

an apologia for Chicago itself, and, by implication, for urban life. No longer was the city an alienating *Other*" (p. 186). Admittedly, they did reinforce a split identity for Illinoisans, caught between the exuberant energies of the northern metropolis and the quieter lifestyles so admired downstate, a contrast further reinforced by guidebooks and other literary forms. But the argument that picture postcards serviced a progressive vision of national development, one that was dynamic and urban-centered, is an interesting one, meriting more discus-

sion than it gets here. The irony, of course, is that today such postcards tend, more heavily, to endorse a spirit of retrospection and nostalgia, nurturing personal and collective memory in a way very different from their original intentions.

NEIL HARRIS is Professor Emeritus of History and Art History at the University of Chicago. His recent book is *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience* (2013).



### *Born in the U.S.A.*

#### *Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory*

Edited by Seth C. Bruggeman

(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. Pp. v, 283. Illustrations, notes, index. Paperbound, \$26.95.)

Birthplaces make for odd historic sites, because they are historic only in retrospect. Who knew, in 1732, that George Washington would lead a revolution for American independence, or in 1911 that Bill Monroe—born that September 13 in Rosine, Kentucky—would someday help create bluegrass music? Once an individual's greatness, fame, or death inspires commemoration, what happens to the place where he (or, less often, she) was born? What architectural and cultural work must descendants, private associations, or public agencies perform to create or recreate the site? What about the place will then be "authentic"? As Seth C. Bruggeman writes in his introduc-

tion to *Born in the U.S.A.*, a persistent obsession with origins has rendered birthplace commemoration "distinctive for its ability to convince us that something of our essential American character is retrievable from the presumably hardscrabble places in which our heroes were born" (p. 17). The essays in this collection speak to the diverse issues at stake in "the politics of remembering birth" (p. 5).

Interpretive conflicts stem from disagreements both over memories of the past and ideologies in the present. Such was the case in the 1920s and 1930s, when several southern women, transplanted to Connecticut, envisioned preserving Robert E. Lee's

Virginia birthplace. In Paul Reber and Laura Lawfer Orr's telling, a Lost Cause interpretation of Stratford Hall foundered on the problem that Lee had lived in the home only until the age of three, while a Colonial Revival approach more successfully characterized the site as home to four eighteenth-century generations of Lees. At John F. Kennedy's birthplace in Brookline, Massachusetts, as Christine Arato explains, the recently assassinated president's mother took a leading part in the preservation, even recording the audio tour that accompanied visitors around the house. But while she mixed JFK's story with her own narrative of motherhood in the early twentieth century, the National Park Service professionals who ran the site chafed at her nostalgia. At around the same time, also in Massachusetts, a combination of anticommunism, racism, and concern about interloping preservationists provoked controversy over W. E. B. Du Bois's birthplace (p. 248). As David Glassberg and Robert Paynter note, even the end of the Cold War and the recognition that tourism was good business failed to produce real engagement with Du Bois's radicalism: the emphasis on his boyhood allows visitors to avoid grappling with his ideas. At Joseph Smith's Vermont birthplace, the subject of Keith A. Erikson's essay, early twentieth-century Mormons who sought to link their faith and Yankee America encountered opposition from local citizens less inclined to acknowledge the Latter-day Saints' connection to their town.

Commemoration of a birthplace site may begin with a famous person, but the interpretation often tells a larger story. Residents of Rosine have made of their town a monument to both Bill Monroe and the "birthplace of bluegrass," as Cynthia Miller describes. A more manufactured heritage emerged in Mason City, Iowa, early home of *The Music Man* author Meredith Willson, where local promoters recreated the idealized midwestern town of the Hollywood movie. Anna Thompson Hajdik captures the ironies of this "simulacrum within a simulacrum," as well as the challenges to local economic development as the musical fades from memory (p. 192). At Jimmy Carter's Plains, Georgia, birthplace (still his home), Zachary J. Lechner explains, the National Park Service and local organizations offer a nuanced portrait of "rural and small-town life in the mid-twentieth-century Deep South," countering nostalgia and acknowledging racial inequality (p. 91). The New Jersey birthplace of women's-rights activist Alice Paul has assumed new life, writes Kris Myers, not as a museum but as a leadership institute for girls, which invokes Paul's spirit to incubate new generations of citizen-activists. Such brief summaries barely do justice to this rich collection, which also includes essays about Missouri's supposed Mark Twain birthplace cabin (by Hilary Iris Lowe), John Muir's Scotland and California homes (by Angela Phelps), and the challenge of commemorating Edgar Allan Poe in Boston, the native city

whose literary snobbery he derided (by Paul Lewis and Dan Currie).

In a concluding essay, Patricia West notes the overriding irony of birthplace interpretations: they typically celebrate eminent men while obscuring women's work and lives in these romanticized domestic spaces. Like many of the contributors, West suggests the opportunity to tell more "meaningful stories" about human life in place and time (p. 265). The essays in *Born in the U.S.A.* tell such stories—of the literal and figurative construction, and the limits and of-

ten-untapped potential, of these sites. Other places, especially the homes of the less famous and fortunate, warrant similar examination from academic scholars and from public historians who engage visitors through the stories of origins and lives.

SCOTT E. CASPER is Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and Professor of History at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He is the author of *Sarah Johnson's Mount Vernon: The Forgotten History* (2008).



## *Way Up North in Louisville*

*African American Migration in the Urban South, 1930-1970*

By Luther Adams

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Pp. xiv, 272. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95.)

## *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*

*Louisville, Kentucky, 1945-1980*

By Tracy E. K'Meyer

(Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009. Pp. xi, 410. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00.)

Luther Adams, in *Way Up North in Louisville*, and Tracy E. K'Meyer, in *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*, have written pioneering studies of the Great Migration and the civil rights revolution in the upper, urban South. Their studies add to and confirm the work of Earl Lewis on Norfolk, Virginia, and Joe Trotter Jr. on southern West Virginia. Adams and K'Meyer know Louisville firsthand; Adams grew up in the city and K'Meyer has lived and worked there for the past thirty years.

Each chose Louisville because of its location on the border between northern Kentucky and southern Indiana. Historically, neither truly southern nor clearly northern, Kentucky and Louisville exhibited features of both. Kentucky did not secede during the Civil War even though it retained slavery. During Reconstruction, Louisville segregated its schools but otherwise did not adopt a legally enforced system of Jim Crow segregation. Neither the city nor the state ever deprived African