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Glenn Feldman, ed. *Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004. xiii + 430 pp. $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8173-5134-2.

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Seeds of Racial Change Amidst Southern White Supremacy

In this edited collection of essays, Glenn Feldman brings together scholarly essays that address black activism and white supremacist reactions to racial change in the modern South. The discussion of these "two sides of the civil rights coin" refutes the general impression that *Brown vs. Board of Education* was a watershed in the history of the civil rights movement (p. 2). This insight opens a new page in the historical scholarship of black protests.

All of the chapters in the book make reference both to the racial divide and to the activism that existed in the Jim Crow South. Feldman's previous work *The Disfranchisement Myth* (2004) addressed this social chasm in the state of Alabama. The essays in *Before Brown* go further in addressing this racial barrier and the early attempts to bridge this vacuum in most of the southern states during a fourteen-year time frame stretching from 1940 to 1954.

The book starts with Patricia Sullivan's brief foreword that provides a clear understanding of the objective and the theme of the work. Feldman's prologue elaborates race and the politics of emotion and mentions Michael Klarman's historical thesis that southern black activism precipitated the white backlash.[1] In an attempt to dispute this notion, the essays emphasize the former.

The in-depth and analytical presentation of the southern social scenario, its elaborate archival research (in a relatively unexplored part of civil rights history), the effective use of source material, and a well-organized index are some of the strengths of this work. In addition to the extensive bibliographic notes, the work might have provided a comprehensive bibliography that would be handy for further readings on the topic. Also including some illustrations like the one on the cover page might have facilitated the reader's thematic appreciation of the social context of the time.

The first essay, Raymond Arsenault's work on the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), starts with a biographical account of Irene Morgan, who won her case in the U.S. Supreme Court challenging segregated interstate bus seating in the state of Virginia. Arsenault infers that CORE leaders such as Bayard Rustin were unsuccessful in implementing the court's ruling because of "social inertia" or the unwillingness of the majority southerners to accept the change (p. 67). The essay might have included factors such as caste consciousness among blacks, governmental pressure, and the fear of losing jobs that convinced some African Americans not to violate the racial barrier.

Adam Fairclough's essay on Louisiana civil rights discusses an insurgent group of young blacks who attempted to unify their community in New Orleans. Fairclough's inference that Louisiana blacks held a "variety of views about integration," and were not vocal on radical attempts to dismantle the system also applies to other southern states (p. 167). Comparison of the situation in Louisiana with that of other southern states might have provided a broader understanding as to the extent of black participation in civil rights in the South before *Brown*.

Sarah Brown's essay addresses black opposition to racial change when moderate blacks did not support the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) agenda at a time when the southern segregationists linked all racial activism to Soviet Communism. Dealing with CRC activities in different southern states and the surmounting challenge they encountered, she left no stone unturned in addressing the growth and decline of liberals and leftists in the light of the changing political landscape.

Despite the inclement social environment, there were some courageous black leaders such as Dr. T. R. M. Howard who stepped forward to push through the racial boundaries in the Mississippi Delta. Howard's economic programs and political ideas represented a combination

of Booker T. Washington's racial accommodation and W. E. B. Dubois's pragmatism. David and Linda Royster's essay explores these aspects, but does not address the extent to which Howard's controversial stand on segregation and his intolerance of leftist infiltration into the civil rights movement impacted his image in both the black and white community.

Unlike Howard, E. D. Nixon, a Pullman car porter, the founder of the Montgomery division of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), was one of the most outspoken black critics of segregation and a champion of voting rights in Montgomery, Alabama. Nixon believed in direct action against racism and was the mastermind behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. These issues are addressed in detail in John White's essay. The author's exclusive emphasis on the biography and the public career of this great civil rights pioneer seems to overshadow the other side of the coin, i.e., the white backlash in Montgomery.

Looking at a different dimension of the civil rights movement, the essays of Pamela Tyler and Andrew Manis focus on women's activism in the South during the New Deal years. They address the civil rights activism of two prominent white women, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Georgia Methodist Dorothy Tilley. Mrs. Roosevelt's "racial liberalism" brought drastic changes in southern gender roles and race relations (p. 275). For her role in this social transformation, Mrs. Roosevelt was blamed as "an outside agitator" (p. 97) and a "meddling racial liberal" (p. 106) in southern white conservative circles. In contrast, Tilley's attempts to tear down racial segregation in Georgia drew more support than opposition from her southern church congregation that had transformed along the lines of the developing progressive ideology. Dorothy Tilley, being a southern white woman who mainly confined her racial activity within her church, had more advantages in carrying on her agenda.

Pamela Tyler did emphasize the reaction of angry Southerners to Mrs. Roosevelt's "racial egalitarianism," but she makes little mention of white liberal and black admiration for the First Lady's activism (p. 100). Andrew Manis might have compared Tilley's civil rights activism with that of women from other denominations in the state that seemed to be at the threshold of racial change in the years following the Second World War.

The situation in the South at the end of the war proved disappointing for many returning war veterans, who made every effort to change the social dynamics. Jennifer Brooks's work on Georgia veterans' activism and the opposing provincialism explores the perspectives of the returning white veterans on race relations. In this context, the author might have compared Georgia war veterans' racial perspective with that of the veterans in other southern states.

In the last thirty pages, the editor, in his epilogue, explicitly analyzes the contours of political transformation from "Solid Democrat South" to "Solid Republican South" since the 1928 elections (p. 268). Feldman refers to the rift between the northern and southern wings of the Democratic Party and discusses at length groups such as the "Neo-Kluxers," "Neo-Bourbons," and "Dixiecrats" that took shelter under the umbrella of white supremacy (pp. 273, 276). Catering to the racial emotions of many of these southerners, the modern Republican Party that became a final stop for disgruntled Democrats and George Wallace segregationists set a firm footing in the South by the turn of the twentieth century. Unlike the extensive analysis of these issues in Earl and Merle Black's *The Rise of Modern Republicans* (2002), Feldman's epilogue concisely assesses the same in the light of the southern opposition to racial change.

Since each essay explored different dimensions of early black activism in the modern South there seemed to be something of a discontinuity in their content and context. It might have been helpful, for example, for the editor to have included transition paragraphs between the essays. Despite this weakness, these provocative essays present a detailed and compelling account of race relations and racial activism. *Before Brown* is a well-researched exploration into the lives and legacy of people from different walks of life who participated and those who opposed racial change in the South before *Brown*. This work will be a welcome addition to scholars interested in studies in gender and race and in the southern roots of racial protests during the pre-civil rights era.

Note

[1]. Michael J. Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change and Civil Rights Movement," *Virginia Law Review* 80 (February 1994): pp. 7-150.

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