Bibliographic Essay on African American History

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Introduction


General texts covering major historical events with attention to chronology include John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000), considered a classic; along with Joe William Trotter, Jr., The African American


**Africans in North America**

Between 1619 and 1808, less than one million Africans were transported involuntarily to North America. Documentation for 27,233 voyages is available in The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Data Base on CD-Rom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Statistics alone tell little about the human conditions; but, the special issue “New Perspectives on the Transatlantic
Slave Trade,” William and Mary Quarterly 58 (January 2001), contains insightful essays that combine sheer numbers with interpretative narratives. G. Ugo Nwokeji, “African Conceptions of Gender and the Slave Traffic,” (47-68); and, David Richardson, “Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave,” (69-93), are but two examples.


An overview of other narratives appears in Jerome S. Handler, “Survivors of the Middle Passage: Life Histories of Enslaved Africans in British America,” Slavery and Abolition 23 (April 2002): 23-56. Several autobiographies, including Venture Smith, mentioned in Handlin’s essay are readily available in print format and at the University of North Carolina website “Documenting the American South”--http://docsouth.unc.edu.html

Slavery and freedom existed concomitantly, and Edmund S.


The incongruent existence of slavery and freedom was most evident in Revolutionary America. As a result, states north of Delaware either abolished or made provisions for slavery’s gradual demise. Given its early efforts to end slavery, the


Conventional wisdom suggests that free blacks remained aloof from their enslaved contemporaries, but Whittington B. Johnson, *Black Savannah, 1788-1864* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996); Tommy L. Bogger, *Free Blacks in Norfolk, Virginia, 1796-1860: The Darker Side of Freedom* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997); and Bernard E. Powers, Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), yield enough data to claim interactions among free and unfree blacks were more fluid than previously reported. Furthermore, Victoria Bynum’s *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social & Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), based largely on public records, may be used to expand the discussion of associations among black, white, free, and unfree persons.

**Southern Slavery:**

North American slavery was not monolithic nor were the experiences of those who endured it. Ira Berlin’s *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), notes regional variations. For aspects of slavery outside the
traditional parameters where cotton was king, see Wilma A.
Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and
http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/vtpubs/mountain_slavery/index.htm;
Wilma King, "Within the Professional Household: Slave Children in
the Antebellum South," *The Historian* 59 (Spring 1997): 523-40;
Ronald L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715-
1865* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979); and, Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old

Other studies illuminate the lives of legally enslaved persons who lived as if they were free.
Kent Anderson Leslie’s *Woman of Color, Daughter of Privilege:*
*Amanda America Dickson* (Athens: University of Georgia Press,
1995; and, Loren Schweninger, "A Slave Family in the Ante Bellum
South," *Journal of Negro History* 60 (January 1975): 29-44, are
impressive contributions about the subject.

Regardless of the variations and ameliorating factors, threatening aspects of bondage existed. The potential or actual
separation of families, real or fictive, heightened anxiety
levels. And, Walter Johnson’s *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the
Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1999) details the intricate process of buying and selling human
beings. Sexual exploitation also challenged the well being of
enslaved men, women, and children. Among the discussions of abuse and
harassment are Edward E. Baptist, “Cuffy,” “Fancy Maids,” and “One-


Resistance to slavery varied across the spectrum. Melton McLaurin’s Celia, A Slave (Athens: University of Georgia, 1991), reveals how a woman defended herself against unwanted sexual advances from her owner. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger’s Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1999) presents a masterful investigation of the many males and females who rejected slavery and fled. Without theorizing, Runaway Slaves raises questions about the nature of plantation slavery and relationships between owners and those they held in bondage. Resistance of a different kind was the subject of Douglas R. Egerton, He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999); David Robertson, Denmark Vesey (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); and, Edward A. Pearson, ed., Designs against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999).

In the review essay, “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators,” William and Mary Quarterly 58 (October 2001): 915-76, Michael P. Johnson points to the historians’ failures to read the testimony of witnesses cautiously thereby becoming co-conspirator in the making of the Vesey conspiracy. Johnson’s observation harkened back to one made by Richard Wade in 1964 and reignited controversy about the veracity of the Vesey conspiracy. The authors’ responses to Johnson’s criticisms appear in William and Mary Quarterly 59 (January 2002) wherein Edward A. Pearson’s “Trials and Errors: Denmark Vesey and His Historians,” acknowledges errors in the transcriptions but defends the analysis. The dispute remains unresolved, but it is clear that slave conspiracies or rumors thereof brought deadly results for
many persons involved or accused of involvement.

Abolition of slavery


There are fewer autobiographical accounts by black women abolitionists than by men. Nevertheless, Shirley J. Yee’s Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992) is recommended for it illuminates the lives of many women dedicated to destroying slavery. Jane Rhodes’ Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) highlights the diversity of one woman’s anti-slavery efforts. Several biographical studies of the foremost black woman abolitionist, Harriet Tubman, appeared since

**The Civil War and Reconstruction**


“‘I’s a Man Now’: Gender and African American Men” in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 76-91, linked war to the creation of masculinity.


