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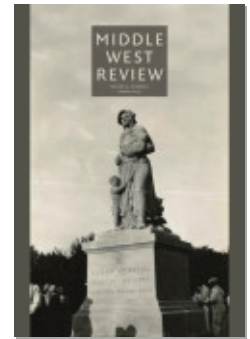
## Whose Midwest?

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PAUL FINKELMAN

## Whose Midwest?

“They’re Selling postcards of the hanging,  
they’re painting the passports brown,  
The beauty parlor is filled with sailors,  
the circus is in town  
. . . And I look out tonight From Desolation Row.”  
Bob Dylan, 1965

Much of my scholarship has focused on race and race relations in the Midwest. Thus, I was genuinely delighted to review a book that would help explain the very complicated and contentious history of race in the Midwest and how such issues play out today. For example, I thought the authors might explore why Iowa, which jump-started Barack Obama’s presidential aspirations in the 2008 caucuses, and voted for him twice for president, then twice voted for Donald Trump. Sadly, this book offers few answers or insights to such questions.

One major problem with this book is its use—or failure to use—evidence, and the authors’ apparent lack of understanding of basic U.S. history. They make assertions that are only partially accurate or demonstrably untrue, such as the truly weird claim that such states as Iowa, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan “all enrolled more soldiers [in the Civil War] than New York or anywhere else in the East.” (61) In fact, New York enrolled more than 400,000 soldiers in the War, about the same as the combined total of these four states. Pennsylvania, another eastern state, enrolled 360,000 soldiers.

The authors are quite open about their strategy of skewing evidence to make their points, noting they will make their arguments “through a selective analysis” of data. (40) They are also aggressive about reading into the past what they “see” as the intentions of actors. This is not exactly the “alternative facts” of Kellyanne Conway, but it comes close.

## I: Who Can Write About the Midwest?

Throughout this book the authors tell personal stories—they call them “reflections.” They seem to feel a need to establish their bona fides to write about the Midwest. Professor Halvorson grew up in Muskegon, Michigan, which establishes her Midwest-street cred. Professor Reno went to graduate school in Ann Arbor and lived in Livonia and Ypsilanti, Michigan and we assume this makes him an expert on the vast area of the Midwest.

For a scholarly book, I find this odd. By their standard, the Englishman Edward Gibbon should never have written *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Robert Caro, the son of a Jewish immigrant from Poland, should not have won a Pulitzer for writing about Lyndon Johnson of Texas, and David Blight, a White man from Flint, Michigan, should not have won the Pulitzer for a book about Frederick Douglass, a Black man from Maryland.

But, since the authors think that one must be connected to the Midwest to understand it, I suppose I should establish my street cred. I did my Ph.D. in Chicago, lived in South Shore and Hyde Park, and delivered pizzas and once served as an election judge on the south side. I later taught at Chicago-Kent Law School, living in downtown Chicago. I currently hold a chair at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. I have taught at Hamline University in St. Paul, Cleveland State University, University of Akron, and Washington University in St. Louis. I edit a book series on the Midwest at Ohio University Press, and I have been a consultant to historic homes in both St. Louis and in Muscatine, Iowa. I have published many articles and book chapters on slavery and civil rights, Native American history, and ethnic and religious persecution in the Midwest. I am the co-editor of *A History of Michigan Law*, which won a “best book” prize from the Michigan Historical Society and was named a notable Michigan book by the Library of Michigan. And I once got fogged in for two days after lecturing at Michigan Tech, on the Upper Peninsula. So much for my bona fides.

## II: Defining the Midwest

This book is supposed to be about “the Midwest,” but we are quickly told it is “not a book about the Midwest, the place, or Midwesterners.” Rather it is about something called “place making” (11) The authors note that there is no agreement as to what the Midwest is. We should start there.

If you want to talk about “place making” then you need to define the place. The authors do not do this, and never offer any criteria of what constitutes the Midwest. Early in the book they list all the states they think are in the Midwest but do not include Indiana. (19) Really? They also list the Dakotas as being in the Midwest, thus making no distinction between the “Midwest” and “Great Plains.” They include Missouri in their list, without any explanation. Missouri maintained slavery until the 1860s and had statewide mandatory segregation until forced to give up such practices in the 1950s and 1960s. Clearly, in terms of slavery, segregation, and lynching, which are central to this book, Missouri was, and in many ways still is, Southern. On the other hand, western Missouri (Kansas City) is also very midwestern. I will treat it as being in both regions in this essay. They also assert Oklahoma is in the Midwest because the Tulsa Race Riot supports their argument.<sup>1</sup> Oklahoma (as the Indian Territory), had slavery until the end of the Civil War, and was strictly segregated by law until the 1960s. It is far more southern than midwestern.

