

4-1-2018

Leaders of Their Race: Educating Black and White Women in the New South

Melanie J. Dunn

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dunn, Melanie J. (2018) "Leaders of Their Race: Educating Black and White Women in the New South," *The Southeastern Librarian*: Vol. 66 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

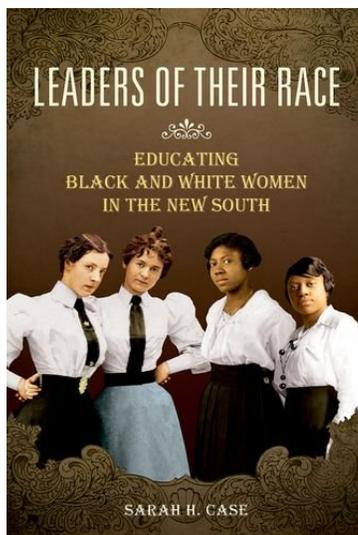
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/seln/vol66/iss1/4>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Southeastern Librarian by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Her primary responsibilities include working with Communication Studies' students and being the liaison to Social Work and Community/Therapeutic Recreation departments. Sanders' professional interests include information literacy instruction, researching library anxiety among students, educational technologies, first-year experiences and furthering professional networks among academic librarians.

BOOK REVIEWS

Leaders of Their Race: Educating Black and White Women in the New South. Sarah H. Case. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017. ISBN 978-0-2520-8279-5 (pbk.). 238 p. \$28.00.



Post-civil war, two women's academies in Georgia opened their doors; one for whites only, the other catering to black women in the New South. Both schools sought to instill in their pupils decorum, feminine refinements and respectability, while at the same time preparing them to take on roles as leaders in their communities through intellectual and social engagement. In *Leaders of Their Race*, Sarah Case thoughtfully compares and contrasts the Lucy Cobb Institute of Athens, Georgia which aimed to create a new model of femininity for southern white women, with Spelman Seminary of Atlanta which educated black women to lead by example through modesty, moral character, and industriousness.

The author, a faculty member in the History Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara, provides a reflective comparison of these two schools during the years 1880 to 1925. As the roles of women transformed during the post-civil war era, each school believed that their graduates should represent the best of their race and the most effective way to prepare them was to create high expectations for their students. Requiring that their pupils be virtuous, modest and well educated, both schools hoped to make their graduates beyond reproach as they entered

society and served as models in their communities. The first two chapters of this four chapter study are devoted to the Lucy Cobb Institute (now defunct), its history, curriculum, and famous alumnae and the last two to Spelman Seminary, still in existence as a college.

The Lucy Cobb Institute, founded in 1859 by T.R.R. Cobb and named after his niece Lucy, sought to combine the attributes of traditional girls finishing schools - manners and feminine graces - with the necessity of preparing young women for participation in the public sphere, including employment. The founder's niece, Mildred Rutherford, instructor, principal and later president, was formative in developing the values and philosophy of the school: piety, propriety, and academic achievement. Anti-suffragist and later a leader of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, she was a prominent public speaker and author of her day, but continued to advocate for traditional roles for women. "Lucies" for the most part conformed to expectations at school, but taking cues from their independent administrators and faculty, many went on to further their education or have active careers. The Institute closed in 1931, primarily due to a drop in enrollment, lack of endowment and emerging competition from the University of Georgia.

Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles, two northern missionaries, founded Spelman Seminary in 1881 to address the education of freedwomen and their daughters. They believed in the value of industrial education in conjunction with academic studies as a means to instill self-discipline and promote the dignity of work. Besides basic chores, students learned home economics skills and eventually, the school was able to add professional programs: printing, nursing, missionary training and teaching. Wishing to become a true women's college like Vassar, the administrators expanded their academic course offerings in order to offer a genuine liberal arts education and the first two college degrees were awarded in 1901. The Seminary was fortunate to have substantial financial assistance from John D. Rockefeller, and this support, along with a proper endowment, allowed it to withstand the financial travails that affected similar schools.

Sarah Case provides a compelling examination of how these two women's schools, though founded on different visions and skewed by race and class, were remarkably similar in the values they espoused. Grooming their students to be well-educated, modest and respectable, they hoped to prepare their young graduates to contribute to a new society in the South and epitomize the highest womanly virtues. Extensively researched with notes, photographs, and a comprehensive bibliography, this volume in the series *Women, Gender and Sexuality in American History* is recommended for academic libraries, particularly those with education or women's studies programs.

