



What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era (Women in Culture and Society)

Stephanie J. Shaw

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Stephanie J. Shaw takes us into the inner world of American black professional women during the Jim Crow era. This is a story of struggle and empowerment, of the strength of a group of women who worked against daunting odds to improve the world for themselves and their people. Shaw's remarkable research into the lives of social workers, librarians, nurses, and teachers from the 1870s through the 1950s allows us to hear these women's voices for the first time. The women tell us, in their own words, about their families, their values, their expectations. We learn of the forces and factors that made them exceptional, and of the choices and commitments that made them leaders in their communities.

What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do brings to life a world in which African-American families, communities, and schools worked to encourage the self-confidence, individual initiative, and social responsibility of girls. Shaw shows us how, in a society that denied black women full professional status, these girls embraced and in turn defined an ideal of "socially responsible individualism" that balanced private and public sphere responsibilities. A collective portrait of character shaped in the toughest circumstances, this book is more than a study of the socialization of these women as children and the organization of their work as adults. It is also a study of leadership—of how African American communities gave their daughters the power to succeed in and change a hostile world.

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