

Ronald L. Lewis. *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980.* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987) xv, 239 pp., \$25.00.

As an historian, Ronald L. Lewis has researched the role of blacks in the coal mining industry, an overall topic which has been largely ignored in treatments of American history. The resulting publication goes far in meeting the need to recognize the fact that blacks were an important part of this national economic enterprise. Lewis' book is interestingly written, well-organized, and extensively documented. Having been born and raised in a coal town, Lewis has been a witness to some of the events he describes. He argues, insightfully, that "Black miners did not share a monolithic experience. American coal miners have always been a culturally heterogeneous group Analysis of such widely divergent black experiences requires the use of a comparative regional approach."

On this basis, the book is organized within a regional framework. In the South, black labor in the coal mines was first expropriated by slavery and then by convict crews. Later, according to Lewis' following of Marxist theory, blacks were exploited economically by mine operators following the social objectives of the segregationist policies which dominated states of the region. For the North, Lewis employs the split-labor market theory, in describing attempts to exclude blacks from the coal industry. Repetitive strikes and conflicts along racial lines prevailed. In central Appalachia, Lewis surveys the situation of relative equality by combining the two previously-mentioned theories. The complex social and economic factors leading to "separate but almost equal" conditions in Appalachia were based—especially in West Virginia—on the fact that this region was never subjected to the full range of Jim Crow laws as obtained in the Deep South.

Regrettably, in terms of the encompassing title of the book, Lewis does not extend his instructive analysis to the midwestern and western United States. Therefore, some important pieces have not been fitted into the puzzle. By figures in the book's appendix, Iowa, among the listed "Northern states," had a total mining force less than Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania between 1900 and 1940; yet the percentage of blacks in the Iowa coal mining industry during those decades was consistently much higher than in those other states. Interestingly enough the Consolidation Coal Company operated several company towns in Iowa as they did in the regions discussed by Lewis. At Muchakinock and Buxton, Iowa, for example, Consolidation established "model towns" similar to those they owned at Jenkins and McRoberts, Kentucky. According to Lewis, Consolidation's Kentucky towns were segregated along racial lines "with blacks living in their own hollow and usually in the worst housing." On the other hand, Buxton's housing and public facilities (schools, stores, restaurants, theaters, Y.M.C.A. buildings, etc.) were not segregated; blacks enjoyed commodious houses on

quarter-acre lots; and blacks held white collar as well as blue collar and mining jobs. Such situations may have been rare or perhaps unique, but they must be considered when looking at the matter of race and ethnicity in the United States as a whole.

In the reviewer's opinion, these more enlightened cases do not detract from the picture Lewis has effectively drawn for the eastern United States; but they do suggest that an extension of the regional analysis would be advisable in further articulating matters of race, class, and community conflict in the coal mining industry in America. In the meantime, Lewis' book will remain a very valuable resource for those interested in ethnic studies; and it can provide a model for the analyses of other American industries in which the role of blacks and other ethnic groups has been too-often overlooked or minimized.

—David M. Gradwohl
Iowa State University

D. H. Melhem. *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987) 270 pp., \$25.00.

This book might have worked out as an article, but it was a gross mistake in book form. That is to say, on the development of what Melhem calls the "heroic voice" there might have been an intelligent and informative study of about article length. I can't be certain, however, that Melhem had a definite sense of her subject, because "voice" sometimes means "prosody," sometimes "form," sometimes "subject" (or "theme"), most often (possibly!), "style."

Despite the thematic emphasis in the subtitle, this book is not thematic in its organization; it is chronological. The organization doesn't clarify the analysis of a development of a "voice," and the unnecessary repetitions also intrude awkwardly.

Melhem's typical discussion includes prosodic analyses, background and explication. They are seldom neatly linked. Often, there is no attempt whatever to link discussion of form, line length, and meter or rhyme patterns to the content. Very often the prosodic analysis is given in excessive length at the beginning of the discussion, but it might intrude anywhere.

Most writers assert there are no stages, periods, even "facile demarcations" in Brooks. (I think there are; Brooks *said*, more than once, that there are.) In any event, Melhem's way of saying she doesn't think the works break into periods is important because it is unfortunately typical of her style throughout: fulsome, enthusiastic, worshipful, sophomoric, and, finally, blurry: "*In the Mecca* (1968) marks a creative prime meridian