

## Review Essay

### The New Postmodern Southern Political History

BY MORGAN KOUSSER

*Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics From Civil War to Civil Rights.* Edited by Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. Pp. xvi, 325. Index. \$55.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper. ISBN 0-691-00192-8 cloth. ISBN 0-691-00193-6 paper.)

In their acknowledgments at the beginning of these essays, which trumpet the arrival of a new southern political history, Jane Dailey, Glenda Gilmore, and Bryant Simon give special thanks to their defenders at "the raucous 'New Directions in Southern Political History' session at the Southern Historical Meeting in Atlanta in 1998" (p. xiii). Along with the late and very much missed Howard Rabinowitz, I was a commentator (and not a defender) at that session.<sup>1</sup> Although I was aware that the panel had instantly attained an almost mythical status, as embellished and, in some in-

<sup>1</sup>My comments on the Dailey and Gilmore papers at that session, which were made available, in manuscript, to Gilmore, substantially paralleled the criticisms of those papers below. The authors neither markedly changed their papers nor responded to the criticisms.

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stances, considerably distorted accounts of the session circulated among historians, I had not previously realized that the myth-making went as far as changing the date of the convention, which actually took place a year earlier, in 1997. It is characteristic of the authors' attitudes toward what one contributor refers to in quotation marks as "facts" (p. 133) that they begin their book by mistaking the date of what they seem to consider a pivotal and traumatic event.

Apparently attempting to insure that their proclaimed insurgency against what they represent as outdated approaches to southern history would arrive with the blessings of the field's leaders already publicly secured, Dailey *et al.* include not only an equivocal, if charitable preface by the creator of post-Reconstruction southern history, my late teacher C. Vann Woodward, but also afterwords by Edward Ayers, Jacquelyn Hall, and Nell Painter. Yet Dailey *et al.*'s introduction seems to ignore the contributions of the irreplaceable Woodward and the generations of students and co-workers he inspired, as though Ulrich B. Phillips's "central theme" of the maintenance of white supremacy were still the conventional wisdom among southern historians, and black and white dissidence had been overlooked previous to this volume. What was the purpose of Woodward's *Strange Career of Jim Crow* if not to "denaturalize white supremacy," which the authors announce as one of their chief innovations (p. 4)? Have southern historians since the classic 1947 survey of black history by John Hope Franklin, Howard Rabinowitz's mentor, or the pioneering collection of primary sources that the too-maligned Herbert Aptheker began publishing in 1951 ignored black agency or resistance, as the authors imply on page five?<sup>2</sup> Didn't Woodward's *Tom Watson* (1938) and *Strange Career* (1955) spotlight white dissenters and have not a great many historians since charted white class conflicts and elite repression?

What is new here is not attention to black and white dissent, but the essayists' view that gender considerations in general and women in particular were central to seemingly every important

<sup>2</sup>John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes* (New York, 1947); Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York, 1951, and six subsequent volumes).

event or trend in southern history. What is disturbing is their unwillingness to consider any other explanations of events or trends or to formulate their own explanations clearly or subject them to hard tests. What is missing are substantial portions of southern political history and many of the most influential shapers of southern politics. As dissidents—always courageous, constantly struggling, victorious even in defeat, never tired, mistaken, or in despair, like other mortals—take center stage, elites shuffle off, silently planning their outrages in the shadows. White supremacy exists in these pages principally as a backdrop to the relentless “dance”—“jumpin’ Jim Crow”—of black resistance (p. 6), and when supremacists do merit brief glimpses, they are usually portrayed as more threatened than threatening, more insecure than in control, more pusillanimous than patriarchal. How can one understand power struggles, even assuming that such conflicts were the whole story in the South, without closely studying those who wielded the vast majority of political, economic, and social power in the region? And how could male elites have retained power so long and so securely if they were so timorous? Dailey *et al.*’s story is one of oppression with the thoughts, words, and actions of the oppressors largely left out.<sup>3</sup>

It is, as well, political history with the politics left out. As the authors adopt the expansive definition of politics introduced by historians of women in the 1970s and 1980s, which includes the family and private life,<sup>4</sup> they simultaneously contract the public political sphere, ignoring most electoral and all legislative, executive, and judicial politics, all mass trade union activity, and, strangely enough, almost all of the modern civil rights movement.

<sup>3</sup>I have no quarrel, of course, with spotlighting dissidents. In an essay on struggles over school integration in nineteenth-century Louisiana and Kansas, I comment that “[i]t is those nonjudicial figures who struggled for constitutional rights—and mostly lost—who impress me most in the dramas from these two states, and it is they, not those who passed upon and denied their pleas, whose memory deserves to last.” Kousser, “Before Plessy, Before Brown: The Development of the Law of Racial Integration in Louisiana and Kansas,” in Paul Finkelman and Stephen E. Gottlieb, eds., *Towards a Usable Past: Liberty Under State Constitutions* (Athens and London, 1991), 239-40. But I do not leave out the thoughts and actions of those who, unfortunately to my mind, won these struggles.

