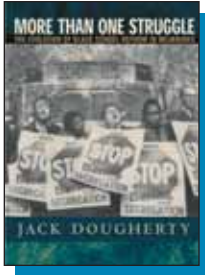


EDITORS' CHOICE

Fighting for Black Education in Milwaukee



More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee

BY JACK DOUGHERTY

University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC,
2004. Pp. xv, 288. Index, notes, bibliography,
illustrations, photos, maps. ISBN: 0807855243

The publication of Jack Dougherty's book on black efforts for school reform in Milwaukee coincides with the fiftieth anniversary in 1994 of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruling that declared legalized segregation of public schools to be unconstitutional. For Dougherty, however, viewing the history of African American education solely in terms of the almost mythic *Brown* decision slights the length and complexity of the struggles for access to public education. Instead, in this extensively researched, comprehensive historical narrative, Dougherty depicts a series of black movements over a sixty-year period in Milwaukee that were aimed at "gain[ing] power over educational policy and practice for the broader goal of uplifting the race." At times these Milwaukee movements worked in concert; at others they came into conflict.

In writing his University of Wisconsin–Madison doctoral dissertation, Dougherty initially focused his research on 1965, the peak year of the school integration movement in Milwaukee (and, he notes, the year he was born). It was a significant year for me too. I was a young Milwaukee *Sentinel* reporter newly assigned to the civil rights beat. I covered the protest marches, school boycotts, Freedom Schools, arrests, and court cases that dominated media attention that year, and then other local and national civil rights activities for the remainder of the 1960s.

Even in that decade—which forms only a part of Dougherty's study—it was clear that "the movement" was made up of more than one faction and that it was evolving. But dramatic events can seem overwhelming, and make it difficult for participants to grasp the larger picture. Similarly,

when historians focus on a landmark like *Brown v. Board*, they may neglect the details of the civil rights struggle in specific communities. Whether you lived through the period or not, therefore, the scope of Dougherty's narrative is especially satisfying.

Paying rigorous attention to the issues and constraints of each decade, Dougherty uses profiles of key figures to move his account from generation to generation. He begins with the 1930s, when the goal of the Milwaukee Urban League's William V. Kelley was simply to get at least one black teacher hired in the Milwaukee school system (Kelley secured jobs for two black substitute teachers, but an unspoken policy confined black teachers in Milwaukee to all-black schools until the 1950s). Dougherty devotes considerable attention to the ambitious and pivotal role of Lloyd Barbee, an attorney, NAACP activist, and state assemblyman, in defining and spurring the school integration movement of the 1960s. But Dougherty then smartly chronicles two divergent strands of

black educational activism—Marian McEvelly's less visible school reform efforts in the 1970s, aimed at stabilizing the racially transitional west-side Washington High School area, and Howard Fuller's fight to save North Division High School, a movement that gave rise to private school vouchers in the 1990s.

Dougherty's book is a local history of a national question, as he shows how Milwaukee both exemplified national conflicts from 1930 to the present, and dealt with them according to local conditions. He points out how Milwaukee's struggles for black education differed not only from those of the south, but also from those of Chicago, Detroit,

and Cleveland. As a result, Milwaukee's black leaders did not always follow the lead of the national movement, but devised their own, varied strategies for obtaining the education owed to black children.

Unlike most northern cities, where the African American population surged early in the century and gained some political power, Milwaukee remained overwhelmingly white until the postwar manufacturing boom of the 1950s drew thousands of southern African Americans to the city, increasing its

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black population by 187 percent. Milwaukee was also distinctive because two civil rights movements “collided” there in the early 1960s, as Dougherty puts it: the longstanding campaign for better jobs, and the struggle for school integration. He explores in fascinating detail the institutional and ideological debates that resulted. In particular, Dougherty shows, some Milwaukee activists eventually decided that integration was not the best way to ensure that public schools adequately served black children.

Most importantly, however, in the 1950s and after, white city and school leaders had choices about how to respond to demographic shifts and the demands of the black community. Despite the role played by the movement’s white allies in Milwaukee such as Father James Groppi, it is deeply troubling to review how whites hostile to the movement concocted policies designed to protect white privilege, and defended those policies with unstinting energy.

