

molded his theoretical work during his tenure at the London School of Economics. This sort of lavish context is organically provided throughout the text, providing a historicized and quasi-personalized account of the theoretical perspectives that serves to plant them firmly in the reader's mind.

Of the perspectives, political ecology seems the most unsuitable in a welfare text. Clinical waste disposal, water quality, global warming, and "massified, monoculture agribusiness" are not traditionally associated with welfare policy analysis or theories of the welfare state. However, O'Brien and Penna make a compelling case for considering the politics of ecology as "an important new element in theorising social welfare." Political ecology, they argue, provides a critique of the logic of growth, a reformulation of the concept of citizenship and participation, and further, has revealed the grossly uneven distribution of the "costs" and "benefits" of environmental degradation. While they make a strong case for opening welfare theorizing to ecological critiques, it was unclear to me why feminist theory, with its enormous contributions to understanding welfare provision and the welfare state, did not merit its own chapter. In fact, the recurring stream of feminist ideas throughout the text seems to point to its omission as a perspective in its own right. These questions aside, *Theorising Welfare*, with its impressive scope and clarity, is a rare tool for teaching and thinking about welfare.

The Roots of African-American Identity: Memory and History in Free Antebellum Communities.

By Elizabeth Rauh Bethel. St. Martin's Press, 1997. 242 pp. Cloth, \$39.95.

Reviewer: LEE D. BAKER, *Columbia University*

The names Crispus Attucks, Toussaint L'Ouverture, and Harriet Tubman have been woven into that amorphous thing called American memory and serve as key tropes in those equally amorphous things called African American identity and historical consciousness. It was black writers and orators of the nineteenth century who first used these figures to articulate moral authority, reconcile democracy with racism, and demonstrate the possibility of autonomy and equality. These intellectuals were so effective at describing and inscribing a corporate memory that the memory of these heroes and heroines persists today.

Sociologist Elizabeth Rauh Bethel offers a nuanced and compelling collection of essays that complicates conventional narratives about the emergence of key tropes, people, and the roots of African American identity. While exploring the black leaders familiar to many school children, she introduces readers to other leaders like Quomony Quash, Paul Cuffe, and Samuel Cornish. Similarly, she highlights the important work of Frederick Douglas, William Wells Brown, and Frances Ellen Watkins. She also introduces readers to J.W.C. Pennington, William

Cooper Nell, and William Still, less well-known writers and orators, who did much of the work promoting racial uplift and developing political agency for African Americans during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Bethel carefully describes the relationship between historic figures and movements and the people who wrote about them. It was this nexus, she argues, that has given rise to a "politicized racial identity." Her essays detail a handful of specific topics that range from the Haitian Revolution and the convention movement to the formation of a Massachusetts community called "Parting Ways." Although she never clearly elucidates the terms of racial identity or African American memory, she effectively describes the conditions of African American identity formation within free or nominally free Antebellum communities in the north. She also explains how members of these communities deployed cultural memory and popular historical consciousness during the eight decades between the American Revolution and the Civil War.

Yoked to the ideology of the American Revolution yet tethered to a transatlantic Black diaspora, she documents how Black opinion makers relentlessly pursued moral authority by creatively focusing "on the contradictions of slavery in a democratic society." Moreover, she demonstrates how writers and orators, festival organizers and community leaders routinely "fused African ancestry with American nativity" to underscore black people's heritage and inalienable rights.

Although Bethel addresses these consistent themes, she makes a real contribution by probing the tensions that give the roots of African American identity their shape, form, and texture. "At the onset of the 1840s," she notes, "the white-dominated abolitionist movement, the African-American Convention Movement, and the flow of emigrants to Canada, Hayti , and Africa offered competing solutions to the increasingly troublesome and controversial dilemma African Americans presented to a democratic society." With facile juxtaposition, Bethel compares leaders who engaged in racial uplift by fostering morality and acceptability and others who approached it by marshaling organizational, political, and economic resources to offer a deft description of the tension between groups and individuals seemingly engaged in similar efforts. With even more subtlety, she describes the tension between authors who wrote autobiographies and those who wrote biographies and historical narratives. The latter, she argues, helped to redefine "the boundaries as well as the content of a collective past by grounding that past in historical consciousness rather than autobiographical memory and by subordinating the particularized and individualized to larger explanations of events and processes."

Bethel's work demonstrates the strengths of interdisciplinary work by persuasively locating clearly not all, but several, important roots of African American identity by showing how memory works and gets deployed in the racial

politics of culture and the cultural politics of race. The book also demonstrates the perils of inter-disciplinary work. Literary scholars will be disappointed with the short shrift given important texts, historians will chafe at the lack of historiography and social history, and anthropologists will be aghast that there is scant mention of folklore in a book with this title. Nevertheless, Bethel achieves what she set out to accomplish. With grace and elegance, she identifies "the connection between cultural memory and popular historical consciousness" and illustrates "the crucial role opinion leaders play in the construction of both memory and consciousness."

From Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones: The Life Experiences of Fifty Professional African American Women.

By Kathleen F. Slevin and C. Ray Wingrove. New York University Press, 1998. 187 pp. Cloth, \$50.00; paper, \$17.50.

Reviewer: YANICK ST. JEAN, *University of Wisconsin*

In interviews with sociologists Slevin and Wingrove, 50 retired African American women professionals, who grew up during segregation, recall how interactive race and gender placed a tremendous challenge on their lives. However, a culture of resistance and survival during childhood, now being taught to the next generation, gave them tools to transpose "negatives into positives," "stumbling blocks" into "stepping stones." Even as the impact of race and gender, still active in their lives, overpowers age, the women consider themselves privileged because of being "free at last," in their well-planned retirement.

The book is about the tenacity of these women and their successful attacks on oppressive structures that could have, but did not sap ambitions. "These Black women personified independence, strength, and a 'can do' approach to life, long before these traits were legitimized for White women by the women's movement." The book is also about secure aging. The women's "comforts and contentments in retirement are not happenstance but rather a reflection of lifetimes of thoughtful planning and preparation." They crack myths "of older black American women as being poor, uneducated, . . . [or as] resistant to retirement because it is only in paid work that they can find status." The authors find them "models and sources of inspiration for women of *all* races."

A brief introduction is followed by early teachings of resistance and survival (chapter 1). These teachings were strengthened in the community (chapter 2), church (chapter 3), and schools (chapter 4). Education placed many limitations on the women's lives. So did work, discussed in the longest chapter of the book (chapter 5). "Choices of professions and careers, as well as their work experiences, were governed by . . . constraints." But drawing from early lessons, the women resist, survive, and find freedom and happiness in retirement (chapter 6). Happiness is