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White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States by Louise Michele Newman

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than forbidding, has to do with the generally high level of political-science speak. While the reliance on jargon varies in intensity from contributor to contributor, and among different methodological approaches, most historians may feel the language is off-putting. A more serious obstacle to appreciating the scholarship relates to the methodological foundations and statistical procedures used in some of the studies. For example, Claudio Cioffi-Revilla's "The Political Uncertainty of Interstate Rivalries: A Punctuated Equilibrium Model" avails itself of probability models and survival analysis, which makes for dense and intimidating reading. His main result, "that the hazard rate function of interstate rivalries is in every case variable, not constant . . . , with a J-shape, indicating that a rivalry's length is a primary factor in explaining its endurance/termination propensity," proves a challenge to even the most quantitatively literate historian.

This should not, however, detract from the overall high value of this work. This collection of studies, along with the introduction and conclusion by Paul Diehl, makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of international relations in general, and to enduring rivalries in particular. Taken together, the various contributions provide a cornucopia of information and insights that range from the mundane to the magnificent. Historians especially will appreciate that the individual studies take temporal dimensions seriously, firmly grounding their analysis in appropriate historical contexts.

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*White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States.* By LOUISE MICHELE NEWMAN. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. 304. \$19.95 (paper).

Louise Michele Newman has written a book on the racial origins of nineteenth-century feminism in the United States that will anger many white feminists, both in the university and beyond, because, I suspect, they will see how white feminism today remains tied to the social evolutionary discourse that Newman implicates in the justification of nineteenth-century American imperialism abroad and racial hierarchy at home.

Through a detailed and clever analysis, Newman reveals how white women's rights proponents of a century ago viewed their work as part of a larger "civilizing mission" where converting savages to "Christianity" meant "Americanizing" Indians and uplifting Negroes and other

non-whites. Because this mission was underpinned by assumptions of white superiority and victimization of people of color, the ideology of racism cast the black woman, for example, in the role of “debased victim,” while portraying the free white woman in the role of “an empowered, sanctified uplifter.”

Suffragists had much in common with missionaries, viewing themselves as superior human beings. Like their American compatriots, suffragists held anti-democratic and racist views toward immigrants and people of color in general. Of course, such sentiments were characteristic of white American society at the time, just as they are today. But it is instructive to read how white women and whiteness as an ideology shaped the suffrage movement as much as its opposition. Thus Newman explains how Catherine Beecher and Mary Abigail Dodge, two famous antisuffragists, shared with their suffragist opponents a “determination to create political roles for white women that would maintain white civilization and advance the race” (p. 75)—the kind of political roles that would keep people of color in an oppressed and exploitable condition.

Newman underscores how the role of missionary did not merely reflect the racist origins of American culture. Practically, white suffragists used the role to escape the oppressive, domesticated conditions that came with their status as white, middle-class women. Ideologically, they argued that patriarchy was limiting their capacities as civilizers. They, too, could participate successfully in the colonial enterprise. Imperialism, in other words, was something white women could practice as effectively as white men.

In 1891, May French-Sheldon, a forty-four-year-old American woman, undertook a three-month safari into a remote region of East Africa. She traveled as any rich white imperialist male would have: with wicker chairs, silk curtains, servants, silver cutlery, and linen tablecloths. The press feted her around the Western world as a heroine. She had demonstrated, like white men before her, the superiority of white civilization.

As Newman makes clear, French-Sheldon’s success as an exemplar of liberated womanhood “was due directly to her deployment of whiteness within a master narrative of colonial domination, which authorized her to embody, for at least three generations of American women, what was best in white civilization” (p. 105).

Accomplishing what white men accomplished was a coveted goal for white feminists of the time. Thus white women embraced the evangelical mission to convert the heathen. At home, the “Indian problem” was reconceived, as Newman skillfully reveals, as a “Woman Question.”

Indian women were cast as saviors of their race and thus agents of the civilizing mission.

But this surface solidarity actually reinforced the superiority of white civilization. White women decided what Indian women should be and how they should proceed. While at work in the fields of the Lord, white female reformers furthered American imperialism. As Newman concludes, "In the end, the main beneficiaries of this civilizing work were white women themselves . . . their work among Indians brought white women great public visibility and political power" (p. 119).

Assimilationist policies, entrenchment of patriarchal gender roles, and an absolute belief in American superiority also guided the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary Roberts Smith Coolidge, two of the most famous, and still read, feminist theorists of the early twentieth century.

For Native peoples in the United States and around the world, the struggle against imperialism has always meant, perhaps first and foremost, a struggle against cultural imperialism. Newman reveals how Gilman and Coolidge sought to transform Native cultures in order to transform relations between Native men and women. Their feminist project, in other words, was an imperialist project at its core.

No better example can serve as proof of this than the work of Margaret Mead in Samoa. As a Native Hawaiian and thus a Polynesian cousin to Samoans, I must say that this is my favorite chapter in Newman's book. Finally, a superbly qualified historian has written what we Polynesians have known for some time, that Margaret Mead's "use of anthropology drew on her culture's longtime prurient fascination with the primitive as racial other, on whom white women projected or worked through their own sexual and racial anxieties as they continued to reflect on what they should do about their own perceived sexual oppression" (p. 176).

In arguing that Western liberal feminism has perpetuated cultural ethnocentrism, Newman underscores what we Native women have known for some time. Racism is central to the Western project, whether feminist or masculinist, American or European. After more than twenty years of American feminism in the modern period, indigenous women like myself understand that working within our own nations takes precedence over "coalitions" with white feminists. This is as it should be, since Native struggles for sovereignty are against the same Western imperialism in which Newman locates Western feminism.

As Newman concludes, "racism was not just an unfortunate side-

show in the performances of feminist theory. Rather, it was center stage." Today, as indigenous nations of the Western hemisphere embark on a new century, racism remains at center stage.

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*The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918.* By ALON CONFINO. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Pp. xiii + 280. \$59.95 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

*Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870.* By SUSANNE ZANTOP. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. Pp. ix + 292. \$54.95 (cloth); \$18.95 (paper).

For decades historians of Germany have been debating the idea of whether or not Germans in their nation-building process throughout the nineteenth century embarked on a different or separate path (*Sonderweg*) towards modernity. Hindsight guides most of these considerations as the horrors of Nazism provided good reason to investigate the less than liberal elements enshrined in the German political tradition. While such debates ensure an interest in German pasts throughout the world's history departments, they also served to insulate investigations of German history from larger, more global themes. As far as world history is concerned the historical investigations of the German global legacy were on their own *Sonderweg*, namely that of excluding the German case examples from larger global investigations. The development of new research interest in both German and world histories, however, is reversing this trend as two recent publications reflect. The late Susanne Zantop's *Colonial Fantasies* and Alon Confino's *The Nation as Metaphor* render important contributions to the world historical themes of "history," memory, and imagination. Both works investigate how such themes are played out in the emergence of the German national and supranational consciousness. Their investigations reveal how Germany's own troubling modernities have important implications for the study of world history.

Zantop's study tackles German colonialism. Unlike the tremendous global impact of British and French colonialism, German overseas expansion was a rather limited endeavor. Not only did Germany