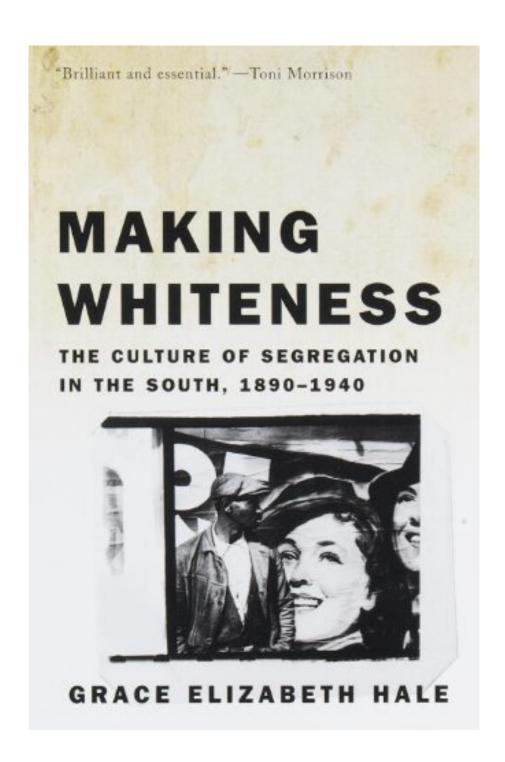


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declaration: `Southern whites cannot walk, talk, sing, conceive of laws or justice, think of sex, love, the family or freedom without responding to the presence of Negroes." But in place of Ellison's simple eloquence, Hale raises an impenetrable thicket of theoretical jargon (terms like transhistorical, isomorphic, and dialectics rain like candy from a Mardi Gras float). She glosses the Civil War's outcome thus: `Union victory delegitimated that nascent nationalist collectivity, the Confederacy." Furthermore, her contention that `this corresponding depth of racial obsession occurred only with passing" for African-Americans spectacularly understates the totality with which whites controlled black life during Jim Crow's dark reign. One senses in Hale's (American History/Univ. Of Virginia) cogent, encyclopedic scholarship the debut of an important new intellectual voiceall the more reason to regret the cloaking of provocative thinking in the fusty duds of academic prose. (8 pages b&w photos) -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

"A delightfully provocative book -- the most nuanced picture yet of the world view of segregationists." -- Austin Chronicle

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Making Whiteness is a profoundly important work that explains how and why whiteness came to be such a crucial, embattled--and distorting--component of twentieth-century American identity. In intricately textured detail and with passionately mastered analysis, Grace Elizabeth Hale shows how, when faced with the active citizenship of their ex-slaves after the Civil War, white southerners re-established their dominance through a cultural system based on violence and physical separation. And in a bold and transformative analysis of the meaning of segregation for the nation as a whole, she explains how white southerners' creation of modern "whiteness" was, beginning in the 1920s, taken up by the rest of the nation as a way of enforcing a new social hierarchy while at the same time creating the illusion of a national, egalitarian, consumerist democracy.

By showing the very recent historical "making" of contemporary American whiteness and by examining how the culture of segregation, in all its murderous contradictions, was lived, Hale makes it possible to imagine a future outside it. Her vision holds out the difficult promise of a truly democratic American identity whose possibilities are no longer limited and disfigured by race.

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Segregation Artfully Explained

By Terry A. Green

Lately, I find myself rereading books that challenge my understanding (not to mention my preconceived notions) of race history, but none more than Grace Elizabeth Hale's "Making Whiteness." This gem of a book ultimately defines the construction of race in the early 20th Century South and is written in a style reminiscent of Du Bois and Langston Hughes. It is an intelligent and informative examination of "class exploitation, disempowerment and racial privilege" that dares to reimagine the concept of racial integration. To quote from the book: "We need to remember that difference is created within, not before, our communities; that difference is created within, and not before, our histories; that difference is created within, and not before, ourselves." Over the past few months, I have amassed several books on race, segregation, Reconstruction, lynchings, Jim Crow, etc., and I consider "Making Whiteness" a cornerstone in my library.

12 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Worth every word.

By A Customer

This is not an easy book to read either intellectually or psychologically, but this is not an easy subject to communicate, either. However difficult the academic vocabulary of the author, the fact remains that her concepts and ideas are clearly presented, the chapters well-formed, and sections thoughtfully connected. Dr.

Hale's explanation of segregation, how it was developed, maintained and why, is logical, well-documented, and profound. She effectively communicates how completely pervasive, paradoxical, and pathological, segregation was. THe book also communicates how everyone, not just southerners and not just men, contributed to the culture of segregation and why. In short, Dr. Hale finally presents the BIG Picture: the reasons why "equal rights" aren't really equal, why prejudice is still rampant, and why affirmative action isn't enough. For anyone who wants to really understand segregation, the civil rights movement, and race relations in late 20th and early 21st century America, this book is a must read. IT is thought-provoking and profound.

20 of 26 people found the following review helpful. verbose but useful

By A Customer

This is a valuable contribution to a growing subfield that is finally examining the social construction of whiteness. I believe Jacobson's Whiteness of a Different Color to be superior, and honestly, Hale needs to lose some of the academic jargon. But overall, this is a well-researched study. I do take issue, however, with the introduction when Hale claims that whites "were not the victims of racism." Not the chief victims certainly, but victims nonetheless. Hasn't the South's reputation for backwardness and bigotry damaged its economic opportunities, and made "the southern redneck" the new villain of post-1960s pop culture? What all this emphasis on race discrimination does is to de-emphasize the class discrimination that harms whites and blacks both. To say that Billy Bob living in his trailer home has benefitted from the privilege of whiteness is farcical. Not that Hale says this, but isn't it time that more serious scholars examine the way tht race acts as a chimera to divert us from deeper divisions of class and nationality?

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