

Educating Milwaukee: How One City's History of Segregation and Struggle Shaped Its Schools

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The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey: Memories from the Farm of My Youth, by Alan Guebert with Mary Grace Foxwell. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015. xiii, 152 pp. Photographs. \$17.95 paperback.

Reviewer Pamela Riney-Kehrberg is professor of history at Iowa State University. She is the author of *The Nature of Childhood: An Environmental History of Growing Up in America since 1865* (2014) and *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (2005).

Alan Guebert's *The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey: Memories from the Farm of My Youth* takes readers on a meandering walk through the seasons on his family's dairy farm in southern Illinois. Guebert grew up there in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, and graduated from the University of Illinois in 1980. He is the author of the syndicated column "The Farm and Food File" and has drawn his material from that column. His family was a relatively prosperous one, and the farm was large. With the help of three full-time and three part-time hired men, the family farmed more than 700 acres of Mississippi River bottomland. Only as the family's boys matured did the family dispense with its hired labor. Once the sons were grown, their father replaced their labor with machines. The book is named for Guebert's great-uncle Honey, who, though sweet-tempered, managed to destroy every machine he laid his hands upon.

This book is fun and lightly written, well suited for the casual reader. There are no great revelations or deep secrets here. Instead, it is a loving examination of a place and time that have disappeared in the past half-century. The author reflects on hard work, a beloved family, and the often oppressive weather of America's heartland. This is a good book for a rainy (or snowy) day.

Educating Milwaukee: How One City's History of Segregation and Struggle Shaped Its Schools, by James K. Nelsen. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015. 287 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer Kathryn Schumaker is assistant professor of classics and letters at the University of Oklahoma. She is the author of "The Politics of Youth: Civil Rights Reform in the Waterloo Public Schools" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2013).

James K. Nelsen's *Educating Milwaukee* is a careful examination of the history of school reform in Milwaukee. That city, like many others in the Midwest and Northeast, suffered from the loss of manufacturing jobs, increasing poverty, and white flight to the suburbs during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. At the same time, the Milwaukee Public Schools were at the forefront of emerging trends in American education. Nelsen employs newspaper accounts, school board

records, and oral histories in addition to social science research on schools and student learning to demonstrate how these ideas surfaced and were put into action in Milwaukee. The result is a study that delves deeply into politics and policy in the city schools while revealing how modern trends in American education have roots in early efforts at school desegregation.

Nelsen's book focuses on three periods in the recent history of Milwaukee schools, which he labels the eras of "no choice (prior to 1976), forced choice (1976–1995), and school choice (after 1987)" (2). The language of "choice," Nelsen notes, is imbued with a positive notion of individual liberty. But as *Educating Milwaukee* demonstrates, choice was at odds with meaningful desegregation, since racial segregation in the schools was a consequence of longstanding residential segregation. The forces that created economic disparities in cities like Milwaukee also opened the suburbs to middle-class whites while excluding many African Americans. What had to be sacrificed in the name of desegregation—the ability of a child to go to school close to home, remain with siblings, and have access to extracurricular activities—is a prominent theme.

The first chapter sets the stage for battles over racial reform in the city's schools, detailing how Milwaukee came to be one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States. The book then turns to the initiation of school reform in the late 1960s, including the establishment of the city's first magnet schools. Nelsen documents how Milwaukee created magnet schools as a way to stem the tide of white students out of the system and into private and suburban schools. Magnet programs allowed students to attend a French immersion school or concentrate in the performing arts, among other options. Schools also turned to innovative pedagogical methods to lure white students. Nelsen then goes inside the schools, giving the perspective of students and their own experiences with desegregation, and providing context for what was happening outside the schools, including the economically devastating loss of manufacturing jobs, the struggle to retain teachers and create positive school cultures, and the rise of gang violence. The final chapter details the state's initiation of voucher programs and charter schools, bringing the book into the modern era by documenting the influence of the conservative Bradley Foundation in engineering the school voucher program in Milwaukee that allowed students to attend private schools.

Some of this covers ground that is familiar from Jack Dougherty's *More than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (2004), which examined the long history of racial reform in the Mil-

waukee Public Schools. By taking a microscope to the process and legacy of school desegregation in the late twentieth century, *Educating Milwaukee* charts the emergence of modern American education, with its collection of magnet and charter schools along with voucher programs and the persistence of the achievement gap between black and white students. It is clear that efforts to achieve racial reform changed the way the American educational system operated as it abandoned racially segregated neighborhood schooling.

For black parents in Milwaukee, "school choice" meant asking students to accept separate and inferior neighborhood schools or pay the price for desegregation. Despite constant efforts to reform the schools, Nelsen notes that the quality of education in Milwaukee declined nonetheless during the period surveyed. Investments in magnet schools and voucher programs drained funds from neighborhood schools, and the system was beset by social problems such as poverty and teenage pregnancy that required more support for students. While *Educating Milwaukee* does not account completely for the contemporary problems of urban public education, it contributes toward a fuller understanding of race and schooling in the present day.