Race has defined the Midwest, but perhaps not the way the authors “imagine.” Much of American history focused on making the Midwest a bastion of “free soil.” The Northwest Ordinance (1787), the Missouri Compromise (1820), the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), Bleeding Kansas (1854–59), the *Dred Scott* case (1857); the failure to bring Kansas into the Union as a slave state under the fraudulent Lecompton Constitution (1858); and the Lincoln-Douglas debates (1858) illustrate the importance of keeping slavery out of the Midwest. In 1861 the Kansas militia, which went to Washington to defend the nation’s capital from southern treason, included Black soldiers, despite existing proslavery federal laws that prohibited enlisting Blacks. While Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa initially restricted Black settlement, all four saw dramatic growths in their antebellum Black populations. By 1850 Ohio had the third largest Black population in the North. Indiana, in the 1850s, was the only midwestern state to successfully stop Black migration, while Ohio and Iowa created publicly funded schools for Blacks in that decade. While Blacks could not vote in these states, Ohio had one Black elected official in the 1850s. None of the other midwestern states restricted Black migration and most of these states—even Indiana and Illinois—passed personal liberty laws in response to the fugitive slave laws.

In the late nineteenth century, every midwestern state would pass powerful civil rights laws, prohibit segregation in public accommodations, and some would elect Blacks to public office. In the early twentieth century the

first Blacks to serve in the Congress from the North came from the Midwest. The history of race in the Midwest is complicated and not always pretty. As historian Jon Lauck has recently noted, it is important to “chronicle the Midwest’s many racial failings, but also to recognize the signs of progress in the region.”<sup>2</sup>

There might be a linguistic definition of the Midwest. It is where people drink “pop” rather than the “soda,” and where the pronunciation of “insurance” changes once you get south of I-70. Obsessed with trying to prove the Midwest is the essence of “whiteness,” the authors argue that there is “an existing Midwest plain speech that acts as an unmarked white standard” of speech. (29) But accents change dramatically across the Midwest as anyone knows who has been in Chicago, Detroit, Gary, Fargo, southern Indiana, Little Egypt, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the Twin Cities, or Iowa (or St. Louis, Kansas City, Cape Girardeau, Joplin, and the Ozarks, assuming Missouri is midwestern). In Chicago accents change as you cross from one neighborhood to the next. The authors note that some people make fun of some Midwest regional accents—such as tapes of “How to Talk Minnesotan” which teach you how to say “you betcha”—but the authors seem to not understand that such use of accents and language for humor and regional identification is hardly unique to the Midwest. I would urge them to watch the iconic movie *My Cousin Vinny*, to learn how to speak Brooklyn while in the deep South.

Perhaps we could define the region by agricultural production. Midwestern states lead the nation in corn, soybean, and pork production. Wisconsin is second in dairy production, but the other four in the top five are California, New York, Idaho, and Texas. Similarly, only four Midwest states are in the top ten in wheat production.<sup>3</sup> There is a good reason why the Midwest is often called the farm belt, but agriculture is important in every state. No Midwest state, except Missouri in one category, is in the top five for the number of agricultural workers, percent of the state labor force in agriculture, or highest salaries for agricultural workers.<sup>4</sup> Despite the importance of agriculture to the Midwest and the nation, if we want to “imagine” the heartland, we need to get off the farm.

Ethnicity, race, and population sizes help define the Midwest. Unfortunately, the authors ignore census data. In 2020 the United States was 14.2% Black. Illinois and Michigan, both at about 16%, exceed that number, as do New York at just under 17% and New Jersey at just over 15%. Ohio is next at 13%. But South Dakota was 2% Black, and North Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska,

Kansas, and Wisconsin were all under 7% Black.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the twelve states with the highest percent of Blacks are all in the South, with Black populations that run from 17% in Arkansas to 38% in Mississippi. Talking about race in the Midwest requires fine-tuning of ideas and a sophisticated understanding that populations are different.