<sup>4</sup>Joan Wallach Scott, “Women’s History,” in her *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 20, 26-27; Linda Gordon, “U.S. Women’s History,” in Eric Foner, ed., *The New American History* (Philadelphia, 1990), 189; William H. Chafe, “The Personal and the Political: Two Case Studies,” in Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eds., *U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995), 189-213.

To some of the authors, it would appear, *only* the personal is political. Thus, although a chapter treats the Dixiecrats and George Wallace makes a cameo appearance, Huey Long, James K. Vardaman, Theodore Bilbo, Eugene Talmadge, Harry Byrd, and all of the architects of Jim Crow and disfranchisement are absent. Martin Luther King, Jr., the ubiquitous Ella Baker, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's Stokely Carmichael and Bob Moses, and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party activist Fannie Lou Hamer enjoy no agency in these pages, nor do the South's four twentieth-century presidents, Woodrow Wilson, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton. Neither Thurgood Marshall nor any of the judges who hampered or hastened school or other integration in the South plays a role here. No schools, highways, railroads, dams, or military bases are built. Segregation and disfranchisement are neither fostered nor eroded. There are no campaigns against convict leasing, child labor, lynching, the poll tax, or disease. Religion and agriculture, finance and factories, the environment, and the structure of government are not explored. There is neither political corruption nor class conflict. The frequent and devastating economic downturns are important only as they affect the psychology of family relations, for in this book, the material is immaterial. In this version of the new southern political history, at least, resistance is rhetorical; law, symbolic; institutions, irrelevant.

Laura Edwards leads off the dance of articles with some dazzling quick steps and amazing spins on the topic of legal cases on marriage and the family during Reconstruction in North Carolina. Not content to trace what appear to be quite minor shifts in the degree of public regulation of the conduct of married persons and their children after 1865, Edwards asserts that "all political and civil rights" depended on "how households were defined," that "marriage lay at the very center of the post-emancipation political structure," and that Democrats used husbands' domination over their wives to justify whites' power over blacks (pp. 9, 21).<sup>5</sup> Such bold assertions about the causes and significance of certain

<sup>5</sup>That the right to marry was extended after the Civil War to a majority of blacks was, of course, a large change, but it was a race change, like voting, not a gender-based change, and it was entirely uncontroversial. To term a completely consensual issue central to a bitter conflict would seem bizarre.

relationships and facts are typically offered in this volume with only the barest of argument or evidence and without considering any contrary hypotheses or interpretations at all. The new southern political history starts with a fresh page, caricaturing or ignoring what has gone before, writing at will.<sup>6</sup>

But surely Edwards has the relationship between public and private rights backwards: laws defined slavery and caste, as well as women's rights within and outside the household. Most laws that set out political or civil rights had nothing to do with households, as, for example, laws that established which men could vote, what public behavior was legal or illegal, and how trials were conducted. To show that marriage was central, one would logically have to establish that the rights to vote, contract, move freely, be educated, hold land, testify in court, ride on trains, or pursue a vocation were less controversial or important, and that marriage mattered more than physical reconstruction or economic reorganization. Edwards does not try, and she could not succeed. As for Democratic arguments, two centuries of experience with apologetics for racial slavery were no doubt adequate to justify post-emancipation white domination rhetorically and in practice. The gender analogy was unnecessary and, because of significant differences between the two types of domination, insufficient. In any event, Edwards offers no evidence that the analogy was widespread or an any sense causal.

Elsa Barkley Brown contends that African-American women played major roles in politics in Reconstruction Richmond, Virginia, by attending mass meetings at the First African Baptist Church and other locations, being among the thousands who were "able to participate in the important discussions" at the 1867 Republican state convention, thronging the galleries at the 1868 state constitutional convention, joining local clubs, and watching men cast ballots on election day. Female disfranchisement, she claims, "did not prevent African American women from shaping the vote and the political decisions." They viewed black men's votes, she contends, as "equally theirs" (pp. 29-37, quotes at 35, 36, 38).

<sup>6</sup>In more decorous and, at least apparently, approving ways, Ayers and Hall make the same point in their brief concluding essays (pp. 302, 306).

What evidence could establish such propositions? First, one might expect to find speeches or resolutions at such meetings, by men and especially by women, in debates thrashing out the issues and proposals of the day. Second, there might be resolutions from clubs or mass meetings, or even diary entries, affirming the politically egalitarian community of African-Americans that Brown describes. Third, there might be lists of officers of such meetings (announcement of whom was a widespread practice during the nineteenth century) or newspaper or other reports of the general nature of attendance and participation at the events. Fourth, the courses adopted by black male politicians elected from places where the meetings were particularly regular or vociferous might have been exceptionally favorable to women. Brown quotes or cites no evidence of this sort. Instead, she offers extremely thinly supported assertions about the nature of Richmond's black political culture and women's role in forming it.

