

Book Review and Book Club Announcement

African American Women Chemists by Jeannette E. Brown

By Carol Mulrooney, NESACS 2021 Chair-Elect

The book *African American Women Chemists* by Jeannette E. Brown is an extensive historical introduction to the presence of African American women in the field of chemistry. Many ACS members will recognize Dr. Brown and her works, but I would like to bring this book to the attention of those NESACS members who haven't yet read it.

I was inspired to purchase the book when it was recommended by participants in the June 2020 Open Dialogue on Diversity, Inclusion & Respect, sponsored by ACS PROF. I confess that up until now I haven't learned much about the history behind the chemistry, never spending much time reading about the lives of those scientists who made the greatest discoveries. This book, however, completely changed my perspective. I was captivated by the accounts of the lives and experiences of these women who had struggled so hard for the ability to add to the scientific knowledge of the world.

The book is structured in chronological order, starting with early pioneers who became accomplished educators and researchers under very difficult circumstances. There is a chapter devoted to Marie Maynard Daly, the first African American woman chemist to receive a PhD in chemistry. Then the sections of the book are grouped by the chemists' respective fields including academia, industry, engineering, and science policy. The last chapter features the author herself.

The stories begin with the scientists' early life, accomplishments, and challenges faced in their education and careers. Most of the accounts include descriptions of mentors who sponsored and supported these chemists. Once established in their careers, these women often worked toward mentoring the next generation of student chemists and giving back to their communities in many different ways. The book concludes with resources, next steps, notes, and bibliography. The resources and bibliography are a particularly fitting way to conclude these histories, as anyone reading this book will be inspired to learn more!

From the very beginning, I was struck by the intense drama in these stories. Accounts of women going from extreme poverty to earning their doctorates were inspiring, but many of these women also faced terrible tragedies. It was hard to not get very angry at the infuriating episodes where chemists had credit for their work stolen or dealt with intense racism from other scientists.

Most of the chapters were ultimately uplifting though. I decided not to share more details of the women's lives and accomplishments in this mini-review because I don't want to give anything away to those who haven't yet read the book.

(Here are some hints: I learned about the discovery of a treatment for leprosy, the invention of a spot test for the explosive TATB that is now used by the DHS, and that one of the chemists was married to a famous actor and singer!) Rather than just summarize the many fascinating stories in the book, I want to invite all of you to read these for yourselves and then join in a group discussion.

Please email carol.mulrooney@gmail.com if you are interested in joining us to discuss African American Women Chemists. We will announce a date for this first meeting of the book club in the coming months and are looking forward to hearing your ideas about additional books to feature in this series of conversations.