For discussions of home front in the Civil War era, especially relief efforts directed at newly freed blacks, see Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes or Thirty Years a Slave, and


For studies with attention to the reunification of families, employment, and establishment of schools during reconstruction, see Leon F. Litwack, Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of

The election of 1876 marked the formal end of Reconstruction, but many promises of the era remained unfulfilled. Similarly, women’s suffrage did not become a reality at the time. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn’s African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) argues cogently that black women did indeed work for women’s suffrage contrary to popular notions claiming they opposed feminist issues in favor of racial equality. Until they voted, according to Elsa Barkley Brown’s "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," Public Culture 7 (Fall 1994): 107-46, the women participated in politics vicariously.

The Progressive Era

The Progressive Era followed Reconstruction and is touted as a period of political, social, and economic reform; however, it has been labeled as the nadir for blacks due to legalized segregation, political biases, and economic intimidations. For discussions of the period see Rayford Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901 (New York: Dial Press, 1954); and, Leon Litwack, Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,


Publications about crusades to stop the carnage include Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997); Sandra Gunning, Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912 (New York:


The Great Migration


World War I at Home and Abroad

The coming of World War I created employment opportunities at home in the industrial sector. In the meantime, the treatment of black federal employees in Washington, D. C., deteriorated.


*Harlem Renaissance*

Disillusionment and despair associated with World War I and

The Jazz Age co-existed concomitantly with the Harlem Renaissance and has a literature of its own. Among the best treatments of the period are Samuel Floyd and Marsha Reisser, eds., *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Greenwood, 1990); Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and “Inventor of Jazz”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Sally Placksin, *American Women in Jazz, 1900 to the*

The Great Depression and New Deal


How well blacks fared under President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal is treated in Raymond Wolters, Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Recovery (Westport: Greenwood Publisher, 1974), a volume that has stood the test of time. And, Patricia Sullivan’s Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996) is a valuable contribution to the literature. Joyce A. Hanson’s Mary McLeod Bethune & Black Women’s Political Activism
(Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003) contains a chapter on the leadership of the sole woman in Roosevelt’s Black Cabinet.


Near the end of WWII, the NAACP initiated a fight for human rights based on its belief that civil rights could only maintain the gulf between blacks and whites while human rights alone could repair 300 years of damage caused by slavery, segregation, and racism. Carol Anderson’s *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) concludes that a shifting of priorities in Cold War America tilted the focus from comprehensive justice to the more limited fight for civil rights. **Civil rights Movement**

The Civil Rights Movement generated a voluminous body of

Townsend Davis’ *Weary Feet, Rested Souls: A Guided History of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998) allows readers/tourists to retrace the steps of activists across seven southern states. In a similar vein, a photographic history by Will Counts, *A Life Is More Than a Moment:*
Desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High School (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), invites readers to witness time-bound images of blacks and whites at Central High School in 1957 and to see the resulting changes in the 1990s.


Women were central to the Civil Rights Movement as evident in David J. Garrow, ed., The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started it: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993); and, Elaine Brown, A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story (1992), an autobiographical account of her leadership in the Black Panther Party. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds.’ Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers, 1941–1965 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) crafted an anthology that examines the role of women and expands both the time and geographical regions in which they were active.
During the 1960s while black Americans were demanding access to public facilities and accommodations at home, many Americans were involved in combat in southeast Asia. Blacks served and died in disproportionate numbers in Vietnam, one of America’s most divisive military engagements. See Herman Graham, III, The Brother’s Vietnam War: Black Power, Manhood and the Military Experience (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), a brief study of the black military participation and the protests it generated. Unlike other publications about Vietnam, James S. Hirsch’s Two Souls Indivisible: The Friendship That Saved Two POWs in Vietnam (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004) is an intimate revelation of an enduring camaraderie between two southern-born black and white officers.

Contemporary America

Recent scholarship about African Americans often reflects discussions of contemporary societal issues and conflicting ideologies such as those articulated in the cultural wars. The presence of politically conservative and liberal black Americans gives pause and raises questions about the meaning of “black solidarity.” See Ward Connerly, Creating Equal: My Fight Against Race Preferences (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000); and, Shelby Steele, The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990). The rise of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and the 1991 confirmation
of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court showed another dimension of diverging opinions among blacks. Toni Morrison, ed.,’s *Race-ing, Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992) presents the significance of the debate surrounding the Thomas confirmation through the eyes of scholars and public officials.

significant in health care decisions.


Conclusions

The future generations of scholars like those of the past
will be guided by perceived conditions and needs to maintain the continuum or fill the interstices of African American history. More readily available sources such as Loren Schweninger, ed., Race, Slavery, and Free Blacks: Petitions to Southern Legislatures, 1777-1867 Series I (Bethesda: University Publications of America, 1999) and Series II (Bethesda: LexisNexis Academic & Library Sources, 200), nearly 20,000 microfilmed petitions make it possible to eradicate voids, real or imagined, and reach new vistas in studies of slavery and black-white relations. Additionally, projects designed to recover and reissue out-of-print sources, such as Arnold Rampersand, ed., The Collected Works of Langston Hughes 16 vols. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001-2003), assure that valuable historical sources are not “lost” to future generations. Finally, the willingness of women and men to probe deeply into the scholarly abyss to correct faulty interpretations and advance new ones or to take on new challenges of studying African Americans within economic, social, and political contexts will result in greater understandings of and appreciations for African American history.

Notes