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Stephanie Y. Evans. *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007. xiv + 275 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-3031-9; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8130-3268-9.

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One Black Woman's View of Black Women's Intellectual History

A comprehensive intellectual history of African American women has yet to be written. When it is, Stephanie Y. Evans's book will provide a starting point.[1] *Black Women in the Ivory Tower* tells the story of the "talented tenth" (to borrow W. E. B. Du Bois's famous term) of African American women, who struggled to build intellectual careers from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. All of these women were teachers; all were deeply committed to the "uplift" of their communities. Some did research and published books, articles, and poems; others became administrators; and still others did important advocacy work for civil and economic rights for African Americans. While some of their names might be familiar–most notably, Anna Julia Cooper and Mary McLeod Bethune–the names of others, who cultivated more local vineyards, will not. By bringing their stories to light, Evans restores to history a hardworking, highly dedicated, and inspiring group of women about who more deserves to be known.

Evans presents her material in two sections. The first traces the educational history of black women from 1850, when Oberlin College conferred a bachelor's degree on Lucy Stanton, to the 1954 Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education.* Despite inconsistencies in record-keeping over the decades, Evans is able to correct some of the statistical errors of previous treatments of this topic and provides a unique visual resource in maps, illustrating the geographical distribution of black women college and university graduates across the United States. Scattered throughout this section are case studies of black women scholars whose careers point to the general developments she highlights. The second section of the book focuses on black women's philosophies of education, from Cooper through Bethune, and concludes by applying lessons learned from their views to the concerns of black women in the academy today.

An assistant professor in the African American Studies Program and Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research at the University of Florida, Evans applies a black feminist epistemological approach to her subject. Taking as her guide Patricia Hill Collins, whose "work is the thematic core of this manuscript," she looks at every topic and issue from the standpoint of African American women, including herself (p. 10). The book is, in fact, in large measure a protest against the negative academic experiences of black women both in the past and present, including her own. "Some of the pressures that I felt as a student and often am faced with as a black woman faculty member (issues of credibility and authority) turn up in narratives from the 1850s to the 1950s," she explains in an online interview.[2] Summing up this point succinctly near the end of her book, she writes, "This history tells my story" (p. 215).

Evans's book has, by her own count, four themes. First, she examines how African American women overcame the barriers raised against their success by negotiating with the institutions that oppressed them and asserting their own agency. Second, Evans shows how, as they met these challenges, they articulated "complex and useful educational philosophies" (p. 6). Next, she points to how their life courses reveal "the tension … between aristocratic and democratic ideals," and the "shortcomings in black women's ideals of racial uplift and woman-centered moral responsibility" (p. 7). And, finally, Evans demonstrates how in securing a place for their scholarly work, the women not only had to overcome multiple forms of social oppression, but also had to resist community pressures and balance complex responsibilities to family, church, and voluntary organizations.

As Evans expands on these themes, she supplies considerable information about the education of African Americans, in general, at both HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) and PWIs (predominantly white institutions). She criticizes both kinds of institutions for their insistence on inculcating in black students a reverence for the culture of classical Greece,

while ignoring that of Africa, and notes their denigration of women's intellectual capacities and "assumptions of white and male superiority" (p. 31). She demonstrates that the higher the rank of an HBCU, the fewer women it graduated. The "Seven Sister" PWIs admitted a few black women, but the numbers were never significant. Overall, by the turn of the twentieth century, black women were far behind both black men and white women in earning higher degrees.

The book includes material on HBCUs either founded for women or later becoming single sex, including Bennett College (1873 in Greensboro, North Carolina, coeducational until 1926), Hartshorn Memorial College for Women (1883 in Richmond, Virginia, awarding its first college degree in 1892), and Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary (1881, later Spelman, named after Laura Spelman Rockefeller). It also discusses black women's induction into honorary societies (including societies founded by black women), black women's sororities, and conflicts among the black middle classes.

The individual women she writes about were remarkable. The stories she provides from six college memoirs (by Fanny Jackson Coppin, Mary Church Terrell, Zora Neale Hurston, Lena Beatrice Morton, Rose Butler Brown, and Pauli Murray) show the multiple barriers attendant in the "double bind" of "race and sex" for black women (p. 102). As inspiring as their stories were, Evans ends this section on a sad note, writing, "For every triumph cited here, the academy crushed thousands of black women" (p. 102). Drawing heavily from Elizabeth Ihle's *Black Women in Higher Education: An Anthology of Essays, Studies, and Documents* (1992), Evans recounts the experiences of black women who attended predominantly white state schools that were not allowed to discriminate on the basis of race, but where black women experienced racial discrimination, nonetheless, and of those who attended HBCUs where, working their way through as "pantry rats" (the term for students who worked in the dining halls), they felt rejected on the basis of class. And, finally, she gives special attention to four women who earned Ph.D.'s between 1921 and 1954: Eva B. Dykes, Georgiana R. Simpson, Sadie T. Mossell Alexander, and Cooper.

When Evans reaches her second section, an assessment of Cooper's and Bethune's educational philosophies concerning research, teaching, and service, she becomes increasingly polemical. Cooper, Evans states, saw the goal of research as working toward social justice; Bethune was most interested in instilling pride in black youth. The definitions of research for both scholars "were in stark contrast to larger academic developments at PWIs. At institutions run by the 'authorities,' publication gained primacy, and the joy of advanced inquiry, the mutual benefit of shared scholarship, or the application of research findings for the public good were soon squelched by raw competition, the demand to produce, and 'intellectual property' squabbles" (p. 154). All of this, Evans concludes, meant that academic institutions did not support black women's agendas, which was a combination of "direct agitation, institution building, and scholarly analysis of the issues that affected public policy" (p. 154).

She follows this statement with a characterization of the modern university that some readers may find distorted. In her view, from the first decade of the twentieth century onward, PWIs became increasingly focused on "rationalizing and perpetuating unequal social conditions or war-focused political agendas. Though there were pockets of progressive politics, as a whole, the American education system perpetuated social inequality" (p. 155). Instead of becoming a "public servant," the professor became an "expert" (p. 155). "Massive publishing," according to Evans, "became an important means by which privileged white Americans maintained dominance" (p. 155). She continues, "When publishing became the measure of academic worth, the ability to publish was strictly regulated by what the insiders of the racist, sexist, and classist organizations deemed worthy to print" (p. 156). Professional societies "claimed the final word" on what could be published, and "all scholarly fields … subscribed to the tenet of black inferiority" (p. 156). If this is how Evans experienced the academic world, or is convinced that black women intellectuals of the past experienced it this way, then she is entitled to this view, but I would predict that many readers would regard her take on it as a caricature.

As I read this book I kept wishing it had received more rigorous editing from the university press that published it. The press could, for example, have eliminated some of Evans's repetitive reminders of male prejudice against women and white prejudice against blacks. Cooper and Bethune and the other women Evans writes about were great teachers, researchers, scholars, and human beings. Their achievements speak for themselves.

Notes

[1]. Readers can see a slide show of the book's illustrations at http://plaza.ufl.edu/drevans/BWIT_page.htm.

[2]. http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/06/21/evans (accessed January 14, 2008).

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