Brown's assertions are also implausible on their face. Could thousands of people at one meeting "participate" in discussions? Is a place in the gallery equivalent to a position on the legislative floor or committee room? Is observing someone else vote the same as casting a ballot oneself? Was the struggle for women's suffrage unnecessary or meaningless, because women enjoyed equal power any time that men were enfranchised? How does one gauge the extent of influence a group has in "shaping the vote"? How would the Republican program or what the legislature or city council or any other governmental body passed have differed had women not (allegedly) fashioned the political decisions? Thin in evidence, faulty in logic, Brown's essay shows no more than that some black women were interested spectators in Reconstruction Richmond.

In a chapter on anti-Republican violence in South Carolina during Reconstruction, Stephen Kantrowitz represents as novel a fact that was not hidden at the time and that has repeatedly been stressed by historians since, that upper-class whites led the violence against black and white southern Republicans during Reconstruction. Two Confederate generals, Martin W. Gary and Matthew C. Butler, were widely understood to have led the Red Shirts in the 1876 campaign, and Butler's role in the state's most

famous incident during Reconstruction, the Hamburg Riot, was featured in newspapers across the country. For a generation that might have forgotten the role of the southern upper class in Reconstruction violence, the movie *Birth of a Nation* (1915) provided a reminder that both reflected and spawned numerous popular and scholarly accounts. Kantrowitz adds to the well-known story only a very slight gender gloss, characterizing as battles over “manhood” the Democrats’ strategy of demonstrating the inability of the Republican government to protect its supporters and black and white Republican men’s military inferiority to the Klan/Red Shirt/Democrats (p. 76). Is every power struggle between men no more than a contest over who has the highest levels of testosterone? Unusual in this volume in its focus on the white elite, the chapter is also notable for its modest claims and its familiar facts.

Jane Dailey asserts that at the “core” of “the postbellum political struggle between black and white southerners” lay the question of whether black men would be able to have sexual liaisons with white women (p. 95). Though she never puts it quite so crudely, Dailey’s thesis is that the right to vote was “conflated” with another four-letter word. Gleefully adopting many nineteenth century Democrats’ and—explicitly—Alabama Gov. George Wallace’s rhetorical position that any political or civil rights granted to African-Americans would necessarily lead to private interracial social interactions, Dailey accounts for the Virginia Readjuster party’s loss in the 1883 state elections by citing Democratic charges that the Readjusters’ appointment of two black men to the Richmond school board threatened white women both practically and symbolically, because the blacks might share the power to appoint white female teachers. Although the evidence for her thesis is so sparse that she has to bring in quotations and citations from other states, as well as nineteenth-century Germany, that which she does produce often undermines her contentions.

First, white Readjusters who defended black public rights and appointed African-Americans to various offices denied that any general philosophical position required them to favor school integration or the repeal of racial anti-intermarriage laws (p. 96). This was a quite common stance at the time, and though we may disagree with it, it does constitute evidence that the issues were not

conflated in many people's minds. Moreover, as has often been noted, upper-class white southerners had no objection to interracial contact *per se*; what they objected to was interracial *equality*. Second, in an editorial on the precise issue that she focuses on, the leading Democratic newspaper in the state, the *Richmond Dispatch*, explicitly approved most black officeholding, but not appointment to school boards (p. 102). In fact, none of the few editorials from the state's newspapers that Dailey quotes equates black voting with interracial sex, much less makes that equation "the main theme in the election of 1883," though one does predict that Readjuster rule will lead to "mixed schools now and mixed marriages in the future" (p. 103). Third, Dailey's only backing for her conclusion that "a considerable number of white voters in Virginia" became convinced that "black male political and sexual power marched hand in hand" is a few unquoted letters—not any systematic analysis of newspaper articles or voting returns (pp. 103 and 114, n. 78).<sup>7</sup> And as is habitual in this volume, Dailey never even pretends to test her thesis against other interpretations of the election.

These New Southern Political Historians combine brash assertiveness with a coy reluctance to make clear statements about causation. Instead of clarifying in order to test, they muddle in order to evade refutation. Thus, Dailey announces that "the Readjuster coalition collapsed in the midst of a miscegenation panic" (p. 99), not "because" white Readjuster voters feared that the policies their party adopted would lead to miscegenation. Similarly, Fitzhugh Brundage declares that "white women . . . played a [not *the*] dominant role in crafting the historical memory that would *inform and undergird*" southern politics for much of the twentieth century [not that it would inspire any particular policies or politicians]; that clubwomen's propagandistic celebrations of the southern past "*dictated the shape of* contemporary public debates" over "racial segregation, disfranchisement of black men, and inequitable funding for black and white education" [not that they caused any specific policies to be adopted]; that white women's version of public memory "*provided crucial ideological ballast* for

<sup>7</sup>I presume that the letters Dailey cites, but does not quote in footnote 78, support her assertion; those she does quote do not.



white supremacy" [not that it changed the racial order in any way]; and that "competing interpretations of the past were *central to the claims of white women and men to authority and privilege in the South*" [not that they enabled whites to dominate blacks] (pp. 115-16, 125-26, 131, italics added). How one might assess the role of memory in as vast a subject as a half-century of southern politics or even in the more limited debates over school funding or disfranchisement is unclear, and Brundage makes no effort at all to do so, following the pattern of his co-authors in contenting himself with blanket assertions. In the formulation of many of the contributors to this volume, only images or ideas influence political action, and they never "cause" it. But to reject the concept of causation, or to do so less forthrightly by restating causal assertions in language that prevents them from being assessed, is to undermine the process of historical inquiry. Perhaps that is one of the intentions of postmodern historians.

