

6-1-2018

Black Boys Burning: 1959 Fire at the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School

Carol Walker Jordan

Librarian and Research Consultant

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

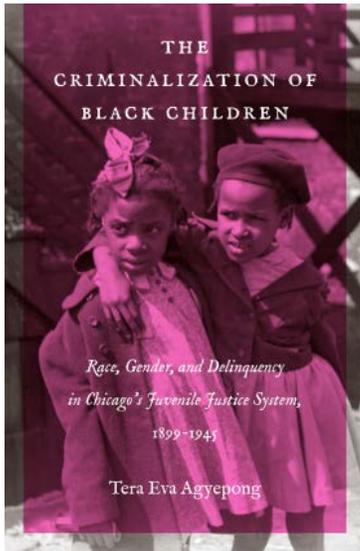
Jordan, Carol Walker (2018) "Black Boys Burning: 1959 Fire at the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 66 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol66/iss2/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Criminalization of Black Children: Race, Gender, and Delinquency in Chicago's Juvenile Justice System, 1899-1945. Tera Eva Agyepong. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1-4696-3644-3 (pbk.: \$24.95), 978-1-4696-3865-2 (hard.;\$90.00), 978-1-4696-3866-9 (Ebook; \$18.99). 196 p.



Today's national news breaks Chicago crime statistics on a daily and weekly basis. Over a three day period this week (May 1-4, 2018), the report on CNN was startling: "40 murders in three days, men, women and children". Crime statistics for Chicago soars and drops each week but remains steady as a national disaster.

Dr. Tera Agyepong, an attorney and professor of history, provides a highly readable and emotionally charged body of historical research on juvenile justice in Chicago and Illinois, between 1899 and 1945.

Black children and white immigrant children who were truant, undisciplined, and victims of neglect and poverty were judged as adults and had no juvenile court to hear their pleas for help. This resulted in adult legal rulings and incarceration in adult facilities where abuses and little to no rehabilitation for children existed.

A national movement to establish juvenile courts and juvenile justice systems attracted the attention of Chicago's legal, social services and law enforcement citizens.

Reading the many pages of intense research by Dr. Agyepong we see the evolution of the establishment of a juvenile court system and separate incarceration facilities for juveniles.

Well meaning but with abundant abuses the resulting court and facilities mirrored the adult penal system. My heart sank as I read of abuses and tragedies heaped upon black

children and white immigrant children from "well-meaning" advocates of the newly established separate system.

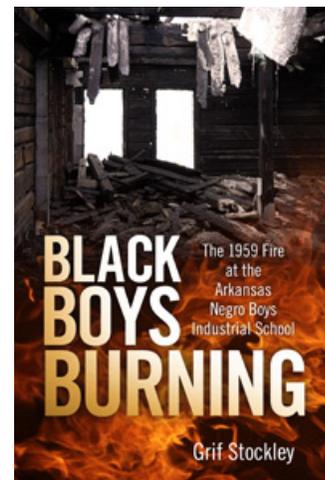
While reading Dr. Agyepong's excellent research, I reflect upon the current news headlines for Chicago's crime rate, "40 deaths in a 3 day period". Might the prison systems, both juvenile and adult, have any factoring in what is going on today in Chicago?

Something isn't right in "Whoville"!

Agyepong's research is a very good resource for students and faculty in juvenile justice courses and American legal history studies. Recommended for public and academic libraries

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D. MLIS
Librarian, Research Consultant

Black Boys Burning: The 1959 Fire at the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School. Grif Stockley. Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4968-1269-8. 210 p. \$35.00



Try to imagine it is 1959 and you are confined to a room in an old dilapidated wooden dormitory with only one door to exit the room and with windows sealed with locked metal screens. You are there with 68 other boys when smoke begins billowing from the ceiling and panic erupts around you. The one exit door is locked from the outside.

Then imagine you are a mother of one of these boys and you learn on the radio of a fire that consumed 21 lives of the 69 boys. The horror of your son being in the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School that day and perishing in that fire fell beyond imagination.

Grif Stockley presents a detailed narrative of the place in Arkansas history of the Fire, of the "history of the school, a

fresh understanding of the broad implications of white supremacy”.

