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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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women and men could access the animal will behind the drive for success.

By the 1920s, the female leadership of the New Thought movement had constructed a model of womanhood fully capable of materialistic as well as sexual desire. But as Satter explains, this ideal was soon absorbed by the emerging discourse of popular psychology, and the desiring woman became sexualized. New Thought became "masculinized," and its chief beneficiaries were the aspiring white-collar businessmen who found inspiration in the "positive thinking" of Norman Vincent Peale and his crasser contemporaries.

Satter's attention to gendered language in New Thought seems long overdue, and her analysis of its ambiguous and slippery discourse is genuinely compelling. Questions remain, of course. Satter's focus on leaders tells little about the rank and file, although her claims about the efficacy of New Thought in the lives of women beg for their stories as well. Readers familiar with other healing movements like Pentecostalism might also wish for more nuanced exploration of New Thought's relationship with its more "orthodox" religious competitors; Satter tends to characterize mainstream Protestantism through the dismissive comments of her subjects. But certainly there were affinities. Methodists like Frances Willard were thoroughly comfortable with the language of spiritual transformation, although they used it with a particular member of the Trinity in mind. But at bottom, Satter's analysis compels attention to New Thought as far more than a marginal religion; its female devotees were clearly striking a chord that resonated deeply through their culture, and indeed has continued to do so.

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LOUISE MICHELE NEWMAN. *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1999. Pp. vii, 261. Cloth \$49.95, paper \$19.95.

Criticism of the U.S. woman suffrage movement for racism and elitism is not new, but the typical explanation for these failings is individual prejudices or tactical expediency. This book takes a different approach. Reviewing the intellectual history of racist ideology among white feminists from the 1870s to the 1930s, Louise Michele Newman highlights the joint emergence of evolutionism, imperialism, and the woman rights movement and concludes that racism is "an integral, constitutive element in feminism's overall understanding of citizenship, democracy, political self-possession, and equality" (p. 183). Feminists embraced evolutionism because it challenged the traditional view that women's sphere reflected divine will or "Nature's plan," moving the debate over gender equality from the pulpit to the ballot box. But evolutionism also put up new barriers to equality by declaring sexual differentiation a mark of social and racial progress and

delineating an evolutionary scale that placed white men at the top and women and so-called "primitive" groups below, a convenient theory for the justification of imperialistic ambitions.

Newman investigates the writings of successive decades of white feminists who responded to the contradictions of evolutionary theory, often by comparing themselves favorably with nonwhite and lower-class groups and demonstrating their worthiness for the responsibilities of public life by asserting their parity with white men. Evolutionism influenced the well-known shift of the woman suffrage movement away from natural rights and toward "expediency" rationales, she argues, by elevating the campaign to a civilizing mission that would save "the race" while simultaneously narrowing its intended beneficiaries to white, middle-class Anglo-Protestants. Other privileged women used the interconnected discourses of evolutionism, racism, and women's rights to liberate themselves from the cult of true womanhood through work as missionaries, explorers, and ethnographers of nonwhite cultures; Mary French-Sheldon's explorations of "savage Africa" in the role of "White Queen" is one vivid example recounted here. The book ends with the work of Margaret Mead, who helped accomplish a paradigm shift in anthropology from evolutionism to cultural relativism yet nonetheless, suggests Newman, retained vestiges of Victorian ideology as she sought authority and recognition through her research on nonwhite peoples.

The strongest evidence for the author's thesis is found in the writings of feminist activists who argued against the evolutionist principle of sexual differentiation for their own class but supported it for women of lesser means. Newman contrasts feminists' assertions of sameness in arguing for women's higher education with endorsements of difference in seeking protective labor legislation for women industrial workers. The notion that separate spheres represented progress for lower-class women was one attempt to resolve the contradictions of evolutionism that supported both women's liberation and their continued subjugation. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose theories on women and work were considered radical at the end of the nineteenth century, is reevaluated as a reactionary who labeled the home a primitive institution from which women must be released for the attainment of (white) racial progress and who endorsed assimilation to the dominant patriarchal culture as a necessary step in the evolution of "primitive" black and foreign-born Americans. Concludes Newman, such examples demonstrate "the simultaneous emergence of feminist ideology and assimilationism as two components of a culturally comprehensive racial politics" (p. 134).

