

*Book Notes*

**The Day Freedom Died:  
The Colfax Massacre, the Supreme Court, and  
the Betrayal of Reconstruction**

by Charles Lane

(New York: Henry Holt, 326 pages, \$27.00)

In 1872 the white-controlled Democratic Party in Louisiana mounted an effort to regain control of state and local governments from the Reconstruction Republicans. At that time the GOP held the unwavering support of black voters. After the 1872 votes were tabulated in county elections in the small central Louisiana town of Colfax, both sides claimed victory. There were widespread accusations of voter fraud and intimidation. Months later, with the election results still in doubt, the black Republicans took physical control of the county courthouse in the tiny town of Colfax in central Louisiana and refused to budge.

On Easter Sunday in 1873, a white mob attacked the Colfax courthouse and its black defenders. The white mob then set the courthouse on fire. The blacks who were cap-

tured when they escaped the fire were summarily executed by the white mob. When the dust settled, more than 100 African Americans were found dead as were three white men.

After whites secured control of the county government in the aftermath of the racial violence, no charges were filed against any members of the white mob by local authorities. Federal prosecutors stepped in and charged nine white men with conspiring to deprive the town's black citizens of their civil rights under the Enforcement Act of 1870. The case eventually made it to the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. Cruikshank*, decided in 1876. In this landmark case, the Court ruled that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment applied only to state governments, not to individuals. Therefore, according to the Court, charges against the individual whites in the massacre had no basis in federal law.

A result of the *Cruikshank* ruling, Reconstruction in the South was dead. The Court, in effect, gave permission for a wave of white violence in the South. This ruling reestablished the pre-Civil War racial power structure which subsequently went unchallenged for nearly a century.



*African Americans tending to their wounded in Colfax, Louisiana, Easter Sunday 1873*

Nearly a half-century later in 1921, the town erected a monument in the local cemetery honoring the three white men who were killed in the 1873 racial violence. There was no mention on the memorial of the 100 blacks who died in the incident, which came to be known as the Colfax Massacre.

Charles Lane, a former reporter who covered the Supreme Court for *The Washington Post*, provides a riveting account of the massacre and its aftermath in his new book, *The Day Freedom Died*.

**Black Greek Letter Organizations  
in the 21st Century**

*edited by Gregory S. Parks*

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 490 pages, \$39.95)

It has been a more than a century since the nation's first black fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, was founded at Cornell University. In 1908 the first African-American sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, was established at Howard University.

From the years of their founding through the civil rights movement the black Greek letter associations represented the best and the brightest of African-American college students. They engaged in community work and produced many of the leaders in the black community. But in recent years the reputations of many of these organizations have been tarnished by allegations of excessive and dangerous hazing. Some of these incidents have resulted in the death of pledges to these organizations.



*Alpha Kappa Alpha at Wilberforce University, 1922*

In the new book *Black Greek Letter Organizations in the 21st Century*, editor Gregory S. Parks has assembled a wide range of essays on the history and activities of black fraternities and sororities. He deals with tough issues such as hazing, eating disorders, gang activity, and attitudes toward homosexuality.

The most valuable essays concern the future of the black Greek letter organizations. Writers in the volume call for a rededication of black fraternities and sororities to community service and leadership in the struggle for equal rights for all.

**Africana Studies: Philosophical Perspectives  
and Theoretical Paradigms**

*edited by Delores P. Aldridge and E. Lincoln James*

(Pullman: Washington State Univ. Press, 338 pages, \$24.95)



*Delores P. Aldridge*

In an academic collection of essays, editors Delores P. Aldridge of Emory University and E. Lincoln James of Washington State University take us through the four decades since black studies has become a staple on American college campuses. Dr. Aldridge has a unique perspective on the issue, having founded the black studies program at Emory University in 1971 and having served as its director for two decades.

Essays in the first part of the book offer a look at the establishment of the black studies discipline. The first chapter includes a 1977 article by historian John Henrik Clarke which reminds us of the early black studies effort in the sixteenth century at the University of Sankore in Timbuktu. Subsequent essays in the first part of the book examine the philosophical roots of black studies in the United States.

Later on there is a major section on the development of Africentric theory. Other articles discuss black conservative thought, the establishment of critical race theory, racism in the academy, the globalization of black studies, and the male/female dynamic within the African-American academic community.

Finally the book looks to the future of Africana studies with four essays on the direction in which the field is headed. Two of these four essays deal with gender issues within the black studies movement.

The book includes a study guide that faculty can use to discuss questions with students as they read each chapter or section. At the end of each chapter are extensive notes and references for additional reading. Undoubtedly, the book will become a staple for black studies programs across the country and for those who are interested in studying the history of the discipline.

Sorority photo: General Research & Reference Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox & Tilden Foundations