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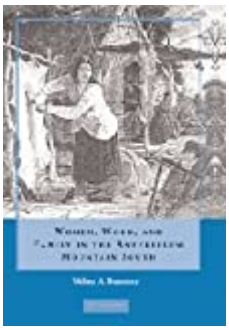

Wilma A. Dunaway. *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xiv + 301 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-88619-2.

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Women in the Antebellum South

The famous nineteenth-century folk ballad, "The Legend of Tom Dooley," tells the tale of one Tom Dooley who lamented his fate while en route to his execution for the murder of his lover. The historical inspiration for the balladâs tale comes from the true story of one Thomas Dula, a man hanged in May 1868 for the murder of Laura Foster in Wilkes County, North Carolina. While immortalized in the mournful tunes of folk music since the late nineteenth century, the story of Foster is often obscured by the fate of the erstwhile lover who stabbed her to death with a knife in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a part of the larger Appalachian Mountain chain. While many different renditions of the ballad exist, the common theme prevalent in all of the versions is that Dula should bow his head and cry because he "killed poor Laura Foster, and you know you're bound to die.â[1] The history of the Dula-Foster legend perpetuates the folk version of Foster as an innocently beautiful woman, whom Dula killed because he wished to avoid marrying her after he decided to end their affair. No clearer example of the common stereotype of a woman living in southern Appalachia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be found than by examining the historical Foster, a woman who drastically varied from her counterpart in local folklore. The historical Foster, murdered by Dula just as Dooley had killed the balladâs version of Foster, died in January 1866. The details surrounding Dulaâs motive for killing Foster are murky, but apparently, Dula murdered her because she had infected him with syphilis during the course of their affair. Records indicate that the historical Foster was beautiful, but she also was an uneducated, poor, sexually promiscuous white woman who spent the majority of each day of her adult life working on her father's farm. The stereotype of women who lived in antebellum southern Appalachia, as represented by Foster, is the exact image that Wilma A. Dunaway attempts to challenge and dispel in *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South.*

Those who turn to the pages of Dunaway's monograph in search of validation of the Foster-represented stereotype of women who lived in antebellum southern Appalachia will be sorely disappointed. Dunaway's

book is a study focused on achieving two primary goals. First, she wishes to debunk "popular mythology about Appalachian womenâ (p. 3). Second, it is her hope that by working against the perpetuation of common stereotypes about women who lived in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains during the colonial and antebellum periods, her research helps to end the "historical silencing about their racial and ethnic diversityâ (p. 3).

The author's desire to challenge the stereotypes so prevalent in literature and historical narrative about Appalachian women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has necessitated the use of several different research methodologies. Essentially, Dunaway's research can be categorized as a work of gender studies, as it seeks to examine how power relationships within the communities of southern Appalachia shaped the experiences of the women who lived there. However, it also possesses some characteristics of a case study in regional history and a historical ethnography. Dunaway does not limit her methodological approach to one historiographical school. She conducts her analysis from several different perspectives depending on how the topic being considered affected the women who lived in the region.

The methodological variation used in Dunawayâs research can clearly be illustrated by the bookâs organization as *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South* is divided into two distinct sections. The first half concentrates on the social characteristics of race, ethnicity, class, and religion that shaped power relationships in the region. The second half relies heavily on evidence derived from economic and demographic data, as Dunaway studies how labor shaped an Appalachian woman's roles as wife, mother, and housekeeper. Dunaway argues that variations in the labor experiences of Appalachian women resulted in work both inside and outside the domestic environment of the home. As a result, the experience of Appalachian women does not conform to the framework popularized by the "spheres of influence" historiographical concept, an idea that remains popular among scholars of nineteenth-century women's history.[2]

Dunawayâs attempt to disprove the validity of the âspheres of influenceâ model, as applicable to the lives of women who lived in southern Appalachia, heavily distinguishes the narrative tone of part 1 of the book from the very theoretical and statistically supported second part. Her extreme distaste for the separate spheres concept, one that Dunaway identifies as identical to the âCult of True Womanhoodâ theorized by Barbara Welter in her 1966 article published in the *American Quarterly*, is apparent throughout the entire monograph. However, while she believes that the theory is of no use in the study of women who lived in antebellum Appalachia, Dunaway does concede that the "death bell for separate spheres" may not have sounded in twenty-first-century historiography as it remained "popular with many [other] feminists and U.S. women's historians throughout the 1990s" (p. 5). Taken as a whole, both sections of Dunaway's book seek to prove her thesis that many different types of women lived in southern Appalachia during the colonial and antebellum periods, beyond the classic stereotype represented by Foster. Modern historiography, Dunaway argues, has tended to marginalize those women who were differentiated by racial, ethnic, and class considerations. Consequently, one of the author's goals is to use her research to help "make invisible Appalachian women visible, in all their class, racial, ethnic, and religious complexitiesâ (p. 4).

