

not all anti-communist hawks? Yet her analysis is generally strong and she admirably develops her “pieces of evidence.” Some errors intrude on an otherwise provocative and very useful work: 110,000 not 70,000 Japanese Americans were interned by the War Relocation Authority and Nixon’s “southern strategy” was his *reelection* strategy, not his strategy in 1968. Walter Mondale was not a key player in the compromise presented to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964, although Joseph Rauh of the ADA was. Why is there no discussion of Israel as a factor in the ADA or Minnesota politics in 1948? The book would be stronger if it ended after the eighth chapter and left out the Epilogue that attempts to carry the story from 1948 to 1968. The author also periodically uses the first person, which produced in this reader an urge to get out the old red pencil! However, these inadequacies are minimal beside the book’s important exploration of the relationships and ideas that account for America’s steady movement to the Right since, Delton argues, 1948. Keep writing, Professor Delton!

Gretchen Cassel Eick,
Friends University

Becky Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1956* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Becky Nicolaidis’ history of South Gate, a working-class suburb bordering Los Angeles on the southeast, opens with the powerful image of its residents standing guard over their homes, “some on rooftops, others on porches, some brandishing weapons” as one of the worst urban riots of the 1960s is raging across the railroad tracks in Watts. The book traces the journey of these white residents from suburban homesteaders, primarily concerned by issues of economic survival, to their transformation into the more conventional post-World War II suburbanites, concerned by race above all. Given the tremendous transformation that the suburb underwent since its first lot was sold in 1920, and the thoroughness of the book’s reach -- it examines every aspect of the residents’ lives from work to consumption and worship -- it is an ambitious goal which is, on the whole, successfully met.

The book’s first part on the interwar period is the most original. The fascinating story of working-class families building their homes themselves in order to get access to the advantages of suburban living has been told elsewhere -- one is reminded, for instance, of Richard Harris’s *Unplanned Suburbs* -- but Nicolaidis weaves together economic, cultural, social and political strands to provide a complex picture of a suburban community not only dominated by a

concern for economic autonomy but deeply divided by class conflicts.

Her account of “suburban homesteading” in South Gate is a powerful reminder of the various meanings that the ownership of residential property has taken over the course of the twentieth century. With more “sweat equity” than cash at their disposal the original South Gate residents build their own modest bungalows and turned their suburban plots into productive property by using their backyards for raising small livestock and home gardens. Hence, their “suburban homestead” had utilitarian rather than aesthetic value; it provided a supplement (or alternative in times of joblessness) to unpredictable cash income and offered them economic security and autonomy; it allowed them to remain independent and self-reliant, values that they prized above all.

The fierce independence of South Gate residents – especially of the blue-collar workers who constituted the community’s largest group – is described most effectively in the author’s analysis of “the texture of everyday life” (chapter 3). In this chapter she explores the impact that one’s occupation and place of work had on social experience (including patterns of consumption and leisure) and allegiance to the local community. Most significant here, and indeed one of the strengths of the book, is the attention given to the class differences and conflicts within the suburb during its first decades – particularly between blue-collar workers and merchants. She convincingly demonstrates that while the two groups shared an identity as homeowners and suburbanites, their loyalty to the local community was vastly different. In a refreshing reversal of the classic – and elitist – local/cosmopolitan divide, the workers are described here as mobile and cosmopolitan, while the merchants appear provincial and parochial. Not only did the former commute to work, but they also traveled to shop (and bargain hunt), play, and socialize: “To them, Los Angeles was a safe, welcome, familiar place. They experienced an easy openness and permeability between their hometown and the larger city” (71). In contrast, “the merchants were a more provincial lot” (96); “they developed a parochial mentality” (101). Largely because of economic interests (their livelihood after all was based on local patronage), they exhibited a strong commitment to South Gate and their day-to-day experience was largely confined within the suburb’s boundary.

The salience of conflicting economic interests, and resulting tension between workers and merchants, is more than ever present in the analysis of local politics offered in chapter four. The merchants, with their “place-based conception of community,” promoted the suburb’s economic growth and development, which included local shopping, expensive improvement projects (ranging from paved streets to ornamental lights), and higher taxes. This conflicted with the workers’ suburban dream, which was predicated on affordable property and low taxes. Again, suburban homeownership, far from the consensus that it has been presented to be, is described as the site of profound tensions among

suburbanites themselves – tensions ordered around diverging class interests.

The centrality of class-based politics, and its predominance over racial concerns in the prewar period, is also effectively illustrated in the debate over education. South Gate residents, in an effort to keep their taxes down, approved annexation with the racially-mixed Watts School District where school expenditures were lower than in neighbouring all-white towns. As the author rightly notes, for ex-southerners this was no small matter – especially in the face of a vigorous opposition by the suburb's merchants who would have preferred annexation with a better-off and all-white town. That it represented a temporary accommodation based on strictly economic motives – rather than on racial liberalism – is made clear by the context of deteriorating racial relations in 1920s L.A., including the widespread use of restrictive covenants to maintain a strict residential segregation, and the residents' fierce opposition to racial integration in the 1960s. But in the prewar decades, the residents "simply could not afford the level of segregation they desired" (164). The author's skilled and nuanced treatment of this issue highlights the prime concern for economic security that dominated the early period, without ignoring the racial (and racist) views harbored by South Gate residents: "The massive popular support for this move revealed how South Gate chose to balance its fears. The tax fear had won out, overpowering even concerns about race." (167)

