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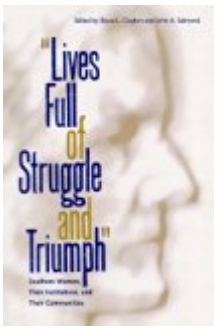

Bruce L. Clayton, John A. Salmond, eds.. *"Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph": Southern Women, Their Institutions, and Their Communities.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. vii + 323 pp. $55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-2675-6.

Reviewed by Sidney Bland

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Who better than pioneer scholar Anne Firor Scott to remind us of how far we have come and how much has changed in the field of southern women's history since she took her fledgling steps in the early 1960s? Scott's introduction to this collection of essays cites trends in the recent outpouring of research and writing on southern women: women as creators, not subjects, of change; the examination of African-American women from their own perspective rather than from the records of whites, capitalizing in particular on the richness of oral histories; the blossoming of studies in labor history and aspects of religious history heretofore neglected, such as non-Protestant groups; a renewed interest in women and politics; the continued rich intersection of race, class, and gender (and increased focus on gender in understanding patriarchal society); and the blend of experienced scholars and young historians who continue to spin off each other to enrich our understanding of black and white southern women.

"Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph" consists of fourteen essays (eleven written by women). Some of the authors, like Orville Burton, Elizabeth Jacoway, Pamela Tyler, Paula Treckel, Karen Cox, and Catherine Fosl, are familiar for the breadth and depth of their scholarship in women's history and southern history. Other contributors are cutting their teeth yet are already impressive with the originality of their research, the quality of their analysis, and the vitality they have brought to the task.

Change is the binding agent of these essays. The book is, collectively, a chronicling of change at the personal and societal level; women finding courage to challenge convention, patriarchy, political power, and entrenched racism and sexism. The anthology is a detailing of the impact of change on the networks and communities in which southern women worked, lived, and exercised agency.

Chronologically there is imbalance, with the bulk of the essays--parts 2, 3 and 4--covering the watershed Civil War era, the South in the Jim Crow period and just beyond, and, finally, the tumult of the sixties and their aftermath. Only part 1, centering on the most private of institutions,

marriage, and treating the educational experience of students at southern female academies in a single essay, covers the antebellum South.

Most of the essays have race as a central component, though gender and class are closely interwoven. Even Michelle Haberland's well-done closing essay on organizing women in the lingerie manufacturing plant of Vanity Fair in Jackson, Alabama, notes how the growing presence of African Americans in the once all-white plant during the sixties and seventies complicated the organizational efforts of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.

Three windows into the institution of marriage during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offer a range of tensions and variations. The marriage of William Byrd II and Lucy Parke Byrd was "filled with tensions over power and intimacy, authority and love, reason and passions" (p. 12), with the couple's slaves often innocent victims in this fascinating eighteenth-century battle of wills. Over a century later, Sarah Morgan fashioned a new post-Civil War ideal and identity for herself and others through her numerous editorials for her future husband, Francis Warrington Dawson, editor of the *Charleston News and Courier*, although scholars disagree as to the resolution of the tension between Morgan's feminism and her "southernism." Her writing career ended with her marriage and to what extent this is a "lived-happily-ever-after" story is unclear. The relationship of Blanche Butler Ames and her husband, Adelbert, a Reconstruction military governor and later U.S. senator from Mississippi, plays out against the backdrop of the Civil War and its aftermath. The centrality of Blanche Ames in the affairs of her husband at the vortex of Reconstruction programs in Mississippi belies the long-held view of southern politics as an all-male domain. Authors of these initial essays excel in their use of diaries and family letters.

Orville Burton's piece on women on the Confederate home front in Edgefield County, South Carolina, distilled in part from his seminal study of that rural district, lays out the direction that the essays on women in the Civil War era will take--namely, that war generated a myriad of new roles for women in their communities, resulting in increased influence and culminating in loyalty and dedication to the Lost Cause.[1] Drawing from her doctoral research, Barbara Mattick concludes that the educational and cultural contributions of the Catholic Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St. Joseph in postwar St. Augustine, Florida, brought them respect and love from their community as they became mentors for future generations of black and white youth. Karen Cox's thorough analysis of the infancy of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, drawn from her fine book on the organization, maintained that the Daughters both "reaffirmed the region's conservative traditions" (p. 141) and "carved a niche for themselves in the political culture" (pp. 137-138) as New Women in the New South.[2]

The final seven essays in "Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph" are set in the segregation era and its aftermath. Challenging Kathleen Blee's view of the Ku Klux Klan as having a liberating effect on women, Glenn Feldman sees Klan women in Alabama as both policers and policed. He finds these wives, daughters, girlfriends, mothers, and sisters of the estimated 115,000 male members of the state KKK in the 1920s sympathetic to the Klan's principles and ideologies, if not its actual methods. Hate is likewise part of the story in Pamela Tyler's interesting essay on southern women's views of Eleanor Roosevelt between 1933 and 1945. Many "sent venom" (p. 196) in their letters, viewing the President's wife as a dire threat to the region's twin pillars of white supremacy and patriarchy; others saw her as a fairy godmother and admirable humanitarian.

