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## Review of *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters*

Andrew W. Kahrl

Marquette University, [andrew.kahrl@marquette.edu](mailto:andrew.kahrl@marquette.edu)

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very deep readings of some of their images. For example, can more be read into the chaos put on display in postcards of Dearborn and Adams streets (page 31, figures 20A and 20B) when so many postcards strived to emphasize order and progress over visual maelstroms and cacophony? What are the deeper, cultural stakes when the University of Illinois' Memorial Stadium is erroneously and comically set against very un-Illinois alpine mountains and a lake in a postcard image (page 132, figure 131)?

Still, even without deep, cultural readings of individual images, *Picturing Illinois* succeeds in reconstructing the tourist's journey through Chicago and Downstate in an exceptionally engaging, informative, and often entertaining way.

DANIEL GIFFORD  
*George Mason University*

### **Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America**

By VICTORIA W. WOLCOTT. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Pp. 310. Cloth or eBook, \$34.95.

In his dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Supreme Court justice John Marshall Harlan predicted that segregation statutes were more likely to incite racial violence than, as its proponents argued, prevent it. The prescience of Harlan's warning echoes through this excellent and long-overdue study of segregated leisure and the fight for recreational equality in America. In *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters*, historian Victoria W. Wolcott tells the story of African Americans' heroic struggle for the right to enjoy their moments of leisure without humiliation or fear of molestation. In so doing, she not only recovers an important chapter in the long black freedom struggle but also forces a more fundamental reconsideration of the movement and its legacy as a whole.

Struggles for recreational equality often merit only brief mention in histories of the civil rights movement, shunted to the margins in favor of the seemingly more consequential battles over schools, jobs, housing, and voting rights. Few white or black Americans at the time, though, viewed segregated leisure as a secondary concern. Indeed, places of public recreation were perhaps the most segregated spaces in Jim Crow America and the most resistant to integration. Wolcott details the extreme measures that whites took to prevent, delay, and eventually circumvent integration of public swimming pools, beaches, and amusement parks, from violent assaults on black freedom fighters who attempted to swim in whites-only pools, bathe on white shores, or ride on white Ferris wheels, to more subtle measures aimed at preserving racial homogeneity in the wake of court-ordered desegregation. She also recounts the bravery of those African Americans (many of them teenagers and children) who withstood abuse and humiliation in pursuit of the right to play.

This book builds on a growing body of scholarship on the struggle for civil rights in the North. Wolcott focuses particular attention on white resistance to integration in northern towns and cities. Chapters 3 and 4 are built around case studies of urban amusement parks in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Buffalo, New York. Chicago and Cleveland also receive a great deal of attention. More important, Wolcott seamlessly incorporates evidence from the South and West in telling a truly national story and in revealing Jim Crow to be a national phenomenon. Racial segregation, we learn, was just as prevalent, and just as violent, in the North as it was in the South.

This sobering account of American apartheid in places of play stands in stark contrast to popular histories of amusement parks in American life, where the mid-twentieth century is described as a “golden age.” These “memories,” Wolcott deadpans, “are as segregated as the park[s] once” were (page 228). While whites remember carefree summers at the local pool and conveniently forget the treatment of racial minorities who dared enter, blacks remember sweating through sweltering summer days, of the humiliation of being turned away at the turnstiles, and of the pain of having to explain to a child why they could not go to the neighborhood swimming pool or local amusement park. This “golden age” of public life, Wolcott shows, was an illusion predicated on African Americans’ exclusion. When these places became truly public, whites fought, and then fled—to theme parks located on the suburban fringe, where distance, lack of public transportation, and cost of admission helped to re-create a racially homogenous recreational experience for middle-class whites. For inner-city blacks, meanwhile, the desegregation of public amusements was a hollow victory. “Across the country the urban amusement parks that blacks had fought so hard to gain access to closed or rapidly fell into disrepair” (page 220). Wolcott ends this masterful book with a call for a more honest, open conversation about the persistence of segregation in places of leisure and recreation today.

*Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters* is not a fun, breezy ride. It is, instead, a challenging, provocative, and critically important examination of an understudied dimension of twentieth-century American society and is a must read for both scholars and general interest readers alike.

ANDREW W. KAHRL  
*Marquette University*

**The Pennsylvania Railroad, Volume I: Building An Empire, 1846–1917**  
By ALBERT J. CHURELLA. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.  
Pp. xviii, 945. Cloth or eBook, \$75.

The Pennsylvania Railroad dominated the nineteenth-century American economy. Dubbing itself “The Standard Railroad of the World,” it expanded beyond the Keystone State to serve most of the northeast, spreading its tentacles