The research questions that Dunaway uses to guide the proof of her thesis are complicated and diverse. She enumerates them in the book's introduction in which she asks five questions. First, how accurate is the concept of separate spheres as applied to the lives of nineteenth-century women who lived and worked in Appalachia? Second, what were the "racial, ethnic, and class junctures among women" in the area (p. 10)? Third, how did the agricultural economy of the region influence women's lives, and how did that influence vary among different groups of women, when women's work "conflicted with the elite gender conventions that were embedded in the public statues" (p. 10)? Fourth, what were the consequences for the women and their families when they did not embrace traditional models of nineteenth-century social norms regarding gender? And, finally, how did family relationships, particularly between mothers and their children, change, if they failed to participate in the "cult of true womanhood" (p.11)?

The primary source evidence that Dunaway uses to answer these questions and support her thesis is numerous and diverse. She primarily relies on oral histories preserved in archives. The largest source of her oral history documentation originates from the Appalachian Oral History Project, and she supplements her research with other similar sources taken from Civil War veteran questionnaires and slave narratives. By her own admission, the use of oral history evidence is more prevalent in part 2 of the book, because not as many "female voices" have survived to tell their own stories (p. 11). She simultaneously considers the broader perspective of their

racial groupings as examined in part 1. Part 1's focus on providing the reader with background information that explains the formation and perpetuation of social hierarchies in Appalachia sacrifices individual narrative in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the region's social framework. Instead, Dunaway attempts to "fill the gaps" where she can with other sources, when firsthand narratives are not necessarily the most appropriate way to illustrate the larger social organization of antebellum Appalachia.

Somewhat interestingly, part 1, "Racial, Ethnic, and Class Disjunctures among Appalachian Women," is viewed by the author as mere "background information" to the crux of her analysis, presented in the monographâs second part, "Structural and Social Contradictions between Women's Productive and Reproductive Labors." The first three chapters of part 1 detail the experiences of the three main social groups to which southern Appalachian women belonged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as characterized by Dunaway. Chapter 1, "No Gendered Sisterhood: Ethnic and Religious Conflict among Euroamerican Women," details the experience of white women who immigrated to the colonies, and later states, of southern Appalachia. These territories include Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The chapter considers the immigration of natives from Ireland, Scotland, Germany, England, and Wales to southern Appalachia. As colonists brought Old World prejudices with them to their new homes, cultural and religious conflict slowed the regional assimilation process. For example, Scotch-Irish settlers continued to fight English colonists, while Protestants rallied against Roman Catholics until the social pressures of outside change forced acculturation in the 1820s and 1830s.

Chapter 2, "Not a Shared Patriarchal Space: Imperialism, Racism, and the Cultural Persistence of Indigenous Appalachian Women," tells the story of Native American women who lived in the region, primarily women of the Cherokee Nation. Andrew Jackson's campaign to remove the Native American tribes from their lands in the Southeast during the 1820s and 1830s, described by Dunaway as a type of "ethnic cleansing," is detailed in a rather holistic manner with a rather minor treatment of the tribesâ women compared with either the examination of Euroamerican white women's experiences in chapter 1 or the lives of African slaves and free black women as detailed in chapter 3 (p. 71).

The experience of black Appalachian women as considered in chapter 3, "Not a Shared Sisterhood of Subordination: Racism, Slavery, and Resistance by Black Appalachian Females," remained heavily influenced, according to Dunaway, by the conflict between poor white farmers and African slaves and freedmen and freedwomen who worked small plots of land in Appalachia. As compared to the same agricultural pursuits that worked to reinforce a separation of the races on the opulent plantations of Virginia's tobacco fields, South Carolina's rice farms, and Georgia's cotton kingdom, local overseers in southern Appalachia had to structure a work environment âin which blacks and poor whites were pitted against each otherâ to keep the groups as segregated as possible (p. 81).

The last chapter of part 1, chapter 4, "Not Even Sisters among Their Own Kind: The Centrality of Class Divisions among Appalachian Women," finally examines how all three groups began to interact as determined by their socioeconomic class. Dunaway's theme of division, prevalent in the first part of the book, almost makes it seem as if she is trying too hard to prove that there was no regional notion of a shared "sisterhood," that each group acted completely independent of and in isolation from the others. While Dunaway argues that they shared a commonality in resisting a patriarchal societal framework that shaped power relations in the region, she contends that any commonality ends with that display of resistance. Ironically, it appears that the isolation and independence of each group from the other that she works so hard to illustrate as fact is heartily disproved by her discussion of labor and family in part 2.

