
Since the 1990s, the "new urbanism" has revitalized the image of "small-town America" in many planning discussions. While Florida's Seaside and Celebration seem literally Disneyfied and may evoke new segregations by race and class, "neo-traditionalism" also speaks to quests for community and order in inner-city neighborhoods. Some have challenged such nostalgia, noting that Main Street was a Sinclair Lewis dilemma before it became a theme park; hence, the need for cogent historical analysis of small-town experiences remains compelling. This is especially true of black towns, whether southern (such as Zora Neale Hurston's Eatonville) or settlements built by black exodusters in the Midwest and West. There, community and autonomy were nourished but tested in ways that recast neo-traditional issues today. At the same time, such black communities faced continual pressures of race and class: Eatonville and Celebration share their state with the site of the 1923 Rosewood massacre, where white vigilantes ravaged another black town.

Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua's painstaking reconstruction of the evolution of Brooklyn, Illinois, from its 1830s foundation through its political chaos in the early twentieth century provides detailed data about another African American town across the Mississippi River from St. Louis. Early Brooklyn fostered both opposition to slavery and clandestine operations that helped slaves escape. Over subsequent decades, blacks and whites negotiated economic and political lives in this small, biracial town through occupation, residence, education, and institutional life within the burgeoning industrial landscape of East St. Louis. After the Civil War, blacks took over greater leadership roles in government and schooling yet lacked control over the industrial development around them. The town also reveals seeming paradoxes, as advocates for black political voices reestablished segregated schools in 1894 (albeit under black control). By the late nineteenth century, nonetheless, regional political and economic shifts fostered increasing proletarianization and destabilized political traditions in the once-proud town.

The author documents this evolution through careful reading of documentary sources, especially census material, and illuminating portraits and events from local presses, black and white. He also contextualizes Brooklyn's development by comparison to other black towns and the lives of blacks in northern metropoles. At the same time, he uses these data to argue the evolution of black nationalist consciousness, framed in terms of an anticolonial discourse.
model. Despite the subject’s importance, there are significant limits in the presentation. As an urbanist, I found the absence of maps and visual material frustrating in tracing spatial relations of white and black residents and the ongoing dialectic of Brooklyn and contiguous communities. More preoccupying is the tendency to move from limited sources to complex interpretations of actions and motivations, individual or collective. Suggesting how "black pride" or "racism" motivated actors or actions, in the absence of corroborative data, undercuts rather than strengthens Brooklyn's example. Paragraphs with multiple subjunctive and conditional verbs also prove both repetitious and distracting.

Brooklyn, its previously unsung citizens, its struggles to vote, celebrate, educate, and survive, nonetheless remains interesting. Despite limitations, this work complements existing studies, challenging presuppositions about small towns, their variety, struggles, and values.

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