Dougherty’s book contributes to historians’ current focus on local issues and unsung heroes in the fight for civil rights. More than this, however, he details Milwaukee’s strategies and struggles for school reform, not because they guarantee success, but because they can energize our thinking about current racial and educational problems. Historical understanding, Dougherty suggests, prompts an openness to possibilities in the present, and stimulates creative approaches that might improve the future.

BERNICE BURESH

Bernice Buresh has been a Milwaukee Sentinel reporter, a Newsweek correspondent and bureau chief, and a professor of journalism at Boston University. Currently she writes about health care and is coauthor of From Silence to Voice: What Nurses Know and Must Communicate to the Public, (Cornell University Press, 2001).



This poster from the Wisconsin Historical Society’s Social Action Poster Collection announces the first of three school boycotts organized from 1964 to 1966 by the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee or MUSIC, an umbrella civil rights organization.

According to Jack Dougherty’s *More Than One Struggle* (reviewed in this issue), eleven thousand children, about 60 percent of all students from “inner-core” schools, stayed out May 18, 1964, the tenth anniversary of the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Timothy B. Tyson is Associate Professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. His first book, *Radio Free Dixie* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), was co-winner in 2000 of the Frederick Jackson Turner Prize awarded by the Organization of American Historians. Recently he published *Blood Done Sign My Name* (Random House, 2004), a memoir of his North Carolina childhood and early experiences of the civil rights struggle and racial conflict.

Blood Done Sign My Name tells the story of a race murder in Oxford, North Carolina, in 1970 and how it changed the community, your family, and your whole life. How did some of the larger issues of the civil rights movement play themselves out in your family's experience?

My father was a white Methodist minister in the Jim Crow South, an "Eleanor Roosevelt liberal," he called himself in later years, and there was no way for him to avoid the race issue and have any integrity. He was wedged between his convictions and his congregations, much of the time, and the example that he set in those years shaped my life indelibly. It wasn't simple. He tried hard to be such a good pastor in other ways that his congregations would listen to him, or at least tolerate him, when he assailed their racial fears and prejudices and resentments. He wanted to play a prophetic role and yet he also wanted to be a parish priest. He knew that if there was going to be a new church and a new social order, beyond white supremacy, someone was going to have to explain it to white people, someone they respected, someone they knew loved them. It was a very, very tough role, and I thought he was heroic in his own way. But as a historian, I have taken some pains to show that his political philosophy was also not adequate to the demands of the revolutionary moment in which he found himself. I am not uncritical, but I admire him greatly.

Americans, perhaps especially outside the South, cherish a certain image of the civil rights movement. How do both your books challenge this image?

This was a political struggle, and inevitably took place in the church, in the courts, in the streets, and in our souls, but sometimes I think we are eager to make it a morality play in which African Americans issued a call on America's con-

science, which America answered. That is a fantasy. . . . [Furthermore] the federal government, which was the only pile of guns and money big enough to do the job, intervened on behalf of the movement, but did so very reluctantly and then only because America's racial problem had become a critical challenge to our position in the world, and because the country was becoming ungovernable due to the chaos in the streets and the challenges to our basic social institutions. But we should never forget that the federal government also intervened against the movement; the FBI plotting to push Dr. King to commit suicide, for example, and to crush him as a person. Most white Christians, too, did not see, at least not until much later, that the black freedom movement's call for justice was a legitimate challenge to their faith.

An important figure in your memoir is your graduate-school friend, Herman Bennett, whose family was confronted with racism in 1960s Milwaukee.

His father, an American soldier stationed in Germany, met his mother there, a German woman whom we would call "white." After they married in the early 1960s, they moved to Wadesboro, North Carolina, briefly, where they predictably had a hard time. And so they moved to Milwaukee when Herman was a little boy and his sister was an infant. And someone who disapproved of their family's racial makeup and the neighborhood they had chosen threw a firebomb into their home, which killed Herman's little sister in her crib. One reason I tell this story is to underline what people really ought to know already, which is that the American race problem is not a Southern problem in particular. Milwaukee is still more segregated, in my opinion, than the Jim Crow South I grew up in.

Your memoir is in a sense a personal perspective on the history told in your earlier work, especially *Radio Free Dixie*, your 1999 study of an unjustly neglected civil rights hero of the 1950s and 60s, Robert F. Williams. How did the Wisconsin Historical Society's collections in African American history contribute to that earlier book, and thus to *Blood Done Sign My Name*?

I was a fledgling assistant professor and thought I had already learned everything there was to know about Robert F.