To their credit, the authors recognize anti-Semitism as a form of racism, and make an occasional reference to Islamophobia, along with discrimination against people of color. But otherwise, they ignore the long history of ethnic conflict in the region. During World War I, midwestern German Americans faced violent attacks and public humiliations. Hutterites, Dunkers, and Amish were persecuted and jailed for their pacifism and the Cincinnati Public Library burned most of its German language books. In the 1920s, most Midwest states prohibited the teaching of German, even in private schools, eventually leading to the important 1923 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Meyer v. Nebraska*.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Hamtramck, Michigan continued to hold its city council meetings in Polish until after World War II. In 1925 the Ku Klux Klan effectively took over the Indiana government with a campaign directed at Catholics, Jews, and White immigrants. Ethnic rivalries have been the essence of midwestern politics in many states.

At the same time, the Midwest demonstrates important political diversity. All four of the Muslims who have served in the House of Representatives have come from the Midwest, while Minnesota has sent more Jews to the United States Senate than any other state, including New York and California. Indeed, despite the authors claims of a homogenous “White” Midwest, we might define the region by its enormous ethnic and cultural diversity. Nebraska may seem homogeneous, but that did not stop the police from arresting Robert T. Meyer for teaching German in a Lutheran parochial school.

Industrial production is central to defining the region. In doing so, it is important to note that from World War I to the 1960s millions of African Americans moved to the Midwest precisely because it offered them good jobs and reasonably good pay. With the exception of finance and the movie industry, almost every major twentieth century industry began and grew in the Midwest, including petroleum (in Rockefeller’s Cleveland), glass (Toledo), scales (Dayton and Toledo), meat packing (Chicago and Austin, MN), packaged food (Michigan, Illinois, and Minnesota), rubber (Akron), airplanes (Dayton and Wichita), agricultural equipment (Chicago and Moline), beer (Milwaukee and Chicago), the nineteenth century version of

Amazon—the Sears Catalog (Chicago)—railroad cars (Chicago), national medical centers, like the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota and The Cleveland Clinic, and the vast and wide ranging technology of Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company—better known as 3M (where would we be without post-its and scotch tape?). Before IBM revolutionized business machines, National Cash Register in Dayton began the industry. And, of course, the king of them all, automobiles in Detroit and elsewhere.

The “military leaders” of American industry—General Mills, General Foods, General Tire, and General Motors, and their companion the Jolly Green Giant—all began in the Midwest. We might think the smiling Quaker on our oatmeal box is from Philadelphia, but he was born in Ravenna, Ohio.

Department store architecture in Chicago and major department store chains, including Marshall Field and Carson Pirie Scott in Chicago, Dayton’s in Minneapolis, and Hudson’s in Detroit, all helped revolutionize retail commerce, just as did Macy’s in New York and Gimbels and John Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia. The Midwest revolutionized architecture with the Irish/Jewish firm of Sullivan and Adler in Chicago and Frank Lloyd Wright, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin. Pittsburgh was the “Steel City,” but Gary, Youngstown, and Chicago competed with it. Minnesota’s iron range produced the raw material while copper came from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Weirdly, the authors quote two geographers who claim that “in discussions of the Midwest” labor, inventions, the factory, metallurgy, and industrialization “appears to be forgotten.” (22) Appears to whom? There is a vast literature on industrialization, unions, labor, and deindustrialization in the Midwest. The history of unionization is often centered in the Midwest, with the Haymarket rally, the Pullman strike, the I.W.W., and Detroit’s sit-down strikes. The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation (and the Rouge River Factory Tour) in Dearborn, Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry, and Akron’s National Inventors Hall of Fame explain all this to the general public.

I suppose that between Al Capone and Dutch Schultz in Chicago and the Purple Gang in Detroit we might even add the “organized crime” industry to the list of economic engines of the Midwest. While the authors are obsessed with the *Wizard of Oz*, *Superman*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *Field of Dreams* in defining the Midwest, they might have also considered *The Sting*, *The Untouchables*, *Eight Men Out*, and *Chicago*.

