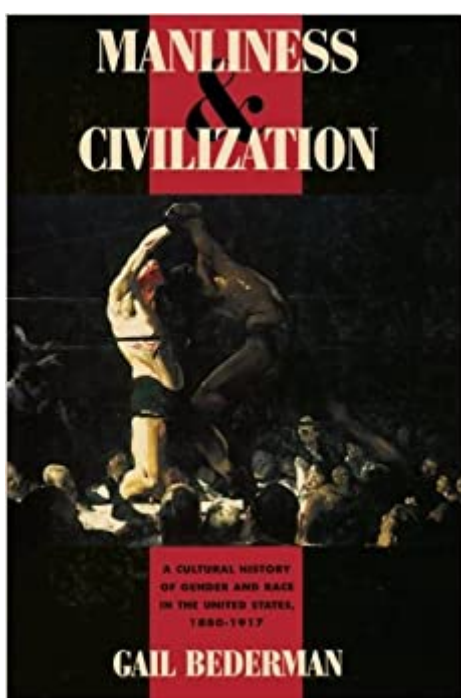


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Manliness And Civilization: A Cultural History Of Gender And Race In The United States, 1880-1917 (Women In Culture And Society)



Synopsis

When former heavyweight champion Jim Jeffries came out of retirement on the fourth of July, 1910 to fight current black heavyweight champion Jack Johnson in Reno, Nevada, he boasted that he was doing it "for the sole purpose of proving that a white man is better than a negro." Jeffries, though, was trounced. Whites everywhere rioted. The furor, Gail Bederman demonstrates, was part of two fundamental and volatile national obsessions: manhood and racial dominance. In turn-of-the-century America, cultural ideals of manhood changed profoundly, as Victorian notions of self-restrained, moral manliness were challenged by ideals of an aggressive, overtly sexualized masculinity. Bederman traces this shift in values and shows how it brought together two seemingly contradictory ideals: the unfettered virility of racially "primitive" men and the refined superiority of "civilized" white men. Focusing on the lives and works of four very different Americans—Theodore Roosevelt, educator G. Stanley Hall, Ida B. Wells, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman—she illuminates the ideological, cultural, and social interests these ideals came to serve.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Bederman (history, Notre Dame) has written a complex but intriguing account of the links between concepts of race, gender, and civilization in late 19th- and early 20th-century America. Focusing on shifting constructions of "manhood" and "civilization," she examines aspects of the lives and careers of Jack Johnson, Ida B. Wells, G. Stanley Hall, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Theodore Roosevelt, and

Edgar Rice Burroughs, all of whom illustrate attempts to use these constructions as rhetorical weapons in the struggle to define basic race and gender roles. A densely packed analysis that will be appropriate primarily for scholars in the field of American cultural studies. Anthony O. Edmonds, Ball State Univ., Muncie, Ind. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Manliness & Civilization is a cultural history of gender and race in the United States from 1880 through 1917. In *Manliness & Civilization*, Gail Bederman investigates the connection between powerful manhood and racial dominance as it was debated, promoted, and resisted during the decades around the turn of the century. Bederman traces a cultural reconfiguration of manhood in which Victorian ideals of self-restraint and moral manliness were challenged by new formulations of aggressive, sexualized masculinity. These new ideals celebrated both the unfettered virility of "racially" primitive men and the refined superiority of "civilized" white men, and Bederman shows how such seemingly contradictory notions came together in the larger discourse of "civilization". She illuminates this tactical interplay between ideologies and evolutionary civilization, racial dominance, and male primitivism by focusing on the lives and works of four very different Americans: G. Stanley Hall, Theodore Roosevelt, Ida B. Wells, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Bederman persuasively suggests that the historical connections between manliness and civilization retain their troubling power to this day. *Manliness & Civilization* is an important contribution to both American History and to Gender Studies reading lists. -- Midwest Book Review

