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### Review Of "The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, And Violence In A New South City" By G. Mixon

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## Georgia Historical Society

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The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City by Gregory Mixon

Review by: Allison Dorsey

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*The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City.* By Gregory Mixon. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005. Pp. xv, 197. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$59.95. ISBN 0-8130-2787-X.)

A surprisingly slim volume, Greg Mixon's *The Atlanta Riot* offers the definitive treatment of the 1906 Atlanta race riot. Culled from his highly regarded and much cited dissertation, supplemented by material gathered from the personal papers of many of the key political players in the city, and a close read of newspapers and civic committee records, the work is a concise, cogent analysis of the firestorm of violence that forestalled the black quest for political inclusion and equality in the Phoenix city.

A corrective to much of the previous scholarship on Atlanta, Mixon's work lays to rest myths about the destruction of Alonzo Herndon's famous Peachtree Street barbershop and details the role of the municipal leadership in reducing by *two thirds* (!) the count of the number of people killed in the riot. Mixon reveals the link between whites who "flocked to Atlanta by streetcar" to attack black citizens and members of the local law enforcement like Sheriff Nelms, who colluded with the mob by deputizing as many as three hundred "prominent and conservative" white citizens who help herd black Brownsville residents to the Atlanta stockade for detention.

The aggressive assault on black lives, property, and civil rights was part of a strategy developed by white "commercial-civic" reformers who wished to craft a "progressive" city marked by "stability and controlled growth" of industry as well as "racial segregation, black disfranchisement" and regulation of social aspects of black life. These elites joined forces with disillusioned and anxious members of the white working class who blamed their declining social status not on the expansion and evolution of ever-more-powerful capital and industry but on the "illegitimate" notion of black political and social equality. Confronted by autonomous black laborers who competed for jobs, housing, and the ballot and who chose to engage in raucous street life, whites moved to reestablish the economic, political, and social control of the South rooted in the slave past. Playing upon sexual fears and anxieties, the elites highlighted the threat to white womanhood posed by the black males to establish a toxic link of white supremacy with their working-class brethren. Despite the "racial improvement campaign" mounted by the city's highly educated black elite, black leaders were unsuccessful in their efforts to forge a viable link of class solidarity across racial lines with their white peers. The triumph of white supremacy and riot "installed disfranchisement . . . and institutional segregation as the dominant form of race relations" in Atlanta for the next forty years.

Mixon's trim text provides a succinct analysis of the causes, action, and resolution of the riot that immobilized the "city too busy to hate" in the fall of 1906. Readers may suspect there is more to know about the life

and role of men such as Henry A. Rucker (who graces the cover) and other black leaders in the city, yet this is not a weakness so much as the mark of a talented narrator who leaves his audience wanting more.

ALLISON DORSEY

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Ms. Dorsey is the author of *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (University of Georgia Press, 2004).

*The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South.* By Shelley Sallee. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. Pp. xi, 207. Notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95, library cloth, \$19.95, paper. ISBN 0-8203-2448-5 cloth. ISBN 0-8203-2570-8 paper.)

Although progressive-era efforts to prohibit child labor centered on the industrializing South, the movement has often been presented only in a national context. Hence, Shelley Sallee's study of child labor reform in Alabama is a welcome and long overdue contribution to the literature. Sallee's study, while narrowly focused on one state, does more than simply recount the legislative history of reform. Drawing on the growing field of "whiteness studies," Sallee offers an important interpretation of southern progressivism and how it became allied with national movements. When reformers chose to center the campaign on racial uplift for white mill children, they necessarily diminished more radical implications regarding class and economic power. "Whiteness" made child labor reform safe and helped forge interregional alliances, but it left African-American children and their plight outside the scope of reform.

The book opens with an exploration of the antagonists of reform, mill owners and southern working people themselves. Early on in southern industrialization, Sallee points out, mill men could comfortably portray the employment of "cracker" children as moral uplift and imagine mill villages as evidence of a booming New South. Mill families themselves, especially fathers seeking control over family labor, welcomed the opportunity for factory labor. Here, Sallee's account is more or less conventional, and it might have been helped by a somewhat more sophisticated investigation of southern working families, especially what they wanted for their younger members.

Sallee is more interested in the language of reform, and the book's central section, which explores that language intimately, is its most valuable. Here, she details how casting child labor in the discourse of whiteness challenged the paternalist language of industrialists. Ironically, the labor movement did much to turn child labor reform away from its socialist implications, Sallee argues. Samuel Gompers's choice of English-born reformer Irene Ashby-Macfadyen to spearhead the AFL's efforts guaranteed that reform would become part of middle-class progressivism