an adherence to the Southern ideal of white supremacy.

Williams's *Beyond Redemption* is a groundbreaking work that deserves the attention of Reconstruction scholars interested in the Texas Democratic Party during the

Gilded Age. Even though the book can be tedious at times, academicians undoubtedly will appreciate the author's attention to detail and his impeccable research. Additionally, there are enough human interest stories within the narrative to keep the attention of general readers. Simply stated, this book is a must read for anyone who purports to study Texas history.

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Buried in Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America. By Elliott Jaspin. (New York: Basic Books, 2007. Pp. 348. Illustrations, map, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-46503-636-8. \$26.95, cloth.)

This book is both troubling and fascinating. It is part history, part journalism, and part personal saga. Jaspin, a journalist, stumbled upon a significant historical question: why did some communities in the United States experience a sudden, dramatic, and permanent decline in their black population. Furthermore, there seemed to be no historical memory of these demographic changes. After researching a number of these communities, Jaspin concluded that he had uncovered a previously hidden history of "racial cleansing" in America. In the twelve communities that he documented, racial violence, or direct threats of violence were utilized systematically to drive black residents away, and to create virtually all-white communities.

Jaspin focuses his study on twelve incidents in twelve small communities over a sixty-year period from 1864 to 1923. Two each took place in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas. Likewise, two-thirds occurred in the last quarter of the time period, between 1908 and 1923. Jaspin also uncovered racial cleansing in Texas, Missouri, Georgia, and North Carolina. Jaspin's great strength is his ability to tease out a detailed and compelling account of racial injustice from the most meager of sources, uncovering memories that most communities, at least their white inhabitants, had either forgotten or suppressed. Each episode was unique, but some patterns emerge. Often a crime or a series of crimes, usually murder and rape perpetrated against a woman, triggered the mob, but on some occasions economic forces such as competition for jobs were in play. Usually there was a consensus that supported the racial cleansing, but occasionally the white community divided, or law enforcement, the local press, or state officials attempted to intervene. In almost all cases the numbers of blacks forced to flee were small, and blacks comprised a very small percent of the community prior to the cleansing.

The Texas case is an example. In 1886 only about forty or fifty blacks lived in Comanche County, mostly in the county seat of Comanche. The murder of a white woman by a black farmhand sparked the event. A white mob tracked down the suspect, brought him back to the county, and then executed him. The mob then ordered all blacks to leave Comanche County within ten days. White residents of the town protested the order as unnecessary and unjust, and the sheriff, out-manned and out-gunned by the mob, appealed to the Texas Rangers for help. By the time the Rangers arrived virtually all blacks had fled the county. They never returned.

Jaspin does an excellent job uncovering the history of these long-suppressed examples of racial violence. He effectively uses scraps of information—a newspaper