Stockley’s research “adds to an evolving understanding of the Jim Crow South, Arkansas’s history, the lawyers who capitalized on this tragedy, and the African American victims”. (cover fly)

To those who see Arkansas as a place where racism and white supremacy dominated the 1950s through the 1970s, there will be ample justification through Stockley’s research to support those impressions. From the Governor Orval Faubus to the staff of the School, racism and white supremacy led to the fire and continued to affect the juvenile justice system and educational access for Negro children for decades in Arkansas.

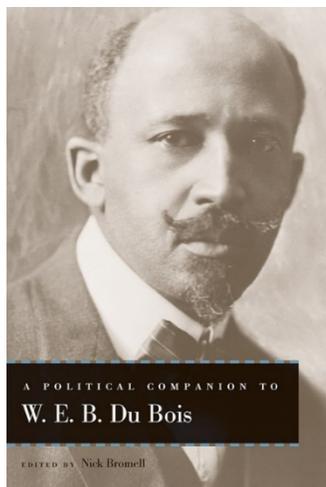
Thanks to Gif Stockley as this book is an excellent addition for any faculty or student collection on juvenile justice, Arkansas history, and white supremacy in the South. However, at times it is a painful read as it warns in the title: “Black Boys Burning..”

Imagine, it is 1959 and you are one of the mothers of the boys who were confined to that dormitory at the Arkansas Negro Boys Industrial School. Then imagine what 69 mothers might have accomplished if they had organized and marched on the offices of Orval Faubus. Would history write the story a different way?

Recommended for academic libraries, public libraries and book clubs.

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D. MLIS
Librarian and Research Consultant

A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois. Nick Bromell, ed. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8131-7490-7 (hardcover; al. paper), ISBN: 978-0-8131-7493-8 (epub.), ISBN: 978-0-8131-7492-1 (pdf), 364 p. \$80 all formats.



Around twenty years ago I went on a W.E.B. Du Bois reading binge. While I was, of course, aware of Du Bois as an important African American intellectual and had read a few short (probably excerpted) pieces by him, I had never actually read him in depth. As it was, I only read a fraction of his copious output but it did include his famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, one of his autobiographies, and a volume of his collected works. The experience was profound: his sociological, historical, political, and personal observations on the plight of African Americans and race relations were astute, disturbing, and still, in the twenty-first century, very relevant to our racial dilemmas of today. During his extremely long lifetime (1868-1963), Du Bois was truly active as an academic researcher, civil rights pioneer, very prolific author, and peace activist.

As editor Nick Bromell (professor of English, University of Massachusetts, Amherst) states, “W.E.B. du Bois was not in any obvious sense a political theorist” (1). However, as the eleven chapters of this book demonstrate, Du Bois’s work was indeed of a very political nature. Actually, Du Bois was, in many ways, a socialist and he frequently wrote about socialism. While not a communist, he did sympathize to some extent with communism, and this caused his some grief with government officials during the cold war era. He may not have been “a political theorist,” but du Bois was definitely a politically engaged person. *A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois* consists of eleven chapters written by eleven different scholars who analyze selected portions of Du Bois’s writings in terms of political theory.

All eleven contributors to this volume are academics with five specializing in Politics, Political Science, or Government; three specializing in English (one of whom also specializes in African American Studies); and three in Philosophy. All contributions are of interest but, as is usual in a multi-author collection, the quality of writing and scholarship varies but every chapter is worth reading.

Among the best contributions is Chapter 9, “The Cost of Liberty: Sacrifice and Survival in Du Bois’s *John Brown*” by Alexander Livingston, assistant professor of Government at Cornell University. Livingston clearly identifies the significance (and political position) of Du Bois’s assessment of John Brown in American history while writing in 1909, an era when the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War was gaining traction. Says Livingston, “From within this nadir of Jim Crow revisionism, Du Bois’s conclusion that ‘John Brown was right’ rang out, as an indictment of the nation’s acquiescent acceptance of Reconstruction’s defeat and called his readers to continue agitating for racial equality” (208).

One finds another example of clear analysis of the political thinking of Du Bois in Chapter 10, “A Splendid Failure? *Black Reconstruction* and Du Bois’s Tragic Vision of Politics” by Vijay Phulwani, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Government at Cornell University. Analyzing Du Bois’s major 1935 book, *Black Reconstruction in America*, Phulwani writes, “Instead, he