Brian Ward, ed.. *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001. x + 312 pp. $55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-2074-7.

Reviewed by Kimberly E. Nichols

Emphasizing the Cultural Side of the Freedom Struggle

In his 1990 book, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement*, historian Vincent Harding argued that the history of the modern civil rights struggle lacked cultural perspective and Brian Ward, editor of *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle*, agrees. [1] While Movement scholars have given some attention to the significance of freedom songs, and perhaps offered some discussion of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Ward contends that African American activism and resistance have been viewed largely through political, social, and economic lenses. In the decade since Harding's critique, a number of authors, including William Van Deburg, Robin Kelley, and Barbara Dianne Savage, have produced excellent and innovative scholarship on the Movement's cultural aspects.[2] However, according to Ward, "the significance of their work has yet to register fully in the mainstream of Movement historiography" (p. 3). The reason for this, Ward argues, is the existence of a "master narrative"--an established

story of what the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements were and meant. With this master narrative dominating mainstream American social memory, the new cultural insights recently added to the historiography of the freedom struggle remain marginalized. Therefore, Ward and the other contributors of this anthology seek to deconstruct the master narrative by asking readers to reconsider what they know of the Movement. Furthermore, they wish to augment the new foray in civil rights scholarship by introducing new voices on the subject.

Emphasizing music, film, literature, and media, the thirteen essays included in this collection are cohesive, but by no means comprehensive. And as Ward rightly notes, "as is perhaps inevitable with such volumes, different chapters will no doubt seem more innovative and informative, relevant and revelatory, to different readers, depending on the particular expertise and expectations they bring to their reading" (p. 3). Many chapters require the reader to really "think outside the box," while others provide simple commentary on various cultural aspects of the African

American freedom struggle. While the culminating effect of this collection will no doubt be educational to all those who delve into its pages, students and scholars of the Civil Rights Movement will find this text most accessible. While not all chapters are mentioned below, a cross-section is represented for a fair appraisal of the material covered.[3]

Civil rights activist Julian Bond and Movement scholar Jenny Walker examine the role of contemporary electronic and print media in shaping historical conceptions of the southern, church-based, nonviolent era and the northern, secular, Black Power era. Bond's essay, "The Media and the Movement: Looking Back from the Southern Front," is a straightforward, detailed account of the relationship between the mainstream news media and the struggle for African American civil rights. From the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 to the march in Selma in 1965, Bond contends that the news media was sympathetic to the ideals and goals of the Movement, spurring further activism by demonstrating the unreasonable nature of racial segregation. However, the positive tone and influence the media had over the Movement evaporated with the emergence of Black Power and urban rioting. As Bond explains, media images no longer depicted African American protesters as victims of white violence. With blacks rioting and calling for self-defense instead of nonviolence, the press portrayed African Americans as the beaters, no longer the beaten. And with many whites believing that "the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts rendered further black demands and protests little more than wanton troublemaking" (p. 34), the mainstream news media began to scrutinize and criticize black activism.

In "A Media-Made Movement? Black Violence and Nonviolence in the Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," Walker further examines the disparities in media coverage between the nonviolent and Black Power phases of the Movement.

Walker suggests that while black violence has been made a feature of the post-Selma struggle, it was ever present during the entire Civil Rights Movement. According to her evidence, the media of the early Movement simply underrepresented the violence that occurred "around the edges, and occasionally in the midst of the putatively nonviolent" era (p. 48). And on the rare occasion when southern white newspapers did report black violence, it was usually disassociated with Movement activity, and portrayed as an act of criminality, not resistance. While critical of the media, Walker admonishes Movement historians for not exposing the early instances of violence in their studies. If historians would reveal and acknowledge the pervasiveness of black violence during the nonviolent civil rights era, Walker believes that the "real and imagined" violence of the Black Power era would represent "a far less radical departure than most historians have assumed" (p. 61) and demonstrate a great degree of continuity between the eras.

Guido van Rijn and David Chappell provide engaging chapters on the relationship between African American music, race relations, and the freedom struggle. Van Rijn's essay, "Climbing the Mountaintop: African American Blues and Gospel Songs from the Civil Rights Years," demonstrates the various ways in which African Americans responded to public figures, in particular Martin Luther King Jr. and the postwar presidents, by examining the lyrics to a number of long-lost songs. Through his investigation, van Rijn observes that at a time when there seemed much to sing about in praise or in sorrow, few songs concerning the Movement were recorded. Van Rijn suggests that "artists, their managers, and their labels, not to mention distributors, theater booking agencies, and radio station managers, were permanently concerned about the adverse effects overtly political songs might have on both their financial and physical well being" (p. 126). Therefore, van Rijn

rightly concludes that the racial situation critically affected the recording industry.

