

consider at all its evolution *toward* theorizing African Americans' position in the United States. Foley does not ask, for example, when Ellison introduced to the eviction scene the two-page catalogue of the Provos' possessions — emblematically representing African Americans' mixed identity — or, in the subway scene, the concluding Harlem street tableau indicating that this identity has depth and complexity the Brotherhood cannot see (240–45, 302–5). Foley's treatment of the protagonist's final meditation on his grandfather's dying words (338) never discusses Ellison's affirmation of the US “principle” and doesn't relate it to the strategic conception — central to African American history since Douglass — of using the US constitution as a weapon for struggle. Indeed, in a basic way, *Invisible Man's* quality as a representation of specifically African American experience is not very important to Foley.

*Wrestling with the Left* adds detail to our knowledge of Ellison's early period and of his novel's evolution. But its analysis of political contexts is naïve, its thesis that *Invisible Man* would have been a better work if it had remained more pro-communist is implausible, and its failure to consider the novel's assessment of African American identity and history provides ironic if belated confirmation of my friend's assessment that “they cared more about themselves than us”.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Ellison, Letters to Richard Wright, 1937–1950. Richard Wright Papers. JWW MSS 3, Box 97, Folder 1314, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include works by Meili Steele, Danielle Allen, James Seaton (in *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope*, ed. Lucas Morel, 2004), Jesse Wolfe (*African American Review*, 2000), myself (*African American Review* 2005), and others. Foley mentions some of these for specific points but never considers the authors' interpretive theses.

**Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).**

Perhaps no Black organization has received more scholarly or popular attention over the past fifteen years than the Black Panther Party. Since Hugh Pearson's controversial work *Shadow of a Panther* (1994) there has been a steady stream of memoirs, and scholarly works on this iconic organization; some of which were written as correctives to Pearson's sensational text, while others were simply long awaited autobiographies and or academic monographs that sought to

put the BPP in its rightful place in history. Many of the works that have been written on the BPP focus on Oakland. Consequently, much of what is known about the BPP by scholars and the general public revolves around the Bay Area. Indeed, some consider this specialized topic a saturated area of research. Only during the past several years have scholars consistently attempted to paint a more complete portrait of the BPP by studying Panther activity in cities throughout the United States.

However, just when you think there is nothing more to say about the Oakland-based Black Panther Party, comes along an insightful new book on the subject. Some of the book's contents cover ground that has been tilled by other scholars of the BPP, but a good chunk of the book delves into areas that have heretofore either been underdeveloped or ignored altogether. Moreover, although the Black Panther Party is featured prominently in this insightful work, Murch seeks to accomplish a good deal more. Nearly a third of the book is devoted to such topics as the machinations of Oakland, the goings-on at Merritt College, the impact of Black migration on the city and the politics of Black life in the Bay area generally. It is not until chapter five that the Panthers are discussed in any substantive fashion.

In fact, Murch writes that although "Living for the City traces the Black Panther Party's rise and fall, internal development, and expansion beyond Oakland, its primary focus lies elsewhere. Exploring the social origins of the BPP provides a window onto the radical intellectual and political movement that spanned black Oakland and the East Bay in the decades after World War II" (6).

Some of the most interesting aspects of the book are Murch's discussion of the role of Merritt College in the struggle for Civil Rights in Oakland, the call subsequent battle waged to bring for Black Studies into fruition. Murch recounts the numerous people on whom Merritt College had a great impact and the critical role these actors would eventually play in the Bay Area struggle for racial equality. While much credit has been given to students and faculty at San Francisco State College for spearheading the call for Black Studies units across the country, Murch refreshingly points out the less acknowledged role that students at Merritt College played in this protracted battle. That the founders of the BPP were students at Merritt College at the time is not inconsequential.

Another fascinating area in which Murch ventures is the influence that southern mores and customs had on those who (along with their families) migrated west and joined the Black Panther Party. On this subject David Hilliard submits that "many of the most important members of the Party" were imbued with the moral and spiritual values of their parents"-the sons and daughters of the South (7). How Hilliard determines who the Party's most important members were is unclear, but his point about southern culture and its influence on a later generation of young Blacks is intriguing, if not under developed.

The most exciting passages and chapters in this book are the discussion of the

1973 mayoral race and chapter six, which goes into great detail about the Panther's foray into real politick as well as the Panther's array of survival programs, for which they are perhaps least known, but nevertheless enabled them to perhaps make their greatest impact.

The least interesting aspect of the book is the discussion of the BPP's demise. A good deal has been written about state repression of the BPP and the author provides little, if any, new information on this score. Much has also been made, recently, of the lack of democracy within the Party and its eroding affect. The argument that the absence of democratic mechanisms within the Party contributed greatly to its downfall is parsimonious and to a large degree, overstated. Like all forms of government, Democracy has its limitations. It should be noted that Democracy is not featured prominently within the United States military, an institution on which the Panthers modeled their organizational hierarchy as well as many other often unacknowledged trappings. Also, Mao Tse Tung, someone whose works and deeds influenced the Panthers immensely was not an advocate of democracy. Given these strong influences the kind of strong democratic apparatus that exists within many organizations was not likely to occur within the Black Panther Party.

*Living For the City* is a fine addition to the literature on the BPP, the Black Power Movement and Black life in Oakland generally. While some readers will find that Murch reiterates a fair amount of material about the BPP that is already known what is undeniable is that the book also excavates a fair amount of new material as well as presents information from angles and points of view that have heretofore gone unexplored. The book could have benefitted from a closer editing. And like many books that feature the BPP, a few statements are made with more vigor than basis of fact. Nevertheless, *Living For the City* is a well crafted and rigorously researched text that makes a strong contribution to the literature.

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**Donald W. Rogers, *Making Capitalism Safe: Work Safety and Health Regulation in America, 1880-1940* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010).**

Donald Rogers's *Making Capitalism Safe: Work Safety and Health Regulation in America, 1880-1940* is a critique of the historiographical interpretation of the Progressive Era in the United States that represents regulatory reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as controlled or predominantly shaped