

## Editor's Note

The issue before you spans nearly two centuries of African-American history in Pennsylvania. Some of the essays describe the obstacles of racism and economic hardship which black people have endured; others detail their heroic efforts to fight prejudice and obtain equality. Marie Lindhorst, a recent Ph.D. in Educational Theory at Penn State, presents a revised chapter from her dissertation on Sarah Mapps Douglass to show how in the 1830s, when the United States was awash in reform associations, African-American women in Philadelphia established literary societies to improve their lot and those of their less literate compatriots. Nevertheless, as Eric Ledell Smith, historian at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, reminds us, evidence of intelligent engagement in public life did not prevent Pennsylvania's taxpaying, property-owning African Americans from losing the right to vote in 1838. The new constitution of that year ironically extended the franchise to illiterate and propertyless white males, many of whom had only recently come to America.

In the years after the Civil War, the Republican Party's rapid loss of interest in the rights of African Americans is symbolized by the tale Mitchell Kachun, a 1997 Cornell Ph.D., tells Black Americans, who had proven their devotion to the Union by fighting in the Civil War, had great difficulty participating in the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Fairmount Park, unlike Southerners who had attempted to destroy that Union. Only through herculean efforts were African Americans finally able, a week before the fair closed, to erect a monument to Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Nevertheless, as Robert Bussel—whose biography of labor leader Norman Hapgood will soon be published by Penn State Press—informs us, late-nineteenth century black businessmen could overcome prejudice in the hospitality trades and operated hotels, taverns, and catering services which appealed to both blacks and whites. As with the female literary societies of a half-century before, the black elite's role as political and moral leaders of their communities supports W. E. B. DuBois's contention that a "talented tenth" indeed served as a vehicle for more general African-American progress. David Witwer, who has recently completed a Brown Ph.D. on the Teamsters' Union, shows that presence of black Teamsters in the Pittsburgh AFL must cause us to modify the generalization that the older of the two national labor organizations generally excluded blacks outside the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters—

Finally, Martin Desht, a photographer from Easton, Pennsylvania, whose exhibit "Faces from an American Dream" has moved and enlightened citizens throughout the nation (you can view his work at the Pennsylvania Historical Association annual convention in Allentown this October) offers sobering,

visual reminders that the high-tech driven prosperity so many Pennsylvanians enjoy has class, geographic, and racial dimensions. A large sector of the state's population—and not only African Americans as Desht's article in the summer 1996 issue of *Pennsylvania History* shows—lacks the economic and educational boost required to participate successfully in the post-industrial world. Some of Desht's photographs were taken in Philadelphia at the time of the famous conference when United States Presidents past and present urged us to volunteer our time and skills for the common good. That poor, black Philadelphians would take this message to heart is a tribute to the resiliency and faith of people who have endured so much yet given so much back to the nation. Their perseverance is also a powerful rebuke to a wealthy, largely Christian nation which denies so many of its citizens not merely equality and justice, but a decent place to live and a reasonable shot at a tolerable life. Desht's images speak at least as eloquently as statistics showing racial differences with regard to income, prison population, and life expectancy.

I would here like to pay tribute to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Brent Glass Executive Director, and Penn State Press, Peter Potter, Editor-in-Chief, for their cooperation in sponsoring the superb volume of essays on Pennsylvania African Americans reviewed in this volume by Charles Pete Banner-Haley. May it reach a wide audience and demonstrate that history can make a difference—by motivating readers to transform the “Commonwealth” of Pennsylvania from an ideal into a reality.

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This volume is dedicated to two recently retired, but still active, historians who have devoted their careers to exploring the roots of racism in the American past: Gary B. Nash of UCLA and my own sponsor, Alden T. Vaughan of Columbia. Both men were exemplary mentors to numerous graduate students, and in happier publishing times would surely have been the recipients of *festschriften* from grateful colleagues. I offer this dedication to mitigate, at least in part, this one injustice.

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