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Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo. *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. xi + 217 pp. $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4563-9; $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2256-2.

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In 1991, Darlene Clark Hine published an essay arguing that in recent histories of black urbanization "there remains an egregious void concerning the experiences of black women migrants."[1] Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo's recent study of black female migrants in the East Bay Area of California is the first historical monograph that attempts to fill that void. By examining the less-studied Second Great Migration of World War II, Lemke-Santangelo also addresses another historiographical gap. The migration of African Americans to urban centers during the 1940s irrevocably changed the racial make-up of American cities, and set the stage for contemporary debates on social policy and the "underclass." Interacting with these debates and giving voice to female migrants, Lemke-Santangelo is aware of the important new ground she is breaking in this work, and thus makes her arguments with care and precision. Her book is elegantly written, engaging, and an important contribution to the fields of urban, African American, and women's history.

The bulk of Lemke-Santangelo's narrative is based on fifty oral interviews she carried out in the East Bay, and the stirring details that emerge from these interviews are the principal strength of the book. The first three chapters of the book are chronological, detailing the "terrible sweetness" of migrants' southern childhood, and the central role that migrant women played in the uprooting and resettlement of black families to the West. These migrants come from religious, working-class, two-parent households. They were not the poor sharecroppers that have formed the primary image of the "typical" African American migrant, but were relatively well educated and had lived in southern cities prior to migration. Lemke-Santangelo emphasizes that their decision to migrate was based on a "drive for self-determination" and "resistance to economic marginalization and dependency" learned from their mothers and female relatives (p. 46). These characteristics served them well in the East Bay, where newcomers faced overcrowded housing, job discrimination, and criticism from the black "old-timers" who resented the influx of southern migrants. Despite these obstacles African American women created stable homes and a vibrant new community that actively contradicted the myth that migrants were "unassimilable."

The remainder of Lemke-Santangelo's book proceeds topically, covering migrant's wage labor, "cultural work" (in homes, churches, and neighborhoods), and collective action in the East Bay. Throughout, Lemke-Santangelo stresses the migrant's "ethic of care" which she defines as "an awareness that survival was linked to the well-being of relatives and neighbors" (p. 4). It was this ethic that gave migrants an "alternate source of status and identity as homemakers, church women, and community workers" (p. 113). After initially working in the defense industry, many migrant women found paid labor in the public sector after the war–a significant form of employment for African American women that has been largely overlooked by scholars. At times women's paid labor created conflict within marriages, conflicts that Lemke-Santangelo suggests were resolved by migrant women's emphasis on their relatively non-threatening "homemaker" role.

Lemke-Santangelo's description of the "cultural work" of migrants and their powerful commitment to the welfare of community and family is the highlight of her book. Details of child-care arrangements, the importance of southern food, gardening, and quilting give the

reader a vivid sense of daily life in the East Bay black community–a picture largely missing from most migration and urban histories. Such details would not be possible without the voices of the migrants themselves, which Lemke-Santangelo places center-stage. Nor are these stories incidental to the history of migration, merely colorful anecdotes of a romantic past. Rather, it is clear that the "ethic of care" migrant women practiced comprised the very structure of the migration process. They provided temporary homes for recent arrivals and encouraged others to join the new urban community. With frequent visits back to the South, and the continuation of southern cultural practices, they also shaped a new communal identity that was based on "southernness," which Lemke-Santangelo argues was the "building block of migrant communities" (p. 135). Their activism and strength also laid the groundwork for postwar political activity in the East Bay, as the black community fought housing segregation, discrimination in public education, and challenged the local Republican political elite.

Overall, Lemke-Santangelo's work can be considered part of the "community building" model of black urban studies. In his study of black Detroit, Richard W. Thomas defines this model as an "organic approach to understanding the sum total of the historical efforts of blacks ... to survive and progress."[2] By focusing on racial progress, conflicts within the African American community tend to be downplayed in favor of a picture of overall consensus about common goals. Following this model, Lemke-Santangelo's narrative is linear, detailing the largely successful struggles of black women in the face of discrimination in the workplace, schools, and housing. Although she posits a linear narrative, her evidence is, by her own admission, partial. In her introduction Lemke-Santangelo notes that her informants "can be characterized as successful migrants" (p. 9). They were solidly working class women who chose to stay in California after World War II and had immense pride for their own, and their community's, accomplishments. Women who returned to the South after the war, women who did not obtain public sector white-collar jobs, and who, perhaps, died in poverty, are absent from this story. Reading her book, one wonders about the missing voices of "unsuccessful" migrants, or migrants who do not fit into normative models of success–two-parent households, well-educated, employed, etc. The memories of her working-class female informants are partial as well, a fact that Lemke-Santangelo also freely acknowledges. Given this, I wished Lemke-Santangelo had made more use of archival sources–such as reports from social service agencies, newspapers, and police records–to supplement her oral histories and bring to light the stories of "unsuccessful" migrants. This more complex history might have also given us a less linear and more comprehensive sense of the community-building process.

Lemke-Santangelo, however, makes clear that describing exactly "what really happened" is not her aim. Rather, she is interested in "how people use the past to produce individual or collective meaning and identity" (p. 8). Her narrative reveals this process with great clarity–migrant women created community based on commonalities of religious belief, southern childhoods, experiences with wage labor, and commitments to community activism. However, in this book Lemke-Santangelo is also trying to refute the "culture of poverty" thesis–in particular, the argument put forth by Nicholas Lemann in his book *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America.* While Lemann views southern migrants as carrying an "ethic of dependency" as they left their southern homes, Lemke-Santangelo describes a powerful "ethic of care," which built strong communities in cities of the West and North. I am strongly sympathetic to Lemke-Santangelo's argument, and the life histories of her informants clearly negate Lemann's stereotypes of migrants as sharecroppers who "undermined family stability, the work ethic, and moral values" (p. 180). However, her methodology, primarily relying on oral histories, leaves her open for criticism.

I am hopeful, however, that further studies on the Second Great Migration will complete the important work that Lemke-Santangelo has begun. Meanwhile I encourage historians to consider using this highly readable book in their courses in urban, women's, or African American history. I have added the book to my own course in African American women's history for the spring semester and am looking forward to exposing my students to the stirring stories of these migrant women.

Notes

[1]. Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Joe William Trotter, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 127.

[2]. Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), xi.

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