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Richard L. Davis and the Color Line in Ohio Coal: A Hocking Valley Mine Labor Organizer, 1862–1900. By Frans H. Doppen. Contributions to Southern Appalachian Studies. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2016. Pp. viii, 184. \$29.95, ISBN 978–1-4766–6739-3.)

Much has been written on union organizers' bitter struggle to establish collective bargaining in the coal mines of central and southern Appalachia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mine operators regularly employed deprivation, intimidation, black and white strikebreakers, violence, and murder to enforce their will. Thus, one can imagine the enormity of the challenges facing an African American coal mine labor organizer during this era. Yet, this is the task Richard L. Davis took on "among his 'colored brothers'" in the "microregion known as the Little Cities of Black Diamonds," located in southeastern Ohio's Hocking River Valley (p. 1). As a founding member of and a delegate representing District 6 of the United Mine Workers (UMW), an organization that Davis believed "did more than any other to break the color line," Davis traveled throughout the contested coal-mining regions of southeastern Ohio, southern West Virginia, and Alabama to recruit miners to the group's cause.

Born in 1862 in Roanoke County, Virginia, Davis began working at a tobacco factory when he was eight years old and attended school in the winters. Approximately ten years later, "disgusted with the very low wage rate and other unfavorable conditions of a Southern tobacco factory," Davis left (p. 16). After sojourns in the coalfields of West Virginia's Kanawha and New River region, Davis resettled in the interracial village of Rendville, Ohio, in 1882. Four years later, at the age of twenty-three, he expressed his commitment to worker's rights when he forwarded his first letter to the *National Labor Tribune*.

Ohio University professor Frans H. Doppen situates his study in the broader context of the trade labor movement, interracial unionism, economic upheaval, and hardening race relations. Through the strategic use of some of the extant 173 letters that Richard L. Davis wrote, Doppen effectively examines the complex and [End Page 194] nuanced challenges that Davis faced. Convincing black and white miners to join the union was challenging enough, but navigating inter- and intraracial animus and mistrust to unite workers against the evils of wage slavery and the increasingly racialized politics of the UMW's white national leadership was quite another matter. That Davis was twice elected to the UMW's national executive board, on which he served from 1886 to 1897, demonstrates his aptitude for successfully negotiating the shifting, overlapping, and interrelated fault lines of race, class, region, and labor organization associated with industrial America during the Jim Crow era. Yet Davis's failure to win reelection to the board in 1898—the board included only white members for the next seventy-six years—illustrates how color and not ability increasingly determined one's status within its leadership. Davis died at the age of thirty-five, impoverished and blacklisted from the very local he helped found. Doppen's compelling biography helps elevate a largely forgotten hero of the labor movement. Like the qualities that benefited labor organizers Mary Harris "Mother" Jones and

John L. Lewis, Richard L. Davis's strength and resilience were critical to the rise of the UMW as America's foremost labor union. There is much to praise in Doppen's study of this remarkable man, and it deserves to be widely read.

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