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Two distinct schools of thought have emerged regarding the origins of the black ghetto in the United States. The first sees the ghetto as a major turning point in black history; the other stresses the basic continuity of the black experience in North America.

Ironically, Gilbert Osofsky is the progenitor of both schools. His study of Harlem, published in 1966 but written earlier at high tide of the civil rights movement, emphasizes change, and is - in the final analysis - optimistic about black prospects in the northern city. Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto chronicles the ghettoization of New York's blacks at the turn of the century, and the deterioration of Harlem, once an elegant district, into a slum during the 1920's. Yet it also argues that the ghetto generated "unprecedented" political power, enabling blacks to climb the patronage ladder and to desegregate the municipal government. Thus, the ghetto is ultimately self-destructive and finite: by concentrating black voting strength, it contains within itself the seeds of its own demise. At least that is the implicit message of Osofsky's Harlem.

The riots in Harlem and Watts changed Osofsky's mind. No

longer did he see the period between 1890 and 1930 as a crucial turning point in black development. In September 1968 he published an influential article in the Journal of American History with the revealing title "The Enduring Ghetto". In it he lamented that, "There has been an unending and tragic sameness about Negro life in the metropolis [of New York] over . . . two centuries". (p. 243) The rise of Harlem, the focus of his earlier work, now seemed unimportant, for Osofsky grimly noted that it made little difference to blacks whether they lived in one giant ghetto, or several smaller ones, as in the nineteenth century. They faced the same "enervating and destructive racism" wherever they lived. To Osofsky, the "social pathology of the ghetto" - joblessness, poverty, crime, and hopelessness - afflicted blacks throughout American history, and had little to do with the erection of the "physical ghetto" around 1900.

The article substituted a static, ahistorical vision of black life for the dynamic interpretation advanced by the Harlem study. Osofsky, failing to see the fundamental shift in his own ideas, added the article to the second edition of the book - an unwise decision that muddied the clarity of the original work.

"The Enduring Ghetto" has needlessly confused historians by redefining the term "ghetto" to summarize the "social, economic, and psychological positions of black people in the city, and also the tone of urban race relations" since the abolition of slavery. (p. 243) The meaning of "ghetto" had until then been simple and fairly straightforward: a segregated district of a city. But after reading Osofsky's article, some historians felt compelled to use jargonistic terms like the "spatial ghetto" or the "physical ghetto".

Before the Ghetto by David Katzman offers a way to escape such jargon even while agreeing with the basic premise of "The Enduring Ghetto" that increased residential segregation in the early twentieth century had limited impact on blacks. Katzman borrows the concept of

caste from sociologists, and describes it as the enduring tragedy of black life. He argues that "the social system that divided black and white in nineteenth-century Detroit was caste-like", taking his definition of caste from Edward W. Pohlman, a student of Hindu society. (p. 82) Katzman points to the "matrix of restricted life chances" open to nineteenth-century blacks as evidence of their separate, lower caste. ". . . The probability that a Negro would live in a Negro residential area", he writes, "that he would be a servant or a day laborer, and that he would interact only with black institutions was extremely high in nineteenth-century Detroit". (p. 83)

Katzman reveals that the black upper class "were a marginal group whose relative position in the social system was at some point between the white caste and the general black caste". (p. 83) Professionals, entrepreneurs, politicians, and white collar workers, they generally served a racially mixed clientele. Daily interaction with whites on business and social planes convinced them that assimilation was desirable and attainable. Their lives breached the racial barrier, thus giving all blacks reason to hope for eventual equality.

Katzman shows that the old upper class gradually disappeared after 1890, victim of deepening racial intolerance. It failed to replenish its ranks, chiefly because the caste system prevented lower class blacks from rising. In addition, as European immigrants poured into the city, they forced blacks out of traditional elite occupations like barbering and catering. Whites frequented black barber shops in the 1870's, but given the choice, opted for immigrant-owned establishments in the 1890's. That same decade, reforms initiated by Hazen Pingree reduced opportunities for blacks in local and state politics. The Republican machine had routinely given blacks patronage and a place on the ticket. Pingree and the reformers, however, reduced patronage and introduced the direct primary in 1902. The voters then eliminated blacks from city politics until the rise of the ghetto created a new power base.

