
Book Reviews

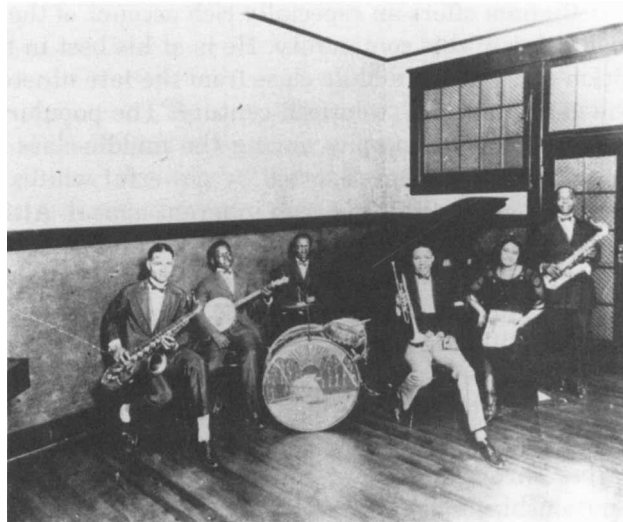
We Ask Only a Fair Trial: A History of the Black Community of Evansville, Indiana. By Darrel E. Bigham. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; published in association with the University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, 1987. Pp. xiii, 286. Tables, maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$20.00.)

We Ask Only a Fair Trail should interest a diverse audience. It is written in a popular style, and its rich details on the lives and accomplishments of dozens of Evansville's Afro-Americans will surely whet the appetites of local citizens. At the same time, Darrel E. Bigham addresses a range of issues of significance to historians of the Afro-American experience, making a real contribution to a collective understanding of that subject.

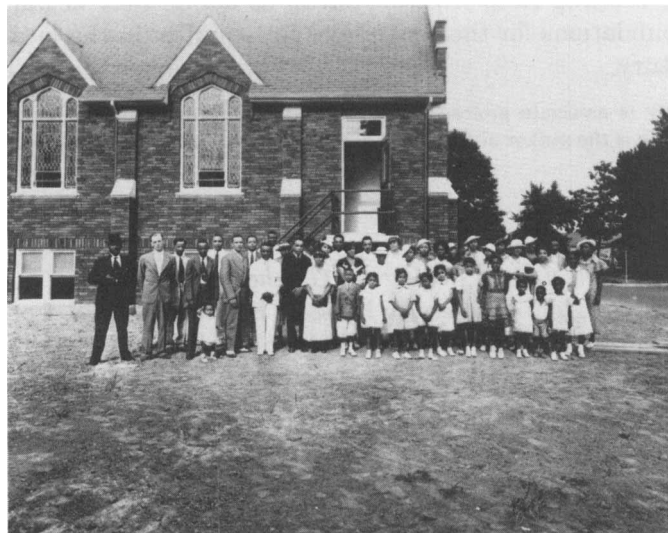
Evansville's location near the border between North and South has greatly shaped its history. On the one hand, located in the free state of Indiana, it was a frequent target for black migrants (e.g., runaway slaves) from the South. On the other hand, located so close to the South, its racial customs and mores had more in common with southern cities than northern ones. Its size—more middling than big city—was an additional influence. Not unrelated was its general lack of heavy industry. While these sorts of factors made the black experience in Evansville quite different from that in Chicago or Detroit, there were nevertheless some important continuities.

Bigham demonstrates that for Afro-Americans, even in the late nineteenth century, urbanization tended to mean ghettoization. Black Evansville grew fastest in the period from Emancipation to the turn of the twentieth century, largely due to an influx of freed slaves who judged that they would find greater opportunities in the North than in the South. In reality, they found a segmented labor market which restricted them to low-paying, largely service-oriented occupations, and an increasingly segregated housing market. By 1880, a "ghetto" had begun to emerge.

Within this ghetto, Afro-Americans constructed a rich associational and institutional life. Churches, schools, and secret societies grouped black people together and gave them a variety of structures through which they could attempt to meet their community's needs. Holidays and anniversaries, like "Emancipation Day," brought the community together with a sense of shared heritage and purpose.



THE INDIANA FIVE: CARDWELL OSBURN, RIDDLES WOODARD, MILTON PARISH, REUBEN REEVES, PETE WHITNEY, NANNIE GLOVER



CONGREGATION OF THE GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH, MISSOURI SYNOD,
LATE 1930S

Courtesy of Special Collections Department, University of Southern Indiana-Evansville.

Bigham offers an especially rich account of the evolution of the leadership of this community. He is at his best in tracing the transition of the black middle class from the late nineteenth century to the early and mid-twentieth century. The popularity of Booker T. Washington's philosophy among the middle-class had as much to do with the pressures exerted by powerful whites on a local level as it had to do with their own inherent appeal. Although organized "integrationism" was weak in black Evansville, there was plenty of resistance to "accommodationism."

Bigham traces the emergence of a new articulate "race pride" in Evansville during the Depression years of the 1930s. Although neither Garveyism nor the "New Negro" appear to have had any influence in the Evansville of the 1920s, these ideas did find resonance in the thirties. This was expressed on multiple levels: politically, through a new independence which redefined black relationships to both established parties; economically, through the development of black businesses which served a black clientele; socially, through the further development of black institutions and organizations.

Moreover, this new "race pride" did not preclude relations with whites. In fact, in this period a new set of relations developed in some new quarters, as manifested by the rise of the UAW-CIO in Evansville and by the new strength of the New Deal-based Democratic party. Working-class Afro-Americans built new cooperative relations with working-class whites. And in so doing, they began to build the foundations for their struggles for equality in the late twentieth century.

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Gilded Age Cato: The Life of Walter Q. Gresham. By Charles W. Calhoun. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988. Pp. viii, 280. Illustration, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$28.00.)

Toward the end of Walter Gresham's life, a Republican senator dubbed him "that old Welkin of diplomacy, that plantigrade pachyderm from the Wabash." The tone of contempt reflected the dislike GOP members felt for a man who had been both postmaster general under Republican Chester A. Arthur and secretary of state during Grover Cleveland's second presidential term. The political journey that Gresham took through the complex politics of Indiana during an intensely partisan era from one party to another is well chronicled in Charles W. Calhoun's excellent new biography.