If we want to understand race and “place making” we must look at Black enterprise in the Midwest. The *Chicago Defender*, founded in 1905 and still

operating, was the most influential Black newspaper in the country for most of the twentieth century, with a huge regional and national circulation. While most Blacks lived in the South at this time, the paper's success was to a great extent tied to its location in the Midwest, in the nation's second largest city, and in the largest hub for Pullman Porters. The authors ignore Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company in Indianapolis, the Johnson Publishing Company (*Ebony Magazine*) in Chicago, and Berry Gordy's Motown Records in Detroit. When Madam Walker died, she was the richest Black woman in America. Today that accolade belongs to Oprah Winfrey who grew up in Milwaukee and is most identified with Chicago.

The authors also ignore the nexus of sports and race in the Midwest. The Negro Leagues had teams all over the country, but the heart of Black professional baseball was in the Midwest, where Rube Foster organized the National Association of Colored Professional Baseball Clubs with eight teams from Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, Dayton, Kansas City, and St. Louis. This of course is another example of Black entrepreneurial success in the Midwest. The prime mover to integrate the major leagues was Branch Rickey, who grew up in Ohio and graduated from the University of Michigan Law School. The second major league leader to sign Black players was Bill Veeck, a native of greater Chicago, and the owner of the Cleveland Indians (now the Guardians). Both Midwesterners consistently articulated their opposition to segregation and White supremacy.

Significant legal and social innovations came from the Midwest. Michigan was the first state to pass conservation laws and to ban the death penalty. Granger laws were as important as growing corn.<sup>7</sup> The settlement houses in Chicago became models for other places.

Beyond this, the Midwest is importantly urban, especially for African Americans. In 1960 one-third of the nation's thirty largest cities and just under one-third of the one hundred largest cities were in the Midwest. That year there were as many cities with one hundred thousand people in Ohio as there were in New York. Our third largest city is in the Midwest—although weirdly, the word “Chicago” does not even make it into the index of this book. Nor do Columbus (14th largest), Indianapolis (16th largest), or the Twin Cities, whose combined population make them the 18th largest city in the nation.<sup>8</sup> Also missing from the index are Akron, Cincinnati, Gary, Madison, Milwaukee, Toledo, Topeka, and Wichita. While insisting Missouri is in the Midwest, they ignore Kansas City (either one) and St. Louis (except for a brief mention of the Arch). These are complex cities,



with vital ethnic enclaves, growing Hispanic populations, and large African American populations with strong traditions of Black political leadership. A number of these White majority cities, including Chicago, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Columbus, and Cleveland, have, or have had, Black mayors.<sup>9</sup> It is hard to buy the claim that the Midwest is the embodiment of White supremacy when so many Whites voting for Black mayors.

Finally, we might consider culture in the Midwest. The authors focus on “myths” and “mythmaking,” arguing that Whiteness in the Midwest is best understood through a serious analysis of fictional figures like Superman, Dorothy Gale, and Freddy Krueger. They talk about “iconic” Midwest novels, depicting hardy White pioneers on the frontier, or relatively obscure Midwest poets who they say embody Whiteness. But they ignore books like *Sister Carrie*, *The Jungle*, *Black Boy*, or *Division Street*, which demonstrate the enormous ethnic, class, and racial diversity of the region. They use Sinclair Lewis’s *Main Street* to illustrate “the plainness of small-town white Midwestern speech,” claiming he “mobilized white Midwest settings” (30–31), but did not consider that his work, in such books as *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Elmer Gantry*, was in fact a far more devastating critique of the “White Supremacy” (although he did not use that term) than the authors have made. They completely ignore the other great Minnesota novelist of the era, F. Scott Fitzgerald, despite his overwhelming assault on elite White culture. The authors briefly mention Langston Hughes as someone who critiqued White midwestern culture, but they don’t bother to tell us that he was raised in the Midwest, wrote for the *Chicago Defender*, and that his great contributions to literature reflects the region. They never mention that his grandfather, Charles Langston, was a leading Black abolitionist in Ohio and his great uncle, John Mercer Langston, was elected to public office in Ohio *before* the Civil War, and served in Congress after the War. They ignore Black midwestern authors like Lorraine Hansberry, Gwendolyn Brooks, Richard Wright, Willard Motley, and Gordon Parks, or those like Ida B. Wells-Barnett who moved to the Midwest. Similarly, the authors ignore such White social critics as Terre Haute’s Theodore Dreiser, Chicago’s Studs Terkel, or the Nobel laureate poet from Hibbing, Minnesota, Robert Zimmerman, also known as Bob Dylan.

