Becoming an African American Progressive Educator: Narratives from 1940s Black Progressive High Schools ed. by Craig Kridel (review)

Sean C. D. Colbert-Lewis Sr.

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moderates in that he was ill-equipped to deal with a more assertive civil rights movement that would not settle for the hollow promises of gradualism.

Gore was ambitious, "thoughtful, serious, and independent," but he was also "arrogant, self-righteous, and willfully stubborn"; it was these latter qualities that often alienated his colleagues and contributed to his failure to garner the Democratic Party nomination for either president or vice president (p. 275).

Badger examines Gore's relationship with Lyndon B. Johnson, who was a major influence throughout Gore's political career. Gore was generally a strong supporter of Johnson as Senate leader and president, but, despite having so much in common politically and personally, the two men hated each other and considered each other to be rivals. The most divisive issue between the two men was the war in Vietnam. Despite being a hardliner and a committed Cold Warrior, Gore also advocated nuclear disarmament, and he was an early critic of the growing war in Vietnam. His opposition to the war not only angered Johnson but also ultimately helped seal Gore's fate in a conservative pro-war South.

By the mid-1960s, the liberal Gore was increasingly out of touch with a changing, conservative South. For the first time, he faced a serious challenge from his Republican opponent in the 1964 election. In the election in 1970, Gore ran a poor campaign and lost. He had never developed much of a grassroots campaign organization, and the people he had relied on were now dead or old and resisted younger ideas. His opponent, William Brock, successfully painted Gore as out of touch with Tennessee, particularly on the issues of race, the Vietnam War, and school prayer.

More important, Badger argues that "Gore never lost his faith" in the federal government as a vehicle for change, but ultimately the South did, and that was probably the biggest reason Gore lost (p. 275).

University of Cincinnati, Clermont JAMES E. WESTHEIDER

Becoming an African American Progressive Educator: Narratives from 1940s Black Progressive High Schools. Edited by Craig Kridel. (Columbia: Museum of Education, University of South Carolina, 2018. Pp. x, 216. Paper, ISBN 978-1-5323-7967-3.)

Becoming an African American Progressive Educator: Narratives from 1940s Black Progressive High Schools consists of three personal accounts written as "creative nonfiction narratives" (p. vii). This book, edited by Craig Kridel and available free online (museumofeducation.info), provides historians researching African American culture and American education with a much-needed personal glimpse of the challenges and fears experienced by African American teachers and their students to improve their education and their lives during World War II and the era of Jim Crow.

The narratives center on three African American secondary schools and their respective communities (Lincoln High School in Tallahassee, Florida; Moultrie High School for Negro Youth in Moultrie, Georgia; and Booker T. Washington High School in Rocky Mount, North Carolina), following professional development opportunities for teachers afforded by the Secondary School Study (which was conducted between 1940 and 1946). Kridel correctly points out that this study represented "the only planned program to introduce progressive experimental

methods into black secondary education" as a means of professional development, and that "these three monographs represent a rare instance of research reports prepared as creative nonfiction narratives" (pp. vi, vi–vii).

Kridel notes that readers will not see the term *progressive education* in any of the three narratives due to the concern of some teachers that publicly using the word *progress* "'was dangerous'" (p. 4). Also, the administration and faculty of all these schools indicated that they created characters to best explain how their respective schools benefited from the professional development opportunities afforded through the Secondary School Study. The three narratives (*The Evolution of Susan Prim* [Tallahassee, 1944]; *Miss Parker: The New Teacher* [Moultrie, Ga., 1946]; and *High School Was Like This* [Rocky Mount, N.C., 1946]) highlight how black secondary schools grew from progressive methods.

First published in 1944, *The Evolution of Susan Prim* highlights the efforts of Lincoln High School's teachers to implement pupil-teacher lesson planning and pedagogy at the beginning of World War II. The character Susan Prim represents a twenty-year veteran teacher of the Tallahassee school who addresses teachers' concerns about the merits of incorporating pupil-teacher interaction in lesson planning, as it may lead to "embarrassing situations" (p. 55). Readers learn about the struggles facing African American students, including improving student learning following standardized test results, gendered retention rate issues, nutritional and health issues, wartime family instability, and children's contributions to the war effort. The narrative concludes with how the Secondary School Study encouraged new thinking among the teachers regarding pupil-teacher lesson plan development and pedagogy.

