

- David M. Johnson, North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, "Teaching Ethnicity with Novels"
- David Katzman, University of Kansas, Lawrence, "Woman's Work: 1870-1920: Domestic Service, Immigrants and Blacks"
- Yolanda Moses, California State Polytechnic University-Pomona, "Female Status, The Family and Male Dominance in a West Indian Community"
- Anna Robinson, Toledo, Ohio, "The Black Woman: Double Jeopardy, Dual Responsibility"
- Natalie Rosinsky, University of Wisconsin-Madison, "Mothers and Daughters: Another Minority Group"
- Michele Zak, Kent State University, "Deification and Disdain: A Literary View of Black and Jewish Mothers"

REVIEW OF VIDEOTAPE PRESENTED AT THE
6TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON ETHNIC AND MINORITY STUDIES

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Dubois
Alan Hertzberg
New School for Social Research, New York

To say that *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Dubois* is an exciting new departure in the venerable art of autobiography does not do full justice to the work under review here. Nor is it sufficient to say that in giving us this study of human life, producer Alan Hertzberg proves that works of integrity and high purpose can be crafted by the video artist, holding out the promise that if it would, American television could lift itself from the slough of mediocrity in which it has ever wallowed. What makes this twelve-chapter study an unforgettable experience is Jane Dubois herself, the young black woman from New York City whose life we "watch" unfold over the course of three hours.*

During interviews spanning more than a year, Jane Dubois and Alan Hertzberg talked. Or rather Jane, her pretty face always filling the screen, responded to her friend's unobtrusive question candidly, vivaciously, and at times with humor. The story that emerges is one of an infant girl "given away" to an aunt and uncle by parents who could not, or would not, care for her, who was reclaimed years later only so her parents could increase their

*Seven chapters, lasting an hour and forty-five minutes, were shown at the Ethnic and Minority Studies Conference.

welfare payments. A pregnant high school dropout at seventeen, a welfare mother for some ten years thereafter, Jane was subjected to the full panoply of indignities routinely heaped upon the urban poor by an impersonal, highly bureaucratized society. Among her tribulations, each explored thematically in one or more of the work's chapters, are her confrontations with the city welfare system, her struggle to raise two sons alone, her abortion, and her relationships with various men, all of whom are portrayed as unremittingly selfish and exploitative.

Were the story of Jane Dubois told by anyone but herself, she might emerge as the archetypical American loser--the poor, urban-dwelling ethnic female, crushed and embittered by the humdrum cruelty of her existence. But this is not the Jane Dubois we come to know through her own words, and herein lies the wonder of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Dubois*. Jane is not a loser, but a winner--a fact that none of her friends (and all who see her life leave feeling that they have known and liked her for a long time) would deny. She not only survived her early ordeals but learned and drew strength from them. Jane's story is one of quiet triumph over adversity told with grace, insight, and dignity. As such it is a powerful weapon in the arsenal of those who are enemies of the dehumanizing stereotype, those who would teach that greatness of spirit can and does flourish at all levels of contemporary American society.

-- James D. Henderson
Grambling State University, Louisiana

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