

Michael P. Johnson and James P. Roark, eds. *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) xi, 296 pp., \$16.95.

In an overgrown cemetery in the old village of Stateburg, South Carolina, a hundred miles north of Charleston lies the body of William Ellison (1790-1860), patriarch of a remarkable clan of free blacks whose achievements belie the myth of the Old South as a society of wealthy white masters and poor black slaves. Born a slave and perhaps the son of his master, Ellison early learned to make cotton gins and at age twenty-six purchased his freedom and went into business in Stateburg. Riding the crest of the cotton boom, in 1835 he bought the handsome home of former governor Stephen D. Miller and by 1851 had also become a large cotton planter owning 800 acres of land and sixty-three slaves, more than any other free black except in Louisiana. He moved on an equal footing with white planters, eventually coming down from the "colored" balcony of Holy Cross Episcopal Church to sit with them.

Several of Ellison's children married into free black Charleston families of equal social — if not quite economic — standing, thus linking the Up Country and Low Country "free brown aristocracy." After Ellison's death the gin-making business and plantation were operated by his sons, but the Civil War and Reconstruction caused them to disintegrate and knowledge of the family faded away.

But in 1935 three small white girls playing under the former Ellison house (again in white hands) found thirty-seven letters spanning the period 1848-1870. The thirty-four letters through 1864 are here reproduced for the first time, and after a century the Ellison family can again receive due recognition.

Most of the letters were written from Charleston by James M. Johnson, a son-in-law, to Henry, a son, in Stateburg. They are a treasure trove of information about the free blacks of Charleston and also the numerous Ellisons at Stateburg and whites and slaves of both areas. With the extensive and superb scholarly notes they provide rare insight into family, social, economic, political, legal, and religious life of that crucial period. The most dramatic episode they deal with was the crisis of August, 1860, primarily instigated by jealous white workingmen, during which the Charleston authorities attempted to enforce laws requiring free blacks to verify their freedom or be enslaved. Some were deprived of their freedom, but up to the outbreak of war in 1861, a third of the 3,200 free Charleston blacks fled to the North and Canada.

But most of the "free brown aristocracy" of Charleston, numbering only 500 but with widespread economic and social roots, hung on, avoided enslavement or emigration, and, as the war diverted attention elsewhere, survived into Reconstruction and later. Realizing there would

be “No Chariot Let Down” to rescue them, they further ingratiated themselves with their aristocratic white friends, and, as the editors say, “Their loyalty to the South, to the Confederacy, and to slavery was never unconditional. As always, their loyalty turned on their ability to maintain and protect their own freedom.”

Few books demonstrate the anomalous and tenuous position of antebellum free blacks as well as this.

— Orville W. Taylor
Clearwater Beach, Florida

C. Kamarae, M. Schultz, and W.M. O’Barr, eds. *Language and Power*. (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1984) 320 pp.

In recent years, educators concerned with issues of access and equity have supported a variety of bilingual educational delivery systems. Similarly, feminists seeking representation and recognition have advocated inclusive language and nonsexist job titles. From these and other arenas, the relationship of language and power has surfaced as an issue of national importance. In this timely collection of essays, Kamarae and her associates have legitimated and extended the discussion.

The editors — an anthropologist, a linguist and a professor of speech communication — illustrate the diversity of the essayists. Drawing upon disciplines ranging from literature to political science, the writers are unified by a consistency of theme. The relationship of language and power is explored in interactions from the interpersonal to the international. Despite the differences in subject scale, each of the essayists contributes to our understanding of the ways in which language expresses, and in turn impacts upon, power relationships.

As O’Barr points out, “most people hold strong beliefs about particular speech patterns and . . . these in turn affect judgments about individuals and opportunities granted to them” (p.266). The impact of these judgments upon individual opportunity is explored in the contexts of medical services delivery, in nuclear family interaction, in the courtroom, and in two geographical areas where language usage helps define identity: Canada and Puerto Rico. More abstract consideration is given to minority writers’ struggles, sex and class in the educational system’s ideology, and to social stratification. Black language, Spanish usage in the U.S., and non-native varieties of English receive special attention.

Kamarae and O’Barr bracket these topical essays with thematic chapters which loosely set the parameters of the discussion. These guidelines are defined in broad strokes, indicating the range of possibilities.