The second part of Dunaway's study, "Structural and Social Contradictions between Women's Productive and Reproductive Labors," presents the main points of her thesis in a discussion of the various labor experiences that all women of Appalachia shared during the antebellum period. Through her examination of how women engaged in both agricultural and nonagricultural types of labor, Dunaway attempts to prove that Appalachian women repeatedly challenged the "separate spheresâ stricture. While she does acknowledge that "females were subordinate to men legally, politically, and economically, there was no clear male public sphere when it came to the female labors that were essential to family survivalâ (p. 129). As a result, Appalachian women resisted traditional nineteenth-century forms of patriarchy within the context of their varied labor experiences. To discuss this point, chapter 5, "The Myth of Male Farming and Women's Agricultural Labor," works

very much in tandem with chapter 6, "the Myth of Separate Spheres and Women's Nonagricultural Labor." It is in these chapters that Dunaway most ardently calls into question the validity of the "separate spheres" doctrine, whether through her examination of women who worked in the fields with their husbands or through her consideration of women who engaged in textile production via the "putting out system," manufacturing, domestic service, and many other nonagricultural jobs.

Chapter 7, "Family as Privilege: Public Regulation of Nonpatriarchal Households," and chapter 8, "Motherhood as Privilege: Patriarchal Interventions into Women's Reproductive Labors," are the clearest examples in her research where Dunaway considers traditional issues of gender and sexuality in her study of marriage, family, and sex in the lives of antebellum Appalachian women. According to Dunaway, Appalachian women faced a difficult task when trying to extricate their personal from their public lives as the patriarchal social framework in which they lived continually placed private concerns within the public realm. Chapter 7's examination of how different types of marriage, including forms of common law, prevailed in southern Appalachia, directly relates to her commentary in chapter 8 on the sexual exploitation of the regionâs women. Dunaway's consideration in chapter 8 of sexual exploitation among the Appalachian population, in the common form of extramarital affairs with both willing and unwilling partners, is interesting given the fact that the antebellum notion of personal honor for most white men and women directly related to their family's social status and place in polite society.

Dunaway touches on other traditional issues of gender and sexuality within these chapters, considering how the interpersonal relationships women shared with men in the course of sexual intimacy, via fornication or rape; maternal relations with children; and the termination of those interpersonal relationships as the result of divorce or separation shaped their daily lives. Through her discussion in part 2 of how labor and issues of gender and sexuality shaped Appalachian womenâs lives, Dunaway once again tries to show that the experiences of women remained separated and that they shared no commonalities. It is in this pursuit that Dunaway fails to comment on sexuality and motherhood–the greatest shared experience of all women regardless of race, ethnicity, or class instead of considering how those common experiences simply may have varied among each group.

While there are many fine qualities of Dunaway's research that make it new and exciting for those who study gender history in the South before 1860, the approach that she takes on several issues result in overall weaknesses that detract from the uniqueness of her work. Perhaps the greatest weakness is her failure to complete a thorough treatment of the research subject within the limited pages of the monograph. The number of pages available in which Dunaway could present her argument, due to editorial constraint, leaves certain portions of the research not thoroughly treated. Dunaway acknowledges this shortcoming: "to publish all the information about contextual background, sources, methods, and quantitative evidence would require far more space than is afforded to me hereâ (p. 14). To rectify this anticipated weakness, Dunaway created one of the studyâs most unique and satisfying characteristics when she developed a companion Web site to her book. The Web site, which can be accessed free of charge, should be explored by anyone who wishes to learn more about topics only briefly touched on in her monograph, including definitions of Appalachia, the legacy of Social Darwinism in Appalachian scholarship, and a more fully developed commentary on the most widely perpetuated stereotypes of Appalachian women during the antebellum period.[3]

Although Dunaway includes a significant number of maps, charts of statistical data, and illustrations to support her narrative, and the book does contain an extensive series of notes and a thorough bibliography, the editorial constraints placed on the author will grate on the reader in several places. Perhaps the most noticeable example of where readers will turn the page and be disappointed at what they find, or not find, will occur at the end of the book. While Dunaway crafted an excellent introduction to her research, and each chapter begins with a concise introduction and concludes with a summarized conclusion, the reader will find no final commentary at the conclusion of the book. Dunaway's narrative ends abruptly with her discussion of motherhood in chapter 8, and it almost seems as if an editorial faux pas was created by omitting a brief, final commentary. Readers who are satisfied by an epilogue or parting words from authors will be disappointed as the final pages of the narrative simply end, leaving many readers unsettled and dissatisfied.

