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

Review by: Allison L. Sneider

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The value and persuasiveness of Kantrowitz's interpretation become especially clear in his discussion of the remarkably violent rhetoric that surrounded Tillman's awkward system of state-run liquor retailers (the so-called dispensary system). Kantrowitz traces Tillman's motivations for this unprecedented extension of state authority (including surprisingly intrusive enforcement) to his intent to defuse the threat that prohibition posed to white supremacy. Similarly, we might wonder why the "voice of the people" would support constitutional reforms that threatened to disenfranchise poor whites. But there was no paradox. Suffrage restriction restored power and mastery to the same elites who had led the charge to defend slavery and then later against Reconstruction.

Having remade white supremacy in South Carolina, Tillman moved on to the U.S. Senate and to the "reconstruction" of the nation along similar white supremacist lines. "Pitchfork Ben" left little mark as a legislator, but he could be counted on like clockwork to vent extreme endorsements of lynching and the inviolable supremacy of whites. Kantrowitz contends that Tillman disseminated his paternalist and racist fantasies to a nation that was at once tantalized, shocked, and swayed by them.

Kantrowitz has written an ambitious book that succeeds in its goal of demonstrating how the discourse of gender and race became the political lexicon of white supremacy. He insists that "any real analysis of white supremacy" must "pay close attention to words and ideas" no less than "mechanisms of physical violence and economic coercion" (p. 3). Tillmanism, not Tillman, then, is Kantrowitz's subject.

No criticism is intended when I suggest that those interested in a conventional biography should turn elsewhere. Kantrowitz betrays little interest in the details of Tillman's life. Readers, for instance, will be surprised to learn that Tillman had a "beloved" daughter Addie; she is introduced and dies in the same sentence (p. 252). Likewise, Tillman is often virtually invisible in the first four chapters. Instead, he appears as a voiceless figure whose identity and agency is defined by his collective affiliations (e.g., landholders, slaveholders, Red Shirts). His ideas apparently were indistinguishable from those of his more articulate and visible comrades.

What this book does beg for is a complementary study of the sinews of Tillman's power. Let me be clear. I am not suggesting that "deeds" have greater historical relevance than "words" but rather that the relationship of discourse to the mechanics of Tillman's power, patronage, organization, and policy merits further scrutiny. But when such a study is undertaken, and when other scholars revisit the other architects of postbellum white supremacy, they necessarily will begin with Kantrowitz's impressive study.

University of Florida

W. FITZHUGH BRUNDAGE

White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States.

By Louise Michele Newman. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. x, 261. Paper, \$19.95, ISBN 0-19-512466-9; cloth, \$52.00, ISBN 0-19-508692-9.)

In *White Women's Rights*, Louise Newman sets out to explain a central paradox of white women's activism in post-Civil War America: their com-

mitment to establishing civil and political equality with white men even while actively constructing and preserving racial and sexual hierarchies between themselves and numerous “others.” She finds the answer to this seeming conundrum in the “simultaneous development of two ideologies, wom[e]n’s rights and social Darwinism” (p. 23). In contrast to scholarship that explains away the rise of racist arguments for white women’s rights, Newman argues that “evolutionary constructions of racial progress and sexual difference were central to the way in which white women activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries conceptualized wom[e]n’s rights and sex equality” (p. 21). Newman thus moves away from a purely instrumental understanding of the political capital that white women made of their sex and race in an expansive and increasingly heterogeneous polity—a move that actively challenges the established narrative of much women’s rights historiography. Exploring the precise ways that racial hierarchy and sexual difference were foundational to the thinking of women’s rights activists, *White Women’s Rights* argues that the paradox is, in fact, no paradox at all.

