

Free, Black, and Female in the Old South (Southern Voices from the Past: Women's Letters, Diaries, and Writings Ser.):

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. BLACK WOMEN'S VOICES By A Customer THIS TERRIFIC BOOK RECAPTURES BLACK WOMEN'S EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE UNIQUE LIVES THEY LED. WE KNOW SO LITTLE ABOUT FREE BLACK WOMEN IN THE SOUTH AND THESE LETTERS AND DIARIES BRING TO LIFE A NEGLECTED CHAPTER OF OUR HISTORY AND THEIR EXPERIENCE.....PLUS THE DIARY OF THIS YOUNG BLACK WOMAN DURING THE CIVIL WAR IS A COMPELLING HISTORICAL VOICE. THE EDITOR HAS DONE A TERRIFIC JOB SETTING THESE VOICES IN CONTEXT SO WE CAN ONCE AGAIN HEAR THEIR STORIES AND READ THE WORDS OF LOST BLACK WOMEN FROM THE PAST.

Chained to the Rock of Adversity offers valuable insight into the lives of the Old South's free women of color, using personal letters and a diary to tell an extraordinary story. The letters, from family members and friends, were written between 1844 and 1899 to Ann Battles Johnson, wife of prominent Natchez businessman William T. Johnson, and her daughter Anna, while Ann's daughter Catharine wrote the diary. A freed slave herself, Ann Johnson became the head of her family and a slaveholder before the Civil War. Her days were filled with the often tedious and sometimes overwhelming duties assigned to slaveholding women, but her race separated her from most other women of this class. The writings depict a tight-knit network of family and friends and show a family well aware of its precarious position in society, feared by most whites and resented by other blacks. Editor Virginia Meacham Gould provides an extensive introduction, a cast of characters, identifying notes, and a brief afterword tracing the Johnson family to the present day.

This is a spectacular achievement. Gould gives us the only example we have of a free black woman's testimony. It is simply a treasure. (Catherine Clinton author of *Tara Revisited*) This is a splendid book. I cannot praise too highly the contributions by Gould in making this book come alive. (Carol Bleser editor of *Tokens of Affection: The Letters of a Planter's Daughter in the Old South*) About the Author Virginia Meacham Gould is the historian for the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans.