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Gender, Race, and Nationalism in Contemporary Black Politics

by Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd

*Gender, Race, and
Nationalism in Contemporary
Black Politics*

Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd

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*I dedicate this book to my late husband,
Gregory K. Floyd (1963–2003),
and to my parents George and Theresa Alexander*

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Contents

<i>Series Editor's Foreword</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvii
Introduction	1
1. Toward a Black Feminist Frame of Reference: Gender, Nationalism, and the Ironies of Black Politics	17
2. "We Shall Have Our Manhood": <i>Black Macho</i> , the Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm, and the Million Man March	51
3. The Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm and George W. Bush's Faith-Based and Fatherhood Initiatives	75
4. "A Threat from Within": The Black Woman as Traitor in African American Thought and Politics	109
Conclusion "When and Where I Enter": Gender and Black Feminist Praxis in the Study and Interpretation of Black Politics	147
<i>Notes</i>	169
<i>Bibliography</i>	201
<i>Index</i>	223

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Series Editor's Foreword

Nikol Alexander-Floyd's *Gender, Race, and Nationalism in Contemporary Black Politics* is a stellar example of a black feminist praxis that takes on some of the most urgent, provocative, and controversial questions facing progressive intellectuals in the United States today. It is located at the intersection of feminist political science, Black and ethnic studies, and cultural studies. As such this book carefully and insightfully engages some of the central interconnected issues in these areas, crafting an exciting and persuasive black feminist theoretical framework that addresses questions of gender, race, and nationalism in the contemporary U.S. racial landscape. At a time in the United States when the (endangered) life-trajectories of young Black men and questions of Black masculinity and manhood are prominently debated in media, public policy, and scholarship, this book makes a significant and insightful contribution to our understanding of U.S. racial and gender politics.

Over the past decades, feminists across the globe have been variously successful—however, we inherit a number of the challenges our mothers and grandmothers faced. But there are also new challenges to face as we attempt to make sense of a world indelibly marked by the failure of postcolonial capitalist and communist nation-states to provide for the social, economic, spiritual, and psychic needs of the majority of the world's population. In the year 2007, globalization has come to represent the interests of corporations and the free market rather than self-determination and freedom from political, cultural, and economic domination for all the world's peoples. The project of U.S. Empire building, alongside the dominance of corporate capitalism kills, disenfranchises, and impoverishes women everywhere. Militarization, environmental degradation, heterosexist State practices, religious fundamentalisms, and the exploitation of women's labor by capital all pose profound challenges for feminists at this time. Recovering and remembering insurgent histories has never been so important: at a time marked by social amnesia, global consumer culture, and the worldwide mobilization of fascist notions of "national security."

These are some of the challenges the CFS series addresses. Drawing on feminist thinking in a number of fields, the CFS series targets innovative, comparative feminist scholarship, pedagogical and curricular strategies, and community organizing and political education. It explores and engenders a radical, comparative feminist praxis that addresses some of the most urgent questions facing progressive critical thinkers and activists today. The series takes as its fundamental premise the need for feminist engagement with global as well as local ideological, historical, economic, and political processes, and the urgency of transnational dialogue in building an ethical culture capable of withstanding and transforming the commodified and exploitative practices of global culture and economics. Individual volumes in the CFS series provide systemic and challenging interventions into the (still) largely Euro-Western feminist studies knowledge base, while simultaneously highlighting the work that can and needs to be done to envision and enact cross-cultural, multiracial feminist solidarity.

Gender, Race, and Nationalism in Contemporary Black Politics argues that the deeply gendered politics of Black nationalism, and its relation to the production of U.S. White nationalism remains largely unexplored. In this text, Alexander-Floyd demonstrates the absolute necessity of a Black feminist theoretical framework in understanding contemporary U.S. gender and race politics. Thus, she makes a case for understanding the profoundly negative impact of the Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm (BCPP) as it has been mobilized in racist narratives of the United States, but also reproduced in Black nationalist politics as a way of analyzing the backlash against civil rights and Black power movements. Asking the question “what does the Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm reveal about what Black and White nationalists have in common?” leads Alexander-Floyd to provide a sharp and convincing analysis of the masculinist assumptions and (hetero)sexist gender ideology that cements these nationalisms, thus defining and limiting the struggle for Black equality. If the project of nation-building is “co-extensive with the plight and political subjectivity of its men,” then women are incorporated into nationalist narratives in consistent and systematic ways. Thus, without a feminist analysis that makes visible the deeply gendered narratives of both Black and White nationalisms, and its impact on a racist, masculinist U.S. state, it is impossible to theorize democratic, inclusive notions of community, freedom, and citizenship within African American contexts.

Analyzing the Million Man March, George W. Bush's Faith-Based and Fatherhood Initiatives, and the mobilization of the BCPP through

a number of interconnected narratives, this book makes a courageous stand for acknowledging the insights of Michele Wallace's ideas in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, a book that was dismissed and vilified when it was first published decades ago. Showing how history has in fact confirmed Wallace's original insights while Black women, and Black feminists in particular have been cast as traitors in African American political thought, Alexander-Floyd provides a brilliant analysis of how race **and** gender must be understood in tandem if we are to realize the potential of the civil rights, Black power, and most anticolonial movements around the world.

This is an original, carefully argued, and persuasive book—one that takes on the underlying racist and masculinist agendas of the now-imperial U.S. state, and sounds a warning to all progressive, antiracist movements that explicitly and implicitly reproduce regressive gender ideologies. A book that will be of interest to all progressive readers who care about life and politics in the United States at this time in history.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty
Series Editor
Ithaca, New York

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Acknowledgments

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List of Abbreviations

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
BCPP	Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm
CBC	Congressional Black Caucus
FBI	Faith-based Initiative
FI	Fatherhood Initiative
HHS	Health and Human Services
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NFI	National Fatherhood Initiative
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families