Brundage never cites the one very direct southern effort to change public policy by invoking a partial and biased history, the 1890 collection of essays that grew out of congressional speeches against the Lodge Fair Elections Bill, Hilary A. Herbert's *Why the Solid South? Or Reconstruction and Its Results*. But it was not these speeches or this publication that killed the legislation. Only a backroom deal with western silver interests prevented its passage. It is also dubious that late-nineteenth-century constructions of a mythically benign and happy southern past affected deliberations on segregation, disfranchisement, and school funding. After all, the immediate post-Civil War "Black Codes" disfranchised and segregated blacks, and they provided no funding for black schools. Southern whites needed no invocation of moonlight and magnolias, no anthems to tattered gray uniforms, no conjuring up of joyous slaves to adopt racist policies in these areas. As Brundage's unwillingness to employ causal language or consider other explanations seems to suggest, even he may find it difficult to believe that historical memories provide more than light rhetorical flourishes for policies determined by other factors.

The Atlanta race riot, which climaxed the bitterly racist campaign for the Democratic nomination for governor of Georgia in 1906, provoked William J. Northen, a planter-governor in the early 1890s, to travel the state in an attempt to organize an anti-

lynching group. His six-month effort, chronicled by David Godshalk, failed to change attitudes, build an organization, stimulate legislation, toughen enforcement of existing laws, or influence trends in lynching. Lacking evidence on Northen's motives for undertaking such a crusade late in life, Godshalk speculates that he was disturbed by the breakdown in social control over the lower orders of both races as they migrated to cities (pp. 142-43). Northen's movement failed, Godshalk argues, rather contradictorily, first, because businessmen feared that it would bring their towns bad publicity by stressing violence, and second, because whites in general and planters in particular refused to give up violence as "the most powerful tool of labor control" (p. 153). Yet this was just the time when whites were consolidating their utter dominance of state and local governments, which meant that they had little need for extra-governmental coercion. In any event, lynching was a very blunt instrument of labor control, and very few lynchings were directly concerned with work issues.<sup>8</sup> Godshalk does not stress the fact that it was also a time when elite demagogues—Tom Watson, Tom Hardwick, Hoke Smith, Clark Howell, etc.—were pushing increasingly widespread racist laws in order to attract political attention in a polity without organized parties. Their activity explains why Northen's crusade quickly faded into insignificance better than anything that Godshalk suggests.

Grace Elizabeth Hale claims that "a new politics of consumption" succeeded disfranchisement and the adoption of segregation laws, affording African-Americans an arena, the marketplace, in which they could still be active agents (pp. 162-63). To the extent that her observations reflect the theory that it is economically irrational for retailers to discriminate against any potential consumer, Hale merely echoes the well-known neoclassical economic view of Gary Becker (whom she does not cite), which has been challenged for the South by Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch (whom she also does not cite).<sup>9</sup> She offers no systematic evidence

<sup>8</sup>Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana, Ill., 1995), 48.

<sup>9</sup>Gary Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination* (Chicago, 1957); Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge, 1977).

that adds anything to the complicated debate over the racial fairness of the market; indeed, she ignores the debate entirely.

To the extent that Hale means that after 1900, southern African-Americans used their power as consumers to fight segregation, she fails to explain why the struggle was so ineffective in the South from 1900 until the 1950s, or to remark on the fact that it began to succeed only when black political and legal power was being reestablished. Hale sidesteps this difficulty by skipping in her last sentence from the 1930s, the latest period for which she discusses black consumption, to the 1950s and 1960s, when she briefly mentions sit-ins and boycotts. But blacks had been challenging segregation through boycotts and targeted spending since at least the 1840s in the North, and they continued to use such tactics in the South (as well as the North) throughout the period of initial enfranchisement. In the nineteenth, as in the twentieth century, extra-legal activities were much more potent when they could be used along with agitation to pass new laws, or with legal challenges to discrimination, or both.<sup>10</sup> The lack of political and legal power crippled blacks' efforts in the marketplace; the lack of concern with political and legal power cripples Hale's arguments.