In "*Manliness & Civilization*", Gail Bederman argues that, "between 1890 and 1917, as white middle-class men actively worked to reinforce male power, their race became a factor which was crucial to their gender" (pg. 5). She writes, "This study is based on the premise that gender—whether manhood or womanhood—is a historical, ideological process. Through that process, individuals are positioned and position themselves as men or as women" (pg. 7). Bederman uses four case-studies in her analysis: the work of Ida B. Wells, G. Stanley Hall, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Theodore Roosevelt. Bederman argues that Wells, in working against lynching, "convinced nervous white Northerners that they needed to take lynch law seriously because it imperiled both American civilization and American manhood" (pg. 46). Wells had to counter the myth of the black male rapist, which whites used to reinforce their linking of controlled masculinity to definitions of civilization. Wells promoted her ideas in Britain and, "by enlisting Anglo-Saxons™ as her allies, Wells recruited precisely the

spokesmen most able to disrupt the linkages between manliness and whiteness which kept white Americans tolerant of lynching" (pg. 71). G. Stanley Hall worked to reconcile fears of neurasthenia, a "disease" believed to weaken men as a result of civilizing forces. Bederman crafts a Foucauldian argument, writing, "As an educator, Hall felt he could remake manhood by making men "literally. For what was education but the process of making boys into men? By encouraging educators to recognize the "savagery" in young boys, Hall believed he could find a way to allow boys to develop into adult men with the virility to withstand the effeminizing tendencies of advanced civilization" (pg. 79). According to Bederman, "By transforming young men's sexual passions into a source of scarce nervous energy, Hall was able both to mitigate the danger of neurasthenia and to reconstruct adolescent male sexuality in ways which did not stress self-restraint" (pg. 103). Specifically, the betterment of the white race. In her third example, Bederman examines Charlotte Perkins Gilman arguing that "because Gilman's feminist arguments frequently revolved around women's relation to civilization, implicit assumptions about white racial supremacy were as central to her arguments as they were to Hall's" (pg. 123). Accordingly, Bederman argues that the point of Gilman's work "was to create an alternative ideology of civilization in which white women could take their rightful place beside white men as full participants in the past and future of civilization" (pg. 135). In writing about Theodore Roosevelt, Bederman argues, "TR framed his political mission in terms of race and manhood, nationalism and civilization. Like G. Stanley Hall and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Roosevelt longed to lead evolution's chosen race toward a perfect millennial future" (pg. 171). Though Roosevelt consciously crafted a rugged, masculine persona, Bederman argues, "his political ambitions ultimately served the purposes "not of his own selfish personal advancement "but of the millennial mission to advance his race and nation toward a more perfect civilization" (pg. 177). Bederman writes of Roosevelt's politics, "America's nationhood itself was the product of both racial superiority and virile manhood" (pg. 183). This idea later reinforced American imperialism.

This book is a tightly woven argument for how masculinity has been intertwined with race and gender through narratives of civilization. Bederman demonstrates that modern conceptions of masculinity emerged in the late nineteenth century, along with racialization movements driven by a kind evolutionary millennialism. Different people "synthesized" race, gender, and civilization in different ways to make sense of social phenomena, like lynching, women rights, adolescence, and

American imperialism. I'm particularly impressed at how Bederman uses the novel Tarzan in her conclusion to show how all these narratives work together in a popular text. Needless to say, many of the discourses she identifies still play important roles in how masculinity is constructed today, even if some of the foundational ideologies have seemingly disappeared. This would be an excellent book to use in a gender studies class or even a cultural studies class. That said, the clarity of Bederman's argument and fascinating primary sources makes this a good read for anyone who wishes to expand their knowledge of turn of the century America or develop their sense of gender.

I have sought readings on analyzes of race and gender in the construction of national ideologies. I really liked the detail and sophistication of the author treated the topic. I recommend strongly to anyone who is interested in issues of race, color, gender and national identity articulated sociologically.

The connection between gender concerns, race, and the overarching language of civilization certainly can get a girl to thinking. In the end, Bederman makes her case--gender and race twined together in the theories of civilization and went a long way to forming American foreign policy at the turn of the twentieth century.

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