



Forgotten Men and Fallen Women: The Cultural Politics of New Deal Narratives

Holly Allen

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During the Great Depression and into the war years, the Roosevelt administration sought to transform the political, institutional, and social contours of the United States. One result of the New Deal was the emergence and deployment of a novel set of narratives?reflected in social scientific case studies, government documents, and popular media?meant to reorient relationships among gender, race, sexuality, and national political power. In *Forgotten Men and Fallen Women*, Holly Allen focuses on the interplay of popular and official narratives of forgotten manhood, fallen womanhood, and other social and moral archetypes. In doing so, she explores how federal officials used stories of collective civic identity to enlist popular support for the expansive New Deal state and, later, for the war effort.

These stories, she argues, had practical consequences for federal relief politics. The “forgotten man,” identified by Roosevelt in a fireside chat in 1932, for instance, was a compelling figure of collective civic identity and the counterpart to the white, male breadwinner who was the prime beneficiary of New Deal relief programs. He was also associated with women who were blamed either for not supporting their husbands and family at all (owing to laziness, shrewishness, or infidelity) or for supporting them too well by taking their husbands’ jobs, rather than staying at home and allowing the men to work.

During World War II, Allen finds, federal policies and programs continued to be shaped by specific gendered stories?most centrally, the story of the heroic white civilian defender, which animated the Office of Civilian Defense, and the story of the sacrificial Nisei (Japanese-American) soldier, which was used by the War Relocation Authority. The Roosevelt administration’s engagement with such widely circulating narratives, Allen concludes, highlights the affective dimensions of U.S. citizenship and state formation.

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