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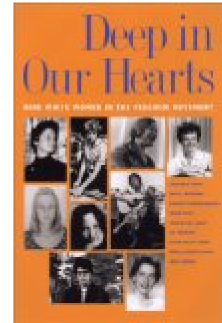

Constance Curry, Joan C. Browning, Dorothy Dawson Burlage, Penny Patch, Theresa Del Pozzo, Sue Thrasher, Elaine DeLott Baker, Emmie Schrader Adams, Casey Hayden. *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000. xv + 400 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-2266-7.

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Telling Their Own Stories

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Joan C. Browning, Dorothy Dawson Burlage, Penny Patch, Theresa Del Pozzo, Sue Thrasher, Elaine DeLott Baker, Emmie Schrader Adams, and Casey Hayden

Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement recounts the "costly times" of the civil rights struggle that the book's nine co-authors "wouldn't have missed for the world" (xiii). >From intimate personal essays, we learn how a handful of very young white women from varied regional, cultural, and class backgrounds crossed racial boundaries and defied social conventions by dedicating their lives to a movement to eradicate segregation and racial prejudice. "Why us? " the authors ask of their own histories. "How did we find our way" into the freedom movement? "What happened to us there? How did we leave, and what did we take with us? And, especially, what was it like? " (xiii).

Deep in Our Hearts addresses all of these questions, focusing primarily on each woman's experiences working with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and other civil rights organizations during the first half of the1960s. Each woman expresses her deep faith in the values of equality and human fellowship that characterized the student movement's early years, as well as her gratitude for having once been part of a beloved community. And each discusses her response to SNCC's ideological shift away from interracialism and toward Black Power. For some, this transformation and the eventual expulsion of whites from the organization were devastating. But most had left SNCC before internal racial tensions reached the breaking point, and several managed to remain active in social justice efforts through other organizations and in other areas. As historian Barbara Ransby notes in her foreword, these women's essays refute the common notion that white activists of the 1960s "either burned out, sold out, or tuned out." Instead, the authors reveal "a profound sense of pride and continued commitment to the values they embraced as young women in their late teens and early twenties" (viii). The inclusion of up-to-date biographical sketches of each author at the end of the volume adds to its value as a retrospective on the period since the mid-1960s. For teachers of twentieth-century history, *Deep in Our Hearts* becomes a valuable resource for answering students' frequent question of "Where are they now? "

The book is also an intriguing study in the historical self-consciousness of historical subjects. "My speaking part in Freedom Movement histories consists of one line, uttered on Tuesday, December 19, 1961," Joan C. Browning writes near the start of her essay, "Shiloh Witness" (p. 40). She goes on to quote historian Howard Zinn's description of the mass meeting at Shiloh Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia, where, just released from jail after the Freedom Ride that helped initiate the Albany Movement, she offered a few words of encouragement to local residents.[1] Browning's decision to quote Zinn suggests the extent to which her memory and under-

standing of her participation in the movement–indeed, the very sense of identity expressed in her essay's title–have been shaped by historians' analyses. The same is true for all of the contributors, as their collective preface makes clear. Sometimes doubting the historical significance of their experiences or the coherence of their multivocal project, "they moved forward … by examining what has been written by others about our lives and times, arriving at the clear perception that no one could tell our stories but we ourselves" (pp. xiv-xv). Given the new sophistication with which a number of historians of the American South are approaching issues of both individual and collective memory, the authors' historical self-consciousness makes their book all the more significant as a primary source.[2]

Because they do know how others have described their experiences, these essayists make a point of recounting events already deemed to have historical significance, often providing new insights or more details than historians' narratives provide. They also address frequently asked questions: "Since we are asked so often about sexual relations between white women and black men, I need to say here that I was approached by two in those early days," Constance Curry writes in the book's opening essay (p. 15). She explains the outcome of each proposition, and several other of the nine authors are equally frank, largely because they *know* that the personal and political dynamics of interracial sex are subjects historians and other observers discuss frequently, but not with as much sensitivity as these nine women might like.