Hale also contends that advertising, an aspect of consumption, raised white racial consciousness in the early twentieth-century South. Caricatured blacks from Aunt Jemima to the Gold Dust Twins, trading cards featuring blacks in various guises, and ads for soap and tobacco "made whiteness by defining blackness" (p. 168). Blacks, according to the advertisements, were generally servants; whites, by contrast, consumed blacks' labor. The difficulties with Hale's assertion are almost too obvious to need stating: White consciousness was already pervasive in the early twentieth-century South, advertising exploited pre-existing stereotypes, and most black adult females in the South in the first half of the twentieth century were, in fact, domestic servants. Whiteness had been made in the seventeenth century, when slavery was starkly sepa-

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, Kousser, "'The Supremacy of Equal Rights': The Struggle Against Racial Discrimination in Antebellum Massachusetts and the Foundations of the Fourteenth Amendment," *Northwestern University Law Review* 82 (1988): 941-1010.

rated from other forms of servitude and was defined as a condition for non-whites.

Nancy MacLean asserts that northern-born Jewish factory supervisor Leo Frank was lynched in Georgia in 1915 for the murder and perhaps attempted rape of thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan because white working-class men were worried about losing control of their wives and daughters, who were increasingly working outside the home and off the farm. The furor over the Frank case was, she says, an instance of a "reactionary populism" that joined anti-capitalism and anti-Semitism to what she is most interested in: "militant sexual conservatism" (pp. 184-85). Since the founding of the second Ku Klux Klan was inspired by the Frank case, gender relations, she concludes, helped to transform a class-based leftist movement, Populism, into what she has elsewhere described as something approaching an American fascism, the Klan.<sup>11</sup>

The striking thing about MacLean's very extensively researched essay is that while she offers plenty of statements of paternal or maternal concern about the exploitation of male and especially female children in factories or other "public work," she presents absolutely no evidence that this concern arose because of a desire to maintain control over them, or that the numerous condemnations of Frank connected a loss of parental control with calls for his conviction or death. No doubt sexual innuendo, spread by sensationalistic journalists, especially Tom Watson, transmogrified a mere murder into "folk pornography" (p. 193). And no doubt hyperbolic defenses of Phagan's apparently dubious sexual purity reflected "an unwillingness to acknowledge youthful female sexual agency" (p. 197). But neither such charges nor such defenses were new or unprecedented, neither charge is necessarily connected with an increase in public work for white women or a reactionary movement, and neither indicates, by itself, that the South was undergoing a "change in sexual behavior" (p. 198).

What MacLean downplays, though she mentions it, is the utterly crass political nature of the prosecution and agitation, which

<sup>11</sup>Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1994). For my review of this book, see *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 32 (1996): 229-32.

Woodward stressed in his treatment of the case in *Tom Watson*.<sup>12</sup> Since 1896, Watson had been attempting to reestablish his political career, latching onto the movement to disfranchise African-Americans, successively endorsing and betraying candidates for statewide office, and ranting against Catholics—while sending his children to Catholic schools. As the public voice of Atlanta solicitor (district attorney) Hugh Dorsey, who chose to prosecute Leo Frank instead of black janitor Jim Conley, Watson made sure that the prosecution won Dorsey the Democratic gubernatorial primary. Watson soon leaped into the U.S. Senate. The evidence suggests, in other words, that it was the political ambition of a few, rather than the alleged familial or sexual tensions of the many that was actually responsible for the Frank tragedy. But a research design that would allow MacLean to test her hypothesis against other explanations is not part of the operating mode in the new southern political history.

In the volume's most traditional political history chapter, Glenda Gilmore contends that northern blacks shifted from the Republican to the Democratic party in 1936 not because of New Deal economic policies, as Nancy Weiss and others have maintained, but because Republican racial policies during the 1920s alienated southern African-Americans, particularly women.<sup>13</sup> Implicitly but not explicitly contesting the assertions of other scholars about the extent of women's political agency before they could vote, Gilmore asserts that the depth of black women's commitment to the GOP was less than that of black men because they had less experience in politics, and that the women's allegiance to the Republicans was therefore more affected than men's by the events of the 1920s. Presumably alienated by the increasingly lily-white policies of the North Carolina and national Republican parties during that decade, "some African Americans," Gilmore states vaguely, "registered as Democrats" in Charlotte in 1928. At least one black woman, Mary McCrorey, a teacher, social activist, and wife of a black university president, changed her registration from Republican to Democratic. "She must," speculates Gilmore, "have

<sup>12</sup>C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York, 1938), 431-50.

<sup>13</sup>Nancy Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of F.D.R.* (Princeton, N.J., 1983).

held out a slim hope that the Democratic Party would accept her or that she could tip any balance of power" (p. 231). Gilmore does not consider that Mrs. McCrorey, whose black YWCA project, Gilmore notes elsewhere, was very "depend[ent] on good relations with Charlotte white women," may have wished to curry favor with leaders of the only political party that mattered in most of North Carolina.<sup>14</sup> Nor does she mention in this essay that McCrorey never left North Carolina, where, according to Paul Lewinson, there were only 2,000-2,500 black voters of either gender registered during the 1920s.<sup>15</sup>

This is the sum total of Gilmore's evidence that southern black women were central to the 1936 black realignment. She does not extend her study northward or into the 1930s to examine the actual vote shifts, and she implicitly dismisses the long-term effect of Republican lily-white policies before woman suffrage on black partisan loyalty. One black woman and "some" black men with no documented connections to the North, which contained the vast majority of African-Americans who could actually vote in 1936, are assumed to represent hundreds of thousands of African-Americans. In the face of the massive discrimination of the disfranchisement era, these few black voters are hypothesized to imagine themselves sufficiently powerful to alter a major party's policy singlehandedly and cast deciding votes—by voting for the party that already received an overwhelming majority in the state! Only those desperate to believe will be convinced on such evidence and logic.

