

Racial Cleansing In Arkansas, 1883-1924: Politics, Land, Labor and Criminality. GUY LANCASTER. New York: Lexington Books, 2014. Pp. v+166, illustrations, notes, index, bibliography. \$80.00 cloth. ISBN 978-0-7391-9547-5.

Coupled with racialized landscape theory as presented in *North American Odyssey: Historical Geographies for the Twenty-first Century* (Craig E. Colton and Geoffrey L. Buckley 2014. chap. 15, p. 273) and “Teaching Jim Crow Pedagogy” theory in *Teaching Ethnic Geography in the 21st Century* (National Council for Geographic Education 2015. chap. 8, p. 68), this statewide analysis of racial cleansing could catalyze a new race relations research paradigm in Arkansas. Logically organized, clearly written and easily readable, this book deconstructs a temporal (1883 to 1924) and spatial (state, county, city) social movement to establish “whites-only” counties and cities therein throughout Arkansas.

For divergent reasons, two research methodologies stood out in this book: archival newspaper content analysis and oral history interviews. The author artfully utilized statewide and local newspaper archives and “uncovered enough events of geographical and thematic diversity” (p. 8) to create a representative and multifaceted database of racial cleansing practices in Arkansas. To the contrary, however, despite the availability of an African American oral history archive with a focus upon white segregationist tactics including racial cleansing within the context of African American Jim Crow culture and society, the author chose not to rely on oral histories as another primary research source “because there continues to be a prejudice among those who might be defensive about their communities’ reputations” (p.8). Therefore, he overlooked the 2001 Duke University Oral History Project and book with Arkansas as a target state, *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South*. By ignoring African American oral histories, voices expressing African American agency and resistance to racial cleansing were minimized if not absent from this book.

The Introduction (Chapter 1) and Conclusion (Chapter 6) flowed as a cohesive, carefully crafted race relations essay. Chapter 1 provided a review of pertinent racial cleansing literature, a multidisciplinary definition of racial cleansing, an explanation of place-based racial cleansing cognitive mapping, along with a clear articulation of the audience and goals for the book. The author also asserted the significance of a solid historical groundwork of racial cleansing research to raise shared consciousness and provide critical terminology as the first step in moving beyond the legacy of the past and undoing (generational) “enduring injustices” (p. 17). The subtly crafted Conclusion (Chapter 6) described racial cleansing as an exclusionary strategy, positioned racial cleansing in an economic geography context, delineated the phases of racial cleansing along a continuum and framed racial cleansing in relationship to national/global policy and practices. However, references to Jim Crow and African American social justice agency were missing from this essay.

The remainder of this book, Chapters 2 through 5, delineated a historically sound temporal and spatial database of racial cleansing case study and case vignette descriptions of discriminatory incidents across Arkansas’s racialized landscapes. The chapter headings set forth a topical framework for identifying racial cleansing events. Successively, reflective of white motivations, these terms -- politics, land/labor, criminality, unknown and multivalent causes -- (re)presented racial cleansing as a continuum rather than as an absolute (p.140).

Two books central to the author’s literature review provided contextual frames for deconstruction of the book: James Loewen’s 2005 *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* and Elliot Jaspin’s 2007 *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America*. Three major differences stood out.

First, Loewen and Jaspin demonstrated how census data and population geography could

be used to define the respective spatial scope, scale and locations of segregated Sundown Towns and racial cleansing counties in the United States. Lancaster chose not use a similar approach to describe the spatial scope and scale of racial cleansing as a statewide phenomenon in Arkansas. Because of the statewide density of racial cleansing events in Arkansas, a statewide map or map series would have strengthened the visual (re)presentation of the scope, scale, locations and places of racial cleansing in Arkansas.

Second, Loewen positioned the Sundown Town movement within the context of Jim Crow laws and culture as the defining foundational white supremacist ideology and strategy during the “nadir” of American race relations from 1890 to the 1930s. Surprisingly Lancaster did not similarly frame racial cleansing within this ideological context. Consequently, missing an opportunity to use racial cleansing to further amplify Loewen’s conclusion that “most Americans have no idea that race relations *deteriorated* from 1890 to the 1930s in the United States” and that “Sundown Towns could not be understood outside this historical period” (p.25).

Third, in terms of the place-based dimension of racial cleansing, Jaspin used county and state maps to contextualize each racial cleansing case study. He graphically illustrated the scope and scale, locations and places of racial cleansing events. Notwithstanding Lancaster’s clear place-based descriptive narrative, maps were noticeably absent in this book.

As a Jim Crow segregationist tactic, racial cleansing measurably created white racialized county and city landscapes throughout Arkansas. Lancaster powerfully situated these racialized landscapes in terms of black and white Arkansans having two entirely different mental maps of Arkansas (p.14). Characterized as “enduring injustices,” he also speculated about Arkansas’s legacy of racial cleansing and its impact upon African American agency after “being driven into exile and away from property then left forfeit to local whites, and being intimidated into avoiding these areas that later offered some measure of prosperity, as exemplified in the economic boom experienced by those Ozark communities along the White River and its upland tributaries when the Army Corps of Engineers created lakes that transformed rural areas into popular resorts or even the boom that hit northwestern Arkansas” (p. 15).

A recent *Jonesboro Sun* article “Mayor denounces pro-white billboard” (May 2, 2015) illustrated the continuation of Arkansas’s racial cleansing legacy into today’s society. Located in mostly white Pope and Boone County, the anonymously purchased billboard space proclaimed “It’s Not Racist To Love (heart symbol) Your Own People” at both sites. As an African American female born, raised, educated and employed for eighteen years as a college geography instructor, Lancaster’s book resonated with me. Beyond “tree of talking” reconciliation (p. 16), this historical text, when integrated with historical geography theory, themes, and methods has unique potential to make race relations discourse more place-specific, to make natural resource management economic development policy and practice more racially equitable in Arkansas and to serve as a place-based research model and laboratory for similarly situated states.

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