Timothy B. Tyson
on Civil Rights History



Timothy B. Tyson

Williams, the NAACP firebrand from Monroe, North Carolina, who defied KKK terrorism and NAACP timidity. But I had an undergraduate come to see me about a paper he was writing, and he looked a little sheepish, so I took him over to the Wisconsin Historical Society, and while I was showing him how to look stuff up I stumbled upon a whole trove of rich stuff I hadn't dreamed even existed, and which proved important to *Radio Free Dixie*. This shows you not only how matchless the Society's civil rights collections are, but also the important relationship between teaching and research.

Can you describe the various collections of letters and papers related to African American history and the history of civil rights that are housed here at the Society? Why are they so important?

If you had to write a book on the civil rights movement and would only be allowed to work in one building, the Wisconsin Historical Society would be the building you would choose. These collections are the best in the country, hands down. The papers from Freedom Summer, the CORE [Congress for Racial Equality] Papers, and all sort of obscure but extraordinary newsletters from the 1960s—just check the footnotes of any of the classic works of civil rights scholarship, and you'll see that it has long been impossible to write about the movement without coming to Madison.

For more on how Tim Tyson's hometown reacted to his research, his understanding of the civil rights issue in American history, and more, read the full interview with him on the Society's Web site, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/>

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WHAT THEY'RE READING

John H. Broihahn

On a warm summer day archaeologist Robert “Ernie” Boszhardt hiked up over a low ridge and then down into a dark world where deer, bison, and humans walked, ran, and floated across the walls and ceiling of a limestone cave. By the light of birch bark torches, artists working in about 700 AD had carefully outlined an array of recognizable images, spirit figures, and enigmatic stories on the stone surface. *Deep Cave Rock Art in the Upper Mississippi Valley* (Prairie Smoke Press, 2003) is Boszhardt’s description of two “dark zone” caves (beyond sunlight) in Wisconsin where American Indian art has been found. He describes in an engaging style the thrill of discovering these paintings and the labor of documenting them. He also explains the challenges of preserving these thirteen-hundred-year-old images, and suggests that interdisciplinary partnerships can help. If you want to see an example of such Indian art in Wisconsin, you can do so at Roche-a-Cri State Park.



John H. Broihahn is State Archaeologist of Wisconsin.

Maxine Fleckner Ducey

Voices from the *Federal Theatre* by Bonnie Nelson Schwartz and the Educational Film Center (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) consists of oral histories from the Federal Theatre Project, the WPA program conceived to aid the more than thirty thousand theatrical artists and craftspeople put out of work by the Great Depression. The interviews give you a real sense of what it was like to be part of the Federal Theatre—exhilarating, frustrating, ennobling, and frightening. Vivid, detailed stories told by Studs Terkel, Arthur Miller, Jules Dassin, John Houseman, and many others, bring the period to life, as the contributors express their immense satisfaction and pride in giving the gift of live theater to hundreds of thousands of Americans all over the United States. Sadly, the book also documents how the House Un-American Activities Committee killed the Federal Theatre Project after only four years.



Maxine Fleckner Ducey is an archivist at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research and a life-long devotee of the theater and its history.

Valentina Peguero

In *The Japanese in Latin America* (University of Illinois, 2004), Daniel M. Masterson, with Sayaka Funada-Classen, examines the “broadest diaspora of a people of Asian origin in the hemisphere.” Students in my course on race and ethnicity in Latin America enjoy and learn from this book because it raises a wide range of economic, cultural, political, religious, and social issues, including the immigration policy of the host countries, as well as the immigrants’ cultural adaptation to the new homelands and their efforts to preserve their Japanese roots. The book immerses readers in the Japanese immigrant experience with compelling stories of failure and achievement in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Peru and other countries in the region. The controversial Alberto Fujimori, who was elected President of Peru in 1990, is an example of how Japanese immigrants have gradually melted into the Latin American cultural and political landscape.



Valentina Peguero is Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. The University of Nebraska Press has just published her *The Militarization of Culture in the Dominican Republic, from the Captains General to General Trujillo*.

