

Swarthmore College

Works

History Faculty Works

History

Fall 2006

Review Of "Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot And The Reshaping Of American Race Relations" By D. F. Godshalk

Allison Dorsey

Swarthmore College, adorsey1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to these works benefits you](#)

Recommended Citation

Allison Dorsey. (2006). "Review Of "Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot And The Reshaping Of American Race Relations" By D. F. Godshalk". *Register Of The Kentucky Historical Society*. Volume 103, Issue 4. 805-806.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history/313>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by . It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Kentucky Historical Society

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* by David Fort Godshalk

Review by: Allison Dorsey

Source: *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 103, No. 4 (Autumn 2005), pp. 805-806

Published by: Kentucky Historical Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23386649>

Accessed: 01-02-2017 20:12 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



Kentucky Historical Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*

Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations. By David Fort Godshalk. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Pp. x, 365. \$59.95 cloth; \$22.50 paper.)

In anticipation of the centennial of the 1906 Atlanta riot, scholars have produced a number of monographs that struggle to put that orgy of racial violence in proper historical context. David Godshalk's *Veiled Visions* makes a significant contribution to this literature. "Atlanta's history," he argues, "underscores the potential instability of Jim Crow social identities, the multiplicity of intraracial divisions among both blacks and whites, the potentially far-reaching consequences of highly localized struggles, and the numerous opportunities for social change, even in the nadir of American race relations." Incorporating Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's "politics of respectability" into an analysis of Atlanta's long-standing political coalition of "white racial moderates" and socially conservative black elites, Godshalk places the riot at the heart of an explanation of why and how American race relations stagnated in racial hostility for the bulk of the twentieth century.

Godshalk notes that white antagonism in the aftermath of the riot "discouraged black elites from forming visible alliances with working class African Americans." Black leaders chose instead to pursue "elite cooperation across the color line as the surest catalyst for social and racial justice." Rejecting open racial pride and political militancy as the path to civil rights and equality as argued by Atlanta's "New Negro Men" (W. E. B. Du Bois, John Hope, and Jesse Max Barber) before the riot, black leaders such as First Congregationalist Church's Henry Hugh Proctor pursued a patron/client relationship with the white elite as part of a strategy to win support for local black institutions and to stave off racial violence. Atlanta's black leadership, as well as local and national white elites, embraced Booker T. Washington's politically conservative rhetoric that discouraged agitation for political rights.

Washington himself, Godshalk argues, stubbornly refused to acknowledge the limits of his accommodationist philosophy in the face of the violence of 1906 (both Atlanta and Brownsville) and the Republican Party's withdrawal of support for black civil rights. Within the limited range of options occasioned by this pernicious racial climate, Atlanta's black leaders pursued either Proctor's top-down exclusionary programs of racial uplift, including self-segregation from working-class blacks, or the "face to face" grassroots activism of Lugenia Burns Hope's Neighborhood Union. Proctor and other black elites who joined hands with Atlanta's businessmen and city

boosters (now concerned about the riot's negative impact upon the city's reputation despite their role in fomenting the violence) secured financial and social support from their white benefactors. This pattern became part of the city's racial status quo through the mayoralty of Andrew Young and beyond, to the disadvantage of black Atlanta's growing urban poor.

Well-written and meticulously researched, Godshalk's work is persuasive. Scholars may question his premise that Atlanta influenced the national model of race relations more than other moments of racial violence, though I was more challenged by his timeline. The divide within the black community was visible prior to the 1906 riot. Educated and increasingly middle class, men like Proctor began to critique and withdraw from social contact with the black "lesser sort" before the violence. Although the black elite would learn paternalistic relations with whites would not save them from attack during the riot (Godshalk's detailing of armed self-defense on the part of *working-class blacks* beautifully highlights the convoluted logic of the black elite), much of the city's black leadership recommitted to this biracial alliance, believing it offered the only hope of freedom from overt violence and provided a secure niche in which to pursue their own agenda for racial development. In the end, black elites sold their heritage of racial solidarity for the pottage of economic advantage and personal dignity.

ALLISON DORSEY teaches history at Swarthmore College. She is author of To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906 (2004), and is completing "Listening to Mammy Tales," an article analyzing white emotional connections to and recollections of black nannies and domestic servants.

Dangerous Strangers: Minority Newcomers and Criminal Violence in the Urban West, 1850-2000. By Kevin J. Mullen. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Pp. xii, 203. \$69.95 cloth.)

Kevin Mullen is to be congratulated for his latest work, *Dangerous Strangers*. In it, he tackles a potentially controversial subject. Understanding that popular wisdom presumes a connection between immigration and crime, Mullen considers to what extent such a nexus does indeed exist. "Are immigrants in fact responsible for more than their share of violent crime?" he asks (p. 3). The author's provocative reply is sure to unsettle many readers: at least in San Francisco between 1850 and 2000, immigrants exhibited unusual criminality. Even more people certainly will find discomfiting Mullen's further