
Book Review:

***Facing Freedom* Examines Lives of Post-Civil
War African Americans
in Montgomery County, Virginia**

The synopsis of *Facing Freedom: An African American Community in Virginia from Reconstruction to Jim Crow*, which follows (indented), is used with permission from the University of Virginia Press in Charlottesville.

Facing Freedom was written by Daniel B. Thorp, associate professor of history and associate dean for undergraduate academic affairs in Virginia Tech's College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. He has served as the history advisor for *The Smithfield Review* and has been a member of the journal's editorial board since 2017.

In describing the book, the University of Virginia Press said,

The history of African Americans in southern Appalachia after the Civil War has largely escaped the attention of scholars of both African Americans and the region. In *Facing Freedom*, Daniel Thorp relates the complex experience of an African American community in southern Appalachia as it negotiated a radically new world in the four decades following the Civil War.

Drawing on extensive research in private collections as well as local, state, and federal records, Thorp narrates in intimate detail the experiences of black Appalachians as they struggled to establish autonomous families, improve their economic standing, operate black schools within a white-controlled school system, form independent black churches, and exercise expanded—if contested—roles as citizens and members of the body politic.

Black out-migration increased markedly near the close of the nineteenth century, but the generation that transitioned from slavery to freedom in Montgomery County [Virginia] established the community institutions that would survive disenfranchisement and Jim Crow. *Facing Freedom* reveals the stories and strategies of those who pioneered these resilient bulwarks against the rising tide of racism.

The 304-page book, which includes notes, a bibliography, and an index, was published in late 2017 and is available in hardcover, paperback, and electronic formats. It is part of the American South Series, edited by Elizabeth R. Varon and Orville Vernon Burton.

Thorp's work has received favorable reviews, including a number from historians and historical publications. According to Jane Dailey, author of both *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* and *The Age of Jim Crow* and a faculty member at the University of Chicago, it is "[a] lucid and moving contribution to the history of Virginia and southern Appalachia." John C. Inscoe, the Albert B. Saye Professor of History at the University of Georgia, called the book "meticulously documented and multidimensional" in its coverage of the African American community in Montgomery County from the Civil War to the early twentieth century. And the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* said that it

delivers exactly what it promises—the stories and struggles of an African American community in Virginia that made its way forward despite a host of obstacles—some deliberately put in its path by racist white people, others a function of the capitalist society in which the community lived.

The book can be purchased at bookstores and online.

– Editor