Martin C. Perkins

Wisconsin *Land and Life* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1997) offers an exceptional collection of essays interpreting the state’s physical and cultural landscapes that will be used for generations by casual readers, students, and academics. Assembled by editors Robert C. Ostergren and Thomas R. Vale, the several dozen highly readable narratives are enriched with historical images, detailed maps, informative charts and notes, and revealing photographs. I was particularly interested in the essays on the state’s settlement process and the resulting cultural patterns, but town development, lumber, mining, and Euro-American settlement are also covered. Individual essays also capture immigration as experienced by Wisconsin’s Polish, Welsh, Norwegian, and Dutch populations.



Martin C. Perkins is Curator of Research and Interpretation at Old World Wisconsin.

Letters from our Readers

I am writing in reference to the article by John E. Miller (Summer 2004, “Fighting for the Cause: The Rhetoric and Symbolism of the Progressive Movement”) which traces the history of the Progressive political movement in Wisconsin. In describing its presumed demise after Governor Phil La Follette was defeated for reelection to a third term in 1938 by the Republican, Julius P. Heil, he concludes:

Ultimately, the Progressives went into eclipse because their rhetoric and their symbolic personae lost the power to persuade. The voters who had elected them into office drifted away and gave their backing to other candidates who were better able to speak their language and reflect their own opinions . . . When the Progressive symbols and personae lost their power to convince, the movement lost its reason for being.

This conclusion is completely wrong and is refuted by the fact that in 1942 Orland (“Spike”) Loomis running on the Progressive ticket defeated Governor Heil, but died before taking office. He was succeeded in 1943 by the Republican-elected Lieutenant Governor, Walter Goodland, who died in office in 1947. This event is the real reason for the decline of the Progressive movement in the state.

It is not a stretch to speculate that but for the untimely death of Governor-elect Loomis, the Wisconsin Progressive party might still be alive and well today. At least, there would have been no reason to disband the party and return to the GOP in 1946. Moreover, the issues of today are the same economic and international issues the Progressives fought for and championed during their campaigns and during their terms in office.

—BRONSON C. LA FOLLETTE
Madison

John E. Miller responds:

Bronson La Follette’s reference to Orland Loomis’s election as governor in 1942 and subsequent untimely death throws important light on the decline of the Progressive movement in Wisconsin and would play a central role in any extended account of that phenomenon. My article on the rhetoric and symbolism of Wisconsin Progressivism is primarily about how those phenomena fueled Progressive successes during the glory years of the movement, but I also suggest that their declining power to persuade provides an ultimate explanation for the Progressive party’s decline. A complete explanation for its demise must necessarily be multicausal, and I tried to suggest some of the other factors that

were operating in the paragraph preceding the one quoted in Mr. La Follette’s letter. These would include the complications introduced by Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, divisions stimulated by rancorous foreign policy debates, financial problems, a leadership vacuum following Phil La Follette’s departure from politics, and, perhaps most importantly, the almost insurmountable difficulties confronting third parties within the context of the American two-party system. Thus, I do believe that it is a stretch to think that the Wisconsin Progressive party might still be alive today but for Loomis’s death. After the 1942 elections, the Progressives were down to one Senator and two Congressmen in Washington, one statewide office holder, and about twenty members of the legislature. By then, already, it was apparent that the old rhetorical appeals and symbols had lost much of the power they had exerted for several decades. The party might have recovered, but it is hard to imagine how. Much of its spirit and impulse later found expression within the Democratic party.

The editors wish to make a correction to the Summer 2004 issue, in the article, “James Anderson: Infantryman in Blue” by Norman Risjord. Professor Risjord himself brought the error to our attention.

Two pictures on page 40 regarding the stone wall and sunken road below St Marye’s Heights in Fredericksburg were taken after the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, not after the Battle of Chancellorsville [in 1863]. There was some fighting in Fredericksburg during the Battle of Chancellorsville, but it did not involve an attack on St. Marye’s Heights.

To Our Readers

Is there information about Wisconsin history that you think we should know about? We’d like to hear from our readers. Write to:

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Curio



PH 6095.929

Ina Judge on her wedding day.



1954.2091,a

Ina Judge (1872-1946) of Darlington wore this to her prom at the University of Wisconsin in 1894. Ina was the daughter of James and Julia Judge, and it was her father who purchased the material for the dress in his native Ireland. Ina was a member of the Gamma Phi Beta sorority when she met Stanley Hanks, a member of the Chi Psi fraternity. They married in 1897. Stanley worked as a lawyer, then began a successful real estate business. The dress appears to be a reworked late 1880s dress with the satin fabric added in 1894.