It is in this balance between class and race fears that the differences between the prewar and the postwar experiences lay most centrally. While homeownership had been invested in the prewar period primarily with economic concerns and had led to internal class tensions, it was redefined in the postwar period by a defensive posture "to segregate, protect, and defend their suburb" (182) from external – and racial – "threats." Here the author's main argument that race replaced class as the main focus of the residents' identity and politics comes to the fore. As blue-collar families experienced greater economic security and upward mobility – moving "beyond sheer survival to comfort and even affluence" (231) – the suburb itself also experienced greater social solidarity. Internal class tensions subsided and a shared sense of community emerged. An active civic life, in which workers now played a central role, flourished and focused on "the sort of defensive protectionism and NIMBYism characteristic of postwar neighborhood associations..." (265). The suburban advantages that they sought were no longer based strictly on the "use" value of their property, but on its "commodity" value which could be lessened by a number of tangible and less tangible factors. Hence, various "threats" – including tenants, juvenile delinquents, encroaching industries, and above all, their black neighbours to the west and civil rights activists in L.A. – now mobilized the residents who acted with a newfound unity in defense of their suburb.

For the postwar period, the book reinforces the well-established narrative of middle-class defensive racism, and situates South Gate squarely within the con-

text of the white backlash against racial liberalism. By showing how these blue-collar workers were at the forefront of that important social and political movement, the book makes an important contribution, complementing well, for instance, Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors*, which documents the rise of conservatism in the better-off suburbs of Orange County in the early 1960s. But if racial tensions are given due attention, and their centrality in the politics of South Gate in the 1960s irrefutable, the related argument that Nicolaides makes about the erosion of class tensions in the immediate postwar period and the existence of a new communal consensus is not as compelling. (It must be said that the author acknowledges that economic concerns did not completely disappear – for instance, they were intimately tied to the fear of residential integration – but class tensions within the community seemingly had). While providing a clear analytical thread, statements such as “when class divisions dissolved into postwar consensus, race moved to the fore” (271), might be too neat to be historically accurate. In fact, the meticulous analysis of class conflicts that characterizes the first part of the book is lacking in the second (or, at least, does not seem as convincing) – and especially for the 1940s and 1950s, which were key transitional decades in matters of suburban politics.

The author's argument that class divisions eroded in the postwar period is based on a number of facts ranging from the improved material circumstances of blue-collar families to the greater participation of workers in civic associations where they fought, along with the merchants, to defend their suburban community from external threats. Another element presented by the author as evidence of “the demise of class-based politics” is the fact that blue-collar workers' loyalty to their union did not go beyond the shop floor (workers ignored, for instance, social activities sponsored by the union, or its progressive stance on racial equality when it came to neighbourhood politics). But in light of the strong case that the author makes for class-based conflicts in the community in the prewar period, during a time when union loyalty was also weak, this last point appears almost irrelevant. However it is in the case of the politics of consumption that the argument about interclass reconciliation is most problematic. The merchants' support of the South Gate workers who participated in the GM strike of 1945-46 is one instance that the author cites to support her case that merchants and workers “began to recognize their shared interests” (239). The fact that the local strikers defined their struggle in terms of their purchasing power, which the merchants recognized as in their interests also, is crucial to the argument. But the merchants' perception that workers would spend their increased disposable income locally is left unquestioned; in fact, this proposition is far from evident given the strong independence and the metropolitan orientation the workers had displayed prior to the war. Why would working-class families who had always considered the greater L.A. – and not simply South Gate – their territory when it came to shopping now confined themselves to

shopping locally? While the book effectively shows that the merchants and civil rights activists racialized the politics of consumption in the 1960s, nothing is said about the workers themselves, indeed the possibility of a continuing class divergence in patterns of consumption is left unexamined.

A related problem is the assumption that an ideological consensus existed in the community. The author mentions in passing the existence of a vocal liberal minority in the suburb in the context of her discussion of the debate over racial integration in 1964. But where these suburban liberals were in the 1950s is unclear. Also, the possibility that they used civic associations to challenge their neighbours' emerging conservatism is not considered. As my study of suburban Queens and Rosalyn Baxandall's and Elizabeth Ewen's work on Levittown have shown, community organizations were often sites where neighbours debated political issues. The same might have been true of South Gate as well.

The author's conclusions about the predominance of race in shaping local politics in the 1960s are not called into question by these criticisms. But the book could have been strengthened by a lesser reliance on the ever-problematic concept of "consensus" and a more careful attention to internal conflicts over class or other issues in the immediate postwar period. This said, *My Blue Heaven* remains a very important accomplishment, and will play an influential role in the ongoing debate about the changing politics of twentieth-century suburbanites.

Sylvie Murray
University College of the Fraser Valley

Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Historians have long treated the Regulation in North Carolina as a prelude to the Revolutionary crisis. Along with the poor in colonial seaports, tenants in upstate New York, and border dwellers in New England, Regulators enter the narrative of the imperial crisis to stage a dress rehearsal for the independence movement to come. For some, their actions signaled that the Revolution would sometimes jump the boundaries of a confined, constitutional challenge to Great Britain to become a class-conscious social rebellion. For others their cause prepared the ground for wartime disaffection from the Patriot cause in the southern back-country. The study under review also places the Regulators squarely in the revolutionary generation, but Marjoleine Kars is much more interested in the causes of the uprising than the consequences of it. This beautifully written and argued book focuses on the long-term economic and political tensions that ulti-