Predictably as Stokely Carmichael’s biographer, Joseph sees the radicalism of King’s final years as being strengthened and sustained by the black power challenge that was Malcolm’s legacy. King’s decision to denounce US policies on Vietnam in 1967 and his embrace of the economic components of racial justice through the Poor People’s Campaign in 1968 flow, according to Joseph, from the example of SNCC and of urban ghetto militants. Other scholars such as Thomas Jackson and Michael Honey would alternatively see King’s condemnation of militarism and colonialism and his insistence on economic justice coming much earlier in the development of his thought.

Some problems of scholarly interpretation go largely unexplored here. Partly to sustain the equivalency that is key to his comparison, Peniel relies on Malcolm’s and Martin’s speeches and many of Martin’s publications. There is, however, little unpacking of the rhetorical pressures that shape their messages and complicate the task of ascribing significance to their words. There is an acknowledgement but little discussion that most of the works published in King’s name were written by one or more ghostwriters. There is similarly an acknowledgement that the pointed words of Malcolm’s public persona sometimes stood in contrast to his generous and relaxed personal charm “offstage,” so to speak. There is no probing of Alex Haley’s presentation of Malcolm in the famed Autobiography or of the sections that Haley was able to exclude after Malcolm’s death. Hence some interdisciplinary opportunities are spurned.

For historians, a further problem is Joseph’s liking for hyperbole and tendency to advance his argument by repeated assertion rather than painstaking causal logic. Although he acknowledges that Malcolm’s expulsion from the Nation of Islam depleted his organizational resources, Joseph still announces that in the spring of 1964 Malcolm is regarded in some quarters as “black America’s unelected prime minister” (177, 209). This metaphor of preeminence continues as Joseph recounts Malcolm’s international travels. But there is not enough critical analysis: the Nkrumah that Malcolm encounters in 1964 is less clearly a force for democracy than the man Martin met in 1957, and the fact that several of his meetings are hosted at the Chinese embassy (192–93) is a sign of why Malcolm’s international image, referred to as his “sole asset” (188), might appeal to specific regimes at certain times. Neither the politics of the Middle East, such as the tensions between Nasser’s Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the context of Islam, nor the politics of Africa, where US aid was both denounced as an instrument of neocolonialism and yet courted as a means of development, are discussed as the context for Malcolm’s reception. Martin’s blending of biblical allusions to the sword in early speeches (“he who lives by the sword dies by the sword,” etc.) and his celebration of nonviolence as “the sword that heals” go undiscussed. Sometimes the sword of advocacy needs the shield of academic rigour.

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When Fannie Lou Hamer started a Freedom Farm near Ruleville, Mississippi, the farm’s Pig Bank provided families with a rolling supply of meat, combating hunger
in the impoverished area. It was the National Council of Negro Women, an organization of women’s organizations begun in 1935 by Mary McLeod Bethune, who provided the original “fifty white Yorkshire gilts and five brown Jersey boars” (130). Five years later, more than three thousand pigs had been produced on the farm. “Every time I kill them hogs, I think about the National Council of Negro Women,” one recipient remarked; without them, “[we] wouldn’t have this meat” (130).

These and other fascinating facets of the NCNW’s place in the black freedom struggle are revealed in a new study by Rebecca Tuuri called Strategic Sisterhood: The National Council of Negro Women in the Black Freedom Struggle. A historian at the University of Southern Mississippi, Tuuri offers a compelling intervention in the historiography of the black freedom movement, which has largely overlooked the ways in which middle- and upper-class African American women helped to make the movement.

Strategic Sisterhood begins with a sweeping account of the NCNW’s founding and first three decades before detailing several key projects the council developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Focusing largely on the southern struggle, especially in Mississippi, several chapters follow the origins and work of Wednesdays in Mississippi (WIMS, later Workshops in Mississippi). WIMS mobilized mostly middle-class and elite women from the North to visit their counterparts in Mississippi during Freedom Summer. These interracial teams from the North segregated themselves in Mississippi as they visited moderate white women and African American families. Tuuri argues that through WIMS, northern women provided a “personal witness” (56) to the severity of segregation, violence and black poverty.