The authors complain that painters like Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton did not depict the Dust Bowl, but relegate their discussion of Benton’s famous Dust Bowl painting *Prodigal Son* to a footnote in the back of the book and ignore his stinging critique of the European invasion of

America in *American Discovery*. They never mention the depression era photography of the Black Kansan Gordon Parks or such White photographers as John Vachon from St. Paul and Russell Lee from Ottawa, Illinois, as well as the many non-Midwest photographers working in the region like the Jewish immigrant Jack Delano and the New Yorker Arthur Rothstein.

Museums signify the importance of race and culture in the Midwest. Cleveland's African American Museum opened in 1956. Chicago's DuSable Black History Museum began in 1961. Detroit's Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, founded in 1965, sits in a magnificent building in the city's cultural center. They are the nation's oldest large museums dedicated to African American history. There are other Black history museums in Detroit and Chicago. Cincinnati's National Underground Railroad and Freedom Center opened in 2004. The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum was founded in Kansas City in 1990 and in 1997 moved to a complex that includes a ten thousand square foot space that is next door to the American Jazz Museum. In 1995 the A. Phillip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum opened in Chicago while Detroit has one for the Tuskegee airmen. In 2003 Cedar Rapids, Iowa opened a Black history museum. Carbondale and Milwaukee have similar museums. The segregated school that Linda Brown attended in Topeka is now a national historic site. If the Midwest is the embodiment of White supremacy, why have significant local, state, and private funds built these museums?

One final aspect of Midwest culture is music. A mere listing of the major Black artists from the Midwest—The Supremes, The Temptations, Martha and the Vandellas, the Four Tops, Aretha Franklin, Michael Jackson, The Artist (formerly known as Prince), Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson, Lionel Richie, Gladys Night, and Marvin Gaye—suggests the importance of race and culture in Midwest, undermining notions presented in this book. Many of these Midwest artists worked with the Black entrepreneur Berry Gordy, who started Motown Records in the Midwest.

### III: Racism, White Supremacy, and the Midwest

This book argues that the Midwest is somehow responsible for White supremacy in the United States and that the Midwest is the embodiment of "whiteness." The key to this claim is in the title: the authors are "imagining" a Midwest they think exists that proves their argument. This premise makes no sense.

American racism—and its flip side, White supremacy—developed in the early seventeenth century as Englishmen in Virginia mostly eliminated the Native population and in the 1660s when Virginia began to develop a system of slavery based on the African ancestry of those who were held in bondage. Other colonies followed Virginia’s lead. In response to the Revolution, which led to abolition in the North and public denunciations of slavery in the North and some parts of the South, southern ministers, political thinkers, scientists, and literary figures developed an elaborate defense of slavery based on theology, economics, history, and science. In his book *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the South’s leading intellectual, Thomas Jefferson, proclaimed that Blacks were intellectually and physically inferior to Whites, and as such only suitable for bondage. By 1830 the South had developed a sophisticated intellectual and cultural argument for White supremacy, Black inferiority, and slavery. In 1860 the threat that Abraham Lincoln, the first president raised in the Midwest, would not support the expansion of slavery, and actually hoped for its eventual end, led eleven slave states to leave the Union to create a nation based on the proposition that all men were *not* “created equal.” Alexander Stephens, the Confederate vice president proclaimed: “Our new government is founded . . . its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro [sic] is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.”<sup>10</sup>

Between 1865 and 1870 three Constitutional amendments secured Black freedom. The author of the Thirteenth, ending slavery, was Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois. Trumbull was also the author of the Civil Rights Act of 1866. Rep. James F. Wilson of Iowa was one of the key floor leaders in the House. While Congress was considering this law, Representative John A. Bingham of Ohio was the primary author of Fourteenth Amendment, guaranteeing equality and citizenship to all persons born in the United States. In 1866, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that Blacks in the state could vote on the same basis as Whites.<sup>11</sup> In 1868, Iowa amended its constitution to enfranchise Blacks. That year the Iowa Supreme Court, in *Clark v. Board of Directors*, ruled that segregated schools violated the Iowa constitution. The plaintiff in that case, Alexander Clark of Muscatine, would become a leading political and social figure throughout the Midwest and eventually serve as a diplomat. After the *Clark* decision, the Iowa court issued a series of decisions banning segregation in schools and on steamboats.<sup>12</sup> The *Clark* case was the first successful school desegregation case in the United States.

