

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. xxii + 384 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2287-6; \$23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8078-4596-7.



Reviewed by Wali Rashash Kharif (Tennessee Technological University)

Published on H-SAWH (June, 1997)

Glenda E. Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow* is an examination of women and the politics of white supremacy in North Carolina during the period 1896 to 1920. Gilmore concludes that although white women were conscious of race and hierarchy in Jim Crow society, unlike white men who worked to disfranchise black male voters, the better class of white women did not promote disfranchisement of black women voters following ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment (1920). Instead, they encouraged white women (who were numerically superior) to register, thus canceling out the black female vote. Gilmore attributes this attitude, in part, to the fact that white women had some contact with capable and effective black female leaders which fostered a limited camaraderie and some respect for their efforts. She infers that if white North Carolina males had taken the same approach toward black males, white supremacy still could have been maintained in the state without alluding to the violence of the Wilmington Riot in 1898 and other uses of force against black men which brought negative publicity to the state. While the conclusions are limited to North Carolina, they provide variables for consideration and for wider application to other southern states during this crucial period.

The first two chapters of *Gender and Jim Crow* provide valuable information about black women and men

in North Carolina during the post-Civil War era. Using characterizations common in the late nineteenth century, she refers to socio-economic and political elitists, whether by birth or attainment through hard work, as the "best" or "better class." The author focuses on a privileged class of black women who held professional positions, were involved in voluntary work, and benefited from co-educational training with the best black men (at a time when white women went to schools in the South separate from men). This class of black women was acceptable to whites as ambassadors for the "race," were often partners in their marriages (economically, politically, and socially), and were not necessarily construed as competitors with black men.

The author provides valuable information substantiating that a cordial relationship existed between leading black women and their white counterparts in state and national women associations, temperance societies, and Christian organizations. She shows where some women, regardless of race, were concerned about societal problems such as alcoholism, infant mortality, pure food and drugs, war gardens, house-keeping, and young women Christian issues. Gilmore asserts that these working relationships sensitized white female activists to the abilities of black female activists, and provided the former with a point of entry into the black community (where even the

best white women often had no clout).

Gilmore provides an excellent overview of nineteenth-century North Carolina racial politics, examines the psychology of political control, and how some white men, fearful of the presence of black males in the state house, on local commissions, and in federal patronage positions, conspired to insure their removal. She shows how the “trump card,” associating black maleness with white sexuality, was played to sanction using physical and deadly force against black citizens. She unveils how three ruthless and determined white men of the better class (Furnifold Simmons, Josephus Daniels, and Charles Aycock) conspired to eliminate political involvement of black men and their Republican supporters. Using every means at their disposal, these conspirators sensationalized politics and established an environment conducive to disfranchising African American male voters. Gilmore skillfully shows how Simmons, Daniels, and Aycock contrived news stories depicting black males as bestial and full of lust toward white women, and how they carefully orchestrated a propaganda campaign that encouraged men like Alfred Moore Waddell to use deadly force to keep African Americans in their “place.” Politically, their work led to imposition of discriminatory practices designed to disfranchise or discourage black voters.

Gilmore has carefully examined a crucial period in American race relations from the perspective of African American women who were very much involved in the Christian work of that era. She is to be commended for using black women club records to provide an insight into the black female leadership in North Carolina and how that leadership conducted relations with white clubs and leaders. This unique perspective, a strength of the book, would not have been possible using conventional documents alone. Gilmore has provided a thorough assessment of the African-American’s quest for

full inclusion in the mainstream politics of North Carolina, and, in addition, introduces important black female personalities (previously unknown to most scholars) who played instrumental roles in the post-bellum era in North Carolina. The author makes a compelling argument that these black women (including Sarah Dudley, Mary Lynch, Victoria Richardson, Rose Aggrey, Sarah Delany, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Mary Jackson McCrorey, and Anna Julia Haywood Cooper) learned to organize, took advantage of the mechanisms for race improvement available to them, and managed to effect social change in spite of the oppressive Jim Crow tactics employed.

Gilmore’s *Gender and Jim Crow* is an excellent contribution to the social and political literature of the Gilded Age, Progressive Era, and African American studies. The book contains a wealth of information for the researcher. Gilmore’s assessment of African-American women, however, could have been strengthened by focusing more closely on the essential link between the legacy of the black female slave experience and her post-bellum socio-economic disposition. After all, the female slave’s work expectations were not reduced because of her sex. In addition, slave women wielded an influence in the family commensurate with that of the black male. These were experiences not shared by white women, and are essential in understanding the black female post-bellum experience, vis-a-vis her white counterpart. Black female activism in the post-bellum years, and the curtailment of black male participation, may well be the logical outgrowths of the slave experience when females were trusted as nurturers, and males were viewed as potential threats that had to be controlled.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-sawh>

Citation: Wali Rashash Kharif. Review of Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. H-SAWH, H-Net Reviews. June, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1026>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication,

originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.