Key to Gilmore's argument about women and political realignment is her contention that "[t]o make disfranchisement work, whites had to frighten literate African Americans from the polls, since continuation of 'legal' electoral principles depended upon illegal practices" (p. 226). The presence of women at the polls after 1920, her argument continues, "dramatically changed the culture of the polling place from violence to vigilance," inhibiting the violence against blacks that was, she believes, necessary to keep them disfranchised (p. 227). This argument entirely misconceives

<sup>14</sup>Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996), 194.

<sup>15</sup>Paul Lewinson, *Race, Class, and Party: A History of Negro Suffrage and White Politics in the South* (New York, 1932; rpt. 1965), 219.

the nature of disfranchisement, seriously distorts the evidence, and perhaps unintentionally insults two generations of courageous black male voters.

The disfranchising laws and constitutional amendments passed from the 1870s through the early 1900s raised wealth, as well as educational barriers to voting, moved the locus of discrimination from the polling place to the registration office, signaled registrars to inhibit black and poor white eligibility to vote, and devastated parties opposed to the Democrats, thus reducing the value of black votes for the parties they supported.<sup>16</sup> Violence and fraud against the lower political orders had not only provided campaign fodder for opponents, but also invited federal intervention to insure fairer elections. The elite disfranchisers replaced such extra-legal methods with much more effective laws and administrative practices that the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Giles v. Harris* (1903) ruled unassailable. During Reconstruction, black voters often faced down terrible violence, succeeding in voting in considerable numbers and having their votes counted for the Republicans in the elections that followed nine of the dozen best-known violent incidents.<sup>17</sup> No post-disfranchisement political violence even approached the death toll from any one of these massacres. To imagine that African-American men would quaver in the face of such polling place behavior as smoking, tobacco spitting, or even a few fights, which is the sort of behavior that Gilmore states that woman suffrage eliminated, is as demeaning to black men as it is distorting of the historical record (p. 228).

Whereas C. Vann Woodward decried the "soured Populism" of Tom Watson and his remaining followers in the early twentieth-century South, Bryant Simon shows considerable forbearance toward the soured post-World War II millhands and their ex-New-Dealish political epitome, South Carolina's Olin D. Johnston. Their mill villages replaced by suburbs, their jalopies traded up for new V-8s, their children headed for college instead of the mill, southern textile workers found little to appeal to them in liberal policies, Simon asserts, and much to fear from blacks "who at-

<sup>16</sup>Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, Conn., 1974).

<sup>17</sup>Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999), 24.

tacked their whiteness" (p. 255). After being defeated by race-baiting "Cotton Ed" Smith in the 1938 U.S. Senate primary, Johnston followed the workers' path, inserting racial issues into his campaigns for the first time, and eventually transforming himself from New Dealer to "a leading member of a new breed of postwar southern reactionaries" (p. 251). Echoing Numan Bartley's harsh criticisms of post-war liberalism for concentrating on race, rather than appealing to the white working class on economics, Simon in effect offers blacks and white racial liberals a retrospective Hobson's Choice: remain quiescent or invite reaction.<sup>18</sup>

But was it liberal pro-black stances that reestablished the salience of race in South Carolina politics? Did liberals ignore white workers? Was Johnston really that reactionary? Did blacks attack "whiteness"? At the time of the 1938 campaigns that reinvigorated racist political appeals, President Roosevelt had refused to endorse anti-lynching or anti-poll tax bills, much less to attack segregation or housing or job discrimination. Cotton Ed and the others were merely following an old southern political aphorism: When the outcome is in doubt, race bait. Who should be blamed for this recurring melodrama—actor, opponent, or audience? As for liberals ignoring white workers, President Harry Truman's 1945-1946 program offered a great deal for everyone: a minimum wage increase, expanded public housing, broadened Social Security, and most of all, national health insurance. That many white southern politicians concentrated instead on defeating Truman's fair employment practices bill does not mean that the other programs were irrelevant or unappealing to southern white workers.

As to Johnston's issue stances, while he unquestionably could not afford racial moderation in South Carolina, his voting record does not seem so reactionary, according to widely used indices from the *Congressional Quarterly* that Simon does not cite. From 1947 to 1952, during the height of the Truman Administration, Johnston supported the Democratic party position 85 percent of the time, placing him eighth among the twenty-five southern senators who served during those three congresses in his "party unity score." The leading southern reactionary, Harry Byrd, supported the Democratic party only 32 percent of the time in those years.