Similarly, several of the authors directly confront issues of sexism and/or the development of feminism within the civil rights movement. Most important, we learn about the drafting of the 1964 SNCC position paper "Women in the Movement" from multiple perspectives. Casey Hayden, Elaine DeLott Baker, and Emmie Schrader Adams each place themselves on the scene at the SNCC staff retreat in Waveland, Mississippi, where they and Mary King and one or two other white women pieced together this analysis of the ways that sexism was comparable to racism. As Hayden writes, this was "a novel idea at the time–so novel, in fact, that the word *sexism* didn't exist in our lexicon" (p. 365). Long considered a milestone in the development of second-wave feminism, "Women in the Movement" was initially "an internal educational document" for SNCC staffers (p. 365), and its creation was a matter of huddling "in a conspiratorial press around a mimeograph machine in the middle of the night" (p. 271). Indeed, Baker describes "how I felt, like a naughty schoolgirl, sneaking up to the second floor of the main building with one or two co-conspirators late in the evening "to place copies of the unsigned document on a table alongside the other position papers to be discussed the next day" (p. 272). Surprisingly, none of the women who helped author "Women in the Movement" reflect on the ridicule the paper received at the next day's meeting, though Hayden acknowledges that "our writing was generally attributed to a SNCC longtimer, the driven, stalwart Ruby Doris Smith Robinson." Robinson did not disown the paper and, Hayden continues, "No one was going to tangle with Ruby Doris, or with the other strong black women of SNCC. The paper caused hardly a ripple" (p. 365).

Undoubtedly, the historical work of Sara Evans has helped Baker, Hayden, and Adams see the significance of a memo written on the fly that "caused hardly a ripple."[3] Yet these authors are also writing against common historical interpretations. "To make our memo relevant to a SNCC staff meeting, we listed examples from the daily life of female SNCC workers. This has led to a distorted slant by later commentators, as if the problem was 'sexism in the movement,' " Adams complains. "No one ever said SNCC was in any way worse than the world at large," she continues. "Indeed, it was quite a bit better" (p. 325). Hayden, too, addresses historians both directly and indirectly. First, she rejects the notion that "Women in the Movement" was a tactic designed to gain white women greater leadership in SNCC. Second, she makes a point of redeeming Stokely Carmichael, whose frequently quoted jibe that "the proper position of women in the movement is prone" has branded him in many minds as a horrible sexist. He was "quite the opposite," she assures (p. 365-66). Theresa Del Pozzo seconds: "That is a funny line today, and it was then, and no one took it any other way. Especially not Stokely, Casey, or me, several of the alleged antagonists in this debate." Far from being antagonists, Del Pozzo suggests, she, Hayden, and Carmichael were still part of a beloved community, "a group of black and white, northern and southern men and women partying together on the Waveland Pier" (p. 198).

Although its treatment of topics like interracial sex, sexism, and the origins of second-wave feminism is important, *Deep in Our Hearts* is often most compelling precisely when its authors are describing parties, friendships, and other day-to-day details of the freedom struggle. Here, the book's layout is especially effective as the first few essays introduce women who knew each other intimately and worked together closely in the student movement's early years. Thus, Constance Curry not

only gives us a delightful glimpse of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson to compare with the tough leader Hayden later describes–"We were ready to go downtown [for a demonstration in Rock Hill, South Carolina] but we had to wait for Ruby Doris's hair curlers to set (p. 23)–but also mentions meeting Joan Browning at an August 1961 conference at Paine College in Augusta, Georgia. Browning then narrates the events at Augusta, which included the brutal stabbing of a local leader, in more detail. Meanwhile, Dorothy Dawson Burlage, the third essayist, arrived in Atlanta in fall 1961 to work for the National Student Association's Southern Student Human Relations Project, which Curry directed. With Curry's help, she also became Joan Browning's roommate–just as she had shared an apartment with Casey Hayden before leaving Texas. These personal connections reflect the complex interweaving of organizations that supported the civil rights cause. All of the essayists had some affiliation with SNCC but they also participated in a range of other groups including the National Student Association, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Southern Regional Council, Southern Conference Educational Fund, American Friends Service Committee, Council of Federated Organizations, and Southern Student Organizing Committee.

To trace these women's organizational backgrounds is one way to explain how they came to participate in the civil rights struggle, which is both the book's major purpose and its greatest contribution to the historical literature on this period. "Sometimes people ask when I joined the movement," Joan Browning writes. " 'Join' is too formal for how the movement happened. People identified a role for themselves and then moved in and out in response to individual inspiration. I tried to be a student and nonviolent and one of the coordinated. That is how I came to be on the Albany Freedom Ride" (p. 66). Other essayists' stories, particularly those of the four other southerners (Curry, Burlage, Thrasher and Hayden), echo Browning's account of drifting into–then dedicating themselves to–the freedom struggle.

