Angela A. Ards provides insight on black feminist activism and the role it has played in the years since Brown v. Board of Education, exploring the narratives of Melba Beals, Rosemary Bray, June Jordan, Edwidge Danticat, and Eisa Davis. Each woman is viewed as an activist in her own right, and the five narratives provide a counternarrative to many depictions of the civil rights era. Each chapter contains a different narrative and builds on the previous one. Ards explains that Melba Beals “capitalizes on movement and childhood memoirs, to craft her countercultural memory of the Little Rock campaign” (p. 29), while Rosemary Bray focuses on the 1960s and the struggles of “working-class people” (p. 61). Ards mentions that black feminist thought is usually “confined to militancy, or stereotypes of black women’s unparalleled strength,” but is more than that (p. 62). Black women were instrumental in political activism, and that is emphasized in each chapter. She unpacks the “real” stories and puts them into perspective by referencing books that have similar themes and focusing on what was happening politically and socially while still focusing on the narrative in each chapter. In Chapter 2, she begins by mentioning the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings and proceeds to go back into history to provide more of a context for readers. The black feminist theme and black politics are used throughout the book, but Ards focuses on events in the 1990s to provide context for Bray’s Unafraid of the Dark. There are also connections to Guida West’s The National Welfare Rights Organization, Carol Gilligan’s In a Different Voice, and Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun, as well as references to the Freedom Riders and “the voter registration drives that launched Fannie Lou Hamer to prominence” (p. 64). She challenges readers to think beyond the stories we have heard and dig deeper to understand what was really going on and what issues lay underneath those stories by making connections to relevant books, events, music, and more that align with the narrative of each woman.

Ards moves on to the narrative of June Jordan, as an immigrant writer who focused on childhood, and to Edwidge Danticat, also an immigrant writer, who “introduces cultural memories whose histories and perspectives serve to expand the black political imagination” (p. 107). The last chapter, on Eisa Davis’s Angela’s Mixtape, brings hip-hop culture to the forefront and looks at its impact on the black community. Ards also references Queen Latifah’s album Ladies First; Lorraine Hansberry’s To Be Young, Gifted and Black; Kevin Powell’s Step into a World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature; and more to draw connections to Angela’s Mixtape.

“A central argument of the book,” says Ards, “is that storytelling offers radical insights for addressing contemporary issues that demand critical engagement from the audience” (p. 112). This powerful exploration of the narratives of five women to understand the role of black feminist activism pushes readers to consider the role of storytelling in history.

Those with a general interest in African American women’s history and African American history will find this book interesting. Students in African American or women’s and gender studies courses can learn more about the narratives of five women and their roles in shaping the post-Brown era. The narratives in this book are about women who are not often discussed when we think of African American women; they are stories we can all learn from.

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