

between the Kerner Commission's *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (1968) and the protests that were initiated by Chicano groups in Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and San Antonio. Of significance is the fact that the Kerner Commission's "critique of stereotypes exposed a set of power relations reinforced by and existing within mass communication"(29). Consequently government could no longer ignore what Chicano groups and others had been pointing out for years. Of equal importance are his analysis of inter and intragroup relations within the context of the state and his discussion of the role of women in independent film and video.

The inclusion of notes, photos, filmography, and an extensive bibliography, makes this book informative and useful for students. Noriega's work makes major contributions to the history of race relations, media studies, and race and ethnic studies. My only recommendation is that the conclusion could have included a brief summary of the author's findings and a discussion of lessons learned and possible courses of action in the future. These are important because they would serve the purpose of helping the reader tie issues and themes together at the end and more importantly, give the audience a sense of other areas that need further study, lessons to be gleaned from past Chicano media activism, and the author's thoughts on where we go from here.

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**Stewart E. Tolnay. *The Bottom Rung: African American Family Life on Southern Farms.* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999). 232 pp, \$19.95 paper**

Stewart E. Tolnay has a message to deliver. In his excellent historical treatise on the family life of African American sharecroppers he counters current belief that rural Southern blacks who migrated North brought with them a dysfunctional family structure, a view espoused today by scholars as politically disparate as the liberal Daniel Patrick Moynihan and the

conservative Charles Murray. Through the use of interview data gathered from the New Deal's Federal Writers Project and with statistical analysis of U. S. Census data, Tolnay's seven chapters and epilogue span the years 1910–1940 from the post-Slavery period and the era of Jim Crow through the Great Depression to the dawn of WWII. His epilogue is essentially a reflection on preceding chapters but with an updated analysis of African American family life in the contemporary urban North. Tolnay's conclusion is that the lifestyles of crime and illegitimacy in the black inner city are largely a function of social and economic determinants and not cultural pathology or moral failings.

Tolnay employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to rigorously test his hypothesis that the influx of migrants from the rural South did not destabilize northern black families nor did they bring with them a dysfunctional culture characterized by desertion, divorce, illiteracy, and illegitimacy. Each of the first six chapters, though slightly repetitive, blazes a push-from-the-South/pull-to-the North dynamic that has led to some of the dismal present-day circumstances affecting significant portions of urban black families. This contemporary view is captured brilliantly in the final chapter and the epilogue. In the preceding chapters we are reminded of the physical and political violence endured by black farm families in the South. The social roles of women and children are addressed. Comparisons between housing conditions, marriage patterns, access to jobs outside the home as a result of economic upturns and downturns, years of schooling allowed, fertility rates, family size, divorce and separation patterns, and desertion are qualitatively and quantitatively compared by race and region.

My only criticism, and it admittedly is a weak one, is the employment logistics regression models using micro-Census data from 1910 and 1940 by race and sex. I'm not entirely confident in the reliability of those early data collection methods. My questioning does not take away from the author's overall analysis or conclusion, however. The interviews culled from the Federal Writers Project provide a much richer and deeper understanding of black/white relationships in the South and in America. We are left with a needed underpinning for the American dilemma, and more, its racist consequences.

Tolnay's *The Bottom Rung: African American Family Life on Southern Farms*, is highly recommended reading. The socio-historical format and the author's almost in-your-face conclusions are needed in this day when academics and pundits are embraced for their blame-the-victim attitude toward impoverished blacks who struggle to survive in a system that has failed them.

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