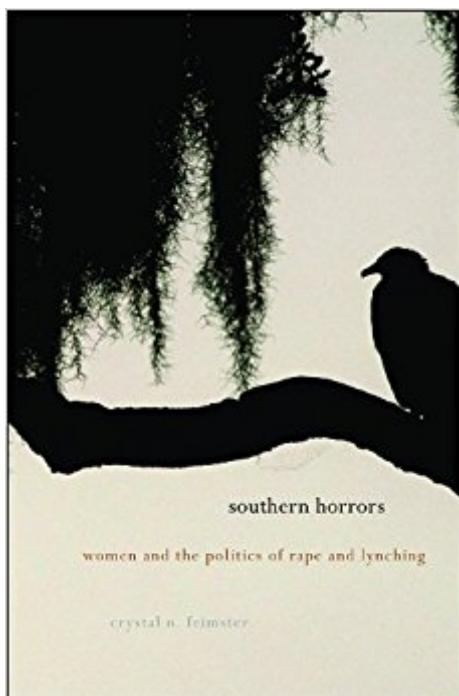


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# Southern Horrors: Women And The Politics Of Rape And Lynching



## Synopsis

Between 1880 and 1930, close to 200 women were murdered by lynch mobs in the American South. Many more were tarred and feathered, burned, whipped, or raped. In this brutal world of white supremacist politics and patriarchy, a world violently divided by race, gender, and class, black and white women defended themselves and challenged the male power brokers. Crystal Feimster breaks new ground in her story of the racial politics of the postbellum South by focusing on the volatile issue of sexual violence. Pairing the lives of two Southern women—Ida B. Wells, who fearlessly branded lynching a white tool of political terror against southern blacks, and Rebecca Latimer Felton, who urged white men to prove their manhood by lynching black men accused of raping white women—Feimster makes visible the ways in which black and white women sought protection and political power in the New South. While Wells was black and Felton was white, both were journalists, temperance women, suffragists, and anti-rape activists. By placing their concerns at the center of southern politics, Feimster illuminates a critical and novel aspect of southern racial and sexual dynamics. Despite being on opposite sides of the lynching question, both Wells and Felton sought protection from sexual violence and political empowerment for women. *Southern Horrors* provides a startling view into the Jim Crow South where the precarious and subordinate position of women linked black and white anti-rape activists together in fragile political alliances. It is a story that reveals how the complex drama of political power, race, and sex played out in the lives of Southern women.

## Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press (September 30, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674061853

ISBN-13: 978-0674061859

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.9 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #407,925 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Women in Politics #808 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Violence in Society #1889 in Books > History > World > Women in History

## Customer Reviews

Feimster's compelling, and profoundly unsettling, history of rape and lynching illuminates the gendered racial politics of sexual violence in the aftermath of Emancipation. (Darlene Clark Hine, Northwestern University)Southern Horrors, a chilling tale that has been largely suppressed until now, exposes lynching as a gendered phenomenon in which southern women played a central role as actors and as victims. This is a breakthrough analysis of the role that lynching served in southern political culture. (Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, author of *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950*)Feimster traces the lives of two political incendiaries, Ida B. Wells and Rebecca Felton, who illuminate the landscape of American race and gender politics. Brilliantly analytical, strikingly well-narrated, this monumental book masters theme and story to reveal heretofore hidden histories of the women who both played and transformed the politics of rape and lynching in the New South. (Timothy B. Tyson, author of *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story*)Thoughtful and engaging, Crystal Feimster's Southern Horrors forces us to rethink women's history and the history of the American South. Accessible to students and general readers, this powerful story is told with originality and sophistication. (Suzanne Lebsock, author of *A Murder in Virginia: Southern Justice on Trial*)Southern Horrors, an impressive achievement, expands and deepens our understanding of the sexual and racial politics of the American South. Through the public careers of two women and a cast of thousands, Crystal Feimster compels us to grapple with the full dimensions of an American tragedy and the movements for change it set in motion. (Leon F. Litwack, author of *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*)Fascinating...Feimster's account challenges us to think again about race and sexual politics...[A] rich and detailed account...The work of Rebecca Felton and Ida Wells engaged with the implications of a form (although not a unique one) of sexual politics, and Feimster's account should be rightly acclaimed as testament to these projects. (Mary Evans Times Higher Education 2009-12-03)Historian Crystal N. Feimster provides an opportunity to better understand the lack of sympathy between black and white suffragists and how lynching spurred both to the political activism that eventually won women the vote...This account leaves us with a sense of what made the fights for racial equality and women's suffrage so complicated and contentious. We're left, too, with an appreciation of the gumption both Wells and Felton showed entering a political fray resistant to their participation and unable to conceive of changes that seem so obviously necessary in hindsight. (Margaret Wheeler Johnson Double X 2010-01-15)An interesting, though somewhat disheartening, tale of the times, this book is destined for a special place in the classrooms and libraries of those concerned with sexual and racial politics. It is a readable study for those simply

