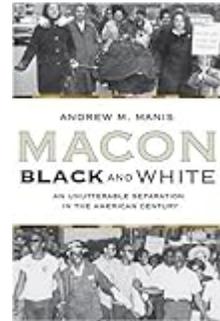**Andrew M. Manis.** *Macon Black and White: An Unutterable Separation in the American Century.* Macon: Mercer University Press and the Tubman African American Museum, 2004. xvi + 432 pp. $20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-86554-958-6; $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-86554-761-2.

Reviewed by J. Michael Butler (Department of History, South Georgia College)

The Historian as Mediator

The latest work of Andrew Manis indicates that historical examinations of local civil rights struggles are moving in a bold new direction. Both his methodology and insights are a refreshing departure from the community studies that have dominated civil rights scholarship since the 1993 publication of John Dittmer's *Local People.* The focus of subsequent monographs remained the grassroots development of area struggles, and rightfully so, but their general timelines and conclusions often varied little. In *Macon Black and White*, Manis goes beyond the generally accepted *Brown* to Memphis period and examines the lives of black and whites in Macon throughout the twentieth century. He divides each chapter by decade and focuses on a primary event that best illustrates the nature of race relations in Macon during the particular years under scrutiny. A theme of continuity connects each chapter and demonstrates that "an 'unutterable separation' has characterized black-white relations in Macon throughout the twentieth century and persists in different forms into this new millennium" (p. 6). While the author makes several intriguing points concerning Macon's past racial struggles, it is his epilogue that is sure to raise the most discussion. In the provocative postscript,

Manis goes beyond his obligatory summaries and conclusions to offer Maconites several "practical prescriptions for racial healing" (p. xii). The success of his book, Manis argues, depends not upon the historiographical impact it has on civil rights scholarship but on the effect it has on future race relations in Macon. Such a conclusion reinforces the author's contention that "history matters most when it helps shape and even change the present" (p. xii). For this reason alone, *Macon Black and White* is the rare monograph that demands considerable attention from both professional historians and a general audience.

Its unconventional epilogue is not the sole virtue of the book. Indeed, throughout his study Manis demonstrates that complexity characterized racial affairs in Bibb County during "the American Century." For instance, Manis successfully demonstrates that both blacks and whites figured prominently in Macon's racial progression. He cites several progressive white editors from the *Macon Telegraph* and a number of interracial Christian groups that prove this point. Most interesting, though, is the role some white faculty members at two Macon colleges played in the local struggle. Professors at both the

Baptist-affiliated Mercer University and Wesleyan College, a Methodist school, used Christian theology to challenge the racial conventions of their day and inspired their students to do likewise. It is quite interesting to read of white southern college students who used their faith to fight, rather than support, Jim Crow. Yet Manis does not overstate the role each institution had in supporting the area freedom struggle. He points out that activist professors represented a minority at their schools and that associations with conservative denominations limited Mercer and Wesleyan in their civil rights activism. However, Manis successfully reveals that some white professors influenced local struggles in a positive manner and thus opens speculation concerning the impact white faculty had on racial affairs in other southern college towns during the post-World War II era.

Another strength of *Macon Black and White* is that Manis does a remarkable job of explaining the local movement in context of events that transpired at the state, national, and even global level. In fact, one of his primary arguments is that "non-local factors also shaped the lives of blacks and whites in their interrelations in Macon" (p. 344). Manis does not neglect the importance of indigenous events and discusses the rise of the Macon Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and the 1963 city bus boycott, to cite two such examples, in great detail. Yet local black and white reaction to outside developments often led to indigenous responses. For instance, Manis demonstrates how the contentious 1907 gubernatorial contest, the two world wars, the *Brown v. Board* verdict, the 1960s fear of communism, the rise of "Black Power" in the 1970s, and the Rodney King verdict of 1992, among other events, directly influenced racial patterns and thought in Macon. It is particularly interesting how the Martin Luther King assassination, local black power movement, Lester Maddux's term as governor, and the judicial integration of local schools all intersected about the same time and together produced a combustible racial environment in Macon. The consideration of outside events strengthens the author's contention that the struggle for racial equality in Macon mirrored the greater national movement in many ways. Such an argument makes his suggestions for racial healing applicable for Macon and the nation as a whole.

