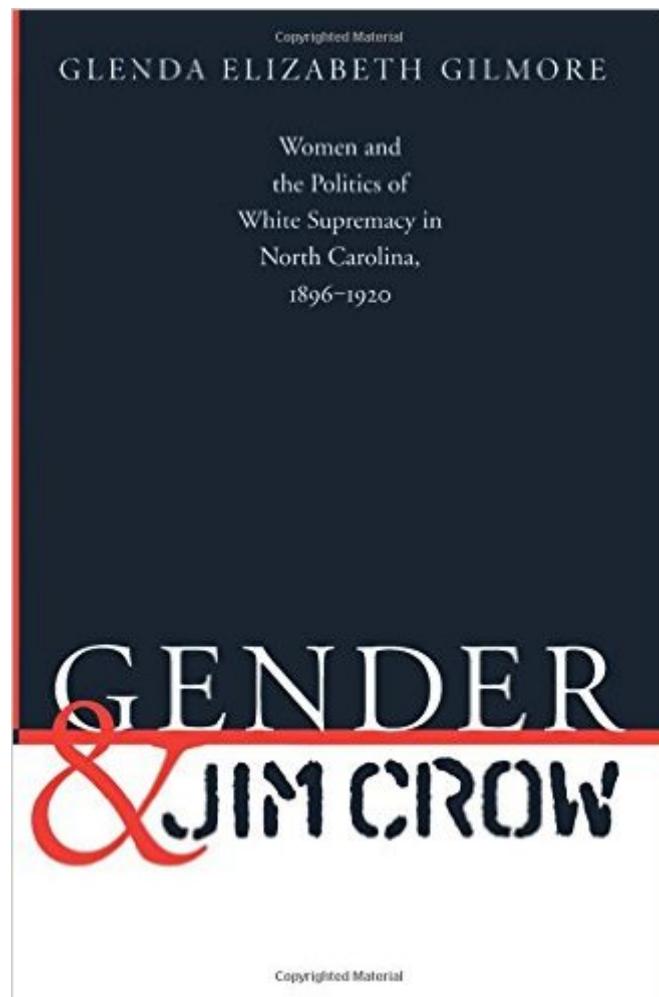


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Gender And Jim Crow: Women And The Politics Of White Supremacy In North Carolina, 1896-1920 (Gender And American Culture)



Synopsis

Glenda Gilmore recovers the rich nuances of southern political history by placing black women at its center. She explores the pivotal and interconnected roles played by gender and race in North Carolina politics from the period immediately preceding the disfranchisement of black men in 1900 to the time black and white women gained the vote in 1920. *Gender and Jim Crow* argues that the ideology of white supremacy embodied in the Jim Crow laws of the turn of the century profoundly reordered society and that within this environment, black women crafted an enduring tradition of political activism. According to Gilmore, a generation of educated African American women emerged in the 1890s to become, in effect, diplomats to the white community after the disfranchisement of their husbands, brothers, and fathers. Using the lives of African American women to tell the larger story, Gilmore chronicles black women's political strategies, their feminism, and their efforts to forge political ties with white women. Her analysis highlights the active role played by women of both races in the political process and in the emergence of southern progressivism. In addition, Gilmore illuminates the manipulation of concepts of gender by white supremacists and shows how this rhetoric changed once women, black and white, gained the vote.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As Gilmore writes (p. 1) in *Gender and Jim Crow*, "since historians enter a story at its end, they sometimes forget that what is past to them was future to their subjects." And with regard to black optimism, potential and opportunities during Reconstruction, African American "subjects" looked

forward to a future of encouraging possibilities, as African American males had real political power and influence within the Republican and populist parties, which courted their votes. These men and women believed that race as a social classification would decline in importance in favor of class. Yet just as the hopes of Agrarian radicals were thwarted by the harsh realities of the two-party system, so too were the dreams of Reconstruction-era blacks crushed by the resurgence of white supremacy and the systematic attempts by whites to disenfranchise the Negro. Gilmore presents this tale of high hopes and shattered dreams in her first chapter, "Place and Possibility." Gilmore's story is one of perseverance among the increasingly subjugated blacks of North Carolina after Reconstruction ended, in particular, the struggle of middle class black women to maintain power, dignity and to some degree control over their lives and communities. By the 1890s, the ugly image of white supremacy showed its face, as white men fought a successful battle to disenfranchise black men through the instrument of fear, that is to say, fear for the safety of white women from the ravenous clutches of Negro rapists. As Gilmore details, this sexually based contrivance branded black men as beasts and drove them from the political realm.

The influence of sex on gender is often mistakenly emphasized to the extent where sex and gender are seen as synonyms. Historian Glenda Gilmore challenges this aberration by re-examining the formative years of Jim Crow in North Carolina through the lens of middle-class African American Women. Her reconstruction of this assumed history demonstrates acute gender construction divergences based on race, class, and political circumstance. Gilmore discloses the dynamics of marriage, education, and above all hope in shaping the differences between gender construction between African Americans and whites. The racial progressive momentum of Reconstruction shaped educated African American women to uplift their race in an effort to improve living standards for their families, to open up opportunities for their sex for both races, and to change white attitudes toward African Americans. By accenting the life of Sarah Dudley Petty, Gilmore reveals that her activism as a "feminist" and as an African American was in contrast to white women because black women were responding not just to patriarchy but to racial oppression as well. A famous example of how African American women hoped to uplift their race was through their work in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). This organization provided North Carolina's black women "their best hope for building strong communities and securing interracial cooperation" (32). The WCTU became a point of mutual for both whites and blacks to improve community and gender equality. When black men voted, white women welcomed and sought out the activism of black women.

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