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**Review of *Pioneer Woman Educator: The Progressive Spirit of Annie Webb Blanton* By Debbie Mauldin**

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*Pioneer Woman Educator: The Progressive Spirit of Annie Webb Blanton.* By Debbie Mauldin Cottrell. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993. Preface, introduction, illustrations, photographs, conclusion, notes, bibliography, index. xxii + 183 pp. \$11.95 paper.

Debbie Mauldin Cottrell has written a meticulously researched biography of the first woman to hold statewide office in Texas. Serving as state superintendent of public instruction from 1918-22, as well as President of the Texas State Teachers Association, Vice-president of the National Education Association, and a professor of education at the University of Texas at Austin, Annie Webb Blanton focused her life's work on the reform of rural education. She also labored tirelessly to promote the advancement and equality of women throughout professional education. By building on their traditional role as teachers, she opened new opportunities for women.

Blanton's career was marked by success as an educator, author, suffrage supporter, and political figure. Under her guidance, Texas lengthened the school year, enforced compulsory attendance laws, revised certification requirements, and reduced the number of one-teacher schools through rural consolidation. In 1929 she made a lasting contribution to education by founding Delta Kappa Gamma, an honorary society for women educators. Its

efforts to achieve its goals, which included removing gender barriers prohibiting professional advancement and influence and improving society through women's work, have earned the society substantial respect and praise. Membership today exceeds 160,000, with active chapters in every state and thirteen nations. Delta Kappa Gamma is certainly Blanton's greatest legacy.

Despite these considerable accomplishments, Blanton could not entirely escape the restricted social vision of her place and time. Although she believed in equality and opportunity for women, her conceptions were limited to middle-class, white women. Cottrell states that "equality was for Blanton an earned privilege rather than an inherent right," but apparently only whites could earn this equality. Blanton's racial exclusivity, its elitism and intolerance, was typical of Progressive reform in Texas. Cottrell recognizes this deficiency but feels it outweighed by Blanton's contributions to education as a whole and to the elevation of women into the upper ranks of the teaching profession.

Debbie Mauldin Cottrell's chronicle of Blanton's career is a noteworthy achievement. Although Cottrell neglects to elaborate on Blanton's personal relationships with women and how they may have affected the contradictions in her ideology, she is clear in documenting the degree to which Blanton embodied the biases of her era with respect to race relations. Regardless, *Pioneer Woman Educator* is a valuable initial inquiry into the history of education and gender studies in Texas.

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