



# **Born Southern: Childbirth, Motherhood, and Social Networks in the Old South**

*V. Lynn Kennedy*

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In *Born Southern*, V. Lynn Kennedy addresses the pivotal roles of birth and motherhood in slaveholding families and communities in the Old South. She assesses the power structures of race, gender, and class?both in the household and in the public sphere?and how they functioned to construct a distinct antebellum southern society.

Kennedy's unique approach links the experiences of black and white women, examining how childbirth and motherhood created strong ties to family, community, and region for both. She also moves beyond a simple exploration of birth as a physiological event, examining the social and cultural circumstances surrounding it: family and community support networks, the beliefs and practices of local midwives, and the roles of men as fathers and professionals.

The southern household?and the relationships among its members?is the focus of the first part of the book. Integrating the experiences of all women, black and white, rich and poor, free and enslaved, these narratives suggest the complexities of shared experiences that united women in a common purpose but also divided them according to status. The second part moves the discussion from the private household into the public sphere, exploring how southerners used birth and motherhood to negotiate public, professional, and political identities.

Kennedy's systematic and thoughtful study distinguishes southern approaches to childbirth and motherhood from northern ones, showing how slavery and rural living contributed to a particularly southern experience.

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