This “witness” then morphed, first, into “liberal dialogue” groups in 1965, and then in 1966 into “workshops” that brought together “black women in Mississippi and government agencies distributing War on Poverty funds” (108). Here—with Workshops in Mississippi—is where Strategic Sisterhood provides its most compelling sense of the dynamic relationship between middle-class, moderate organizations like the NCNW and the radical efforts swirling around them. WIMS hired a well-connected local woman, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party activist Unita Blackwell, to recruit workshop participants (whom the NCNW paid for their time). These women not only reoriented the ways in which the NCNW thought about “expertise,” but also schooled the officials in the room. In one workshop with a US Department of Agriculture agent who had “implied” that poverty resulted from personal choices, they told the agent that her assumptions about income were wrong, as “many of them made less money” than the “assumed lowest salary” (110) in the presentation. Polly Cowan, the white director of WIMS, taped the conversation and promised Fannie Lou Hamer that she would “play the tape for high-ranking officials at the US Department of Agriculture” (111).

In shifting its ideas about who possessed poverty “expertise,” the NCNW was clearly influenced by SNCC, MFDP and other grassroots groups in the movement, many of whom had long questioned top-down expertise. However, Strategic Sisterhood largely stops short of unpacking other ways in which the NCNW took its cues from the radical milieu in which it operated. To what extent did Council of Federated Organization groups see the value in WIMS and other NCNW efforts in Mississippi, and vice versa? Did the NCNW moderate the viewpoints, ideas or strategies of these groups in any way? These and other questions lack full answers, even as the book makes a successful case for seeing the NCNW as a complex civil rights organization.
Tuuri’s account moves from WIMS to a number of ways in which the council promotes “black self-help and community survival,” including through its support of the Freedom Farm and low-income housing. Moreover, Tuuri shows that Height, as the long-serving president of NCNW, takes a shining to a number of young women like Prathia Hall and Frances Beal who cut their activist teeth in radical groups like SNCC, and she hires them in various capacities at NCNW, which provides them the capacity to carry out other, more radical projects. For instance, Frances Beal did the work to publish the Third World Women’s Alliance’s *Triple Jeopardy* newspaper while working for the council in New York. Here, Tuuri claims that hiring women like Beal “allowed for more radical views to permeate the generally staid organization” (159), but this is not effectively evidenced. Tuuri has done black freedom movement historiography a service in detailing the contributions of the NCNW but stops short of a compelling analysis of this work in relation to the larger movement.

*Strategic Sisterhood* releases the NCNW from the sober, elite frame that it is often captured within. While its central arguments might have gone further, overall the book contributes to a more multilayered view of the movement in the South.

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In the introduction to *World War I and Southern Modernism*, David A. Davis argues that “World War I played a pivotal role in the emergence of southern modernism” (4). Davis notes that the South’s relation to modernism is problematic, because the movement is so often associated with the urban. His argument is that modernism in the South looked somewhat different, because there “modernism preceded modernity” (6). Useful to understanding Davis’s argument are his conceptions of proximal and distal modernism. Proximal sites of modernity are those urban centers that attracted artists and writers who were working in the avant-garde and experimental— in the United States, primarily New York City. On the other hand, Davis states, distal modernism occurred outside these primary sites, such as in the South, where modernism reflected more rural settings, and was marked by more conservatism, less artistic experimentation, and a resistance to modernity.

World War I meant that southerners came into contact with modernized cultures and proximal sites of modernism, and the changes it brought transformed the South’s economy and, in many cases, conventional attitudes related to southern society, gender, and race. Despite the differences between traditional and southern modernism, southern writers “clearly recognized changing conditions in the region” (6).

Chapter 1, “The Forward Glance: Modernity, Southerners, and Interregional Contact,” examines how the contact between southerners and non-southerners facilitated by World War I affected how each group viewed the other and how they represented the South in their writing. Prior to WWI, since travel outside one’s region was not terribly common, the perceptions northerners had of southerners were often limited to what they saw in print or onstage, such as the romanticization of the Old South in literature or stereotypes perpetuated by minstrel shows. Interregional contact precipitated by the war affected how non-southerners such as F. Scott