<sup>18</sup>Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge, La., 1995).



Later in his career, from 1958 to 1962, Johnston's "conservative coalition" score of sixty-four placed him ninth lowest among twenty-three southern senators who served, hardly at the forefront of Deep South conservatism, which was led by Mississippi's John Stennis with a score of ninety-six and South Carolina's Strom Thurmond with ninety-five.<sup>19</sup> And does Simon confuse the questioning of white privilege with an assault on white identity when he says that African-Americans wished to "attack whiteness"? What proportion of southern whites believed that any effort to jump out of Jim Crow elections or schools or public transit was an assault on white identity, and how did those numbers change as the civil rights movement progressed? Does this cultural, all-or-nothing view of race relations really help us to understand the South in the time when Jim Crow was beginning to be weakened?

Even more willing than Simon to project herself into the thoughts and feelings of racist politicians and voters is Kari Frederickson, who connects the anxieties of dissolving families to that of a shaky racial order through a discussion of divorce reform and the rhetoric of the Dixiecrats in South Carolina. The Dixiecrat movement, Frederickson declares, represented an effort "to defend segregation against federal intervention and increasingly aggressive grass-roots activism," to preserve southern "political autonomy" by defending states rights, to allay "the angst of the white South." But since racial and familial hierarchies were "equally central" to white Southerners, efforts to repeal the provision of the 1895 state constitution that prohibited divorce also threatened Dixiecrat values (pp. 261-63). And attacks on Federal District Judge J. Waties Waring, who overturned the state's white primary, often connected his decision to the northern-born woman he married after his first wife obtained a divorce in Florida, linking "the subversion of one hierarchy," the family, to the disruption of the other, the racial order (p. 266).

There are four difficulties with connecting these two hierarchies on this evidence. First, the thoroughly segregationist legislature passed divorce reform, Gov. Strom Thurmond, the Dixiecrats' presidential candidate, signed the bill, and white

<sup>19</sup>There are many possible voting indices, but these are easily available and comprehensive. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 1948: 39; 1950: 59; 1952: 67; 1960: 123; 1962: 732.

South Carolina voters approved it in a referendum in the same year, 1948, that they gave Thurmond the state's electoral votes for president. Most white South Carolina voters welcomed rather than feared easier familial breakups. Second, there was a perfectly good reason why South Carolinians might have been more willing to authorize divorce in 1948 than at the four other times since 1916 when the state had considered the issue: Many marriages during the Second World War were hasty and unsatisfactory, and the divorce rate in the United States rose markedly after that war.<sup>20</sup> Frederickson never considers such reasoning or compares the 1948 effort with previous attempts at divorce reform, and she devotes only three-quarters of a page to arguments over the divorce measure. Third, the Warings attracted attention only because of the judge's civil rights opinions. Had he upheld the primary, he might still have been snubbed in society for splitting from his "Charleston blueblood" wife and a week later marrying a much younger woman, but the larger world would not have condemned his private affairs any more than it did the rumored cavortings of Governor Thurmond that Frederickson mentions (p. 266). Fourth, the gendered language that Frederickson quotes from the debates is very confused. In one cartoon, the South is an "old maid," and in a Dixiecrat song, southern Democrats were a "battered wife"—hardly symbols of what Frederickson calls "male political authority" (pp. 265, 270). If every reference to gender echoes with deep psychological resonance, then the Dixiecrats must have been more concerned with cross-dressing than with divorce. In sum, this effort to connect the defense of segregation with the defense of the family is unconvincing.

Timothy Tyson chronicles the inept efforts of some late-1950s Klansmen to stifle the courageous, but muted criticism of segregation by an upperclass white woman, Claudia Sanders, of upcountry Gaffney, South Carolina. After she published an essay in a sedate tome favoring very gradual compliance with *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Klansmen tried twice, unsuccessfully, to dynamite the stately house of Sanders and her physician husband. Finally managing to get their crude bomb to explode on the third effort,

<sup>20</sup>Roderick Phillips, *Putting Asunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society* (Cambridge, 1988), 553-58; Glenda Riley, *Divorce: An American Tradition* (New York, 1991), 159.

the Klansmen hurt no one but themselves. When state and federal law enforcement officials quickly caught them, one confessed, only to die mysteriously, perhaps by murder. The death of the key witness and a southern judge and jury's predictable prejudice allowed the other conspirators to escape penalties.

The problem with this well-told tale is that Tyson wants it to explain why white moderates failed to speak out against racial discrimination in more significant instances. But Mrs. Sanders, from a low-country, aristocratic background, was hardly representative of racial moderates; her attempted murder was extraordinary—violence was much more usually aimed at blacks or more outspoken whites; her case received too little attention to have served as a warning to many others; and the threat of violence in the South against dissenters was in any event well-known and has long been understood to exist.