As the black upper class faded, its mantle of leadership passed to a new elite of middle class businessmen who looked to the black community for sales and support. The caste system thus tightened its hold on Detroit by eliminating the one group operating outside its bounds. According to Katzman, this transformation was well underway in 1910, before the emergence of the ghetto. Detroit then had only 5,741 blacks, just 1.2% of the total population. Blacks still lived in mixed neighborhoods, but since 1860 more than 80% of them inhabited the near east side in the vicinity of St. Antoine Street. In-migration of blacks after 1910 simply filled out existing black neighborhoods.

Katzman argues that the coming of the ghetto had little real impact on Detroit's blacks. Quoting Osofsky, he asserts that a "tragic sameness" links the lives of blacks in the nineteenth century with those today. In stressing continuity, Katzman downplays the idea of a major turning point in the history of black Detroit; but if forced to choose one, he would look not to the era of the ghetto but rather to the 1890's when reform politics enfeebled the last important interracial organization: the Republican political machine.

Katzman's study, a model of its kind, also considers the role of blacks in the civil rights battles of the nineteenth century, their occupational and residential patterns at decadal intervals, and the class structure of the black community. With his conclusions well grounded in the United States Census and reports of state and local agencies, Katzman has produced a book worthy of intensive classroom use. However, educators may prefer Kenneth Kusmer's The Ghetto Takes Shape, perhaps the best monograph yet written on the origins of the black ghetto in the United States.

Kusmer challenges historians to "revise and move beyond ahistorical concepts like the 'enduring ghetto', "that ignore variations in the development of black communities. (p. xi) Otherwise they cannot hope to explain why Chicago rather than Cleveland or Detroit suffered a

race riot in 1919. Kusmer also chides historians for failing to use immigrants as a control group for testing their findings on blacks. He points out that evidence of increased black segregation between 1870 and 1910 must be analyzed in the context "the segregated city" made possible by street railways. For the first time Clevelanders could sort themselves out along racial, ethnic, and class lines. Increased segregation of blacks thus had its ethnic counterpart. Kusmer discovers that in 1910, "Cleveland's Italians were considerably more segregated from the dominant native-white element than were blacks . . .", and the latter were no more clustered than "new immigrants" like Poles, Slavs, and Croatians.

After 1910 the paths of blacks and immigrants diverged. Immigrant districts shrank, their residents departing for the suburbs. Negroes, on the other hand, became more segregated: the first all-black neighborhoods appeared during the war, and by 1920 two census tracts were more than 50% black. According to Kusmer, the ghetto "took shape" during this decade. These years constituted a fundamental turning point in the history of the races in Cleveland. Until 1910 it was possible to regard blacks as just another ethnic group, but their failure to share the gains made by immigrants in the early twentieth century marked them as a caste apart. Restrictive housing covenants kept them out of suburbia; as a result, black homeownership fell precipitously. Blacks, discriminated against by employers and trade unions, never received a fair share of factory jobs. Thus, as the city industrialized, the occupational gap between the races widened.

Kusmer, defining racism as an American constant, isolates technological change as the crucial variable creating the black ghetto. For him the ghetto is not so much the end result of centuries of prejudice, but rather a by-product of industrialization and mass transportation. The ghetto does not "endure" - it is instead a distinct stage in the evolution of American industrial society.