Melanie J. Dunn
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Smoke Signals From Samarcand: The 1931 Reform School Fire and Its Aftermath. Barbara Bennett. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1-61117-860-9 (hardcover); 978-1-61117-631-6 (Ebook). 144 p. \$24.99

Barbara Bennett's research entices the reader to pursue this work as a story that needed to be told. We learn that smoke signals was a call for help. Was setting fire to buildings in this North Carolina juvenile training school for girls under the care of the State of North Carolina a crime punishable by life in prison or was it justified as a cry for help? In this small juvenile training center for girls in Eastern North Carolina, Bennett documents the actions of the residents who suffered chronic abuse and mistreatment at the hands of the staff and teachers.

From floggings, starvation, imprisonment in locked rooms and medical sterilization, the girls at Samarcand Manor experienced abuses beyond imagination today. Through Bennett's craft of writing and research, she tells a story that is captivating and painful to read. A place where evil overcame goals of rehabilitation led the unfortunate girls to attempt to escape the Manor. Their thinking in rebelling was that the escape might allow them to return to their homes. The fifteen girls meet a terrible end in the battle of wit and might that ensued.

Bennett reveals to us "In North Carolina in the 1930s, North Carolina was in the throes of a powerful eugenics movement. (Part One, One) At the time, influential members of society believed one must be strong, intelligent, economically and genetically superior if they are to bear and produce children." Bennett points to theories proposed by "Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, Margaret Sanger, H. G. Wells and H. L. Mencken, 'who once suggested that the U.S. government pay one thousand dollars each to all Americans deemed "undesirable if they would be voluntarily sterilized"' (Part One, One).

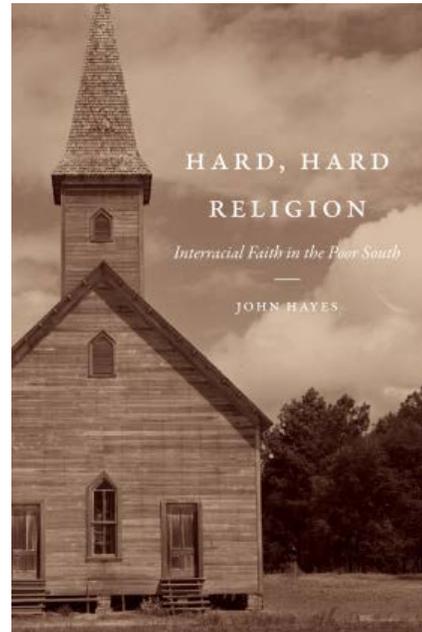
This research allows the reader to meet the fifteen accused girls residing at Samarcand Manor. Bennett's interviews reveal the prejudice, bias, power and evil resident in the minds of the public and government authorities promoting "natural selection". As a case study, it reveals how the science of eugenics could be visited upon the powerless and weakest of society. How did the state of North Carolina employ staff who lied to a girl that she needed an appendectomy so that a sterilization might be performed? Read the stories and remember the power we gain from the knowledge of the uses of history. Never again, we say.

This question and more are examined by Bennett's research and can lead anyone to a deeper understanding of our past as a society and those who became our victims. A great read and a helpful awakening to women's issues and to our past in North Carolina.

Recommended for public libraries, school libraries, academic libraries and women's studies classes.

Carol Walker Jordan
Retired Writer and Educational Consultant

Hard, Hard Religion: Interracial Faith in the Poor South. John Hayes. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4696-3532-3 (pbk. - \$27.95); 978-1-4696-3531-6 (hardcover - \$90.00); 978-1-4696-3533-0 (Ebook - \$19.99). 250 p.



Beginning with a serious determination to skim Hayes' 238 page book and get a review ready for the SELn spring issue, I soon changed my approach. Each and every page revealed another fascinating anecdote along the trail Hayes was leading me, it became impossible to simply skim his words.

Hayes' ability to show how disenfranchised black and white people living in poverty and discrimination in the South in the years before World War II and the Civil Rights movement shared commonalities and developed a folk religion to sustain themselves. Christianity in its appeal to those who had risen above the levels of poverty and begun to climb into the middle class was not appealing to black and white people trapped in poverty and held down by prejudice and no opportunity to move beyond their circumstances.

The last paragraph of John Hayes' book, gives us a look at "one of folk Christianity's practitioners—a farm laborer who coined the evocative phrase "hard, hard religion". The laborer said, "the snake came, and Adam and Eve couldn't stay away from the snake, it got to them, that's what happened, it just got to them. Every day there's a snake in our lives, every day, I tell you...There's nothing so bad on the outside, that it don't have its equal on the inside...I'm