

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.

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*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

who advocated violent means to achieve a social revolution amidst the millennial mood generated by the eight-hour movement. They preached violence and died violently.

Messer-Kruse succeeds in reopening the case. He argues convincingly that the prosecution correctly understood the relevant Illinois law on conspiracy, despite controversy about it. He also shows that the prosecution assembled powerful evidence of a conspiracy that included the throwing of the bomb, not one that simply advocated violence in the pursuit of revolution. In addition, he strongly defends the jury selection process and the rulings of Judge Joseph E. Gary, both of which were attacked after the trial, most famously by Governor Altgeld in his pardon statement. Messer-Kruse convinces me that at least four, and perhaps five, of the eight convicted anarchists were guilty as charged under the law at the time.

Messer-Kruse presents the anarchists as committed revolutionaries, not just victims of injustice; but he fails to “get inside their heads and view the world through their eyes” as he aimed to do (p. 8). He does not attempt to link the anarchists to the politics and culture of German workers, even though six of the eight convicted men were German

immigrants. Nor does he embed the events he discusses in the recent history of Chicago, particularly the 1877 national railroad strike that in Chicago witnessed conflicts between the police and workers prefiguring the battles of the 1880s. Readers who do want to get inside the heads of the anarchists should consult Paul Avrich’s *The Haymarket Tragedy* (1984), Bruce C. Nelson’s *Beyond the Martyrs* (1988), Hartmut Keil and John B. Jentz’s *German Workers in Chicago: A Documentary History* (1988), and James Green’s *Death in the Haymarket* (2006).

Messer-Kruse’s findings will and should be seriously debated, including the question of which standards should apply in evaluating the fairness of the trial—those of the 1880s or today? By today’s standards it was not fair. Perhaps his greatest contribution will be his vivid presentation of the strength of the working class in Gilded Age Chicago and of the profound challenge that it presented to the city’s ruling elite.

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