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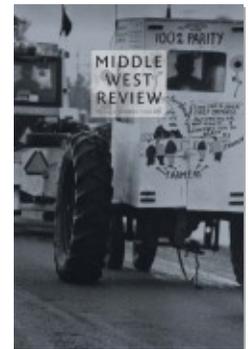
*The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford* by Beth  
Tompkins Bates (review)

Karen Miller

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significant place during the late twentieth century. As such, the collection both provides information which otherwise may have been lost, and poses problems. The various chapters—many not particularly well written—are more stream-of-consciousness reflections than biographical sketches. They give more of a “flavor” than an account of his subjects. Historians seeking information about Door’s inhabitants will find it useful, but they will have to parse relevant information from the author’s rambling prose.

Also, the editors fail to provide pertinent details. This includes the dates when Blei wrote particular chapters. Hence, unless there are clues in the text, the reader has no way of knowing even the decade when a chapter’s featured personality was chronicled. Publication specifics indicate that the present iteration is a reprint edition, but the editors do not give the original imprint date. According to Google, it was 1981, but even this does not reveal when individual chapters were written. For those reading to get a historical perspective, this will be frustrating, but such is the nature of most historical sources.

It is hoped that historians of the Midwest will endeavor to write Door’s history or include it in more expansive regional studies. The story of its past generations is rich, telling an important chapter in the evolution of the region stretching north and west from Chicago. It has been a place of renowned beauty, a summer destination dating back decades, and a home to wonderful eccentrics, including those whose lives fill the pages of *Door Way*. The history of Door’s residents and visitors reveals much about those who have called themselves midwesterners. When scholars do seek to explore that history, they would do well to consult *Door Way*, as well as the other works by Norbert Blei. Despite the criticisms made here, they can be valuable historical sources.

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Beth Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 360 pp. \$27.95.

Beth Bates’s book, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, represents her effort to answer a perennial question: Why did a majority of African American workers at the Ford Motor Company (FMC) sign on to

the United Auto Workers' (UAW) recognition drive in the early 1940s, rejecting the model of loyalty that Henry Ford and his African American allies had fostered for decades? In order to answer this question, Bates provides a richly detailed study of "the formation of black Detroit from the perspective of those who built it" in the 1920s and 1930s (6). Ultimately, Bates demonstrates that black workers' willingness to submit themselves to the FMC's labor regime did not mean that they embraced the company's anti-union sensibility as their own.

Bates argues that "the power of raised expectations" among African Americans helped "turn the wheels of history." In other words, during this period, black Detroiters anticipated more access to jobs, housing, and civil rights than they would have in previous eras. This expanded sense of entitlement, she maintains, shaped their politics and activism. Bates argues that Henry Ford "was a major catalyst for raising those expectations." After the First World War, the FMC hired many more African Americans than any other manufacturer in Detroit and assigned them to a far broader range of jobs than the menial, dangerous, and dirty work that their counterparts performed at most other plants. These opportunities, according to Bates, "raised the bar for what was possible for African Americans in the United States" (3).

Bates is interested in probing what allegiance to Ford meant in this context. She argues that conventional studies "assume rather than explore" black loyalty (5). These studies' approaches flatten the relationship between Ford and African American Detroiters into one of straightforward domination and paternalism on the part of Ford and acquiescent supplication and gratitude on the part of African Americans. Bates, conversely, found that African Americans—even Ford's outspoken supporters—maintained a broad range of sentiment toward him.

Bates suggests that the FMC's decision to hire African Americans in large numbers emerged out of the labor management practices it initiated immediately after the First World War. Designed to emphasize "loyalty to [the] company over the welfare of employees," the "American Plan" was a distinct turn away from welfare capitalism and toward a harsh disciplinary approach that included massive speed-ups and constant surveillance (52). Ford trusted that a majority of black workers would maintain high levels of allegiance to him in spite of these practices, since no jobs with comparable salaries, benefits, or responsibilities were open to them elsewhere in the city. Allegiance and loyalty thus came to describe relations between Ford

and African Americans because they were central to Ford's language of labor management.

