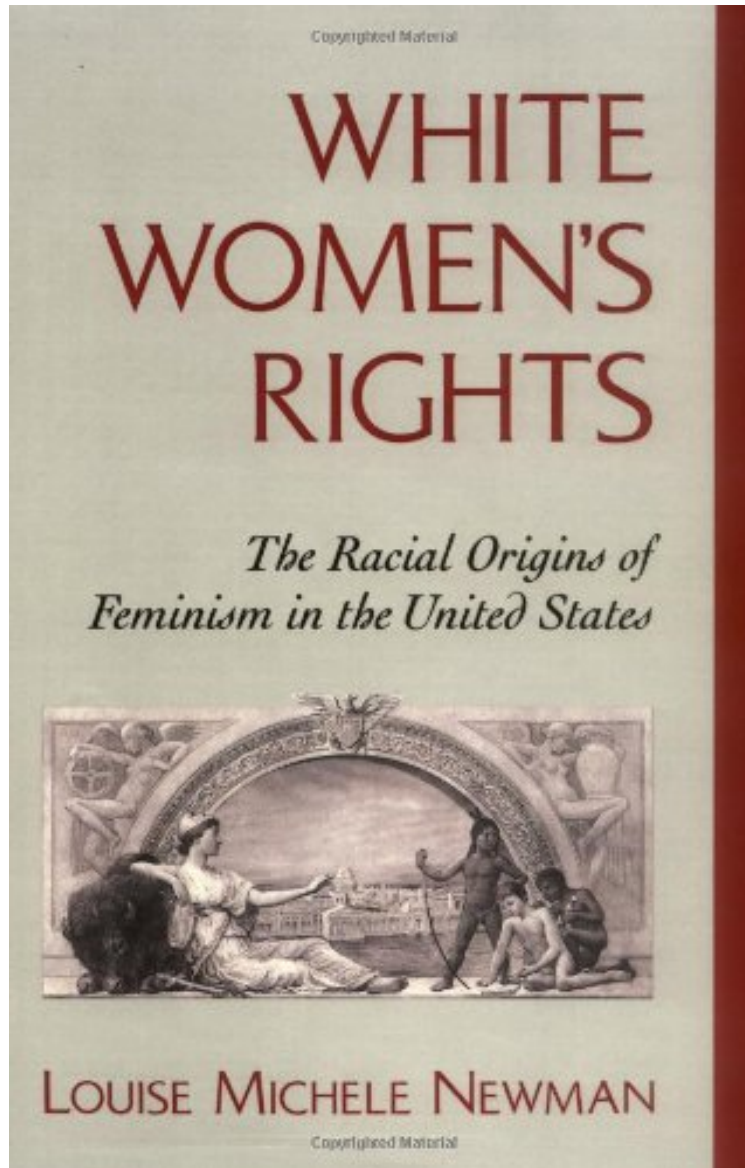


# White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States

Louise Michele Newman

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**Louise Michele Newman : White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States:

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This study reinterprets a crucial period (1870s-1920s) in the history of women's rights, focusing attention on a core contradiction at the heart of early feminist theory. At a time when white elites were concerned with imperialist projects and civilizing missions, progressive white women developed an explicit racial ideology to promote their cause, defending patriarchy for "primitives" while calling for its elimination among the "civilized." By exploring how progressive white women at the turn of the century laid the intellectual groundwork for the feminist social movements that followed, Louise Michele Newman speaks directly to contemporary debates about the effect of race on current feminist scholarship."White Women's Rights is an important book. It is a fascinating and informative account of the numerous and complex ties which bound feminist thought to the practices and ideas which shaped and gave meaning to America as a racialized society. A compelling read, it moves very gracefully between the general history of the feminist movement and the particular histories of individual women."--Hazel Carby, Yale University

From Library JournalIn this complex and often intense work, Newman (history, Univ. of Florida) examines the impact of racism and ethnography on feminist thought from the end of the Civil War to the 1920s. This period saw the widespread acceptance of Darwinian theories as well as the rise of American imperialism, both of which influenced the white middle-class women who comprised the leadership of the suffrage and women's rights movements. Hoping to elevate their own limited role in an entrenched patriarchal society, these women redefined their sphere to include the preservation of white bourgeois civilization and the education of primitive peoples. Newman focuses on the writings and activities of a select group of elite white women, including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Mary Roberts Smith Coolidge, May French Sheldon, and Alice Fletcher. She contributes a fresh perspective on the development of women's philosophical growth in the 19th century, but the aridity of the prose will limit the appeal of this book to academic libraries.?Rose M. Cichy, Osterhout Free Lib., Wilkes-Barre, PA Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. "This is a provocative and important book that makes a major contribution to our understanding of how American feminism has been shaped by a legacy of racism. In a compelling and illuminating exploration of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist thought, Newman explores how racial thinking distorted liberal ideals of citizenship and democracy and limited the commitments of white women to equality for all. Everyone interested in the deep-rooted and paradoxical consequences of hidden racism should read this book."--Alice Kessler-Harris, Rutgers University"Newman's book will be as much admired as it is hotly debated. The book is, if anything, more broadly significant than it looks at first encounter. White Women's Rights is acute in its demonstration that important breaks in feminist (and anthropological) thought have often developed unevenly and contradictorily, shuffling elements of existing evolutionary models rather than overthrowing them. The tone of Newman's work is exemplary, evoking tragedies without lapsing into easy moralism."--David Roediger, University of Minnesota"White Women's Rights is an important book. It is a fascinating and informative account of the numerous and complex ties which bound feminist thought to the practices and ideas which shaped and gave meaning to America as a racialized society. A compelling read, it moves very gracefully between the general history of the feminist movement and the particular histories of individual women."--Hazel Carby, Yale University"Highly readable intellectual biographies illustrate the complexities and ironic contradictions within turn-of-the-century feminism...White Women's Rights is an important addition to the study of US racism. A provocative and challenging book."--CHOICE"[T]he thorough analysis of the influence of evolutionism on early feminist writing offers many new insights...[A] compelling look backward at the limitations of feminism as an ideology of human liberation."--American Historical "Draws attention to the ambivalence of white women and early feminisms in national, colonial and imperial history...[S]how[s] that contemporary racial ideologies influenced activists and leaders."--Journal of American Women's HistoryAbout the AuthorLouise Michele Newman is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Florida.