Post-industrial age dashed blacks' hopes

by Mary Lalevée

One sad point comes across very clearly in Margaret Edds' detailed review of the political situation of black Americans in the years following the victories of the civil rights movement: The hopes of many blacks that economic progress would follow political advances have been dashed. Black Americans moved into the cities in the 1950s and 1960s, found employment in industry, and it looked as if young blacks could look forward to a future of education and employment in industry, which would have ended the tragic situation where blacks form the majority of people living below the poverty line.

The coming of the "post-industrial society" in the mid-1960s meant that most blacks remained in poverty: In Macon County, Alabama, black family income is 60% that of white families, in Lowndes County black income is only 41% of white income. In Birmingham, Alabama, the steel industry once employed 30,000 workers. Now, only 2,500 work there. In her accounts of local political battles, Edds mentions without comment that the only new enterprises that have been set up in many areas are greyhound tracks!

However, apart from useful documentation on this aspect of American political life, Edds writes in an irritating journalistic style, which seems to have its own rules: Every person mentioned must be physically described ("a whispery-voiced minister’s son," and "sported a distinctive, shoulder-length hairstyle," are just two examples in one paragraph), and adjectives must be added to every noun. The cliché level is also far higher than tolerable. ("Similar change would soon sprout in more sophisticated settings across the South, sending pundits scurrying to record the advent of a new stage in the evolution of black politics.") Editorial work could have improved this book.

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