In "Hip Like Me: Racial Cross-Dressing in Pop Music Before Elvis," Chappell aptly demonstrates how black and white entertainers broke down racial barriers, "more or less accidentally," through a "democratic frenzy of music borrowing, theft, homage, parody, and mutual instruction across racial lines" (p. 104). However, Chappell suggests without much evidence that this "racial cross-dressing" then helped to shape "America's conscious and subconscious attitudes about race and freedom, thus preparing the psychological and ideological ground for changes that protests finally brought" (p. 105).

William Van Deburg and Eithne Quinn explore cultural stereotypes and their impact on the Black Power Movement. In "Villains, Demons, and Social Bandits: White Fear of the Black Cultural Revolution," Van Deburg offers a stimulating discussion of how culturally constructed white perceptions of "blackness" caused white America to vehemently oppose the Black Power Movement. Analyzing the social construction of blackness throughout history, Van Deburg provides ample evidence to demonstrate that whites were terrified of cries for "black" power, "causing them to view all manner of black power activists as dangerous, threatening, even villainous and demonic" (p. 199). While whites stereotyped black power activists as villains, African Americans refused to negate the stereotypes, and even embraced images of dark-skinned villains as heroes. The respectability desired by so many in the early Civil Rights Movement was now replaced with the "independent, evil, cunning, streetwise 'Bad Niggers'" whites dreaded" (p. 7).

Quinn's essay, "'Pimpin' Ain't Easy': Work, Play, and 'Lifestylization' of the Black Pimp Figure in Early 1970s America," takes a closer look at Van Deburg's "heroic hustler" -- the black pimp. Recognizing that the pimp figure has long been a street cultural "antihero" in black America, Quinn ex-

plains that much of his appeal came from his dismissal of traditional attitudes of work and leisure. With his own flare for style and his own brand of work ethic, the black pimp was viewed as an entrepreneur, a consummate capitalist who earned his own way, on his own terms. This independence and initiative exhibited by the black male pimp made him a popular-cultural icon for African Americans during the political and social upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Sharon Monteith and Trudier Harris explore the ways in which black and white writers dealt with the legacy of Martin Luther King and the Movement in their fiction. Monteith's essay, "The 1960s Echo On: Images of Martin Luther King Jr. as Deployed by White Writers of Contemporary Fiction," focuses on the literature of three southern white women who write about interracial relationships among women in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Monteith contends that the white female characters of these novels were driven by "King's moral authority and the moral imperative of the civil rights movement" to forge personal relationships with black women (p. 267).

In "The Power of Martyrdom: The Incorporation of Martin Luther King Jr. and His Philosophy into African American Literature," Harris examines how the assassination of King transformed and unified African Americans. In the last years of his life, King had as many opponents as supporters among African Americans. However, his death converted African American writers who had once been critical of King's philosophical and political views. Martyring him, African American writers used King's life, beliefs, and death as a means to condemn white America and racism. The emergence of this new literature unified most African Americans, who then rallied behind "the belief that white Americans should die for the crime of King's death and that American itself should be destroyed" (p. 274).

Ward must be commended for bringing together such an impressive array of essays, though

being the director of the 1998 Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Conference on Civil Rights and Race Relations, where most of these essays were presented, probably made it easier for him. His hope for producing this work was to "illustrate the kinds of insights into postwar American race relations, black and white racial consciousness, and the struggle for racial justice which can be afforded by closer attention to the interlocking worlds of media and culture, art and entertainment" (p. 3). I believe he has successfully risen to his challenge. By helping to blaze a new path to a familiar destination, *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle* makes a significant contribution to the historiography of the Movement.

Notes

[1]. Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement* (New York: Orbis, 1990). The need for further cultural study of the Civil Rights Movement is also mentioned in Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *Journal of Southern History* 16 (November 2000): 834.

[2]. William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996); and Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[3]. The chapters not mentioned in this review are as follows: "Black-Oriented Radio and the Civil Rights Movement" by Stephen Walsh; "Reclaiming the South: Civil Rights Films and the New Red Menace" by Allison Graham; "Free Jazz: Musical Style and Liberationist Ethic, 1956-1965" by Peter Townsend; "Jazz and Soul, Race and Class, Cultural Nationalists and Black Panthers: A Black Power Debate Revisisted" by Brian Ward; and "Mau-Mauing the Filmmakers: Should Black Power Take the Rap for Killing *Nat Turner*, the Movie" by Scot French.

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