

*Goddess of Anarchy: The Life and Times of Lucy Parsons, American Radical.* By Jacqueline Jones. (New York: Basic Books, 2017. Pp ix, 447. \$32.00.)

American social historian Jacqueline Jones makes the argument that anarchist-communist Lucy Parsons' long career in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries as an activist, writer, mother, and widowed wife was full of contradictions. These contradictions were birthed from Parsons' desire to maintain a persona as "champion of the laboring classes" (xiii) while strategically hiding aspects of her own background that would be displeasing – if not downright damning – to the largely white, immigrant masses on whose behalf she advocated. Lacking an autobiographical narrative from Parsons, Jones employs archival materials to prove that Parsons was a formerly enslaved mixed-race black woman from Virginia, rather than (as Parsons herself claimed) the product of Indian and Spanish parentage in Texas. Jones explores what might have led Parsons to create an alternative origin story, and she engages with her willful ignorance about black organizing efforts that stemmed from this choice.

Jones unpacks the inconsistencies within Parsons' family life, including her troubled relationship with her children as well as her having multiple lovers after the martyrdom of her husband and fellow organizer, Albert Parsons. Despite her public call for traditional sexual mores and nuclear family values, Parsons eschewed the Victorian respectability politics of her age. With these additions, Jones' work sets itself apart from Carolyn Ashbaugh's 1976 biography, which before *Goddess of Anarchy* was the only biography dedicated to Parsons.

While Jones is a professor of history, academics and public audiences will find her work both accessible and rigorously sourced. The work is sectioned into four chronological parts: part

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one tracks Lucy and Albert Parsons' childhoods, courtship, and radicalization in Waco, Texas; part two details Albert and Lucy's arrival on the Chicago labor organizing scene as political orators and alternative media producers. This section contains some of the strongest narrative writing in the book as Jones uses the industrial environment of Gilded Age Chicago as a thread that links the divided (though economically intertwined) worlds of the white immigrant "urban proletariat" (56), the worse-off African-American transplant workers, the drama-hungry journalists, and the anti-anarchist police forces. Chapters seven through nine immerse the reader in the tragedy of Albert's trial and execution for the Haymarket bombing, as well as Lucy's efforts to galvanize political and monetary support for her own career as an anarchist.

Section three follows Lucy Parsons' struggle in her later years to find an organizing community that shared her unwavering values on labor and free speech, particularly as Chicago's anarchist landscape evolved. While Parsons maintained her earlier calls for tactical dynamite strikes, anarchism had grown to include the embrace of sexual taboo and bohemian artistic expression. Section four explores the latter years of Parsons' life, including how her organizing efforts shifted to compensate for the widely held wartime view that workers' organizations, anarchists, and communists were "inherently criminal enterprises" (318).

That it might have gone further in its theoretical analysis of Parsons' gendered and racial personal blind spots will disappoint some. However, Jones' work sets a strong foundation for future researchers to interrogate Parsons' legacy as a woman of color activist in American history. While the narration of copious primary sources remains Jones' chief contribution to

Parsons' legacy, *Goddess of Anarchy* may also serve as "a cautionary tale" to organizers today about "the challenges of promoting a radical message" (xii) that is discriminatory in whom it serves and uplifts.

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Michelle May-Curry

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