Many historians, Bates explains, have uncritically celebrated Ford's "Inkster Project" as an example of his generosity. Bates's closer look at the program exposes its deeply coercive nature and helps her dissect the contradictory meanings of "allegiance." After the township faced bankruptcy in 1931, the FMC agreed to hire many of its unemployed African American residents, provide them loans, and extend credit to the township. The company garnished seventy-five percent of black Inksterites' wages, which went toward their individual debts or the township's coffers. Furthermore, the FMC "forced" unemployed black "volunteers" to work for the municipality (150). For Ford, allegiance meant unfettered access to black labor. In exchange, African Americans won an impoverished stability in a company-run township. The Inkster Project represented Ford's ideal for worker-management relations and relationships between cities and companies—where companies sustain control over workers' lives and are paid back for their public investment. Inkster, Bates shows, was also something of a public relations stunt. Ford initiated the program just weeks after he had been pilloried for refusing to help fund Detroit's Department of Public Welfare.

Bates paints a fuller and richer portrait of black participation in the UAW Ford organizing drive than is usually acknowledged. She reconstructs National Negro Congress (NNC) activists' roles as unpaid organizers in the homes, churches, and other spaces they used to talk to workers. She demonstrates that they sustained a deep commitment to the campaign in spite of their inconsistent reception from the ever-changing UAW. Indeed, Bates demonstrates, NNC activists saw organizing black Ford workers "as their mission" and modeled their campaign after NNC successes "in other parts of the Midwest" (220).

Overall, Bates makes an important intervention: she shows that black Detroiters' ideas about Ford were far more conflicted than conventional narratives suggest. But I was left with a few concerns. First, Bates tends to cast black workers' motivations as emerging exclusively out of their material interests. Her scant treatment of the black Left and her portrait of NNC activists as somewhat separate from ordinary black workers makes it difficult to see the complex ways that some African Americans understood racial capitalism or sustained proactive commitments to unionization. Second, like many scholars who write about Henry Ford and the FMC, Bates often slips between the two. Consequently, she attributes too much importance

to the conscious motivations of Henry Ford and not enough to the political and economic priorities of the FMC. I would have liked to see Bates dissect the FMC's use of "allegiance" and "loyalty" in light of this perennial slip-page, one that I believe the company cultivated. Finally, even Bates's less sentimental treatment of Ford casts him as a bit too exceptional. While the FMC was certainly the largest employer of African Americans in Detroit, a few other industrialists had majority-black or integrated workforces. The "raised expectations" of African Americans during this period cannot be attributed primarily to the FMC, which was as embedded in the contradictory pulls of the racialized political economy as any other company. Ultimately, Bates's very readable study will be of enormous interest to historians of the urban and industrial Midwest, to scholars interested in racial formation in the region, and to those who study African American experiences.

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Suzanne Cooper Guasco, *Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in Nineteenth-Century America*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013. 293 pp. \$28.95.

Suzanne Cooper Guasco's elegantly written study of Edward Coles, second governor of Illinois, proves that his life story merits historians' attention. Cooper Guasco has a gift for selecting diverting examples, and she adeptly depicts how throughout his long public life Coles battled sectionalism, sought national unity, and tirelessly argued that the United States' founders opposed slavery. Coles suffered for his convictions; his decision to abandon his Virginia planter birthright led to both economic and personal hardships, and he swam against the tide during a long political career. As the nation divided along sectional lines, Coles promoted gradual emancipation as the means to keep the country together—even as this seemed increasingly impossible.

Cooper Guasco argues that scholars have erred in only granting Coles minimal attention over the years. Generally, they have restricted their interest in him to his 1819 act of freeing his slaves and his role in keeping Illinois a free state during the 1820s. The standard narrative about Coles is of a minor and inconsistent politician who, apart from these few accom-