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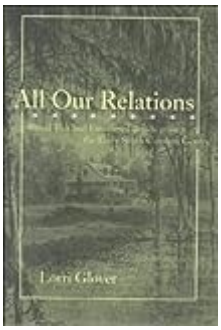

Lorri Glover. *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. xvi + 206 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-6474-2.

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It's a Family Affair

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In *All Our Relations* Lorri Glover, assistant professor of history at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, argues that historians have overlooked a crucial aspect of the cultural and social life of South Carolina's eighteenth-century lowcountry elite: "intragenerational bonds of blood and friendship" (p. ix). Drawing primarily on the extensive family correspondence of her subject population, Glover argues that this tightly-knit group was bound together by the strong emotional, economic, political and social ties forged between siblings and kin in the first years of settlement and strengthened over the course of the eighteenth century. The psychological and sociological literature on family and sibling ties, and the growing historical literature on family formation and function in early America inform her argument.

Intragenerational kin ties helped to define elite identity and were the primary means of excluding outsiders from elite circles. More striking, Glover argues that within elite circles female and male kin often acted as equals, collaborating, and proffering advice on matters ranging from childraising, to political and economic endeavors, to romantic affairs. Such kinship ties, Glover concludes, were based on "cooperation and mutuality" rather than on the "deference and hierarchy" (p. x) that other scholars argue defined elite interaction within the natal household and the rest of South Carolina society.

According to Glover, the pattern of intragenerational cooperation began early in South Carolina, sparked by the harsh demographic and economic climate faced by early settlers to the colony in the late-seventeenth century. The first and most successful white settlers in South Carolina arrived as representatives of family enterprises that stretched from Barbados to England. Once in South Carolina the early deaths of parents forced families to depend more heavily on siblings and extended kin for support. In contrast, those settlers who came to the colony without family support networks rarely succeeded.

These early beginnings established a cultural pattern in which family became more broadly defined and "relatives, especially siblings, formed the most consistently dependable part of the familial world" (p. 24). A variety of lowcountry elite practices–marriages that conflated emotional and economic interests, a narrowed definition

of incest that permitted marriage to first cousins, and the abandonment of primogeniture–strengthened kin bonds at the expense of patriarchal authority within the private household. Throughout the life course, siblings and kin–both male and female–shared the responsibilities of raising and educating children, aided in the selection of marriage partners, and visited and wrote regularly in order to maintain familial attachments.

This pattern of what Glover labels "affective interdependence" among lowcountry elite kin groups fostered a "strong collective identity" (p. 58) centered around extended and egalitarian family bonds rather than the patriarchal household. These family networks, once forged, became the basis for the lowcountry elite's economic and political control of the colony, allowing them to promote and finance their own while actively excluding outsiders from economic and political power.

Glover's concise and well-organized book makes a strong case for the importance of extended family ties in elite formation and the need for historians to reconsider the nature of family in the eighteenth century. Perhaps her most striking contribution lies in her assertion that the egalitarian and cooperative nature of intragenerational ties must force historians to reconsider the rigidity of gender roles among the elite and the power of patriarchy. Affective and egalitarian horizontal relationships within the family, Glover argues, could on occasion undermine the power of the patriarch. Equally important, women actively participated in decisions that influenced both the private and the public realms of elite South Carolinians. Thus, they were not, as most historians have argued, relegated to a separate women's sphere; instead "women's private world was actually intricately intertwined with men's public life" (p. 146).

All this makes for an exciting reconceptualization of gender relations and patriarchal power in the eighteenth century. If only it did not been hang on such a slender reed. Behind this far-reaching re-interpretation of family, gender and power, lies the correspondence of a few elite South Carolina families, buttressed by a small sample of estate and political records drawn largely from secondary sources. Most lacking is a clear description of the economic connections that linked the lowcountry's elite families. Business records and account books that might demonstrate the way in which family was used to establish and maintain the economic power of the Charleston elite make no appearance in Glover's research.

Nor does Glover provide a convincing portrait of the way family shaped the political actions of the lowcountry elite in the late-eighteenth century. Her brief survey of the political history of South Carolina after 1750 from the perspective of family provides neither adequate evidence nor sufficient clarity to be wholly convincing. That family ties could influence the political decisions of elites is a truism; that "family considerations determined political action" (p. 137) seems to overburden family and underestimate the influence of more traditional causative factors such as economic and political interests and ideological commitments.

Moreover, one wonders in light of other historical studies that stress the continuing power of patriarchy in early America–for example, the work of Stephanie McCurry, Allan Kulikoff, and Kathleen Brown–how significant the more egalitarian bonds between siblings and extended kin were in shaping Charleston society.[1] Despite the elite's participation in such unusual relationships, the lowcountry remained a place where race, gender and class shaped the lives of its residents, and even within elite families–as Glover acknowledges–with a few exceptions patriarchal relations trumped the more egalitarian bonds between siblings (pp. 76, 80).

Still, if Glover has not wholly convinced she has provided an important new perspective on family, gender, and power relations within South Carolina – and early American society more generally. No longer can historians ignore the importance of kin networks if they wish to understand how elites gained and maintained economic, social, and political power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What is needed now is a deeper examination of these ties and the way in which they influenced and shaped patriarchy. Glover has provided the first step in that process.

Note

[1]. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, & the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); and Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

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