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The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education edited by Walter J. Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr., and Jon L. Wakelyn

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education. Edited by Walter J. Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr., and Jon L. Wakelyn. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985. Index. \$25.00 cloth.

Reviewing an anthology is always difficult. But the task is especially cumbersome when the text results from an academic conference. Despite prominent authors represented, excellent work included, and editors' valiant efforts to connect diverse essays, conference proceedings often lack coherence and organization. They patch together individual efforts to create an illusion of unity. The reader must view the book through an imposed framework. This collection of essays presented during a two day "Symposium on the South" is no exception. The editors and contributors are foremost in the field of Southern history. Yet paradoxically the thirteen essays presented here are not ordered historically. Instead the editors fit the essays into three overlapping, converging subject areas: women, family, and education. Most of the essays pertain to two or more of these areas, contributing further to the reader's confusion. As a result of this loose organization, the text jerks the reader back and forth between settings, time periods, and subjects toward no general conclusion. The introduction to the volume does not resolve the reader's quandary as to its goals or purpose.

Still, each essay read individually is good. Many of them illustrate the political implications of personal experience and restore the individual to history. The stated goal of this book is "to provoke questions for all students of southern society, especially those who want to learn more about ordinary lives" (p. xv).

Most congruent with this purpose are the essays about education. Since few professional historians have written about Southern higher education, we have little information about the effect of schooling upon personal lives and the relationship between education and its cultural context. Here we learn about how the conservative socialization provided by female academies could be negated by the subversive sisterhood these schools encouraged. Similarly in men's colleges there were influences which tended to subvert family control. Thomas G. Dyers' enlightening historiographical essay about higher education in the South points to numerous untapped areas for scholarly research. There is a need for balanced and objective (rather than celebratory) institutional histories. There have been few historical studies of the effects of Reconstruction, the new South, or desegregation upon education! And there have been no studies of the role of athletics in Southern universities. Are these areas which individuals are afraid to research? Such gaps in scholarship leave many questions unanswered.

Only two essays are specifically about the Southern family, and both are perceptive. Orville Vernon Burton reveals that the Civil War and Reconstruction had a "differential impact" upon young Southern men. The black community remained stable, and black men adjusted well to historical changes; but the white community experienced an economic decline, and white men experienced a crisis of confidence. In a sensitive essay entitled "Folks Like Us: The Southern Poor White Family, 1865-1935," J. Wayne Flynt utilizes oral histories and other personal testimony to dispel stereotypes, foster understanding, and emphasize the diversity of poor white lives.

Most of the essays about women address narrower topics stressing women's historical agency in areas heretofore unrecognized. These are very isolated case studies which together provide only a sketchy outline of some of the factors affecting Southern women between the eighteenth century and the Progressive Era. For example, Carol M. Bleser studies autobiographical sources and private correspondence to discover that Elizabeth Frances McCall Perry was the principal adviser to her less controversial, less ambitious, and less outspoken husband, South Carolina legislator Benjamin Perry. In his autobiography, Perry suppressed all evidence of his wife's non-traditional role in their marriage. But Bleser's analysis of the couple's correspondence - 540 previously unavailable letters - provides a glimpse of Elizabeth Perry's exceptionally strong voice in her husband's political career.

More provocative and all-encompassing is Catherine Clinton's "Caught in the Web of the Big House: Women and Slavery," which exposes the antebellum legacy of persistent patterns of sexual oppression that covertly united Southern women while racism overtly locked them in competitive conflict. As historical evidence in two other recent books - Joanne V. Hawks and Sheila Skemp's *Sex, Race, and the Role of Women in the South* (University Press of Mississippi, 1983) and Minrose C. Gwin's literary study *Black and White Women of the Old South* (University of Tennessee Press, 1985) - also document, this is a legacy which contemporary Southern women need to combat.

While the lives of ordinary Southerners have been diverse and multifaceted, they have also been altered by cultural and historical changes. Their living record is history in its most basic sense. From the study of everyday lives in times past we can look beneath the surface of political history to discover facts and details which were more relevant to a majority of Southern lives. Historical studies like these prevent both the social scientist's tendency to over-generalize and the outsider's tendency to stereotype.

Ruth A. Banes

Our Story of Gulfport, Florida. By the Gulfport Historical Society. Gulfport, Florida, 1985. Gulfport Historical Society. Illustrations. Maps. Pp. 341. \$13.25

Our Story of Gulfport, Florida is a compilation of the history of the city of Gulfport by the Gulfport Historical Society. The contributors to this local history volume number over fifty, and it is therefore not practical to list all of them. An acknowledgement should be made, however, of the Editorial Committee who brought all of the pieces together and furnished the glue to make this endeavor both informative and readable. The Editorial Committee consisted of Mary Atkinson, Agnes Conron, Willard B. Simonds, Genevieve Smith, and Frances Purday, chairperson.

As is usual, the early history of the city proved to be the most interesting. The early settlers who came to this tip of land on Boca Ceiga Bay were much like other settlers on the Pinellas peninsula. They lived off the land and the abundance provided by the warm waters surrounding them. Fish and game were plentiful, and it was easy to grow crops in a favorable climate. During those early years, the city went through several name changes. It started out as Disston City, so named by real estate tycoon Hamilton Disston, who had purchased four million acres from the state. The post office used the name Bonafacio until 1890, because there was already another