

*Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890-1940.* By ROBERT GREGG. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993. xiii, 272p. Maps, tables, index. \$39.95.)

"Differentiating." It's a word Robert Gregg uses a number of times in this good little volume. "Differentiating" is a good word, one that has been too infrequently applied to African Americans. When we have insufficient information about a group, we tend to generalize about the aggregate meaning of their beliefs and behavior. In recent years, Vincent Franklin, Harry Silcox, Roger Lane, Allan Ballard, and others have begun to disaggregate Philadelphia's "black community," showing it for what it was at the turn of the century—a number of pieces of overlapping communities. Now Gregg has taken on the challenge of disaggregating that amorphous entity known as "the black church."

In his 1899 study, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, W. E. B. Du Bois grappled somewhat with intraracial questions of class, race, regional origins, and church membership, and half a century earlier Joseph Wilson had tackled them in his *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored People in Philadelphia*. Gregg has, of course, gone much further. Building on the tradition of community studies, of E. P. Thompson, Kenneth Kusmer, and Joe William Trotter, Gregg brings an intricacy and sophistication to his analysis that is admirable.

The book is organized in eleven chapters divided into three sections, preceded by an introduction clearly setting out Gregg's goals and where he sees his work fitting into and/or breaking tradition. Reminding us of the work of Robert E. Park, E. Franklin Frazier, and the Chicago school, he threads his way through their arguments and those of Carol Marks, Kusmer, and Ballard. Then he "focuses on the problems faced by the black community and black churches as a result of socioeconomic changes occurring in Philadelphia."

The second section of the book, the strongest, "examines the writings of African Methodist intellectuals, ministers, and members to delineate their theology and ideology." Here Gregg analyzes the words of men and women to assess what is unique about African Methodists, as compared to other African-American denominations. Finally, in the third section, Gregg adds the component of the Great Migration, discussing its impact on the configuration, strategies, and leadership of the A.M.E. churches.

Gregg does many things well. He pays attention to the unique meaning of "class" in the black communities. He neatly and easily incorporates gender issues without segregating women into a separate section. He tackles the subtle differences and overlap between social revolutionary rhetoric and accommodationist rhetoric. He gives us a sense of the meaning and availability of theological education in the hierarchy of the A.M.E. churches. He pays attention to the politics of church life, both within the congregation and within the communities at large, and he explores the evangelical dilemma of a fine line between providing entertainment and slipping into commercialism.

But there are places where the reader could wish for more. We are left with only a vague notion of how the A.M.E. churches and membership related to the African-American United Methodists, or how, or if, the A.M.E. mission for creating a strong middle class was "differentiated" from that of the United Methodists or Baptists. And there are annoying lacunae in footnotes. Gregg mentions, for example, that the A.M.E. groups supported the Quaker-sponsored Institute for Colored Youth (as opposed to the Methodist-sponsored schools), but there is no citation to help the reader know where this information came from. Similarly, he quotes a fascinatingly insightful interview with a church member, Ella Mae Story, but he doesn't tell us where we might find that interview. This documentation problem is more frequent than a reader might like, and it is annoying, but it does not detract much from Gregg's solid contribution to the conversation about differentiation within the black communities. Yes, it's true: all African Americans don't look alike. And Gregg has done a lot to illuminate that fact.