The stories of two living African-American women, Esther Cooper Jackson and Thelma

McGee, are both courageous and inspiring, and essayists Sarah Hart Brown and Kathi Kern, respectively, have done commendable work in rescuing them from oblivion. Undergraduate work at Oberlin College and graduate studies at Fisk University with eminent sociologist Dr. Charles Johnson preceded Esther Cooper's 1941 marriage to "Jack" Jackson, an activist at Virginia Union and Howard universities and later a Communist party organizer. By the time of her marriage, Cooper's pioneering field work for civil rights in Alabama had positioned her to become executive director of the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC). During her tenure SNYC "fought racial discrimination in the armed forces, expanded the voter registration drive, continued to investigate police brutality cases and civil liberties violations, collected a mountain of data on discrimination for the Fair Employment Practices Act in 1943, and even waged a campaign to end segregation on buses" (p. 215). A forced five-year separation from her husband because of his full-time Communist Party work and indictment under the Smith Act resulted in constant FBI surveillance of Esther and resulted in her release from both the Urban League and the National Board of the Girl Scouts for political reasons. She persevered, however, and became co-founder (with Shirley Graham Du Bois) and managing editor of the important journal of radical thought and the international civil rights struggle, ***Freedomways: A Quarterly Review of the Freedom Movement***, from 1961 until 1986, when it ceased publication.

Likening Thelma McGee's story to that of Anne Moody in ***Coming of Age in Mississippi***, Kathi Kern writes of the sustaining power of family and community and survival and triumph in the heart of the Mississippi Delta.[3] Rising above her sharecropper origins on area plantations and the abuse that went with it, McGee and her siblings became a "highly disciplined economic unit" (p. 233), waging a heroic struggle from the 1950s to the present to hold on to substantial cotton farm acreage that had been in the family since World War I. Discouraged from attending college, McGee went anyway, graduating from Jackson State University amidst the violence of the civil rights movement to become a schoolteacher, yet returning virtually every weekend to work the family's land and attend her church. At a time when black landownership in Mississippi was in decline and blacks were moving north, Thelma McGee's life tells a different story.

Catherine Fosl's important essay reminds us that Anne McCarty Braden is a white, native-born, southern radical heroine unto herself. In modern southern women's history, Braden is, says Fosl, "a connecting figure between consciousness about race and also class and gender" and "a bridge of sorts between generations; between blacks and whites; and between liberals and the left" (p. 249), as well as a link "between the civil rights movement and other social movements it spawned" (p. 260). Elizabeth Jacoway brings the civil rights focus of this book to a close through examination of Arkansan Vivion Brewer's leadership of the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools during the Little Rock school crisis, a story told in Brewer's "remarkable memoir," ***The Embattled Ladies of Little Rock***.[4]

Southern women's history has come a long way from that lost generation of "unheard voices" to whom Anne Scott was so indebted and whom she lifted up in her work of the same title just over a decade ago.[5] ***"Lives Full of Struggle and Triumph"*** is an exceptional addition to the flood of scholarly work that ultimately ties back to that early trickle of writing from five pioneer social historians, often treated as marginal workers in a field most male historians simply did not recognize.

Notes

[1]. Orville V. Burton, ***In My Father's House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina*** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

[2]. Karen L. Cox, ***Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*** (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

[3]. Anne Moody, ***Coming of Age in Mississippi*** (1968; reprint, NewYork: Dell, 1976).

[4]. Vivion Lenon Brewer, ***The Embattled Ladies of Little Rock: 1958-1963, The Struggle to Save Public Education at Central High*** (Fort Bragg: Lost Coast Press, 1999).

[5]. Anne Firor Scott's edited volume entitled ***Unheard Voices: The First Historians of Southern Women*** (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993) chronicles the lives and careers of Virginia Gearhart Gray, Marjorie Mendenhall, Julia Cherry Spruill, Guion Griffis Johnson, and Eleanor Boatwright, five women historians who wrote between 1927 and 1941 and whose work for many years went largely unheard of and unread. Spruill's ***Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*** (1938; reprint, NewYork: Russell & Russell, 1969) is considered a classic in American social history, and the Southern Association for Women Historians annually awards the Julia Cherry Spruill prize for the best new book in southern women's history.