There are many other elements of *Macon Black and White* that make it an important contribution to existing civil rights scholarship, but it is the book's purpose that causes it to stand out. When Manis reflects upon the accomplishments of the Macon movement and the greater national struggle, he notes that positive changes have transpired. But he is quick to point out that racism still characterizes American society. White privilege exists, as do the economic disadvantages that plague many black Americans. The problem of racism, though, is that most individuals interpret it as a political matter. Such an approach allows conservatives to address the issue strictly at the individual level, while the left calls for corporate action in resolving inequality. Consequently, very little occurs besides shifting blame for the current state of race relations from one group to the next. Manis argues that individuals must address racial divisions from both an individual and group perspective. Because they perpetrated the injustice for over three hundred and fifty years, Manis argues that whites must take the lead in healing the racial divide. It is at this point where Manis makes the impassioned argument that change will come only when the nation's racial divide is viewed as a moral issue. Repentance, acknowledgment of past abuses, accepting individual responsibility for certain failures, and forgiveness are steps that will initiate racial reconciliation, but they will not come until racism is accepted as a moral failing of contemporary America. In addition, Manis maintains that clergy members must lead the way in addressing racial problems. As a white historian and minister, Manis practices what he preaches by publicizing his thought-provoking recommendations.

Although Manis interprets the racial divide as a moral issue, he does not place the impetus for change upon the individual alone. In fact, those who possess political and economic power have a corporate responsibility to forge a more racially equal society through the support of affirmative action programs. Such actions are necessary because whites have had a significant head start in terms of the economic and political benefits they have inherited since the beginning of American settlement, and blacks cannot be expected to overcome that reality in a generation or two. Manis acknowledges that many will view his suggestions as "liberal" with the likelihood of whites surrendering their privileges for the sake of racial reconciliation "as likely as the proverbial snowball surviving the fires of Hell" (p. 360). Still, he uses his understanding of Macon's racial division to provide realistic suggestions for improving the nation's most divisive issue. The next step in achieving a more racially equal society belongs to those who read this book.

Macon Black and White is a remarkable work of scholarship. A close reading, though, raises a few questions and issues that could use clarification. For instance, Manis spends a great deal of time tracing the influence that *Macon Telegraph* editors had on race relations in their city. But what about its two black newspapers, the *Ma-*

con Voice and the *Macon World*? The author briefly discusses a rivalry that divided black editors in the 1940s, but mentions neither paper again in his work. Why analyze the *Telegraph* so closely and consistently but ignore the black publications? Also, more information on the mass meetings that black leaders held during the 1962 bus boycott is necessary. Who organized them, how long did they last, and what influence did they have within the entire black community? Like the newspapers, clarification on the purpose and nature of the mass meetings would strengthen the black perspective of the boycott. Finally, Manis cites the meetings of state organizations in Macon, like black voter or interracial groups, as indicative of the tireless struggle for racial justice that characterized the city. In one case, for instance, he states that "the most radical strategy of the MCHR (Macon Council on Human Relations) was to hold its regular meetings and occasionally host the statewide annual meeting of the GCHR (Georgia Council on Human Relations) in Macon" (p. 193). Perhaps the Macon meetings had as much to do with the city's central location within the

state as it did with the activity of Bibb County activists. As I have learned during my past five years in southern Georgia, geography is an important factor to take into account when planning state-wide organizational meetings. Practicality, in other words, could have influenced what appears to be an otherwise "radical strategy."

Despite these few quibbles, Andrew Manis does a commendable job of demonstrating the continuity of complexity that characterized the twentieth century racial struggle in Macon, Georgia. His book is well written, clearly explained, and accessible to both the professional scholar and non-academic alike. Furthermore, Manis takes his duties as a historian a step farther than most by learning from his research both the paths that should be taken and avoided in suggesting meaningful racial changes in Bibb County and, vicariously, the entire nation. His willingness to do so will undoubtedly spark debates concerning the role historians should occupy, but I suppose that matters little to Manis. He would rather it lead to more productive discussions of race on the civil level, and for that he should be commended.

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