

the emergence of trade paperbacks; and by the 1970s, creative writing programmes were being offered at universities. Canadian literature was born.

Today, new possibilities are on the horizon as the result of the internet and the emergence of self-publishing, online magazines, blogs etc. Atwood's lecture ends with the challenge: 'If you're twenty, you are the age I was in 1960. You're entering your experimental decade. Make new life forms! Create new fossils for future generations to unearth! Plunge in!' (43).

*The Canadian Writing Landscape of the 1960s* is as informative about the emergence of Canadian literature in the 1960s as it is poetic. Atwood's study is replete with witticisms, poetic descriptions and challenges for present-day Canadian writers. At the same time, it also reflects Atwood's concern not only for the literary but also for the physical environment. Literature has an important role to play in alerting readers to important environmental issues. Books, or "paper dinosaurs" as Atwood terms them, seem to have a great deal of life left in them. While Atwood expresses hope about literature, there is also a clear note of warning about our planet:

I won't risk any predictions about the future of reading, of writing, of publishing, or even of storytelling. Frankly, I think the narrative and poetic impulses can look after themselves just fine, assuming there's still a livable planet to house them. Exactly how the future will unfold won't be up to me, however: it will be up to you (43).

And just how we meet that challenge, of course, is up to us!

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**Jørn Brøndal, *Det Sorte USA: Fra Uafhængighedserklæringen til Barack Obama*. Copenhagen: Gads Press, 2016. 432 pages. ISBN: 978-87-12-05289-0.**

Jørn Brøndal has written a monumental book about the history of African Americans in the United States from the time of the Declaration of Independence to the end of the presidency of Barack Obama. In a book of four main parts and 13 chapters, Brøndal cleverly chronicles the quest by blacks

for liberty and equality in a nation that was founded on the promise that “all men are created equal.” In vivid prose, Brøndal brings to life a dramatic story of how far blacks have come since they arrived as slaves, but also why race remains a contentious issue in the United States, illustrated by, among other things, diverging voting patterns of recent presidential elections. Writing a book in his native language of Danish, Brøndal joins a group of other prominent American Studies scholars in the Nordic countries, including Ole O. Moen, Erik Åsard, and Niels Bjerre-Poulsen, who have published major books in Scandinavian languages with a broad readership in mind.

Brøndal discusses the complexities of the history of blacks in the U.S., arguing persuasively that a symbiosis of innocence and guilt – the creation of tension between the ideals of the founding documents and the reality of race relations – has defined the nation (379). This “American dilemma,” as Gunnar Myrdal called it in his classic 1944 study, has endured for centuries. Not only confined to the South, racism has remained a national problem. Brøndal notes that Alexis de Tocqueville had observed in the 1830s that prejudice against African Americans appeared to be more widespread in the North than in the South.

Reconstruction from 1865 to 1877 is a vital period in the historiography of black America. According to columnist E.J. Dionne, Jr., “no aspect of our story has undergone a more thoroughgoing revision and counter-revision than our view of what happened during Reconstruction in the South after the Civil War.”<sup>2</sup> Dionne notes that some of the early scholarship on Reconstruction, led by William Dunning and other historians at Columbia University, interpreted the era as a time of repression by Radical Republicans on southern authorities and pandering to “ignorant” blacks. Eventually historians such as Kenneth M. Stampp and Eric Foner challenged this interpretation. In his authoritative account *Reconstruction*, published in 1988, Foner argues that blacks were not “passive victims of the actions of others or simply a ‘problem’ confronting white society,” but were instead “active agents in the making of Reconstruction.”<sup>3</sup> Brøndal’s account of Reconstruction is informative, but I think knowledgeable readers would have appreciated if Brøndal had also addressed disagreement among scholars about the significance of Reconstruction. Brøndal does occasionally refer

2 E.J. Dionne, Jr. *Our Divided Political Heart: The Battle for the American Idea in an Age of Discontent* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 62.

3 Foner quoted in *Ibid.*, 66.

to Foner and other historians throughout the book, but to a limited degree examines competing interpretations of Reconstruction and other key eras. Having said that, I understand that this is a book written for Danes (and other Scandinavians) who have less prior knowledge of U.S. history than scholars at universities.

The Jim Crow era was a major setback for recently liberated slaves. Brøndal intensely describes the brutality of southern whites against blacks and the suffering that lynching caused. This dark chapter in American history needs the attention that Brøndal gives it in order to remind people that even in a democracy, oppression can be prevalent.

World War II is widely regarded as an important factor that contributed to changing people's perceptions of segregation. It is easy to overlook events prior to prior to the war. Brøndal emphasizes the significance of international opera singer Marian Anderson's April 1939 performance at the Lincoln Memorial, claiming that this was an "overwhelming success" because it redefined the meaning of the memorial. Since the segregated inaugural in 1922, the memorial had mainly represented Lincoln as the savior of the Union. Due to Anderson's concert, the Lincoln Memorial became a monument of President Lincoln as a liberator of slaves, according to Brøndal (159). This concert is often missing in narratives that describe the quest of African Americans for equality, and Brøndal deserves credit for devoting adequate attention to an event that also symbolizes the role of women as instruments in the effort to end segregation.

In his acknowledgements, Jørn Brøndal points out that he had originally planned to write a history of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, but as he found the topic increasingly exciting, he somehow ended up writing a book about the history of the "the black USA" from 1776 until today. Brøndal's original plan is to some extent reflected in the magnitude of his coverage of the 1950s and 1960s compared to other decades before and after. At times the book is arguably a bit too detailed on the tumultuous events of the civil rights era and Martin Luther King's outsize role in shaping the movement.

In my view the best part of the book is the fourth and final part, especially the excellent chapter 11 on the "right to the pursuit of happiness." This chapter is more analytical than the chapters on the King era, and Brøndal skillfully interprets complex statistical information about the uneven degree of success blacks experienced in the quest for economic parity with whites from the late 1960s until the 2000s. Brøndal examines the high in-

carceration rates of blacks, but also the rise of the affluent black middle class, pointing out that in the Cambria Heights quarter of Queens, New York, the African American level of income was higher in 2006 than that of white residents.

In his final two chapters Brøndal chronicles the historic election of Barack Obama and the challenging race relations during the Obama presidency. Brøndal points out that Obama's message in his famous speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention was that the American dilemma was coming to an end. However, the financial crisis of 2008 disproportionately affected blacks, and Brøndal has gathered an impressive amount of data to document the economic situation of African Americans during the Obama era, noting that one in four blacks were below the national poverty line.

All in all, this is a highly successful book. The variety of pictures and images add an important dimension to Brøndal's narrative. We see pictures of slain soldiers at Gettysburg and CNN's Wolf Blitzer declaring Barack Obama as the President Elect. Hopefully, the optimism that Obama represented as president will endure during the Donald Trump presidency and beyond, and that the recent arrival of well-educated immigrants from Africa can help strengthen American society.

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**Alfred Hornung, ed., *Obama and Transnational American Studies*. American Studies: A Monograph Series, Volume 276. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag WINTER, 2016. 528 pages. ISBN: 978-3-8253-6675-9.**

As the Obama Presidency has come to a close and Donald Trump has taken the oath of office as America's 45th president, scholars now have the benefit of hindsight in analyzing the Obama presidency and its impact. As far as American Presidents go, the potential in the diversity of topics and approaches in studying Barack Obama is outstanding. It seems only appropriate to evaluate Obama's impact on a variety of fields and topics, much wider in scope than the purely political. Many different approaches have found their way into this volume, but according to its editor, Alfred Hornung, they all share one assumption: "the correlation between the extended Obama family, the Obama presidency and Transnational American