Degrees of Equality: Abolitionist Colleges and the Politics of Race. By John Frederick Bell. Antislavery, Abolition, and the Atlantic World. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022. Pp. xii, 298. $45.00, ISBN 978-0-8071-7194-3.)

John Frederick Bell's *Degrees of Equality: Abolitionist Colleges and the Politics of Race* expertly blends social and institutional history to offer a bold reconsideration of three nineteenth-century "abolitionist colleges"—Oberlin College in Ohio, New York Central College, and Berea College in Kentucky. Unlike previous authors who have examined these schools as part of American higher education generally and applauded their relative progressivism, Bell trains his focus on the individual experiences of Black students. Thanks to this shift in perspective, a more complex picture emerges. While all three institutions emerged from authentic attempts to promote an egalitarian vision, "there was a disconnect between equal rights for all races and complete social equality" that saw these projects fall short of their full promise after the Civil War (p. 9).

Degrees of Equality proceeds in six chapters, each focusing on one of the colleges and moving chronologically from the 1830s to the turn of the twentieth century. From the moment Black students first enrolled at the college in 1835, Bell argues, leaders at Oberlin were insufficiently committed to Black citizenship and equality. The school's board instead "couched Black admissions in the language of individual liberty or asserted it was an act of charity" (p. 16). Bell pays particular attention to the experiences of Black women at Oberlin. "The adversity they faced," Bell writes, "sometimes proved its own education" (p. 80). New York Central College was more radical and egalitarian than Oberlin, but ultimately succumbed to financial failure. The college's responses to financial trouble, Bell writes, "illustrate a persistent reality of campus politics: while activists champion change, institutions privilege continuity" (p. 51). In its final throes, trustees at New York Central briefly reincarnated the college as a de facto all-white institution, throwing its mission to the wind in a desperate pitch for financial solvency.

Berea College's ascendance coincided with the aftermath of the Civil War and the beginnings of Reconstruction. Berea, a southern institution more thoroughly integrated than any other abolitionist college, embodied the same revolutionary promise that animated the Reconstruction era. However, Berea struggled to reconcile competing visions of racial equality within the abolitionist movement after emancipation "removed [a] common enemy in slavery" (p. 110). Staring down the same financial problems that had crushed New York Central, Berea succumbed to outside pressure and delineated harder boundaries between the races and sexes in the early 1870s. "From that moment on," Bell argues, "the brightest hope for racial reconciliation in the South began to dim" (p. 115). Progress also slowed at Oberlin in Reconstruction's wake. The Reconstruction amendments offered white liberals a chance to view racial barriers as a thing of the past. White Oberlin students and school leaders alike failed to appreciate racism's persistent forms, and Black students found that "unspoken ideas about inherent difference circumscribed their supposedly equal rights" (p. 141).

Degrees of Equality makes a powerful contribution to a long tradition of work on slavery and white supremacy in the nineteenth century that emphasizes themes of hypocrisy, decline, and the unfulfilled promise of the emancipation moment. Among other insights, Bell effectively captures how often—even at the leading edge of racial progressivism—gender and intimacy were a third rail for advocates of racial harmony. Most important, Bell makes a compelling case that the mere absence of racist structures was not and is still not enough. "Lip service," Bell warns, "can be as detrimental as disregard" (p. 211). Oberlin and its competitors fell short because, in the absence of antiracist proscriptions, individual acts of discrimination were left to shape the campus climate for Black students. Those of us working on college campuses today should take notice.

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Invisible No More: The African American Experience at the University of South Carolina. Edited by Robert Greene II and Tyler D. Parry. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2021. Pp. xiv, 252. Paper, $24.99, ISBN 978-1-64336-254-0; cloth, $49.99, ISBN 978-1-64336-253-3.)

"The new laws of the new day can no longer resist these three irresistible ones," asserted Nikky Finney in her 2013 poem called "The Irresistible Ones." Finney—the John H. Bennett Jr. Professor of Creative Writing and Southern Letters at the University of South Carolina (USC)—wrote this ode to honor Robert Anderson, Henrie Monteith, and James Solomon, the three Black students who desegregated the university in 1963. Her verse also well describes *Invisible No More: The African American Experience at the University of South Carolina*. This grand collection, edited by Robert Greene II and Tyler D. Parry, argues that the history of South Carolina's flagship university cannot be understood if African American stories that stretch across the antebellum period and into the present are not centered in that narrative. Over ten essays, including selections by Greene and Parry, this volume's contributors affirm that their investigations do not simply place African Americans at USC over the school's 222-year story. Rather, African Americans "molded the university into something greater than the sum of its parts," and *Invisible No More* correctly insists that the process of desegregation should be thought of as "*ongoing*," as antiracist and pro-Black activism continues at USC and at institutions of higher learning across the United States (p. 3).

This anthology depicts many different African American experiences at USC from the arrival of enslaved people on campus in 1801 at then South Carolina College, to efforts of historians to memorialize those enslaved people, to the life of Professor Richard T. Greener, the first African American to teach at USC (where he also earned his own law degree). Greener also held the distinction of being the only Black professor at a southern university during Reconstruction. Standout chapters abound. Christian K. Anderson and Jason C. Darby (both of USC) explore the remarkable career of Greener, depicting him as the ultimate example of the possibilities open to Black Carolinians had a genuinely biracial democracy been allowed to succeed. Similarly, Evan A. Kutzler presents a groundbreaking exploration, based on never-before-explored

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