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***In the Way of Our Grandmothers: A Cultural View of Twentieth-Century Midwifery in Florida* by Debra Anne Susie**

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after World War I. Killing in secrecy, rather than before large crowds, was more characteristic of the late 1930s than 1900.

In 1917 and again in 1927, Tampa leaders acted firmly to prevent lynchings, requesting assistance from the National Guard and joining the forces protecting the prisoners in both cases. In 1927, they formed a “vigilance committee” of “600 ‘leading citizens’” which patrolled the streets along with other military and police personnel. Who then were the 1,000 people who tried to storm the jail in their quest for alleged murderers in 1917 and 1927? Obviously, they were angry, for they rioted for three days in the latter year, ceasing only after soldiers killed six of them. What socio-economic interests did they represent? What tensions, in addition to labor, beset this community? Is it possible that Tampa’s labor violence was less “southern” than Ingalls supposed and that the non-labor-affiliated lynchings and attempted lynchings were less “establishment?”

These possibilities deserve consideration, but they should not obscure the importance of Ingalls’ contribution. Although he does not analyze conflict among Tampa whites, he documents impressively the unlimited ends to which American businessmen would go to defeat labor, the support throughout the nation which such actions could generate, and the persistence of radical proclivities among Tampa’s cigarworkers, despite, or perhaps in part because of, their lack of success. He also argues persuasively that class solidarity existed across ethnic lines, in the case of native businessmen and immigrant manufacturers on the one hand, and white and minority union members on the other. In short, rather than explicating some uniquely southern phenomenon, this book reveals a great deal about the American establishment and the lengths to which it will go, when given tacit approval, to protect class hegemony. It deserves a wide reading.

Gail W. O’Brien

In the Way of Our Grandmothers: A Cultural View of Twentieth-Century Midwifery in Florida. By Debra Anne Susie. Athens, Georgia, 1988. University of Georgia Press. Pp. ix, 254. Preface. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$25.00.

In this book, Debra Anne Susie provides an excellent account of lay midwifery mostly from the perspectives of African-American lay midwives and the women they served. She tells the story of the “granny” midlife in Florida, stressing her values, principles, commitments, tradition and noting the skills she acquired from “hands on” experience. She also describes various strategies employed by Florida State Health officials to discredit the lay midwife and to eliminate her practice. Significant among these was the plan of Health officials, who saw the lay midwife as a “necessary evil to be borne until medical services were improved” (p. 8), to establish a public health care program to educate and license midwives. This, the author says, was the immediate goal; but the longterm plan “was to replace the lay midwives with modern medical and hospital services, to improve, regulate, and eventually to eliminate midwifery” (p. 8).

Attainment of this ultimate goal took a long time. This was true, first, because hospital facilities frequently failed to reach outlying rural areas where the bulk of the black population lived. Most importantly, because of the segregated environment in the southern United States,

Florida hospitals provided care to blacks only for emergencies and only in hospital basements. It was this segregated environment, the author notes, that prolonged the services of lay midwives.

The author explains that the black community in Florida viewed the practice of midwifery as “a personal calling, whether directly from God or indirectly through a respected elderly midwife” (p. 8). She describes how several of the African-American midwives she interviewed received their calling to the practice and asserts that most of them had a strong desire to pass down their craft, especially to a family member who demonstrated her aptitude for midwifery through an apprenticeship.

According to the author’s findings, the birthing chamber was the focal point of a variety of female attachments and relationships between the laboring woman, her midwife, family members and a number of other females, all gathered to support the laboring woman throughout her birthing experience. The midwife’s services, she notes, did not end with the birth of the child. Part of her responsibility was to provide her client postpartum care for at least ten days. For the midwife, her clients and their families and support groups, the entire birthing process was very exciting and was viewed as within the natural province of women. The midwife was held in the highest respect in her community. “She was a local wise woman who presided over the important occasion of birth,” and was called on for other healing remedies as well.

The author’s subsequent account includes a discussion of the attitude of the State of Florida and its officials toward lay midwives during the process of implementing plans to eliminate the practice of midwifery. A program of registering all midwives was the first phase of the elimination plan. However, the midwives who were required to register with County Health Departments did not understand that doing so would begin a chain of events that would lead to the demise of their craft. Those who voluntarily registered believed that the state was legalizing their trade and providing an opportunity for training and for refinement of their craft.

Other elements of the phasing out process included forced retirement of registered midwives and the requirement that the lay midwives obtain a physician’s permit. Other factors cooperated with the wishes of the state. The availability of federal funds for health care and desegregation laws made hospital care and facilities available to blacks and drastically reduced the number of doctors’ permits for home births. Revived interest in midwifery (home birth) among the white middle class in the 1970s and the harassment of practitioners by various county health departments led to the passage of a midwifery statute by the Florida legislature in 1984. The statute eliminated further training or promotion of lay midwives in Florida and was designed to replace the traditional lay midwife with the nurse-midwife. As a consequence of the statute and earlier measures, the rich tradition, skills and wisdom of black midwives in Florida are gone forever, and until now unnoticed.

The author of this book dwells entirely on the experience of African-American lay midwives. Since midwifery is an age-old tradition that transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries, her account should have included experiences and perspectives other than those of blacks on the subject. However, the book is an excellent tribute to lay midwifery and one that should be of interest to libraries and students of the subject.

Emma B. Ohaegbulam