



The struggle for black freedom in Miami: civil rights and America's tourist paradise, 1896-1968

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BOOK REVIEW

The struggle for black freedom in Miami: civil rights and America's tourist paradise, 1896-1968, by Chanelle N. Rose, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2015, xiii +315 pp., £31.31 (hardback), ISBN 978-0807157657

Chanelle N. Rose's *The Struggle for Black Freedom in Miami* provides a well-written and engaging history of several important but lesser studied social movement organizations. The text centres on organizations that fought for racial equality and black liberation between 1896 and 1968 within the distinct confluence of geographic and social contexts provided by the city of Miami, Florida, USA. Focusing on five unique dynamics that shaped how the Civil Rights Movement manifested in Miami, Rose interrogates: (1) the early and ongoing presence of Caribbean immigrants of African descent, (2) the influx of northerners (particularly Jewish) to the USA South, (3) Cold War geopolitical dynamics, (4) the post-Second World War rise in Latin American tourist growth, and (5) Miami's positioning as a 'Gateway to the Americas'.

Given the uniqueness of this case, its most compelling warrant is that Miami remains an understudied city in Civil Rights scholarship. And the book focuses on a similarly neglected period of time among sociologists and historians who study Miami by including the 'pre'-Civil Rights era. Echoing Du Bois' (1900, 47) famous call to examine 'the problem of the color line [...] in its larger world aspect in time and space', Rose employs Miami as a powerful case study towards understanding how local and translocal social forces shaped the contours of the colour line in the USA. In Miami, the colour line is not a straight and fixed line but rather complex and jagged due to the steady influx of tourists and migrants who fail to neatly fit into the black-white binary. In other words, Rose addresses the poignant question of how white supremacy and struggles against it were historically shaped by Miami's geographical and cultural context as a borderland. Through placing the story of black freedom struggles in Miami within this context, the complexity and contingency of the colour line is rendered vividly as an artefact of contestations, power relations, and external social, economic, and political forces.

Rose's analysis of each period in Miami history has a rich multidimensionality as it brings in important aspects such as class divisions, immigration, political shifts, and macroeconomic trends where relevant. In particular, the uniqueness of racial and ethnic identity formations within Miami permeates the text. The book opens with an account of how Bahamian Garveyites, who comprised some of the earliest black immigrants to Miami, engaged in resistance and the formation of Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist identities as a way to counteract the domination of white elites. Rose notes how the relations between Caribbean immigrants and native-born blacks who originally migrated to Miami to work on the railways took shape through their civic and political organizations. Interestingly, the

organizations, once split by identities, came together due to the shared experience of racial marginalization and economic exploitation. The book also highlights how influential political dynamics such as the Cold War red-scare and migration patterns within the USA such as the influx of Jewish migrants who often formed coalitions with black organizations in the 1950s uniquely shaped mobilizations in Miami for racial progress.

Perhaps one of the best features of the book is Rose's lucid narration of how the unique context of Miami as a 'tourist paradise' shaped racial dynamics within the city and the struggles of social movements and organizations to overcome racial oppression. She describes how white elites simultaneously benefitted financially and politically from the image of Miami as a progressive 'New South' haven of tourism but simultaneously continued to enforce policies that geographically, socially, politically, and economically marginalized the city's black population. Illustrating the paradoxical and contingent nature of racial formations, white elites in Miami simultaneously enforced the one-drop rule to maintain narrow definitions of whiteness and public accommodation for Spanish-speaking consumers. Rose also demonstrates the broad variation in discursive practices and resistance tactics employed by various groups and the impact of these strategies on Miami's racial order and social institutions. For example, the paradox of progressive and utopic symbolism and the reality of oppression presented a discursive opportunity that movement leaders seized upon to frame the white power structure as illegitimate and hypocritical.

The book's analysis of racial inequality and power dynamics relies largely on the concepts of white supremacy and the colour line. While these concepts serve as helpful organizing themes, Rose's analysis of these issues could have benefited from engagement with more recent sociological frameworks such as racial formation (cf. Omi and Winant 2014) to illuminate the unique ways that racial categories took shape over time; systemic racism (cf. Feagin 2010) to expose the domination of white elites; the role of white identity formation encapsulated in 'hegemonic whiteness theory' (cf. Hughey 2010, 2012), and; racialized social systems and the Latin Americanization thesis (cf. Bonilla-Silva 2006; 2014) to further examine the ways that race and in particular, a tripartite system of racial categories, shaped social relations. Regardless, the insights provided by the rigorous study of this uniquely situated case, while not fully developed as a set of theoretical propositions, makes tangible contributions to scholarship on immigration, social movements, border cultures, racial identity formation, and other fields of inquiry. Historians, social scientists, and general audiences alike will find this study relevant, accessible, and illuminating.

Finally, the *longue durée* perspective presented by the ambitious 70 plus year time span taken on by Rose provides both benefits and limitations for the book. In one sense, it allows Rose to develop a compelling account of the continuity of the freedom struggle and the various disconnects, conflicts, and barriers that emerged over time. In another sense, it precludes the text from providing extensive detail and in-depth analysis of the relevant organizations, individuals, and historical dynamics. The book is thus more path breaking than definitive in the way that it privileges narrative over fine-grained description and explanation. Appropriately for a book focusing on an understudied issue, time, and place, it

thereby opens up important spaces for future historical and social scientific analyses of the struggle for black civil rights and freedom in Miami.

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