

the degree to which this study addresses the full extent of the debate over race in the profession. The time boundaries placed on this study are another problem. Williams never indicates why he begins his examination in 1896, or why he ends it in 1945. Logical events to mark the beginning of a study on racial attitudes might be Booker T. Washington's Atlanta speech, or, perhaps, the founding of the *American Journal of Sociology*--both of which occurred in 1895. Likewise, logical dates to end the study might be the publication of Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* in 1944, or the election of Frazier as president of the American Sociological Society in 1946. The lack of a clearly defined beginning or end to this study reflects the more general problem that Williams has with the organization of this study.

In spite of these flaws, *From a Caste to a Minority* is a valuable book which adds to our knowledge on the formulation of attitudes about blacks in the United States. Furthermore, together with Stow Person's *Ethnic Studies at Chicago, 1905-45*, it provides an intriguing analysis of racial thought in one of the important disciplines of the social sciences.

— Cary D. Wintz  
Texas Southern University

**Shay Youngblood. *The Big Mama Stories*. (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1989) 106 pp., \$8.95 paper.**

A story ain't something you just read off like ingredients on a soap box. A story's like a map—you follow the lines and they'll take you somewhere. There's a way to do anything, and with a story you can take your time.

Shay Youngblood learns how to tell stories from her many Big Mamas. The tales answer questions about her biological mother who is dead, what it means to be a woman, and how it feels to be black in Princeton, Georgia, prior to the civil rights movement. The voices of Big Mama, Miss Emma Lou, Aunt Mae and others leap off the page, and take readers on a journey into homes, on porches, and down the river fishing. Each story is a piece of a puzzle that adds to form a complete picture of the protagonist.

Written in black English, the twelve stories in this volume are portraits of the many women and the few men who teach the young protagonist (who remains nameless) lessons about life. From these tales the narrator/protagonist comes to know not only her personal history, but the larger history of the black community. The optimistic mood and upbeat style of this collection is similar to Toni Cade Bambara's *Gorilla My Love* (1981), in which the narrators are mostly street-smart, hip-talking young women determined to make a place for themselves. While Youngblood's women are middle-aged, they demonstrate spunk, humor, and wisdom.

Youngblood is intimate with the characters, yet her portrayal is not romantic.

These are not your stereotypical strong black women; some are independent like Aunt Mae who enjoys the company of men, but affirms, “I don’t need a husband.” Others are like Miss Alice “who was always having trouble with her husband,” and still others are like Miss Tom, “a mannish-looking woman with a mustache.” However, these women form a sisterhood that provides support for each other during illnesses and other social crises, but they also share laughter. From the stories the protagonist learns about the ingenuity of black people:

Colored folks, as you know, is the most amazing people on this earth. Anything we put our minds to and our hearts into we can get done good and most times better than that. You’ll never know if you can do a thing till you try, and try has never failed.

While her Uncle Buck will agree with Miss Emma Lou about trying, he notes the particular burden that is the lot of the black man,

A black man has seen misery in this country, especially in the South. I’m gonna tell you some things you better member. You think colored peoples free, don’t you baby. Don’t let nobody fool you into thinking you can relax, there’s a heap of colored folks still in chains.

Each story connects the protagonist to the community and prepares her for the history she is expected to make. When she begins to menstruate, her Big Mama guides her:

When a girlchile gets her first blood her mama or one like her mama have to prepare her, tell her things a woman needs to know.

When the young protagonist is told what she needs to know, she is welcomed into the community of womanhood: “I was given a name and invited into the circle of women, no longer a lil girl. I was a woman now. All the stories they had told me were gifts. . . .”

Shay Youngblood’s autobiographical tales are so evocative that the pleasure and pain bleed through.

— Opal Palmer Adisa  
University of California, Berkeley