It is also worth noting that colonial historians who consult Dunawayâs research, hoping to see a discussion on the evolution of the experience of Appalachian women during the early seventeenth century, will be sadly disappointed. While several descriptions of the research describe it as treating the material chronologically

between 1700 and 1860, the colonial era receives very little attention. The experiences of Cherokee women during the first decades of the eighteenth century are touched on, but the story of Euroamericans, African slaves, and freedwomen are not discussed until after the years of the American Revolution. Instead, Dunawayâs treatment of those women is confined primarily to the first decade of the early Republic in the 1790s. Although the Proclamation of 1763 officially limited British colonization efforts to lands located east of the Appalachian Mountains, men and women did immigrate to lands located west of the line. Treatment of the experiences of women who illegally immigrated to the western side of Appalachia during the first half of the eighteenth century, and whose actions inflamed colonial tensions between Great Britain and her North American colonists, remain absent and, at the same time, seemingly necessary to the authorâs larger research goals. Perhaps, as Dunaway hinted in her discussion on source materials in her introduction to part 1, such a discussion remains absent as the requisite primary source material is scarce. However, the few pages devoted to explaining how and why colonists immigrated to the mountains of southern Appalachia renders Dunaway's research, as a whole, thoroughly antebellum in chronological coverage, and the descriptor â1700-1860â is misleading.

In short, the common themes of race, ethnicity, class, and religion as they define the three social groups of Euroamerican, Native American, and African slave and freed black women distinguish the experiences of women who lived in southern Appalachia before 1860. Dunaway works hard to challenge the popular historiographical notion of separate spheres in her consideration of how resistance to patriarchy and the pursuit of labor prevented Appalachian women from being confined to the domestic sphere during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although she attempts to challenge common myths and historiographical assumptions as she argues that women in southern Appalachian were the exception to the rule, and does so quite successfully in a number of places, Dunaway discounts any shared experience by the three groups of women as if they lived in a relatively self-contained environment. While the author does successfully demonstrate that Appalachian women were not confined to the domestic sphere of the home by the variety of their labor experiences, it remains uncertain if such an argument is unique to southern Appalachia. For example, historians of western frontier women have argued that necessity also eased the notion of separate spheres on homesteads and in western mining towns after the gold rush of 1849. However, Dunaway does show that the experience of Appalachian women, compared to their southern counterparts in cities like Baltimore, Washington, Charleston, and Savannah, and in the tidewater, differed very much from the unique life experienced by women in Appalachian settlements.

By no means are these critiques of Dunaway's methodology and her conclusions a devaluation of her contribution to the larger historiography of gender in the antebellum South. In consideration of the fact that no other historian has attempted to treat the experiences of the disparate groups of women who lived in southern Appalachia before 1860, most likely because of the complexity of the task regarding theoretical considerations and the dearth of primary source materials, the author has done a great service. Other scholars will be able to use Dunawayâs research as a model to create other regional studies that consider the experiences of the women who lived there. Dunaway writes clearly and explains well her research methodology that shows how and why she came to her conclusions. However, her repeated statements challenging and disproving various notions and myths surrounding the women of antebellum Appalachia sometimes cloud the very narrative that she strove to create by employing a research methodology that would allow the women themselves to tell their own story. Such an adamant defense of Dunawayâs research subjects still has resulted in a well-crafted study that will no doubt offer a starting point for many other scholars who wish to consider issues of gender within a specific region, especially the antebellum South.

Notes

[1]. For more on the historical Foster, see John Foster West, *The Ballad of Tom Dula: The Documented Story behind the Murder of Laura Foster and the Trials and Execution of Tom Dula* (Durham: Moore Publishing Company, 1970; Boone: Parkway Publications, 2002), 79-81. The circumstance of Fosterâs murder at the hands of Dula is controversial. For a discussion of the complicated relationship between Foster, Dula, and other Wilkes County residents, see ibid., 186-202.

[2]. The idea that American society was ordered according to "spheres of influence," in which males existed in the public sphere, while females remained confined to the private sphere in order to deal with domestic issues, has been widely debated by social and feminist historians since the theory was first posed in the 1960s. See Barbara Welter, âThe Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,â *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, pt .1 (Summer 1966):

151-174; and Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 9-39.

[3]. Wilma A. Dunaway, "Online Archive for *Women, Work, and Family in the Antebellum Mountain South*," Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, `http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/faculty_archives/appalachian_women/index.htm` (accessed February 2, 2009).

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