For those interested in the history of ideas, the thorough analysis of the influence of evolutionism on early feminist writing offers many new insights. This is not, however, a history of the early women's rights movement; rather, it is an amalgam of writings by nonfeminists, feminist fellow-travelers, and a few true

believers. The organized movement for women's rights receives little attention, particularly in its most active phase from 1890 to 1920, and the comparison between women suffragists and their opponents overstates their ideological kinship through writings that predate the emergence of organized antisuffragism. The asserted link to contemporary liberal feminism is likewise tenuously drawn. Although perhaps too ambitious in its goals and too quick to interpret ambiguous discourse as supportive evidence for its primary thesis, Newman's book provides a compelling look backward at the limitations of feminism as an ideology of human liberation.

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ELIZABETH HAYES TURNER. *Women, Culture, and Community: Religion and Reform in Galveston, 1880–1920*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. x, 371. \$19.95.

Galveston, Texas, is usually featured in American urban history as the source of the city commission form of government that was invented in the wake of a devastating hurricane that destroyed much of the city in 1900. The city commission was one of those "progressive" innovations that sought corporate efficiency at the expense of such inconveniences as popular elections in order to place power in the hands of the "best people." Elizabeth Hayes Turner's finely researched book shows that the Galveston storm was a major turning point for the progressive women of Galveston as well, and with some of the same contradictory implications. Next to studies by Anne Firor Scott and Anastatia Sims that treat women's voluntary associations on the national and state level, Turner offers an in-depth examination of one community with important implications for our general understanding of this subject.

Before the storm, the women of Galveston had confined themselves primarily to church activities and various benevolent institutions. Church ladies concerned themselves above all with the interior decor of their churches. In new benevolent institutions, orphanages, kindergartens, and Ladies Aid Societies, "lady managers" gained administrative experience and established an authority in public affairs involving the poor and destitute. The emergence of women's clubs, whether devoted to culture or to service, also provided vital training grounds for clubwomen. Out of these groups would come a corps of women equipped with the organizational skills and civic consciousness that prepared them to assume the larger roles the events of 1900 had suddenly opened to them. The emergence of Galveston's progressive women paralleled that of other urban areas, but the storm acted as a catalyst that upset the more tradition-bound roles that defined southern womanhood. The Women's Health Protec-

tive Association, founded soon after the big storm, took up issues that extended naturally from traditional women's roles, such as pure milk and city beautification. In turn, their engagement with such public policy issues flowed into a more direct political movement to gain votes for women. The Galveston Equal Suffrage Association sprang from the same cadre of activists and the same concerns that had pulled women from churches and benevolent societies into the public sphere.

Turner is interested in identifying the social characteristics of the leaders, particularly their religious affiliation, and the special feminine nature of the women's movement. Her leading activists were all wealthy, white, Protestant women linked to the male business and civic elite. They belonged to the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches for the most part, but denominational affiliation seems to have been more significant as a marker of class than a theological influence on reform. Those outside the white Protestant upper class organized their own benevolent societies and clubs. Jewish, Catholic, and African-American women generally adopted quite similar models of organization, but these signified their excluded status. Turner's chapter on African-American women provides a rare glimpse inside their world.

That white elite women shared with their male counterparts similar class interests and values is undeniable, but Turner is concerned with showing the different nature of the women's reform movement. Men used political power to protect or privilege the material interests of their families, or their class or race, over others. Elite women "were more interested in issues of aesthetics, health, and protection of the community at large." Their reform impulse sprang from their roles in the home and church and therefore was "imbued with values that fostered nurturing of dependents and care for the unprotected" (pp. 196–97). This gender dichotomy may be overdrawn, but it points to a certain complementary division of labor among the urban elite, in which women offset and softened some of the harsher features of the economic world their male counterparts ruled.

Some of the most interesting and original parts of Turner's book reveal women who went against type. Her fascinating portrait of the United Daughters of the Confederacy shows them playing a leading role in implanting the "true" version of southern history in school curricula. The excerpts from their "Catechism" provide a glimpse of how white women helped to construct a culture of southern white identity that combined pride in regional heritage with white supremacy. The movement to glorify the Lost Cause coincided by no accident with the rise of Jim Crow's new regime. Turner pulls no punches when it comes to showing the complicit role of white women in these and other unprogressive "reforms" of the era, and if this contradicts her otherwise laudatory view of women