

American Pogrom

The East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics

By Charles Lumpkins

(Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008. Pp. xiv, 312. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$55.00; paperbound, \$24.95.)

In *American Pogrom*, historian Charles Lumpkins upends the dominant narrative of the 1917 East St. Louis race riot not only by placing the African American experience at the center but also by arguing that the riot was a strategic effort to negate black political organizing. Whereas previous scholars placed the responsibility for the riot on white working-class males concerned about social strife, Lumpkins argues that city elites, women, and political bosses played an integral role in this destructive demonstration of white superiority. Lumpkins offers a provocative interpretation that the riot represented a growing battle for political clout between black and white elites.

Lumpkins lays out his argument chronologically. He begins with the establishment of East St. Louis's African American community and then outlines its political structure from 1898 until 1915. During this period, African Americans began to assert their autonomy in the political arena by shifting from a typical patronage system to "a black political infrastructure independent of white political bosses" (p. 45). It was this "increasingly assertive black population" (p. 73) and white elites' unfounded paranoia over southern black migration that prompted whites to enact drastic measures to reduce

black migration or to force African Americans from the city. Using commission reports and newspapers, the author reconstructs both the May and July incidents. Lumpkins reveals in detail how blacks responded with armed self-defense to white attacks, an important fact buried by contemporaries and scholars alike. This historical erasure is remarkable considering that the city's predominant black communities in the south end remained untouched by rioters.

Although the pogrom metaphor is effective in showing the desire of participants to completely rid East St. Louis of its black residents, the author's omission of a sustained discussion of the use of daily violence as a means of social control weakens his thesis. Throughout the book, Lumpkins demonstrates that blacks in East St. Louis knew that they were "not safe as long as most white Illinoisans held contempt for black people" (p. 61). Yet, he only briefly discusses blacks' everyday experiences with violence (pp. 19, 37). In his book, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (2004), William D. Carrigan asserts that in central Texas whites "remembered extralegal violence as a just and necessary part of their history" (p. 13). Lumpkins's book ignores the work of scholars who

study daily violence and terror against blacks in the Deep South, and thus he loses the opportunity to consider how social control via racial violence played an integral part in daily race relations in the Midwest and other parts of the North. Despite this shortcoming, Lumpkins demonstrates that black midwesterners occupied a curious position in the social hierarchy—simultaneously integral parts of the machine yet living under the constant threat of violent repression.

Lumpkins's monograph focuses on the black experience within East St. Louis politics and the interwar-era riots, but it also demonstrates the resiliency of this African American

community. Beyond challenging the accepted motivations for racial violence in urban areas in the first decades of the twentieth century, he offers an in-depth view of the actors, social organizations, and political structures of black communities, which allowed African Americans to create and sustain their lives in the face of racial oppression.

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Sin in the City

Chicago and Revivalism, 1880-1920

By Thekla Ellen Joiner

(Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. Pp. xiv, 271. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95.)

After one particularly bruising encounter with Gilded Age clerics who considered themselves inconvenienced by Dwight L. Moody's urban evangelism, the lay leader remarked: "[S]ave me from the devil and ministers." Moody might have added to that list future generations of feminist historians who would find fault with the Third Awakening's "gendered theology" which "marginalized women" while "ritualizing racial superiority and ethnic animosity" that privileged white middle-class morality (pp. 14, 17). Thekla Joiner asserts that the roots of the modern religious

right and its "dedication to imposing its moral, social, and racial authority upon the nation" (p. 231) can be found in three revivals staged in Chicago between 1893 and 1918.

Joiner makes little effort to join the sixty-year interval between the revivals of Billy Sunday and the rise of Ronald Reagan. Instead, readers are expected to accept a linkage that the author sees between the current religious right "who feel overwhelmed and embattled by evil" (p. 232) and their evangelical forefathers who sought to usher in a second Eden by keeping women in their place. So,