Experiences outside the academy often illuminate those within. On July 2, 1982, a federal district court in Jackson, Tennessee, heard arguments in *Taylor v. Haywood County, Tennessee*, a federal voting rights case.<sup>21</sup> Although it is unusual for such cases to attract much public attention, and even rarer, an audience, that day about forty African-American women made the thirty-mile trip from Brownsville to Jackson, Tennessee, to listen to two witnesses discuss the history and present condition of black voting rights in Haywood County. One spectator stood out, a formidable-looking woman wearing a bright red dress, the lead plaintiff, Truly Mae Taylor. In 1960, when blacks managed to register for the first time in recent history, Taylor had reportedly been the fifth African-American and first woman to complete the process, making her likely the first black woman to register to vote in the history of Haywood County. For this challenge to the white power monopoly, she and many others were thrown off of the farms where they worked, ending up in a "tent city" sustained by funds from civil rights and labor groups in Tennessee and throughout the country. As Taylor's presence indicated, twenty-two years later, the struggle for equal political power and the governmental services which that power might buy was not yet finished.

<sup>21</sup>544 F. Supp. 1122 (1982).

Highways and other roads in Haywood County were allocated and administered by an elected road commission, and roads in the areas where blacks lived were notoriously bad, many unpaved or even lacking gravel. In the frequent rains, some streets and back roads turned to mud, miring cars and pickups and leading some school bus drivers to refuse to leave the main highways, which forced black children to trudge some distance through the muck to catch their rides to school. From its establishment in 1937, the road commission had been elected by districts, instead of county-wide, and until 1978, every commissioner had been white. In that year, one of the five districts elected a black commissioner. At about the same time, two white nuns from Massachusetts, Attracta Kelley and Pat Siemans, founded a civil rights group in Haywood County, naming it JONAH (Just Organized Neighborhood Area Headquarters) and concentrating on two governmental activities that they believed were of great practical importance for African-Americans, schools and roads.<sup>22</sup>

In response to both the election of a black member and the agitation of JONAH, the county commission took the earliest opportunity to shift road commission elections from district to at-large. JONAH's vehement public protests were unavailing. Because of pervasive racial bloc voting, no black had won an at-large, county-wide election in Haywood since 1888, even though the county population was 47 percent black in 1980 and had been even higher in previous years. JONAH convinced West Tennessee Legal Services to sue in the activist Taylor's name, and after the hearing, Judge Odell Horton granted a motion for a preliminary injunction against holding Road Commission elections at-large. JONAH got districts restored and a black road commissioner temporarily appointed.

Taylor and her well-dressed friends were in court that day not to prove symbolically that the political may be personal, as the authors of *Jumpin' Jim Crow* might theorize, but because the struggle in Haywood County demonstrated the *actual* connections in the *real* world between the vote, the electoral system, federal election law, the judicial process, and less suffering for their children and

<sup>22</sup>See Richard A. Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A Political History of Struggles for Emancipation* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1993), 232-39.

grandchildren—between the whole gamut of governmental institutions and the mud on a schoolchild's boots. Although they would never have expressed themselves in these terms, they knew that the degree of agency they enjoyed was limited by the political rules they faced. If the women sometimes saw their conflicts in ideological terms—it was not fair for whites, but not blacks, to be able to vote or ride on asphalt streets—they also knew that the road to equality was paved by an elected commission. It is a distinct failing of the new postmodern political history that it shoves such struggles as Truly Mae Taylor's into the intellectual ditch, treating institutionalized government not as a necessary means to practical ends, but as largely inconsequential or merely emblematic, and any attention paid to its actual workings, as an irrelevant vestige of outmoded historical practices.

Without such practices, however, the *Taylor* case would have been lost. I was employed at a nominal fee to do research and testify for the plaintiffs. In my testimony, which Judge Horton termed "graphic and highly credible" and which he summarized or quoted for nearly a third of his opinion, I analyzed election and educational patterns statistically and recounted local government campaigns and meetings. As in scholarly publications, I framed the analysis as an explicit test of a hypothesis—here, that the at-large election system for the road commission had been adopted with a racially discriminatory purpose. To make the test as hard to meet, and therefore, as persuasive, as possible, I arrayed it against every competing hypothesis that I could conceive: that at-large systems of election for road commissioners were standard practice in the state, that five equi-populous districts could not have been drawn based on existing data, and that the county commissioners were unaware of the racial consequences of their action. I analyzed all the evidence I could find and made every effort to clarify my methods, reasoning processes, and conclusions. Nothing else would have stood up in court.

By contrast, the authors of *Jumpin' Jim Crow* offer only fragmentary or very weak evidence for their positions, assume, not rigorously show, that statements by one person somehow produce actions by another, and never test alternative descriptions or explanations. Historians have no higher intellectual responsibility than thoroughgoing skepticism towards their own favored sub-

jects or theories. *Jumpin' Jim Crow* not only dramatically shrinks the scope of southern political history—on the topics it does consider, it shirks the historian's duty to doubt. And without the clarity that makes doubt productive, historians will never be able to fulfill their highest moral responsibility, to build a better world, even if all they can do is, for example, to make it possible for some child they will never meet to get to school with dry shoes.