Browning's description of the Albany Freedom Ride is a particularly good example of how the personal narratives in *Deep in Our Hearts* enrich historical interpretations through their intimacy of detail. In November or December 1961, Browning and her boyfriend, Georgia Tech student Bill Humphries, heard that SNCC was planning to test a recent Interstate Commerce Commission ruling desegregating all forms of public transportation that crossed state lines. Four other whites had already volunteered to take a train from Atlanta to Albany along with four black riders who would sit with them in the white car and waiting rooms. However, Casey Hayden could not afford to get arrested because she might lose her job with the YWCA. "Bill desperately wanted to be the fourth white freedom rider, but it was impossible," Browning reflects. "If he were arrested, his Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps scholarship would be revoked and he would immediately be drafted and sent to Korea for peacekeeping, or to Vietnam." Browning's "white skin made the Albany Freedom Ride half white and half black," so she volunteered to go. "I followed Casey's instructions and obediently put clean underwear and my toothbrush in my purse. I felt silly and a little risque with dainties in my purse and hoped that nobody would ever know" (pp. 67-68). Because the ride was planned for a Sunday, Browning also dressed in an olive green corduroy suit from Sears and freshly shined penny loafers. She then boarded the train with the other seven riders and Casey Hayden, who was to serve as the "designated observer." Hayden's role, like Browning's choice of clothing, is the kind of detail often overlooked in historical treatments of the civil rights movement. As Browning explains, "it was standard discipline in integration tests to designate one person to stand apart from the group, an observer safe from arrest....The observer often was the only witness, other than arrested demonstrators, who could be relied on to tell the truth in court and to the press. The observer also would not be in jail, and so would be free to contact the SNCC headquarters" (p. 67). While the mechanics of a freedom ride may seem minor in comparison with its effects, it is precisely by fleshing out these details of who was there and why, as well as how they felt about it, that *Deep in Our Hearts* adds significantly to our understanding of how the civil rights movement progressed.

Such details are also what will make this a great book for teaching, particularly because of its appeal to today's more conservative students and to white students who may know little and understand less about whites' participation in the civil rights movement. First, we *feel* how young these women were when they dedicated themselves to the struggle. For example, Penny Patch tells us that she went south in the summer of 1962 "an idealistic, intelligent, but very naive eighteen-year-old." She also *shows* us how true this was by noting that, during her movement years, she learned not only how to organize, but also how "to cook, type, and ... drive a car" (p. 152).

These nine white women were not only young, they were just as uncertain, just as susceptible to peer pressure, and just as likely to come into conflict with their

elders as today's students. Theresa Del Pozzo describes her youthful rebellion against both the injustice of segregation and the narrow worldview of the Italian immigrant neighborhood where she grew up. Meanwhile, Sue Thrasher suggests her secret exasperation when a teacher invited her to a mass meeting organized by the Nashville branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "Why doesn't she leave me alone? Haven't I done enough? " she whined inwardly, thinking of the opposition she had faced for an earlier foray into activism. But she went, unwilling to have someone she admired think less of her, and that meeting proved to be a "dazzling moment of clarity" about the pain and injustice of segregation (p. 222). For other women it was friends and boyfriends who pulled them into activist circles or helped them to sense that segregation limited their own freedom and not only that of African Americans. And for all of these women, the friendships and support, as well as the high purpose, they found in the student movement's early years were energizing, affirming, and vital. Several describe their respect and admiration for Ella Baker, the "mother of SNCC" (p. 345). James Forman, Will Campbell, Anne Braden, and a number of other individuals, black and white, also appear as beloved mentors whose models of interracial fellowship would stand even against the internal political struggles of the freedom movement's later years.

Friends and mentors proved especially important as these white women's families disowned them or grew distant because of their activism. Even if they expect the southern women's parents to be racists and treat their daughters as "race traitors," today's students may be surprised to learn how deep the opposition of the *northern* women's parents sometimes ran. Here, Emmie Schrader Adams's story is likely to be the most surprising of all, as readers confront the fact that her father, the child of German immigrants living in St. Paul, Minnesota, regularly informed on her activities and turned over her personal letters to the FBI.

