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Larry E. Rivers, Canter Brown Jr., eds. *The Varieties of Women's Experiences: Portraits of Southern Women in the Post-Civil War Century.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. xvi + 342 pp. $69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-3412-6.

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Dyer on Rivers and Brown, Jr., eds.

In *The Varieties of Women's Experiences*, Larry Eugene Rivers and Canter Brown Jr. contribute to our understanding of the diverse experiences of women in the southeastern United States during the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century. Through this collection of biographical essays, editors Rivers and Brown amply demonstrate how fourteen women played active roles in their communities and thereby transcended traditional gender and racial boundaries. Chronologically organized, this work provides candid narratives on a varied group of women that includes a Jewish woman, eight African American women, and a Cuban woman. The book is a valuable reference that will enable readers to understand more fully the complexity and richness of the lives of southern women following the Civil War and into the twentieth century.

In their effort to draw attention to women whose lives have previously received scant attention, the authors of these essays have mined an impressive array of primary sources, including diaries, newspaper articles, correspondence, and census records. Richly documented, this work also makes ample use of the secondary literature that has developed around the subject of southern women. Women who lived in Florida and Georgia are particularly prominent among the essays. In addition, woven throughout many of the essays is the importance religion played in the lives of these influential women.

The first three essays illuminate the lives of three wealthy white women of Florida. The narrative on Catharine Campbell Hart by Brown Jr. sheds light on how a widow without a pension or Social Security was able to deal bravely with the challenges that came "fast, hard and often unexpectedly" (p. 19). In her biographical sketch of Ellen Call Long, Tracy J. Revels paints a picture of a woman who could play the role of the Confederate matron while harboring Unionist tendencies in her heart. Long, known as the "Countess of Tallahassee," overcame the difficulties of separation from her husband to become a goodwill ambassador and proficient fundraiser. James M. Denham offers insights concerning the pivotal role women played in community-building despite hardships. Detailing the life of thrice-widowed Victoria Seward Varn Brandon Sherrill, Denham effectively argues that Sherrill expanded her sphere of influence through her work in various women's clubs and then provided crucial leadership for the new town of Brandon, Florida.

The life of Mary E. C. Day Smith dispels the myth that whites alone were responsible for educating former slaves. Daria Willis's study of Smith paints a vivid picture of a northern-born African American woman who was a formidable advocate of African American education in Florida as well as an active member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Embracing a variety of causes, from conservation to protecting the rights of the Seminoles and African Americans to preserving Florida's history, Mary Barr Munroe was an aggressive promoter of community projects who at times defied social boundaries. Like Munroe, Maria Valdes de Gutsens worked arduously to better the community and often overcame barriers. Known as a "true mother of the poor," this Cuban woman devoted her life to operating the charity institution known as Mercedes Hospital in Key West, Florida (p. 120).

The next four essays chronicle the lives of four African American women. Inspired by her Baptist beliefs, Louise Cecilia Fleming served as a teacher and medical doctor and was a pioneer in the women's African missionary movement. As an educator at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Adella Hunt Logan made significant contributions in community outreach, cultural affairs, and education. Terrance D. Smith and Sally J. Zepeda demonstrate how Logan's efforts for women's suffrage improved race relations and "helped to bring the woman's suffrage movement to the forefront in the South" (p. 166). Florence Johnson Hunt had to overcome barriers of gender and race in order to leave lasting contributions in the fields of social welfare and reform. Her life exemplifies the consequential role that such women's organizations as colored women's clubs and the Women's Christian Temperance Union played in moving women to the vanguard of various Progressive causes. Fred R. van Hartesveldt posits that Hunt's contributions have largely been overlooked because of the prevalent gender stereotypes of her era. Like Hunt, Selena Sloan Butler played a crucial role in a myriad of philanthropic and charitable associations in her efforts to "uplift the race." As the wife of a prominent African American physician in Atlanta, Butler was involved in such organizations as the Chautauqua Circle, the National Association of Colored Women, the Atlanta Neighborhood Union, Atlanta's black Young Women's Christian Association, and the Gate City Free Kindergarten. She also helped establish the first Parent Teacher Association for African Americans and the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers.

This work breaks fresh ground by detailing the life of a Jewish southern woman named Gertrude Dzialynski Corbet, a political consultant, civic leader, and businesswoman who also became one of the first woman attorneys in Florida. Corbet worked as a legal stenographer, office deputy for corporate taxation in the headquarters of the U.S. collector of internal revenue for Florida, and an attorney. She also helped create a Florida State League of Women Voters after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Most importantly, Corbet "earned respect and stirred pride across religious, cultural, and gender lines. She evidenced the great potential of a woman who

dared to be different" (p. 230). The next essay examines the life of Eartha Mary Magdalene White, who was known as "Jacksonville's Angel of Mercy." Employing tactics of moderation and cooperation with receptive whites, White created a home for indigent elderly black people, fed the hungry, opened a community center for the homeless, worked as a clerk for the Afro-American Life Insurance Company, and helped organize the City Federation of Women's Clubs. Like the essay on Logan, this essay explores the racist attitudes that plagued the southern women's suffrage movement. Neither White nor Elizabeth Benton Moore, who is the subject of the next essay, allowed barriers of race or gender to restrict their activism. As a missionary and principal of Dorchester Academy, a rural school for African Americans in Georgia, Moore "guided the community toward self-improvement, self-reliance, and pride" and became a role model for countless people (p. 282). Finally, the last essay explores the life of Jerenia Valentine Dial Reid, who became Florida's first African American registered nurse. Like the others chronicled in this book, Reid chose a life of service, community activism, and commitment to improving the lives of other black women.

A careful reading of this biographical collection provides clues to lives that previously remained unknown. The major drawback to this work is its lack of penetrating analysis. Although some of the authors provide context on women's history, there is little information on the history of the South, black history, or religious history (the term "cracker," for example, is used in two of the essays without any explanation of this term or any details about Florida history). The strength of this work is its attempt "to highlight lives lived in relative obscurity" (p. xiii). Yet, while the book taps sources that have not received adequate attention, it does not judiciously blend narrative with enough interpretation, evaluation, and historical perspective. Lauding the diversity of southern women, *The Varieties of Women's Experiences* is still a praiseworthy effort that adds to our knowledge of southern women.

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