interested in the historical account, and is made so by multiple narratives of affected citizens, passages from diaries and newspapers, as well as the lives of the two main scholars. (Allena Tapia San Francisco Book Review 2010-01-08)

Crystal N. Feimster is Associate Professor of African American Studies, American Studies, and History at Yale University.

I am currently putting together a literature review for my Graduate Thesis about women and war in American History with a focus on violence towards military women. I have found very few sources that articulate violence against women prior to the Vietnam War, especially violence towards women that are, presumably, on the same side. What is most significant about the violence that southern women suffered at the hands of northern soldiers is that these men were, supposedly, fighting to end slavery and yet they were raping enslaved women. It is important, as another reviewer stated, that history of violence in this country, and my concern here is violence towards women, not be forgotten because the "Good ole Days" were generally only good for middle and upper class white men. This book is well researched and well written. What most amazes me, however, is that the author paints a vivid picture of the horrors suffered not only by black women of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but white southern women as well. The author has laid out a model that I hope to be able to follow as I get deeper into my research, and that is looking at history from more than one angle.

I realize that the book is intended as a scholarly analysis of "women and the politics of rape and lynching." But, as I was reading through, I could not help but keep coming back to thinking just how carefully one must think through when engaging in any conversation about the 'good old days.' As the young people say: To "keep it real" even the bad must be considered when discussing the old days. An excellent juxtaposition/comparison of the two ladies: Ida B. Wells and Rebecca Felton and their handling of the position of women (and race) in an era where the two factors were so intertwined. Such that the position of women and race could get one ("justifiably") killed. Let's not repeat such a period.

This book is very informative

This book describes in great detail why we all are related to one another. It is something that all

white Americans should consider when addressing diversity. African Americans are not responsible for the colors inherent in African Americans, while white men are responsible. White women also should be offended by the conduct of some of their forefathers.

In *Southern Horrors*, professor Crystal Feimster offers a rigorous and fascinating examination of rape, lynching, and the sexual politics of white supremacy in the New South. Feimster approaches her topic through several lenses, mindful of the multiple ways in which white male supremacy and the violence that enforced it shaped the lives and circumstances of white and black women alike. Feimster does not use this understanding to assert a simplistic womanly solidarity across the color line. Rather, she uses it to explore how black and white women defended their bodies and asserted their rights within this limited horizon of possibility. In a masterful portrait of white Southern feminist Rebecca Latimer Felton, Feimster demonstrates how one brilliant tactician navigated this terrain embracing white supremacy but not necessarily Democratic orthodoxy. Using the biography of activist Ida B. Wells, Feimster shows how a fearless African American woman combined her concern for black human rights with her commitment to defending black womanhood. Both critiqued white Southern men. With Wells's and Felton's stories come a wealth of others. The women of *Southern Horrors* appear as lynchers as well as victims of lynchings, defenders of the practice or its most vociferous opponents. For all of them, these positions were bound up in the threats and realities of sexual violence and a limited franchise. In a work that is frequently moving, often horrifying, and always illuminating, Feimster has given us much to ponder.

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