Adams's narrative is surprising in other ways as well and adds greatly to the overall importance of this volume. "I lived in Jamaica for twenty years and was never interviewed or contacted for any of the books about the Freedom Movement," she explains at the start. "So this is my one chance to say things I've always wanted to say, to tell stories I've always told but never written" (p. 291). The story she writes is of a Minnesota Catholic who finished high school before she ever met a black person and who became interested in Africa while sailing through the Strait of Gibraltar on her way back to the U.S. after a summer in France. Volunteering for Operation Crossroads Africa in the summer of 1961 after her second year at Harvard-Radcliffe, Adams began the three-year international odyssey that would eventually take her south in April 1964. She stayed in Kenya and worked as a teacher after the Operation Crossroads summer program ended–"the only white woman in the whole country living on the African side of the fence" (p. 300). Then, back in college in the winter of 1962-63, she began dating a Ghanian student with whom she would eventually go to Mexico (in hopes of getting visas for Cuba), Morocco, and Algeria. "It was during this Mexican period that the FBI first contacted my father about my activities," she writes. "Apparently the possibility that two highly visible and successful Harvard students might be about to go to Cuba for guerilla training had pushed their red button" (pp. 307-08). Once in Algeria, Adams and her boyfriend were unable to achieve their ultimate goal of volunteering for the Angolan war against Portugal. Instead, they faced disillusionment and alienation, as well as hepatitis and an unwanted pregnancy. Adams's account of traveling to Switzerland for an abortion is particularly poignant.

Thus, unlike her eight co-authors, Emmie Schrader Adams had substantial experience in international and revolutionary circles prior to her involvement in the civil rights movement. The black freedom struggle was, for her, a homegrown version of the liberation movements sweeping Africa, and it was an ideological commitment, rather than any personal experience of life under segregation, that compelled her to become involved. "I saw nothing in America for me except joining the struggle against racism," she writes of the weary young woman who returned from Algeria. "College had become irrelevant. I was beyond the pale" (p. 313).

Although both the foreword and preface of *Deep in Our Hearts* emphasize the diversity of these nine women's backgrounds and experiences, neither suggests how the profound differences within their stories should reshape the overall narrative of white women's participation in the movement or, more broadly, the history of this generation of Americans. Barbara Ransby's preface, in particular, falls back on the more familiar story of white southern women's radicalizing experiences. Ransby does make the very good point that, unlike recent studies of whiteness, *Deep in Our Hearts* illustrates "the ways in which white racial identities were, at a particular moment and place in time, profoundly informed by a set of explicitly *antiracist* politics"(emphasis mine). However, she follows this point with a reminder that the "dominant culture of the white South did not intend to produce

a Connie Curry, a Joan Browning, a Dorothy Dawson Burlage, a Sue Thrasher, or a Casey Hayden"(p. ix). The essayists who grew up outside the South seem to disappear behind the admittedly man-bites-dog story of white women who challenged their native culture. Yet these essays make it clear that St. Paul, Minnesota, and Bronx, New York, were not very happy about producing an Emmie Schrader Adams or a Theresa Del Pozzo either.

Incorporating these nine women's stories into the historical narratives of the civil rights era will ultimately be the job of historians. For all of their historical self-consciousness, these authors are primarily interested in telling their own stories as they understand them personally and emotionally, not as an analysis of America in the 1960s or even of the civil rights movement. Dorothy Dawson Burlage ends her essay with a postscript that explains the difference. A few weeks before her chapter was to go to press, she found some thirty-year-old storage boxes containing her movement papers and correspondence. "Reading some documents, I noticed that most things were exactly as I remembered," she writes. "However, it is clear from writing my story that there is the actual history of what happened and then there is the past that resides in my memory, which is selective and sometimes may be mistaken. I have told the story as honestly as I can and believe that if there are inaccuracies or omissions, what I have written reflects the truths of my heart" (p. 129-30). Taking their cues from these deeply honest and intimate personal essays, historians should both bring their analytical tools to bear and be very grateful for this rich new set of sources.

Notes

[1]. Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 132.

[2]. Recent work in southern history that focuses on individual and collective memory includes Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, " 'You Must Remember This': Autobiography as Social Critique," *Journal of American History* 85 (September 1998), 439-65; Jennifer Fleischner, *Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family, and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed. *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[3]. Sara Evans interviewed several of the authors of *Deep in Our Hearts* for her influential book *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), which emphasizes the 1964 position paper "Women in the Movement," as well as Casey Hayden and Mary King's later memo "Sex and Caste."

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