

*"We Will Be Satisfied with Nothing Less"**The African American Struggle for Equal Rights in the North during Reconstruction*

By Hugh Davis

(Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011. Pp. xvii, 209. Bibliography, notes. \$45.00.)

Historians are taking a growing interest in the politics of race and civil rights in the Reconstruction-era North, and Hugh Davis's book is a welcome addition to that literature. Rather than look at a particular city, state, or subregion, as many previous studies have done, Davis attempts to examine the North in its entirety. *"We Will Be Satisfied with Nothing Less"* grapples with northern black activism at local, state, and federal levels, focusing in particular on schools, voting, and black northerners' vexed relationship to the Republican Party.

This slender and clearly written volume begins with the Civil War, which Davis frames as the origin of black northerners' postwar struggle for equal rights. At a national convention in Syracuse in fall 1864, African American activists laid out a civil rights agenda and established the Equal Rights League (ERL) to push for its implementation. Davis provides the most complete account we have of the ERL's activities on the national stage and in states and cities across the North. He gives special attention to the notably active Pennsylvania ERL, whose internal records, unlike those of other state organizations, are extant.

The book proceeds roughly chronologically, exploring African Americans' activism on behalf of

federal measures such as the Fifteenth Amendment and the Sumner Civil Rights Act, as well as local efforts. Davis's emphasis on the struggle for access to schools is particularly welcome. He considers the array of different local and state policies regarding schools, race, and taxes; delves into debates among African Americans about the merits of black-only schools; and considers African Americans' varying tactics for demanding adequate schools for their children, including mass meetings, lobbying, and lawsuits by parents.

Throughout, Davis makes some useful interpretive points. Contrary to scholars who argued that northern black leaders in this period were an isolated elite with virtually no constituency, Davis shows, where sources permit, that civil rights activism extended deeply into black communities. Meanwhile, although he does not overlook factionalism among black leaders—a theme in older scholarship—Davis places it in context by emphasizing that disagreements about strategy and tactics are ubiquitous in social movements and that white racism and scarcity of resources posed far greater threats to black organizations than factionalism.

Davis's sweeping, national approach and his limited focus do have some drawbacks. Examples drawn

from places as divergent as Indianapolis and San Francisco seem to run together, and Davis rarely explains why civil rights struggles were more successful in some locales than others. Although a few individuals, including Peter Clark and George Downing, feature prominently throughout the book, Davis clearly chose geographical breadth over depth of characterization. He gives little attention, for example, to how black leaders made their livelihoods and how their work may have shaped their activism. Meanwhile, some aspects of the northern "struggle for equal rights" go largely unexplored, includ-

ing African Americans' demands for access to public accommodations, protests against unfair policing, and the quest for better wages and fairer hiring practices.

Still, this book succeeds on its own terms. It offers new findings, synthesizes existing literature, and sketches a multifaceted northern struggle in which activists adjusted to the changing political climate and persisted even as national policymakers abandoned the egalitarian promises of Reconstruction.

KATE MASUR is Associate Professor of History at Northwestern University.



*The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists
Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age*

By Timothy Messer-Kruse

(New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011. Pp. viii, 236. Notes, index. Paperbound, \$30.00.)

This is an iconoclastic book about one of America's most controversial political trials. On May 4, 1886, a bomb killed seven police officers in Chicago's Haymarket Square; eight anarchists were convicted of the crime. Four were executed, one committed suicide, and three received life sentences, although they were subsequently pardoned by Governor John Peter Altgeld. According to the standard histories, the trial was a miscarriage of justice in which the anarchists were convicted for their political opinions.

With passion and in painstaking detail, Timothy Messer-Kruse argues that the current conventional inter-

pretation is wrong: the Chicago anarchists received a fair trial and were guilty by the legal standards of the time. Their case was weakened by an incompetent legal defense team and their own use of the trial to propagate their ideas. To substantiate his claim, Messer-Kruse draws extensively from the 8,000-word transcript of the original trial, which the standard works do not consult. To him, the results do not simply refute other historians; they rescue the anarchists from their defenders who, since the day of their conviction, have turned them into martyrs to free speech and victims of the first Red Scare. For Messer-Kruse, they were genuine revolutionaries