The faculty of Moultrie High School for Negro Youth published *Miss Parker: The New Teacher* in 1946 to highlight how the Secondary School Study benefited them. They took a unique approach to creating their narrative by using personal letters between "Miss Parker" and a veteran schoolteacher as Parker is traveling to Moultrie to start her new job. The narrative highlights troubling statistics, such as 15 percent of the school's eight hundred students were absent every day due to illness and 70 percent of the ninth grade were employed after school. The narrative also highlights the interactions between Moultrie's black and white high school teachers because both faculties desired to improve the educational opportunities for all students. The narrative ends with Parker, now a veteran teacher, writing a letter to a new teacher traveling to work in Moultrie, and she expresses hope in the continued collaboration between her school and the white high school.

Finally, the Booker T. Washington High School in Rocky Mount published *High School Was Like This* in 1946. Unlike the first two narratives, this one centers on the students. It addresses students' concerns over their lack of civil rights, cleaning up slums, and stopping various black-market activities. For example, some social studies students questioned segregation and civil rights, which was prompted by what they had heard at home.

The voluminous content in the three narratives provides readers with a glimpse of some of the challenges that faced African American teachers and some white teachers who worked to improve the educational and community lives of African American students during the Jim Crow era. Readers may sense a tendency in the narratives to not discuss the impact of apartheid. Perhaps

teachers knew that to say too much might prove disastrous for African American students and their teachers. This reality becomes clear when reading the very short but powerful epilogue to *Becoming an African American Progressive Educator*, as Mrs. Lawson (a character from *High School Was Like This*), Prim, and Parker describe in their own words what an interviewer had asked and had not asked them during the post-interview process following the end of the Secondary School Study. Lawson states how she expected to hear "the desegregation question" but never heard it (p. 210). Parker's emotions sum up best her feelings about the experience when she states, with a teary eye, "We were respected and we cared . . . and we spoke for a common good. What we did was important, and we told it our way" (p. 210).

North Carolina Central University SEAN C. D. COLBERT-LEWIS SR.

Centering Modernism: J. Jay McVicker and Postwar American Art. By Louise Siddons. The Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018. Pp. xiv, 313. $45.00, ISBN 978-0-8061-6033-7.)

The title of Louise Siddons's book, *Centering Modernism: J. Jay McVicker and Postwar American Art*, is both bold and appropriate. Not only is her Oklahoma subject at quite literally the geographic center of the continental United States, but Siddons also shows the state to be a perhaps surprising aesthetic center of mid-twentieth-century modern art. Rather than serving as a decentering of American art that simply refocuses readers away from the predominant "New York–centricity" of the field, Siddons's work removes the very necessity of a center-periphery argument, offering a remapping based not on a roots-and-branches model but on a rhizomatic, or horizontal and unhierarchical, model (p. 29). Such a mapping system allows places in middle America—in "so-called flyover country"—to emerge as deeply networked to the coasts and not as the expected isolated cultural backwaters "from which progressives have continually been in flight" (pp. 7, 4). Siddons demonstrates that the "coastalization of American art," which we now take for granted, was not predetermined in the post–World War II era, but rather was actively constructed by art markets, critics, and historians based on the coasts (p. 2).

This carefully researched and clearly written account centers on a single little-known artist—J. Jay McVicker—who constructed his art career from his home base in Stillwater, Oklahoma, at Oklahoma State University, the institution where Siddons herself is currently employed. McVicker was a painter, but also a printmaker, watercolorist, and sculptor—working in media that are severely sidelined in canonical accounts of modern American art. But one question that readers must ask is whether McVicker's art is worthy of such a monographic study, or if the rich archive that Siddons deploys so skillfully merely offers a forum for undermining existing art historical narratives. Though the latter is still a useful project, Siddons has also convincingly argued that McVicker's art is indeed "outstanding" and can hold its own in comparison with the many renowned modernists she also discusses in the book (p. 3). *Centering Modernism* is beautifully illustrated with large full-color images so that readers