The riots of the 1960's are less immediate for Kusmer than for the author of "The Enduring Ghetto", and so his book recaptures the optimism of Harlem. Thus, he argues that "the consolidation of the ghetto . . . produced a growing sense of black unity that would lead to a quest for more political power . . ." (p. 233) The black bourgeoisie in the 1920's saw the ghetto as a guaranteed market, and segregation as the key to personal prosperity. The black masses, most of them migrants from the South, regarded the ghetto as far superior to a farm tenancy. Both groups took pride in black-controlled institutions and businesses sprouting up around them. In the 1920's, despite "the social ostracism imposed by whites", most blacks believed that their "race was entering the mainstream of American civilization". (p. 233)

A brief review cannot do justice to Kusmer's encyclopedic range. The book, in addition to presenting primary research on Cleveland, also synthesizes the secondary literature on the rise of the ghetto. Its quantitative approach to housing and employment patterns pioneers in ethnic as well as black history. In addition, it offers valuable insights into the political, social, and intellectual life of black Cleveland over a century. "Cleveland is virtually unique", Kusmer states, "in having a large number of collections of manuscripts by blacks". (p. 289) As a result, he penetrates unusually deeply into the thinking of community leaders between 1870 and 1930.

Publication of the books by Kusmer and Katzman has wrought a striking irony: historians now know considerably more about the black communities in Cleveland and Detroit than about the white majority surrounding them. In a sense, these two studies float in an historiographical vacuum. Kusmer asserts that, "There is no thorough history of Cleveland for this period (or for that matter, any other)". (p. 38) Detroit has fared little better: its most useful city history dates from 1922. Important monographs by Melvin Holli and Sidney Fine have examined Detroit in the 1890's and 1930's, but the intervening period remains terra incognita. David Levine has tried to fill this gap by

writing a biracial history of Detroit between 1915 and 1926, but his failure to consult white manuscript sources has resulted in a seriously flawed book.

Internal Combustion has no over-riding thesis. A pervasive cynicism provides the only unifying theme. The book has two centres - the founding of the Detroit Urban League and the Ossian Sweet murder trial - bound together by a confusing narrative of growing racial tensions in Detroit. The first two chapters describe the rapid growth caused by the automotive revolution and the ensuing housing crisis. Levine accuses "business progressives", an unidentified group whom he seems to equate with the city's leaders, of devoting "too much attention to plant expansion and high yield return, too little to social overhead, housing". (p. 16) Levine paints a curiously static picture of the white elite, considering that the city's population quadrupled between 1900 and 1920.

Levine is apparently unsure what to do with chapter three, for he calls it "Direction and Diversion", an apt title. This bewildering chapter does, however, discuss the origins of the Detroit Urban League. The League's records are unusually complete, and Levine's comments, therefore informed and useful. Yet his indictment of the League for collaborating with employers seems off-base. The Employers' Association of Detroit crushed the labor unions in 1907, and controlled access to jobs in industry. It is difficult to see, therefore, how confrontation would have increased job opportunities for blacks in the automotive plants. The companies had done without them before the war, and could have done so again in the 1920's if the League had not, as Levine charges, tried "to educate blacks to the institutional expectations of northern life . . .". (p. 199)

Levine sees the League as a pawn of the white charitable establishment. Had he consulted the papers of the Associated Charities of Detroit he would realize that the establishment was neither as small nor as united as he maintains. He also ignores several manuscript

collections, including the papers of key figures in the automotive industry and those of the Employers' Association held by the Ford Archives, which would help him understand the interaction of black and white leaders in Detroit.

Chapter Four, entitled "Forebodings", wanders from the Urban League to the housing problem to municipal reform to the Klu Klux Klan. It leads into the case of Ossian Sweet, tried in 1925 for killing a white attacking his house. Levine discusses the trial at length, using the court records. He admits, however, that the case, though famous at the time, had no impact on Detroit's race relations.

Internal Combustion contains too many factual and interpretative errors to stand as a valid biracial history of Detroit between 1915 and 1926. It assigns the wrong date to the founding of the Detroit Municipal League and - to the horror of Detroiters - the Ford Motor Company. (pp. 13, 133). A biracial history of the early ghetto era in the North has still to be written.

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