Newman’s effort to give post-Civil War feminism a new history is built around a series of vignettes that address the “particular precepts of evolutionist theories concerning social progress, woman’s nature, and racial difference that Anglo-American Protestant women used to empower themselves” (p. 10). This approach brings together a host of reform activities that together represent the varied manifestations of organized white womanhood through the Progressive era. Newman’s examination is designed to show that Alice Fletcher’s work for Indian reform, Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s suffrage activities, Frances Willard’s temperance organizing, and May French-Sheldon’s exploration of Africa (to name only a few) were linked by the common belief that the special traits of white womanhood were crucial to the advancement of Anglo-Protestant civilization. Claiming that a belief in “sexual difference”—the notion that men and women possessed innately different yet complementary qualities or traits—“had been accepted by the woman’s movement of the late nineteenth century as the defining feature of white women’s contribution to white civilization” (p. 135), Newman locates the true emergence of the idea of equality in the early-twentieth-century writings of such thinkers as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary Roberts Smith Coolidge. Although not completely outside the assimilationist politics and imperial missions that formed the backdrop of their nineteenth-century counterparts, Newman suggests that Gilman and Coolidge represented a new stage of feminist thought: one that understood “sexual difference *for whites* as a negative vestige of their primitive past.” Newman posits that this shift in thinking at once formed the basis for new demands for equality between white women and men that would grow stronger over the next decades, while reasserting the “evolutionary consequence of *the gender relations of specific racial groups*” (p. 137; emphases in original).

Newman’s underlying argument—that women’s rights “must be understood in relation to the nation’s civilizing missions and imperial projects, both at home and abroad” (p. 181)—builds on a growing body of scholarship focused outside the United States that similarly situates the growth of white women’s movements in the context of colonialism. Exploring these questions

in the American context, Newman locates the history of women firmly within the broad contours of American political history and brings our attention to understudied questions regarding the culture of colonialism within the United States. This is an ambitious and important reconceptualization of American feminism. Newman, however, often paints too broadly; our attention firmly fixed on “white” feminists, we lose sight of the nuances embedded in both region and class and the effect of individual intelligence and personality that created so much diversity within the women’s rights movement. This diversity included a commitment to equality-based notions of rights (as has been demonstrated by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Ann D. Gordon, among others) and suggests that the importance of sexual difference to women’s rights activism was not nearly so uniform as Newman would have us believe. Finally, Newman’s premise that feminism is best understood as a “racialized theory of gender oppression” (p. 21) requires careful evaluation. It is at once possible to agree with Newman that feminism “was part and parcel of the nation’s attempt to assimilate those people whom white elites designated as their racial inferiors,” without subscribing to the notion that feminism was never, “in any of its late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century incarnations,” an egalitarian movement (p. 181).

Rice University

ALLISON L. SNEIDER

Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights. By Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, c. 2000. Pp. xvi, 298. \$32.50, ISBN 0-8131-2149-3.)

Gardiner Shattuck Jr. has written an invigorating counterpoint to the history of “race” in modern America. He singles out a powerful social institution, the Protestant Episcopal Church. Because Episcopalians generally remained aloof from the antislavery evangelism that split the Methodists and Baptists, and eventually the country, they entered the modern era with a rare institutional unity. Since their membership overlapped so much with the privileged class of civic and cultural leaders, they enjoyed the autonomy and authority that paternalists and liberals always said they needed to cope with racial tensions. Shattuck’s evidence suggests, however, that Episcopalians could do nothing with their advantages. They remained powerless to alter the tragic course of racial politics or to avoid responsibility for it.

Episcopalians and Race covers the action and inaction from Reconstruction to the present, but the heart of the book concerns the desegregation struggle in the mid-twentieth-century South. At their best, Episcopalians had enough of a sense of responsibility to rise above the snottiness for which they are more generally known. No one could deny the importance of the black Episcopalians in Shattuck’s spotlight, such as Thurgood Marshall, Kenneth Clark, and Pauli Murray. Many of Shattuck’s white southern stars will also be recognizable to students of civil rights: J. Waites Waring, Anne and Carl Braden, and Sarah Patton Boyle, among the radical integrationists; Hodding Carter II, Ralph McGill, and LeRoy Collins, among the moderates who tried to mitigate the brutalities of Jim Crow.