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Kathleen M. Brown. *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. xvi + 496 pp. $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4623-0; $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2307-1.

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Years ago, when Joan Scott pointed out the utility of gender as a mode of historical analysis, she most likely had in mind mainly the possibilities of inclusivity. She did not envision the wonderful work that has been produced here by Kathleen Brown, assistant professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania. Brown's brilliant work on race, gender and power in colonial Virginia is far more than inclusive. In a comprehensive, thoughtful, enlightening work, Brown has made gender and race the central modes of analysis in an attempt to understand the societal, political, and legal institutions of colonial Virginia.

Drawing on every conceivable source on colonial Virginia, from tax rolls, deeds, county court records, government documents, narrative histories of the colony by its early occupants, court minutes, newspapers, statutes, and wills and inventories, and possessing a firm command of the secondary literature on virtually every aspect of colonial Virginia and Chesapeake history from the most traditional to the most current and pathbreaking, Brown has woven a marvelous synthesis of those sources that convincingly explains the way in which the social categories of race and gender were continually redefined by Virginians so that they might better support the patriarchy of elite Virginia society that existed by the Revolution.

Gender as a social category to delineate women's and men's proper roles had a long tradition in Europe which transferred only in part to the New World, where high death rates and close proximity to Native Americans provided men and women with glimpses of and opportunities to pursue different living patterns. Having carefully defined her terms in the introduction, in the first section of her work Brown looks at the degree to which ideas about gender transferred to America. The degree of transference was crucial, since the ideas of patriarchy, subordination, and dominance were the lynchpins upon which societal structure, hierarchy, and political authority rested and by which they were justified. As England moved to conquer new lands, a gendered discourse based on domestic submission and male ownership of property provided conquerors with both a rationale for conquering and recognition of their duties of ownership and management.

Early encounters with Indians on the American frontier disrupted the definitions of gender, however, and the English were forced to further refine what was essential about masculinity and femininity in order to maintain their own sense of superiority. As Native Americans were pushed farther west, English colonists turned inward and struggled to redefine gender roles in a society where labor was so crucial to survival that English traditions of male/female roles could not be sustained. They did this in part by defining as "good wives" those women who more closely resembled the goodwife of English tradition (married and employed in primarily domestic labor) and defining those women who were unmarried, lacking domestic skills, poor, and often indentured servants as "nasty wenches." Having established a gendered identity, colonists then turned to engendering racial differences.

In part two of her work, Brown argues that race is in part a social construct, and that the construct here was used to further define English identity in the New World. As the tobacco economy of colonial Virginia redefined the role of goodwife prior to 1670, a further refinement of identity for white Virginians of their place in the patriarchy came through tax laws that differentiated between black and white women, hereditary slavery based on the mother's race and status (rather than the traditional English view) and legal definitions of a "Christian." Bacon's Rebellion provided an opportunity

for the men of Virginia to redefine masculinity in a more usable form, as it led to a political makeover in the colony, when white men aspiring to higher status achieved their goal of attaining similar privileges to those of the gentry patriarchs. That redefinition restricted women's lives further for, as Brown points out, "In a political game in which planters often found it necessary to position themselves as feminine supplicants to imperial authority, it was perhaps comforting to reassert, frequently and publicly, their social identities as men and their separateness from women" (p. 186). Additional restrictions on women took the form of legislation against interracial unions and redefinitions of mixed-race individuals as non-white, and therefore automatically lesser than free white men. Race and gender, not class, were Virginia's "mainspring of social control" (p. 219).

In Part Three, "Class and Power in the Eighteenth Century," Brown carries her analysis forward to the Revolutionary era. She examines marriage, hospitality, architecture, gossip, changing sex ratios, and domestic battles between husbands and wives to trace the formation of class, the solidification of power in the hands of patriarchs, and the constant vigilance exercised by the patriarchy to maintain control over rebellious servants, slaves, wives, and children. The driving impetus here was a desire by white male Virginians to formulate an identity with which they could be comfortable and one that hearkened to English tradition. But the demands placed upon this process by the differences inherent in the new land and its multi-racial population meant that English definitions were never going to be enough. Race and gender definitions differed from those of England's. In the end, goodwives were white, nasty wenches were black, and anxious patriarchs were everywhere.

The only possible caveat to the reader here is that Brown does not particularly examine the intellectual underpinnings of the formation of notions about gender or race. But that is a truly minor quibble, and no one should be expected to do everything. This is a wonderful work, and casts a new and very bright light on the complex process of identity formation as well as on the formation of class and racialized slavery in the colony of Virginia.

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