The second half of the book focuses on the lives that African Americans crafted in the region after emancipation and migration. Chapter Four outlines how African Americans articulated and justified demands for full freedom and citizenship. Schwalm contends that men and women “experienced their participation…in ways that that included the subjectively symbolic, material, relational, and physical meanings of gender” (p. 107). In fact, her analysis of the construction and meanings of gender is a real strength of this work. Chapter Five delves deep inside the institutional lives of African Americans, emphasizing the significance of fraternal and sororal associations in defining, shaping, pursuing, and defending freedom and citizenship—and in shaping gender roles. Perhaps the most innovative part of Emancipation’s Diaspora is Chapter Seven, which examines how African Americans publicly commemorated their collective memory of slavery. Emancipation Day celebrations provide the predominant lens for this inquiry, but the author also relies on pension claims, death notices, and postbellum slave narratives to enhance her argument. According to Schwalm, the historical record proves that acknowledging slavery and its trauma was a critical aspect of African Americans’ collective identity and of their post-war activism. Emancipation’s Diaspora follows the unlikely and uncharted path of African Americans’ Civil War migration into a region not typically associated with African American history. This book persuasively demonstrates that historians would be remiss to ignore the consequences of emancipation and its subsequent diaspora in regions outside of the slave South—specifically, the Upper Midwest.

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Lynching and Spectacle
Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940
By Amy Louise Wood

In his 1937 novel Black Boy, Richard Wright reflected, “The things which influenced my conduct as a Negro did not have to happen to me directly; I needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects.” Yet lynching was not performed solely to influence the behavior of African Americans. Amy Louise Wood argues that lynching was carried out for the instruction of
The brutal practice was used to bind whites together as a unified group in spite of class, gender, and religious differences. Wood claims that “the cultural power of lynching—indeed, the cultural power of white supremacy itself—rested on spectacle” (p. 3). This is a study of how lynching drew on a culture of spectacles—public executions, religious ceremonies, theater, photography, and cinema—to reinforce white supremacy, and ultimately how critics utilized that spectacle to turn public opinion against the practice.

Organized chronologically and thematically, the book analyzes three broad elements of lynching: its dependence on sensationalism, the relationship between the local and the national, and the practice’s connection to modernity. No spectacle better exemplified the turn-of-the-century contest between local and state power than public executions. When the state deemed private executions more civilized, lynch mobs reclaimed local authority but “saw themselves as extensions of the state” (p. 46). White mobs likewise used religious ceremonies to justify their actions and to demonstrate that they were rational, modern, and civilized.

In an insightful discussion of lynching photography and early cinema, Wood examines the capacity of modern technology to uphold anti-modern forms of social power. Wood deftly utilizes visual theory without losing sight of how locals perceived and circulated the images. Her analysis makes many familiar images newly appalling to the reader. With thorough attention to the importance of gender, Wood demonstrates that photos made lynching “safe” for a white audience by freezing the body in time and place.

The spectacle of lynching eventually led to its demise. Images circulated by the NAACP and films such as MGM’s Fury (1936) shifted the emphasis from the broken black body to the mob itself. Gleeful white mobs demonstrated that lynching was irrational, antimodern, and antithetical to American ideals. Some critiques were effective because the victims, such as two men killed in San Jose in 1933, were white. Southern newspaper editors, fearing an economic backlash, could thus adopt antilynching rhetoric without feeling attacked as a region. By World War II, critics had created the national perception that law and order were the real victims of the practice. Whites could turn against lynching without abandoning their white supremacist ideals.

Wood focuses primarily on the lynching of African American men in the modernizing South—Georgia, Texas, and Mississippi—but one of the work’s greatest strengths is the interplay between local and national contexts. Although it is difficult to understand how viewers received films and images, Wood is careful to focus on what can be known: the words of local critics; the intentions
of filmmakers; which films theater owners chose to screen in particular locations; and which photographs news editors chose to publish. Yet the relationship between reality and representation is not always clear. Did viewers ever doubt the authenticity of photographs as they became technologically savvy and more accustomed to cinematic productions? Continued research on the reception of such spectacles would be welcome.

Lynching and Spectacle is an excellent example of how visual culture and theory can enhance historical research without obscuring the argument. This work is recommended for historians interested in how race and violence worked together to shape popular culture, and vice versa.

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Civic Passions
Seven Who Launched Progressive America (and What They Teach Us)
By Cecelia Tichi

Cecelia Tichi’s new book on the Progressive Era exhorts the reader to reconsider Progressive passions and accomplishments through narrative accounts of seven noted Progressive leaders: Alice Hamilton, John R. Commons, Julia Lathrop, Florence Kelley, Louis D. Brandeis, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Tichi’s purpose is to rouse current civic passions by drawing parallels between the concerns of the often quaint-seeming Progressive reformers of the turn of the century and the glaring flaws and corruption of our own polities. Central to this exercise is the vibrant concept of the public good that each of these reformers held up as a beacon in their often exhausting and risky work as public intellectuals and activists.

Tichi’s book is beautifully written and each chapter succeeds in gripping readers by plunging them into the middle of the subject’s stream of life, generally at a pivotal moment in his or her career. Tichi begins her account of Alice Hamilton’s career as a pathbreaking industrial toxicologist with her confrontation of Edward Cornish, vice president of the National Lead Company, over the poisoning of workers in his plants. She catches the labor economist John R. Commons on a train platform with some of his students as they embark for Pittsburgh to study the health and welfare of laborers and their families.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett brings up the rear in this parade of research-oriented superstars, and the jaded reader might initially see her as the