

Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Viewed from our seemingly ‘post-racial’ present, the racial legacies of war, emancipation and reconstruction often seem little more than distant memories. Yet the social, economic, political, and cultural effects of these processes have informed American society and political economy from the mid-nineteenth century through to the present day. Historically this racial divide has been delineated along the lines of poverty, housing, crime, education and health. Racial inequality – specifically inequality defined along a black white axis - is perhaps most evident when viewed through the lens of health. Measured across a variety of metrics from mortality, addiction, disease, obesity, access to care, black health (or ill health) has long characterized America’s racial divide. From the colonial era to the present, the health, vitality and very contours of the American body politic – fundamental questions of political and economic citizenship and its various rights and responsibilities have been inextricably tied to the racial politics of health and the constitution of the color line.

In *Sick from Freedom*, Jim Downs locates the modern origins of the nation’s racial health divide in African Americans’ fractious transition from slavery to freedom during emancipation and reconstruction. Downs draws on a deep and eclectic range of archival sources from US Army medical reports, charitable organizations, and the records of the Freedman’s Bureau to craft a convincing and deeply humane counter narrative to celebratory accounts of emancipation, citing it “not as a jubilee, but rather as a continuous process of displacement, deprivation and ultimately death” (21). For Downs, emancipation was not an end but a beginning in African Americans’ long and tortuous transition from slavery to freedom. This transition unleashed a host of unintended and unexpected health consequences on the unwitting freed people and authorities - such as the Freedman’s Bureau - charged with negotiating these shifting circumstances. Following emancipation, millions of freed people - freed from the ostensibly protective embrace of the ‘peculiar institution’- found themselves thrust into the uncertain and unhealthy landscape of freedom, bereft of even the modicum of health benefits to which they had been accustomed under slavery. This process was further complicated by the inevitable health crisis occasioned by all wars and the sheer scope of the Civil War in particular which Downs cites as one link in a longer chain of nineteenth-century pandemics unleashed by war, fledgling national health agencies – such as the medical division of the aforementioned Freedman’s Bureau - and an ill-formed knowledge of microbiology on the part of global health professionals. Mobility, evinced in the unprecedented transfer of peoples, goods, and capital facilitated by advances in transportation technologies on rail and by sea, was the primary factor in these harvests of death. Amidst this

maelstrom of disease and death freed people found themselves trapped within a kind of existentialist nightmare in which they were condemned to freedom, seemingly free to forge a new world out of the detritus of the old but ultimately constrained and beholden to biological, social, and economic forces entirely out of their control.

Downs situates the African American experience within a broader transnational narrative – informed in part by studies of slavery in the West Indies - which posits emancipation as a process rather than a sharp break between slavery and freedom. Viewed through the corporal framework of health the African American experience of emancipation takes on a multi-faceted character, which defies much of the prevailing temporal and or spatial historical models. The broken and diseased black bodies of the freed people bore the stig-mata of the nation's titanic and tragic and ongoing attempt to reconcile the con-tradictions of racial capitalism and egalitarian democracy. Yet Downs anticipates and militates against any potentially inchoate flights of theoretical fancy by effec-tively grounding his study in the cold realities of post-Civil War political econ-omy. Throughout the book, Downs reiterates the connections between the respec-tive imperatives of labor and health for the era's various actors and institutions: the federal authorities of the Freedman's Bureau, southern ex-slaveholders, and the freed people themselves. In short, a healthy race was a laboring race and the health of the freed people, not as human but as labor capital was of paramount importance to the aforementioned parties in the process of emancipation.

Sick From Freedom is most effective when charting the social, cultural, and political dynamics of health as a function of labor capital and racial dis-course. Downs demonstrates how in the wake of the postwar small pox epidem-ic which ravaged the south and claimed the lives of thousands of freed people from 1862-1868 – the inadequate response of the Freedman's Hospitals to estab-lish effective quarantines and vaccinations - evinced a growing tendency amongst elites to view social problems through biological lenses. Downs contends that by turning a “biological crisis into a discourse about racial survival” the federal gov-ernment did very little to address the real health concerns of the freed people. Subsequent chapters explore the linkages of health and citizenship and the ways in which the nebulous status of the freed people often had fatal effects on their health and access to health care. Ultimately, blacks' status as labor units during slavery continued through the processes of emancipation and reconstruction, but without the imperatives which drove their captors to provide a degree of health care –however Spartan - as a means to protect their investment. Freed people in a fledging postwar free market labor economy faced a double jeopardy of a legacy of ill health and a yet-undefined status as republican free laborers. Downs also addresses the gendered aspect of this process arguing that the grad-ual displacement of freedwomen from the labor force was the most severe con-sequence of the development of free labor ideology in the south.

Yet perhaps the greatest strength of this work is Downs's vivid and empathic historical imagination. Through a liberal but effective use of anecdotal examples, Downs is able to craft an engaging analytical narrative which reframes the often overwhelming and opaque process of war, emancipation, and reconstruction in decidedly and often heartbreaking human terms. Though at times this can run towards the sentimental, somewhat diluting the book's analytical heft, this is a minor flaw, rendered all the more insignificant by the author's impassioned, sharp, and nuanced analysis of a key chapter in the American capitalism. Through an ingenious corporeal framework Downs demonstrates the deep linkages between the American republican body politic and laboring black body – both as a lived experience and a conduit for the production of racial knowledge. This is a connection that would only continue to deepen in the coming century as African Americans made their first tentative forays into industrial modernity.

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Robin Folvik, Sean Carleton, and Mark Leier, *May Day: A Graphic History of Protest* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012).

Faire tenir en moins de 30 pages une histoire cohérente et compréhensive du 1^{er} mai est certainement un défi de taille. D'autant plus lorsque la forme retenue est celle de la bande dessinée. Fruit d'un travail collaboratif sous l'égide du Graphic History Collective, les auteurs Robin Folvik, Sean Carleton, Mark Leier et les illustrateurs Sam Bradd et Trevor McKilligan ont su produire une publication autant accessible que visuellement attrayante. *May Day: A Graphic History of Protest* se veut donc une œuvre inédite qui propose de faire une brève synthèse historique de cette célébration en contexte canadien.

Appelant les lecteurs à se réapproprier le 1^{er} mai afin de reconnaître la lutte continue des prolétaires pour leurs droits, leur légitimité, et leur respectabilité, le collectif livre un véritable plaidoyer pour la transmission de l'histoire ouvrière dans le but de conserver vivante la tradition militante qui caractérise la journée internationale des travailleurs (4). C'est d'ailleurs dans cette optique que le choix de la bande dessinée fut retenu puisqu'elle s'inscrit dans une lignée de publications similaires cherchant à amalgamer l'histoire, les arts graphiques et l'activisme politique (5).

Le lecteur trouvera en le feuilletant une trame narrative épisodique exposant comment le développement des célébrations du 1^{er} mai se fit en symbiose de l'apprentissage de la culture militante ouvrière. À ce propos, l'œuvre rend bien compte de la centralité du dernier tiers du XIX^e siècle dans l'élabora-