

*Race Becomes Tomorrow: North Carolina and the Shadow of Civil Rights.* By Gerald M. Sider (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015). Pp. 226. Cloth, \$89.95. Paper, \$24.95.

An important paradox of the history of race is brought out from the shadows in Gerald Sider's *Race Becomes Tomorrow: North Carolina and the Shadow of Civil Rights*. Sider's primary argument is that race both can and cannot be lived. He points out that race can be lived gladly in the joy and comfort of people's identities of race, class, gender and locality. Yet these very identities can produce unlivable personal and collective conditions, as race is intertwined with racism, or for example when class is impacted by an unlivable minimum wage. Sider's fundamental argument is broad enough for some of his ancillary themes to resonate, particularly his analysis of how labor patterns in the Southeast were impacted by the Civil Rights Movement, which is his most significant contribution to the historiography of race relations in the United States. The book addresses the period between the 1960s and the 2010s, often making connections between race as a lived past, and race today, which is both lived and contested for an unpredictable tomorrow (1, 12, 13).

"We" are enriched by Sider's insights and analysis. The purpose of the emphasized "we" is two-fold: it serves to demonstrate the book's value to scholars of history and anthropology, but also anyone interested in the ways in which race has been constructed and lived in the U.S. More specifically, the reference to "we" evokes Sider's inclusive use of the word, which at first may strike the reader as curious for a northern White such as Sider discussing issues related to African Americans and Indians. But Sider himself was deeply involved in pursuing racial and social justice, especially evidenced in his efforts to increase African American voting registration in Robeson County, North Carolina, in the late 1960s. Sider being chased by Whites with guns on an election day is one of several personal accounts that make their way into his book (18). Sider effectively integrates personal stories into his larger analysis of the social production of race and how it affects the lives of those impacted by that construction.

*Race Becomes Tomorrow* reinforces previous works from historians and other scholars. Sociologist Doug McAdam's *Freedom Summer* reveals the long-term impact that involvement in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's "Summer Project" in Mississippi in 1964 had on the lives of its participants.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Sider's book is not history as merely the study of the past, but rather a history that people live with and even against (15). His description of the historical and economic realities that hindered voter registration and the promotion of black candidates in the rural South is perhaps less thorough than other quality historical works such as Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* and Hasan Kwame Jeffries's *Bloody Lowndes*, but a major contribution of the book is that it poignantly reveals the cultural factors that permeated these efforts. While many of Sider's experiences address race in North Carolina, he also offers interesting vignettes about racial identity and issues in New York City, thus enhancing the historiography of race, labor and civil rights in the North examined in important works such as

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<sup>1</sup> Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially pp.161-240.

Thomas Sugrue's *Sweet Land of Liberty* and Heather Ann Thompson's *Whose Detroit?*<sup>22</sup> But the most significant contribution of Sider's work is his analysis of how shifting patterns of labor were impacted by the Civil Rights Movement and by economic changes effected by the national government. The civil rights gained by African Americans in the 1960s and beyond carried the unintended consequence of making them replaceable in the labor force. Sider maintains that large businesses and agricultural companies have essentially replaced African American labor with that of undocumented immigrants, who often have few rights. He suggests that "A world that produced abusable Blacks one day on the next makes illegal aliens and then has little use for Blacks" (170). Thus, Sider views the production of race as a fluid process, one rooted in the past and also in the unpredictability of tomorrow.

Sider argues that much of the production of racially influenced abuse comes from the state. This theme permeates the book, in examples ranging from the New Deal's implicitly racially exclusionary programs to the impact of NAFTA to what Sider calls the "Supremacist Court" under Chief Justice John Roberts (48, 154, 156). Criticism of the American government is rampant, and the most striking contention Sider makes is that it is merely an illusion that the United States is still a democracy, especially evidenced in the role of money in determining elections (48, 154, 156, 98). The book has no shortage of controversial statements and thought-provoking arguments. Some are well-reasoned, and in certain instances when entwined with the personal stories, very cleverly written. Yet some of his arguments are left unsubstantiated or at least lacking in evidence or context to appreciate the larger complexities from which they are framed. For example, in discussing the very broad period of the "first three-quarters or so" of the twentieth century he mentions that the Democratic Party in Mississippi was legally deemed a private club, enabling it to forbid Blacks from voting in the primaries (134). It seems reasonable that he should also have mentioned the Supreme Court decision in *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) that essentially struck down the all-white primary. Granted, not all Supreme Court decisions were followed by state or local governments in the South, but here we see Sider's tendency to be a little loose with his evidence, or at least his periodization. Another problematic example comes when he mentions the sit-ins at the Woolworth's lunch counter "in 1964" that "precipitated a national change" (200). The sit-ins he describes actually occurred in 1960 and the increasing sit-in movement that peaked in 1963 played a major role in the coming of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Despite a few problematic aspects, Sider's work is nonetheless compelling and important reading for understanding race in the United States. It is not a work on the Civil Rights Movement per se, but provides interesting perspectives on the "Shadow of Civil Rights." He asserts that civil rights are rather limited and do not fully challenge the domination of the elite. He prefers the more basic terms "rights," which can more fully incorporate rights to a decent living (30). A good deal of *Race Becomes Tomorrow* addresses the "crucial contradiction, between people who don't count yet who produce so much of what gets counted" (147-148). This is particularly true in places like Robeson County, North Carolina, where African

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001).

American labor was manipulated for centuries, largely giving way to undocumented immigrant labor in recent decades. But as Sider demonstrates, African Americans, Native Americans, and undocumented immigrants are not the only people who suffer from the systematic inequalities that are often produced by the state and large corporations in the United States. So in his estimation, “we” must confront them.

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