ForeWord Reviews

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Right in Michigan's Grassroots: From the KKK to the Michigan Militia
JoEllen Vinyard
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Throughout the twentieth century, Michigan was home to nearly every political movement that emerged from grassroots origins, notes JoEllen Vinyard in her compelling, lively history.

Vinyard digs deep into the factors that fostered the rise of groups like the Ku Klux Klan, John Birch Society, anti-Communists, and the Michigan Militia. While she expertly uses a level of academic detachment to describe the motivations and actions of these organizations—which many would decry as hateful and destructive—the author also highlights the fact that these groups were made up of ordinary citizens. Town bakers, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, and next-door neighbors were all involved in throwing on a white sheet late at night to try to eradicate immigrants from an area.

While not condoning their actions in any way, the author manages, in trying to understand why these people would come together in grassroots efforts, to shine light on some of the darkest parts of Michigan's past.

A professor of history at Eastern Michigan University, Vinyard is the author of a number of books on the state's history, and brings not only a scholar's perspective, but also an outsider's. She grew up and lived in Nebraska until migrating to Michigan "following a husband, graduate school, and a job."

Michigan's archives are a treasure trove for researchers, Vinyard notes, and made even more useful with the inclusion of knowledgeable staff at places like the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library. Vinyard uses that research well, tracing a connection between seemingly disparate groups like the Klan and the Michigan Militia. She writes, "Michigan, the state that produced automobiles and cherries, appeared to be a longtime producer of right-wing groups, a term conjuring up bigotry in mean and ugly forms."

Yet, to see the state as a cauldron of hate is to ignore all the progressive reforms like civil rights legislation, organized labor, peace groups, and Martin Luther King's march through its cities' streets. The way that both types of grassroots efforts flourished in the same state, and sometimes in the same towns, is striking. Michigan's rich history, and especially Vinyard's

skillful analysis of it, will be of interest to anyone seeking a well-written, thought-provoking exploration of aberrant grassroots movements.?

Elizabeth Millard