



Liberalism and the Culture of Security: The Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric of Reform

Katherine Henry

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Figures of protection and security are everywhere in American public discourse, from the protection of privacy or civil liberties to the protection of marriage or the unborn, and from social security to homeland security. *Liberalism and the Culture of Security* traces a crucial paradox in historical and contemporary notions of citizenship: in a liberal democratic culture that imagines its citizens as self-reliant, autonomous, and inviolable, the truth is that claims for citizenship—particularly for marginalized groups such as women and slaves—have just as often been made in the name of vulnerability and helplessness.

Katherine Henry traces this turn back to the eighteenth-century opposition of liberty and tyranny, which imagined our liberties as being in danger of violation by the forces of tyranny and thus in need of protection. She examines four particular instances of this rhetorical pattern. The first chapters show how women’s rights and antislavery activists in the antebellum era exploited the contradictions that arose from the liberal promise of a protected citizenry: first by focusing primarily on arguments over slavery in the 1850s that invoke the Declaration of Independence, including Harriet Beecher Stowe’s fiction and Frederick Douglass’s “Fourth of July” speech; and next by examining Angelina Grimké’s brief but intense antislavery speaking career in the 1830s.

New conditions after the Civil War and Emancipation changed the way arguments about civic inclusion and exclusion could be advanced. Henry considers the issue of African American citizenship in the 1880s and 1890s, focusing on the mainstream white Southern debate over segregation and the specter of a tyrannical federal government, and then turning to Frances E. W. Harper’s fictional account of African American citizenship in *Iola Leroy*. Finally, Henry examines Henry James’s 1886 novel *The Bostonians*, in which arguments over the appropriate role of women and the proper place of the South in post-Civil War America are played out as a contest between Olive Chancellor and Basil ransom for control over the voice of the eloquent girl Verena Tarrant.

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