

Reese, Renford. **Review of Kate Dossett's *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935***, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 269 pages. **Western Journal of Black Studies, Volume 33, 2 (October 2009).**

Kate Dossett's book, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935*, examines a recurring theme in African American discourse. The dichotomy between black nationalism and integrationism has been well debated throughout black history. Many scholars have explored the political stances of Booker T. Washington, the accommodationist, and W.E.B. DuBois, the black nationalist. Scholars have discussed Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X and others using the same language and through the same lenses.

The categorization of the ideology and political tactics of black leadership has focused on "authenticity." More candidly, this discourse has focused on who is "real" and who is not. In other words, the scholarship on this subject has been gripped by placing black leadership in distinct black and white camps by examining which leaders are committed to the cause of racial uplift and which ones are 'selling out' to fit into a white constructed reality. This simplistic deconstruction of the "sell-out" narrative has become hackneyed over the years.

Dossett gives us a more complex examination of this seemingly black and white paradigm. *Bridging Race Divides* focuses on how prominent black women navigated the integrationist versus nationalist dichotomy. The author's central argument is that the political activism of prominent black women has been dismissed as assimilationist because their class status rendered them as inauthentic black folks—ones that could not connect with the struggles of their downtrodden brothers and sisters. Fossett challenges this argument by looking at black female leadership between the founding of the National Association of Colored Women in 1896 and the creation of the National Council of Negro Women in 1935.

Dossett's primary aim in this book is to deconstruct the complex political thought and cultural production of black female leaders by analyzing political activism, entrepreneurship, and literary endeavors. She highlights the careers of prominent black women such as pioneering hairdresser Madam C. J. Walker and her daughter, A'Lelia, and Universal Negro Improvement Association activist, Amy Jacques Garvey, and NAACP activist and novelist, Jessie Redmond Fauset. Dossett also examines the life and legacy of prominent clubwomen such as Margaret Murray Washington, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Mary MacLeod Bethune.

The book puts forth three central arguments: 1) that prominent black female leaders challenged the dichotomy between black nationalism and integrationism 2) that black women were at the forefront of black nationalism and worked to shape it in a feminist framework and 3) black women made a significant contribution toward the development of a black feminist tradition.

In her introduction Fossett argues that the nationalism versus integrationism debate has, at times, been extremely divisive and distorting. She also argues, "it is only through analyzing the roles of black women that the extent to which African Americans embraced both integrationist and separatist strategies becomes clear, since black women's leadership roles and overlapping networks made it easier for them to avoid the ideological posturing that often characterized black male leadership roles." The author goes on to state that "Black women were inspired not only by contemporaneous movement; they were also able to draw on a long tradition of black nationalist protest in American which linked race and gender oppression."

This book is an insightful examination of race, class, and gender. It addresses, in detail, all three of the author's central arguments. Fossett exposes the tension in black leadership between "trying to work within white America and with white Americans and remaining true to an 'authentic' racial identity." She effectively examines the causes and consequences of walking this complex and nuanced tightrope.

The profiles on the prominent black female leaders is engaging and interesting. The author takes the reader on a journey through the various race and gender debates that existed in black America from 1896 to 1935. This book is meticulously researched and well sourced.

The major limitation of the book is its organization. Because the themes, reflected in the title of the book, are so broad the book seems to be fragmented. At times, the book reads like a biography, at times a scholarly analysis, and at times a literary critique. The writing style seems to shift abruptly from chapter to chapter as if the sections of the book are disparate essays forced together under one rubric. Nevertheless, the book contains substantive, rich, and interesting content and is worth reading.