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*Jim Crow Terminals: The Desegregation of American Airports*  
by Anke Ortlepp (review)

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(Review)



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collected, forming relationships that could now only exist in print. Readers may wonder whether the book itself would have existed, if not for the loss of the initial collection. Cooper Cafritz desired to build permanence through acquiring art, and it is through the cultural recovery work of documenting her collection—in the form of this publication—that her singular contribution will be widely known and valued.

A celebration of both her art and her “collections,” as essayist Kerry James Marshall titles his contribution, the book also serves as an unplanned homage to the now late collector. On February 18, 2018, just days before *Fired Up! Ready to Go!* was released, Cooper Cafritz died. She had already created a legacy, but the book and its sweeping account of her life and her art provide a kind of intimacy that the word “legacy” doesn’t. As a volume focused on her decades of explorations, support, and advocacy in the arts, its images and storytelling are monumentally gratifying. However, the contributed essays now seem like ominous tributes.

“May I live to be 100” (153), Cooper Cafritz writes at the end of a long caption for a painting by Arcmanoro Niles, a former Duke Ellington student. The painting is titled *A Promise to Never Get Old*, because as Niles says, and Cooper Cafritz agrees, there is so much work left to do. The life in these pages exemplified how to do this work with power and grace, humility and empathy, but also with courage and fierceness—Fired Up, and Ready to Go.

The treasure of this book is the treasure that was her life. Dressed up as a stunning compendium of Cooper Cafritz’s collection, the book, like the woman, is a “constellation” connecting beauty, equity, art, and African American life—just like the title says.

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**Anke Ortlepp.** *Jim Crow Terminals: The Desegregation of American Airports.* Athens: U of Georgia P, 2017. 216 pp. \$26.95.

**Reviewed by Christopher Schaberg, Loyola University New Orleans**

**T**his fascinating study covers the history of the rise and fall of segregated airports in the U. S. South from the late 1940s to the early ’60s. Ortlepp “conceives of airport terminals as sites of conflict—as territories of confrontation over the renegotiation of racial identities in postwar America” (10). For civil rights activists, but also for African American travelers trying merely to exercise their citizenship and consumer status, “the airport terminal was new protest territory” (37). Tracing a series of legal cases and drawing on oral histories and government documents, Ortlepp paints a vivid picture of how civil rights debates played out inconsistently (and often indirectly) around the planning, construction, and operation of new terminals throughout the Southern United States in the postwar period.

*Jim Crow Terminals* complicates any easy linear notion of social progress with regard to the development of commercial air travel. The unfair treatment of passengers based on their skin color—enforced around airport restaurants, waiting areas, restrooms, and drinking fountains—reveals how local customs and ingrained political attitudes ensnared and tarnished the promises of smooth transit by air. The snapshots of mistreatment and racialized Othering are consistent with other more familiar civil rights flashpoints (such as buses), but the built environment of the airport exposes an intriguing irony. While white supremacists saw airports as more or less natural extensions of their local regions (and thereby places in which to automatically maintain segregated practices), zooming out slightly showed airports in their connective capacity to be exploding parochial regionalisms in favor of a

more inclusive modernity. Court cases concerning the integration of these terminals were always necessarily (eventually) taking this zoomed out view—which was precisely what air travel was facilitating more broadly, as the very creation of the FAA in 1958 suggests. So Ortlepp offers the compelling observation that “emotionally, legally, and practically, the airport terminal was one of the weakest bastions of southern white resistance” (137). While Southern white supremacists may have assumed that airport construction projects were a way to double down on and bolster their (Southern) identity (including segregation), in fact the modern airport terminal became a significant part of the unraveling of such practices.

One of the most curious minor details in *Jim Crow Terminals* is the reoccurring function of the *delay*. Numerous cases cited in the book wherein a traveler is either denied service or offered a separate dining area are triggered by the occasion of a delayed flight: “When the return flight of her business trip from New York to Washington was delayed. . .” (16); “Faced with a delay. . .” (39); “While waiting for a delayed flight. . .” (67); “While waiting for his delayed connecting flight. . .” (69). Each of these unplanned, extra temporalities at an airport results in an altercation or confrontation in which segregation is implemented—and then called out. In other words, one of the banes of air travel—the dreaded delay—in a bizarre way ends up *aiding* the desegregation of Jim Crow terminals. Hiding in plain sight here is a quite radical reconceptualization of one of modernity’s most annoying low-grade glitches: time to kill becomes time for social justice.

Toward the end of the book, Ortlepp discusses how the desegregation of the Jim Crow terminals depended on the acceptance of a “broad definition of ‘air carrier,’ which included airports and all necessary supportive services to air commerce” (129). Not only were the physical realities of these particular airports being changed—signs saying “WHITE” and “COLORED” removed; separate seating areas in restaurants rendered illegal—but air travel itself was undergoing a conceptual shift, spreading out into seemingly detached parts of modern life. One wonders if the imprecision of “all necessary support services” was lost on the lawmakers, or if the capaciousness of this phrase was intentionally strategic. As if to say there is no such thing as a simple “terminal” where things end when it comes to civil rights. Everywhere, concourses instead.

Living under the murky shadow of Donald Trump’s travel ban, and recalling the airport protests at JFK and elsewhere in January 2017, Ortlepp’s book is an important and at times chilling reminder of how bodies that matter get filtered and screened by the everyday architecture of commercial flight. At the same time, *Jim Crow Terminals* is heartening to read for the ways that the physical instantiations of white supremacy in airports were systematically eliminated through legal recourse and collective persistence. It is something of a comfort to read the transcripts of flaccid argumentation and circular logic used to defend the status quo in Jim Crow terminals, and to follow the story as, one by one, these airports were successfully desegregated. It gives the reader hope for how future generations may read the vapid justifications of nationalism and isolationism that, today, still hold significant sway in more complex debates concerning border politics as well as international travel, asylum, and immigration.

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