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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks'*

*Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916-1930.* By Peter Gottlieb

(Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987. Pp. xiii, 250.

Illustrations, bibliographical essay, appendixes, index. \$26.95.)

With a skill few others have managed, Peter Gottlieb succeeds in fusing the interconnected stories of black migration, urbanization and industrialization. The result is a magnificent portrait of central aspects of black life in Pittsburgh and the varied process of proletarianization. To make the often-told story fresh again, he breaks with tradition by going beyond the "cause and effects of the migration" (page 3) and the theme of racial oppression in the South and North. He describes black migration as more than a solitary, unconnected episode in Afro-American history. By interspersing the migrants' own voices with exceptionally rich archival data and company records, Gottlieb presents their experience "as an unfolding social development closely linked to economic, cultural, and social growth in both the South and North." (6)

Three major points hold this book together. First, he argues that the work migrants engaged in before leaving the South and the culture they came out of influenced the jobs they acquired in Pittsburgh. Likewise, culture figured in the decision to migrate and informed migrants' expectations of Pittsburgh. Second, rather than the inactive actors some have described who were pushed or pulled by larger economic, social and political forces, Gottlieb portrays the migrants as active agents who made thoughtful, conscious decisions to leave old homes. Third, once they reached Pittsburgh they tried to recreate elements of their social and cultural past. This put them at odds with the city's black old-timers. The result was a noticeable split in the community and greater intraracial class tension.

Gottlieb begins by demonstrating that the origins of black migration to Pittsburgh were much more complex than the push-pull factors we typically catalogue. The impulse to move and the structure of the movement was rooted in the economy of the agrarian South (which is much broader than the more limited "Cotton South" Gottlieb frequently mentions). Sharecropping and share tenancy generally under-

mined the financial integrity of black households. Since both practices were labor-intensive and family based, all in the household worked. Farm work, at the same time, was seasonal. During lulls many rural blacks entered the wage economy to secure their financial footing. Some worked at pursuits closely akin to agriculture — at fertilizer plants, cottonseed presses, and cotton gins. Others worked at more industrial jobs in the region's lumber industry, steel mills or coal fields. Ultimately the seasonal movement out of agriculture into semi-industrial and industrial employment facilitated the exchange of information critical to "migration father afield." (26) Hence the several years spent in the regional wage economy played a central role in later decisions to migrate.

How they reached Pittsburgh varied by gender and age. Many were aided by a complex system of chain migration, where earlier migrants informed relatives and friends of job opportunities and assisted them materially, monetarily, and emotionally as they adjusted to their new environment. Young, unmarried males, however, proved the least focused of the migrants. Few left home with expressed intentions of relocating to Pittsburgh. Instead they moved in steps, from southern town to southern city, and from there to several northern cities before eventually settling in Pittsburgh. Both married and unmarried young women typically moved directly to the city. Like younger males, older males often traveled in groups and came because they had been recruited by employers; but like female migrants, the verdict to move came after much deliberation.

The arrival of the migrants transformed certain patterns of work, especially among males. The many black women who worked had few options other than personal or domestic service employment. Prior to 1916 most black males, however, worked equally in industry and domestic or personal service jobs, as they did after 1920 with certain critical changes. First, by 1920 the number who held industrial jobs rose from one-third to one-half of the total employed. Second, with this increased proletarianization came a marked decline in the status of male workers. Before, a disproportionate number of black males held skilled positions. As more joined their ranks, the skill level declined, which post-1920 economic ripples and the union's racial opposition to blacks merely exacerbated. Moreover, with increasing regularity blacks found themselves the recipients of the hottest, hardest labor.

The transformation of work also affected the migrants' relationship with the established black community. The migrants, for their part, dodged the attempts of elite elements to have them take sides in

the frequent labor-management disputes. Black workers carved out a middle ground and never became "the minnions of Pittsburgh employers" (176) or fit comfortably in the fold of labor's brotherhood. They were less successful in avoiding efforts to get them to adhere to elite standards of decorum at work and at home. This tug-of-war served to set the migrants apart from old-timers.

This point about the battle to effectively integrate the migrants into the community raises one of several interlocking questions about this otherwise exemplary study. At the book's end we are left to wonder: when do migrants cease being migrants and when do they become black Pittsburghers? Also, what does the transition from migrant to resident tell us about the impact of out-migration on the sending communities? Further, is this just a story about social, cultural and economic adaptation and transformation and not about integration into a political economy, where politics at all levels was central to the overall experience? Finally, if the migration of blacks to Pittsburgh between 1916 and 1930 extends backward to the 1880s, does not it also extend forward to the 1940s, the end of the industrial period? What are the implications?

All in all, *Making Their Own Way* is a very fine addition to a revitalized literature in Afro-American urban history. Building on earlier work, Gottlieb's nicely written account offers us a keener understanding of the intersection of urbanization, industrialization and Afro-American history, and of the race and class consequences. ■

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*A Century of Excellence: University of Pittsburgh,  
School of Medicine.* By Barbara Paull.

(Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Medical Alumni Association, 1986.

Pp. xvii, 259. Illustrations, foreword, preface, bibliography, notes, index. \$35.)

There are treacheries in writing anything, but certainly more minefields threaten the historian than the poet. Archives may be factual, but, as any professional person knows, minutes of many a meeting have been censored or made deliberately opaque, and some contentious meetings go unrecorded. Beyond this, such a record tends to be bloodless and