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***The Silencing of Ruby McCollum: Race, Class, and Gender in the South* by Tammy Evans**

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Silencing of Ruby McCollum: Race, Class, and Gender in the South. By Tammy Evans. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. xv, 167 pp. Foreword by Jacqueline Jones Royster, acknowledgments, introduction, photographs, conclusion, afterword by Lynn Worsham, appendix, works cited, index. \$29.95 cloth).

Readers of Florida history will be familiar with the events of Sunday, August 3, 1952. Ruby McCollum, a thirty-seven-year-old well-to-do African American mother of four, walked into the Live Oak medical office of State Senate nominee Dr. Clifford LeRoy Adams and shot him dead. In the “official” version of events, a dispute over a medical bill provided McCollum’s motive, but it soon emerged that she had been Adams’s unwilling and abused mistress. Adams was the father of one of her daughters and was alleged to have fathered the child she was carrying at the time of her arrest. On December 20, McCollum was convicted of first-degree murder, and there was no recommendation of mercy from the all-male, all-white jury, which included former patients of Dr. Adams. A month later, a defense motion for a new trial was denied, and McCollum was sentenced to death on January 17, 1953. She was remanded to Suwannee County Jail rather than the state prison farm at Raiford while her case was appealed to the state supreme court. Eighteen months after her conviction, in July 1954, the court reversed the death sentence and ordered a new trial, but this never took place. In September, McCollum was deemed mentally incompetent to stand trial and was committed to the state mental hospital at Chattahoochee, where she would spend the next twenty years.

By utilizing many court, private, and published sources, as well as a range of theoretical tools, to analyze the competing narratives surrounding the murder and its central actors, Evans presents an intriguing and compelling study of the race, gender, and class dynamics of segregated small-town Florida at mid-century. As a native of Live Oak, and growing up as part of its political and economic white elite, albeit a decade or so after the McCollum-Adams case, Evans offers insights that have particular salience with regard to the conundrums of private, public, and historical memory (especially as the murder is not freely discussed by Live Oak residents fifty years on). Indeed, she describes her study as “dialectic both with and against memory” (xxvi).

Divided into three main chapters, the study begins with an exploration of the use of silence in southern myth making and how this shaped media and popular explanations for McCollum’s actions. “Silence” is indeed the central trope in the study.

Life in the segregated South was characterized by silence and denial. As Evans reminds us, white communities were governed by, and white supremacy was perpetuated by, codes of silence and surveillance. In order to fully understand the complexities of southern history and culture, scholars must attempt to unravel the ways in which dichotomies of race, gender, and class created and perpetuated acts of silence that in turn could both shield people from and expose them to inequality and indignity. In the second chapter, which focuses on McCollum's courtroom experiences, Evans unravels the discursive formations of religion and law that surrounded McCollum's "silence-filled" trials. Full exposure of Adams's relationship to Ruby and her wealthy, bolita-operator husband; the extent of local officials' involvement in illegal gambling and other dubious activities; and a frank discussion of McCollum's motives for shooting her abuser would have levied a serious blow to white supremacy and patriarchy. Thus, court officials and politicians sought, with the complicity of Live Oak's black and white residents, to shape and censor the testimony to conform to an acceptable narrative and to shore up a corrupt and nefarious system. The third chapter provides fascinating insight into the relationship between Zora Neale Hurston and William Bradford Huie, both of whom covered the case for northern black newspapers, published articles and a book on the McCollum-Adams case, and tried unsuccessfully to establish a connection with McCollum and to uncover the "real" story of the murder.

As the book's title underlines, the study focuses on the silencing of Ruby McCollum by legal and community members, but Evans considers also the reasons why McCollum herself may have chosen not to or been unable to articulate her version of events, perhaps as a means of self-preservation to avoid execution. Nonetheless, as Evans notes, "Ruby McCollum is—and has always been—what the words of others have made her" (14). Despite the author's best investigative efforts (for example, in the search for her burial site as detailed in the conclusion), McCollum remains an enigmatic figure—and perhaps aptly so.

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Constructing Floridians: Natives and Europeans in the Colonial Floridas, 1513-1783. By Daniel S. Murphree. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. x, 188 pp. List of maps, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth).

Daniel Murphree asserts that for more than two and a half centuries whites (Europeans) constructed an identity for Florida Indians that changed little from the time of the early Spanish *entradas* until the American Revolution. Colonial Florida offers a good venue to explore this idea because it was the area of the earliest, longest,