

The nativists had no plan of action, no solution to the Catholic menace. They viewed the dissemination of information as an end in itself. Although they might have raised the decibel level of hatred, they appealed largely to those who already harbored anti-Catholic beliefs. Nor did their anti-nativist opponents convert many bigots. Each side, in effect, was preaching to the choir.

Nordstrom's study provides a window for understanding an important, long-lived spiritual/militaristic metaphor through its manifestation in a specific context. Like most good monographs, it seeks to explore the macrocosm through a microcosm and to provide a building block for further studies. The book is thought-provoking and diligently researched in primary sources.

Although useful to specialists, the book is narrowly conceived, especially chronologically, a fact that will limit its audience. The text contains little that is original, offering instead a parade of academic experts more

appropriate for footnotes. The author's style is flawed by jargon and overuse of certain words and phrases, the most ubiquitous of which is "trope."

Some of Nordstrom's conclusions are arguable, such as his implication that nativism declined with World War I and the extinction of certain journals. In fact, the anti-Catholic prejudice of the Progressive Era might have changed form, but it actually grew. The influence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, the attacks on Catholic presidential candidate Al Smith in 1928, and the immigration laws of the 1920s designed to bar Catholics, among others, are cases in point. *Dangers on the Doorstep* is useful, within limits.

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Migrating to the Movies
Cinema and Black Urban Modernity
 By Jacqueline Najuma Stewart

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Pp. xix, 343. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95)

In *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*, Jacqueline Najuma Stewart describes the creation of an American cinema through its links to the Great Migra-

tion of African Americans from the South during the first twenty years of the last century. This is a brilliant move that sheds fresh light on two familiar stories. Through extensive,

finely detailed research and well-judged interpretation, Stewart recovers what was at stake in the production of images and narratives that sought to describe the “reality” of black people in the raw, new medium of silent-era film. Well versed in the tradition of black film scholarship that charts Hollywood’s development of racist images, Stewart seeks to move beyond it through postcolonial and feminist theoretical models. From this grounding she develops a way of seeing “preclassical film” that establishes the active part played by African Americans in America’s early film culture.

An impressive aspect of Stewart’s work is her skillful use of extant film, old newspapers, correspondence, and other archival sources, including those held at Indiana University’s Black Film Center/Archive. This research allows her to recover the complex social life of Chicago’s Black Belt as it responded to a white-dominated cinema, helped to create the spaces of a modern urbanism, and produced the “race film.” This study revises the presupposition, fostered in the pioneering work of Thomas Cripps and Daniel J. Leab, that silent-era cinema related to the black community only as an instrument of racist stereotyping.

Stewart opens her study with a consideration of “preclassical” film’s strategies for addressing the representational challenge posed by the New Negro. She argues that while whites experimented with the motion

picture as a new way of policing blackness, it proved an unwieldy instrument, producing images that resisted cooptation into received racial categories. Her interpretation of films in the sub-genre she calls the “misdirected kiss” admirably supports this point. In Stewart’s handling, silent-era film is also a record of African Americans moving into a public sphere of new physical and emotional freedom.

The creation of a vibrant film culture in early twentieth-century black Chicago is the core of her project. Stewart’s presentation of the social collision between the uplift projects of its old settler elite and the emerging power of Southern migrants through their engagement with the new mass medium makes for compelling reading. Class-inflected debates over the propriety of certain leisure activities, the place of women in public spaces marked by race and vice, and the vexed issue of patriotism in the fight for democracy at home and abroad play significant roles in defining what film meant and how it was used by black audiences and filmmakers. Stewart highlights the complex social impulses that drove black critical response to film as a popular amusement and as a medium for conveying certain social truths.

In her closing chapters, Stewart turns our attention to those African Americans who played active roles, as actors, directors, managers, critics, and theater owners, in creating Amer-

ican cinema. Oscar Micheaux, the most famous filmmaker of the race film era, is her primary subject here. The isolated figure of previous studies develops as part of the social and institutional networks that made him an influential and productive artist. In her detailed and sensitive reading of Micheaux's 1920 film, *Within Our Gates*, she argues that Micheaux took the narrative invention of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and applied it to African American rhet-

oric of racial uplift. In so doing, he indicated "the unreliability of cinematic representation of Blackness in general" (p. 237). This insight is by itself worth the price of admission.

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Black is a Country
Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy

By Nikhil Pal Singh

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005. Pp. 285. Notes, index. \$16.95.)

In this critical volume, Nikhil Pal Singh demonstrates why racism in America is still an issue. He argues that existing struggles have resulted from American imperialism, internationalism, and neocolonialism, movements that have undermined democratic engagement in and outside of the United States. Singh's subtitle, "Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy," suggests that black African descendants continue to be traumatized by a type of neo-liberalism that critiques white supremacy and racial capitalism, but does not include blacks as complete partakers of the democratic ideal. Within this context, Singh writes convincingly that global democracy remains an unfinished project because its ideals are linked to super-

ficial notions of universalism, paternalism, and American exceptionalism, all of which prevent blacks from engaging in processes and positions that would help to dismantle global racism and foster transnationalist politics that might make democracy a universal reality. Connected to this global perspective is a black reality that recognizes freedom as an ideological construction, dictated by race and the ideals of white supremacy, that sees democracy as a praxis that involves protest and blacks' right to act as their own agents of change.

Through an examination of various social and political movements in twentieth-century American communities, the five chapters comprising *Black is a Country* connect readers to evolving scholarship that has