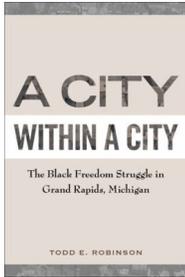


Books by the Stack



A City Within a City by Todd Robinson

A City within a City examines the civil rights movement in the North by concentrating on the struggles for equality in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Historian Todd Robinson studies the issues surrounding school integration and bureaucratic reforms as well as the role of black youth activism to detail the diversity of black resistance. He focuses on respectability within the African American community as a way of understanding how the movement was formed and held together. And he elucidates the oppositional role of northern conservatives regarding racial progress.

A City within a City cogently argues that the post-war political reform championed by local Republicans transformed the city's racial geography, creating a racialized "city within a city," featuring a system of "managerial racism" designed to keep blacks in declining inner-city areas. As Robinson indicates, this bold, provocative framework for understanding race relations in Grand Rapids has broader implications for illuminating the twentieth-century African American urban experience in secondary cities.

Why you'll like it: African-American History, Grand Rapids History, Civil Rights, Urban Studies

About the Author: Todd E. Robinson is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He received a dual B.A. in History and American Studies from American University, MM from Cambridge College, M.A. from the University of Massachusetts, and a Ph.D. in History from the University of Michigan. He offers undergraduate and graduate courses in African American History, urban and suburban history, race and sports, and social movements..

Questions for Discussion

1. On page 10, Dr. Robinson cites the *Grand Rapids Magazine*: "This revolution wasn't born in the front parlors over brandy and cigars, but in the kitchens over rising loaves of bread and in the laundry rooms over soapy washerboard." Describe a few of the methods and organizations that black women used to promote justice and political freedom in their local community.
2. Had you heard of the 'Mustache Saga' before? How did you understand this event at South High School?
3. This wasn't the only situation where an event at a public school heavily affected its neighborhood. What were other instances of unrest regarding the relationship between the Grand Rapids community and the public schools. Why are public schools so politically important?
4. How did you understand the Riot of 1967? What conditions led to the riot happening on Jefferson avenue? Did the police handle the riot responsibly? What was the 'Task Force'?

5. Dr. Robinson writes on page 120: “Grand Rapids never faced the brutality associated with Mississippi or Alabama; yet behind the mask of civility lay a harsh system of oppression designed to allow white business leaders and politicians to preserve their dominance even while making modest concessions.” How did you interpret the mechanisms of 'Managerial Racism', and how did it change the community?

6. What was the housing dilemma that black communities faced? How did race relations affect the neighborhoods and the layout of the city? How did the Federal Housing Administration “[ensure] the majority of blacks had minimal access to homes outside the developing 'black belt' near the center of the city”? (Page 51).

7. Is Grand Rapids still a city within a city? What do the black communities in Grand Rapids look like today? Has the way that you see the city now been changed by reading this book?



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