In 1883 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which provided equal accommodations for Blacks. In response, *every* mid-western state passed a state civil rights law, except Kansas, which already had such a law. Significantly, in 2009 the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage was legal in the state, citing the racial integration cases from the 1860s and 1870s in support of this result.<sup>13</sup> It is hard to square this very important history, running from the post-Civil War era to the present, with the notion of the Midwest as the embodiment of White supremacy.

In the 1880s Benjamin Arnett, an African American, represented predominately White rural Greene County in the Ohio legislature, successfully sponsoring the “Arnett bill” which repealed the last remaining racial restrictions in Ohio. This sort of evidence does not show that there was full equality in Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, or elsewhere in the Midwest in the late nineteenth century. But this evidence shows the region was hardly the center of White supremacy. Indeed, while Blacks were being lynched by the thousands in the South, most Midwest states passed anti-mask laws, making it a crime to even parade in Klan garb. In 1883 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Alabama’s law criminalizing interracial marriage. That year Michigan repealed its antebellum ban on such marriages.

The authors incorrectly tell us that the “one drop rule designated anyone with a Black biological parent to be Black and not white in both de facto and de jure forums.” (24) The authors simply do not understand the “rule” or its history. That rule, set out in a Virginia law in the early twentieth century, said that *any* Black ancestry—not simply a Black parent—made someone Black. But this was a modification of older laws which said that anyone who was more than three-fourths White was White. The authors might be surprised to learn that in the 1840s the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that people who were more than half White were in fact “White” for purposes of voting and that in 1866 Michigan’s court reached a similar conclusion.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, after the defeat of the Confederate experiment in treason, the fifteen states that had slavery in 1860, plus West Virginia, and later Oklahoma (which was a slave territory in 1861), organized their legal systems, school systems, economies, and social relations to create a harsh system of segregation and White supremacy enforced by statues, courts, police officers, and undergirded by the Ku Klux Klan and other White terrorist organizations. From 1882 to 1968 White terrorists and mobs lynched more than three thousand Blacks in the South, but this is surely an undercount and does not include thousands murdered from 1865 to

1882. In this period there were 82 lynchings of Blacks in the Midwest, but Midwesterners also lynched 193 Whites.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that vigilantism in the Midwest was not predominantly racial. The horrendous lynching of three Black men in Duluth in 1920 is remembered in part because it was so unusual. It was one of only two lynchings of Blacks in the state. It is worth noting that Duluth has a substantial memorial to this event, in effect “owning it” and regretting it. This contrasts with 539 blacks lynched in Mississippi, the 492 in Georgia, the 352 in Texas, and the 335 in Louisiana between 1882 and 1968. If we are looking for the source of racism and White supremacy, we should be looking outside the Midwest, south of the Ohio River.

Starting in the 1940s the Supreme Court, Congress, and President Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson finally ended legalized race discrimination and segregation. Two key senators in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act were Everett Dirksen of Illinois and Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota. Indeed, almost all scholars agree that without Dirksen the southern filibuster would not have been broken, and the law could not have passed. Every midwestern senator except Iowa’s Bourke Hickenlooper supported the law. Eleven House members from eight midwestern states also voted no, while 97 voted yes.<sup>16</sup>

#### IV: Recent Politics, the Midwest, and Racism

The authors are obsessed with the 2016 election and Donald Trump. There are some forty index entries to Trump and the election, dramatically more than any other individual or event. The authors come back often to the 2016 election, seeming to blame Donald Trump’s victory on White supremacy in the Midwest. (63)

Surely Democrats were surprised when Trump carried Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan—states that Barack Obama had won in 2008 and 2012. But it never occurs to the authors that perhaps voters in Wisconsin were just as surprised that Senator Clinton never bothered to set foot in their state in 2016 and she barely campaigned in Michigan or Iowa. Joe Biden did not make this mistake and carried both Michigan and Wisconsin.

One question that comes to mind when we think about this is why Iowa—the center of the authors’ White supremacist Midwest—voted for Obama in the 2008 primary and twice in the general election and then voted for Trump twice. Something has clearly changed in that state, but is it

only about race? Could the 2016 vote have something to do with the quality of the Democratic candidate and her abysmal campaign? Could it be that she failed to articulate her plans to help out the struggling farm economy and declining industrial base of the region?

