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Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry

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to secure federal funding for rural libraries. Even today, of the 542 public libraries in Iowa, 412 serve populations of less than 2,500. As a former resident of Iowa and author of *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa*, Pawley relates many examples from events in Iowa, the Midwest, and the nation.

Beyond its illumination of the complex interactions and tensions historically influencing support for or opposition to libraries, factors still pertinent and recurring as libraries reinvent themselves in light of ubiquitous technology use and the current economic recession, *Reading Places* makes an equal or greater contribution in its lucidity regarding the research methods used to access that history. Pawley draws on newspaper coverage and interviews with more than 25 key individuals to vividly convey the experiences of those who were involved in the demonstration. She also uses often overlooked primary sources — institutional records, particularly library circulation records — to reveal patron borrowing patterns and individual reading choices, thereby providing comparisons to the claims made by the various stakeholders. Her inclusion of tables of circulation information and relevant statistics, as well as her precise descriptions of her methodological approach, serve as a model for scholars and researchers while elucidating the importance of retaining records that are routinely discarded. *Reading Places* is a timely call to action to print culture historians, library advocates, and anyone interested in the future of public archives.

Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry, by Tiffany M. Gill. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010. xi, 192 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Reviewer Malia McAndrew is assistant professor of history at John Carroll University. Her Ph.D. dissertation (University of Maryland, 2008) was "All-American Beauty: The Experiences of African American, European American, and Japanese American Women with Beauty Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century United States."

The politics of African American hair is a rich, vibrant subject of academic inquiry. In *Beauty Shop Politics*, historian Tiffany M. Gill moves the scholarship beyond its overemphasis on the political meanings of hair styling practices to examine the politics of beauticians themselves. Gill argues that beauty culture professions have historically served as important vehicles through which black women have advocated political change in America. By examining the lives of black beauticians, beauty school owners, and members of beauty culture associations, Gill

links black beauty culturists to the major political and social struggles that African Americans took part in over the course of the twentieth century.

In *Beauty Shop Politics*, we learn of black beauty culturists who, in the early twentieth century, doubled as organizers for Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and went on to become labor leaders in the International Ladies Garment Worker's Union. Gill further positions noted black hair care industrialists, such as Madame C. J. Walker and Annie Turnbo Malone, as social agitators who fought against sexism within the black community as they sold beauty culture as a means for black women's economic advancement. By the 1930s, beauty culture organizations formed to help legitimate their profession and lobby state governments for favorable legislation. Gill's most powerful evidence for her thesis comes from the middle decades of the twentieth century, when beauty culturists worked as grassroots organizers in the fight to dismantle Jim Crow. In addition to participating in sit-ins and marches themselves, beauticians used their shops to politicize patrons. They distributed NAACP literature, registered voters, collected donations, and made the civil rights movement a topic of conversation on their shop floors. In the post-civil rights era, Gill asserts, this tradition was kept alive by beauticians who used their businesses to educate black women about healthy eating, the need for breast and cervical cancer screenings, and the growing rates of HIV infection among black females.

Throughout Gill's work, she asserts that black beauty culturists were effective social and political organizers because of their unique economic position. As self-made businesswomen, black beauticians secured their financial livelihood from within the African American community. Unlike domestic servants, who worked under their white employers' watchful eye or schoolteachers who were beholden to local school boards, beauticians could operate in the world of politics without the fear that white reprisals would leave them jobless. In addition, Gill argues, the beauty shop was a good incubator for political activism because women gathered there for long periods of time and were accustomed to talking about community issues. Much political groundwork could thus be laid under the guise of doing hair.

Beauty Shop Politics more than adequately supports its central argument that black beauticians served as key mobilizers for African American social and political movements over the course of the twentieth century. It is most convincing for the first six decades of the century and then falls somewhat short in its investigation of more recent advocacy efforts. Gill only sparingly discusses the politics of Black

Power and the Afro in the 1970s. In addition, her analysis of beauticians' health activism in the late twentieth century does not make a distinction between the efforts of contemporary beauticians who have been co-opted by mainstream health organizations and the earlier work of beauty culturists whose activism was borne out of the black community itself. Despite this declension at the end of the text, *Beauty Shop Politics* remains a convincing chronicle of black women's social and political mobilization via the beauty industry.

Memory of Trees: A Daughter's Story of a Family Farm, by Gayla Marty. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. xv, 237 pp. Illustrations, bibliographical note. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewer Zachary Michael Jack is associate professor of English at North Central College. A native Iowan and resident of rural Jones County, he has edited many books of midwestern history, agriculture, and essay, including *Homer Croy: Corn Country Travel Writing, Literary Journalism, and Memoir* (2010) and *Iowa: The Definitive Collection* (2009).

I'm glad to have read Gayla Marty's smart, soulful memoir, *Memory of Trees: A Daughter's Story of a Family Farm* and happier still to recommend it. Although the Martys, like so many midwestern farm families, long ago sold out, Gayla Marty stands out as a farmer's daughter whose deeply felt epiphanies concerning the blessing and balm of her agrarian upbringing have been fully realized in an adult life lived in the Twin Cities. As the old saying goes, you can't take the farm out of the farmer's daughter, and for this fact we, her readers, are fortunate. Unlike other recent memoirs of its ilk, *Memory of Trees* is admirably understated and wholly but not blindly appreciative — not a purveyor of the wild child's woe-is-me, couldn't-wait-to-leave-the-farm tell-all that pervades today's farm memoirs written by erstwhile rural sons and daughters.

Although the trees that lend the book its name — maple, oak, birch, spruce, etc. — are episodically described in what amount to interstitial prose odes — the title itself misdirects: the book's front cover features good black dirt, tilled deep, for example, but only the foggiest outline of a tree may be made out. Marty's is not, then, principally a memoir of botany, ecology, or even sustainable agriculture, but a narrative of a daughter's role as a witness to, and sometimes player in, the machinations of a midwestern dairy farm near Rush City, Minnesota, in the 1960s and 1970s. Every farm family should be so lucky as to have a recorder as faithful as Marty, and she herself seems cognizant of her gift and its attendant burdens. "What was written on my