The authors argue the Midwest embodies White supremacy, and since 2016, has been a place of “hate and violence against immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ individuals, and people of color.” (17) But they provide little evidence that such hate and violence is worse in the Midwest than the rest of the country. A list of anti-Semitic incidents since 2016 shows that, unlike in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California, and New York, there have been thankfully no anti-Semitic shootings or killings in Midwest.

Politically this argument is even more problematic. The first openly lesbian U.S. Senator is Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, who won re-election in 2018, two years after the state voted for Donald Trump and two years before it voted for Biden. The three midwestern LGBTQ Representatives, including one who is also Native American, make up more than one third of the LGBTQ members of the House.<sup>17</sup>

The Midwest has produced more non-White U.S. Senators than any other region. The Midwest produced the nation’s first Black president. The authors never try to explain why the Midwest also produced the nation’s first non-White Vice President—not the current occupant of that office—but Charles Curtis, who grew up on the Kaw reservation in Kansas, spoke Kaw and French before he spoke English, and was an enrolled member of the Kaw nation. Before going to law school and entering politics he was a successful jockey, known as “Indian Charley.” I would love to know why White supremacist Kansas sent Curtis to the House of Representative for seven terms and for three terms to the Senate, before he was elected Vice President in 1928.<sup>18</sup> Or why Kansas recently elected a lesbian Native American to the House of Representatives. The state is 83% White and less than 1% Native American. I wish this book sought to explain why Illinois is the only state east of the Mississippi to elect an Asian American to the Senate. But, alas, Senator and then-President Barak Obama, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Rep. Sharice Davids, and Vice President Charles Curtis never make it into the book. Nor do the many important Black members of the House (thirty-five in all or forty if you count Missouri) from across the Midwest, starting with the first two from the North in the 1920s and 1930s. Add to that the Black mayors of majority White cities, like Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis, and we get a very different picture of race,

racism, and White supremacy. Why has Illinois, which is about 75% White, had one Asian and four Black senators? The authors correctly spend some time discussing anti-Semitism in the Midwest, as a classic form of racism. But they fail to notice that Minnesota has had more Jewish U.S. Senators than New York or California, Illinois now has its third Jewish governor, Wisconsin has had two Jewish governors, and Nebraska, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin have had Jewish senators.

## V: Conclusion

I rarely suggest that scholars ignore a book, even if I disagree with its premises or arguments. But *Imagining the Heartland* should simply be ignored. There is so much in it that is wrong, inaccurate, misleading, or confusing that it will lead readers astray and down rabbit holes that are not useful. We need a good book on race and the Midwest that explains the history, complexities, and contradictory realities of this subject. Jon K. Lauck's new book, *The Good Country: A History of the American Midwest, 1800–1900* does much of this for the region's first century. I hope he, or some other fine scholar, will carry the story forward to the present.

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**Paul Finkelman** is the Robert E. and Susan T. Rydell Professor at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter Minnesota. His most recent major book is *Supreme Injustice: Slavery in the Nation's Highest Court*, published by Harvard University Press in 2018.

## NOTES

1. Paul Finkelman, "Exploring Southern Legal History," *University of North Carolina Law Review* 64 (1985): 77–116. I should add I was once the President of the 1921 Tulsa Memorial Foundation, which built a monument to the victims of that event.

2. Paul Finkelman, "Prelude to the Fourteenth Amendment: Black Legal Rights in the Antebellum North," *Rutgers Law Journal* 17 (1986): 415, 425; Paul Finkelman, "The Hidden History of Northern Civil Rights Law and the Villainous Supreme Court, 1875–1915," *University of Pittsburgh Law Review* 79 (2018): 357, 379–83; Jon K. Lauck, *The Good Country: A History of the American Midwest, 1800–1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022), 121.

3. "Quick Stats," U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, accessed 14 Dec. 2022. Data for the crops and livestock mentioned, using 2017 census and 2021 survey data can be found at these links: corn (<https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/results/7A04AEE4-35B9-3D85-8AF8-337575D5FAD4>); soybeans (<https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/results/2D43BFA3-0AA3-365A-8E70-BD3B053F2161>); hogs (<https://quickstats>

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