



# **No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity**

*Sarah Haley*

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries imprisoned black women faced wrenching forms of gendered racial terror and heinous structures of economic exploitation. Subjugated as convict laborers and forced to serve additional time as domestic workers before they were allowed their freedom, black women faced a pitiless system of violence, terror, and debasement. Drawing upon black feminist criticism and a diverse array of archival materials, Sarah Haley uncovers imprisoned women's brutalization in local, county, and state convict labor systems, while also illuminating the prisoners' acts of resistance and sabotage, challenging ideologies of racial capitalism and patriarchy and offering alternative conceptions of social and political life.

A landmark history of black women's imprisonment in the South, this book recovers stories of the captivity and punishment of black women to demonstrate how the system of incarceration was crucial to organizing the logics of gender and race, and constructing Jim Crow modernity.

## **No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity Details**

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# **From Reader Review No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity for online ebook**

## **Kidada says**

Haley's research on African American women in Georgia convict camps, chain gangs, and domestic service captivity (paroled women forced into domestic service instead of having their sentences commuted) offers a critical intervention into understandings of gender under Jim Crow. The historic brutality of the carceral state is well-known to many historians but the many techniques of terror and torture inflicted on black women convicts (as opposed to their white female and black male counterparts) is less understood. When we think of violent terror from the late 19th century, we tend to focus our attention on people outside the carceral state (on lynchings, where the vast majority of victims were male). By opening a window onto the violent world of convict leasing, chain gangs, and domestic service Haley joins other scholars like Kali Gross and Talitha LeFlouria in calling for a more comprehensive accounting of American violence.

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## **Marrissa says**

**“Cobb’s distance from womanhood was at the heart of her alleged crime, the murder of a child whose sex is never mentioned”**

Haley discusses the theme of femininity stripped from black women during the late 1800s. This theme worked with the white supremacist ideology that black women were in no threat and more than often, “perpetrated” a threat to white children, women and men. This was a time when whiteness was close to ladyhood and Blackness would not only strip a woman of any embodied womanhood but place her closer to masculinity.

Haley takes the reader on a unfortunate but necessary journey of what it was like to be a black women in the Jim Crow era and imprisoned in a work labor, or chain gang camp, facing not only racial inequalities but heartily gendered.

An enlightening, impressive, and necessary read.

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## **Mills College Library says**

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## **Jenny Karraker says**

I read this for a college class on Car Culture, and found it full of the expected specialty jargon used in college textbooks. It was very disturbing to read of the racial incidents during the rise and growth of the

automobile culture that paralleled the Jim Crow era. That black women were arrested for loitering and then assigned to work on the chain gangs alongside men to build roads (while white women weren't incarcerated for loitering or if they were, were assigned easy jobs like mending clothes at the prison) seems so cruel. The author contrasted photographs of white and black women, pointing out the obviously racially motivated ways in which they were portrayed. The charts also showed how arrests were racially motivated and provided cheap labor for the growing car industry. As a white female, I'm often ignorant of the prejudices black women have endured over the years that come up in so many areas of life that seem unrelated to race (like cars and the building of automobile roads).

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### **Nicky says**

I was surprised by how invested I found myself in this topic. Southern history usually isn't my focus, but Haley does an excellent job both historically and rhetorically working with her subject. However, there were moments where she played fact and fiction a little too much—mostly in the second chapter with two prisoners whom Haley insinuates their sexuality and does not emphasize the speculative nature of that choice. All in all, this was a very engrossing book!

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### **Chris Cook says**

This was a good, if depressing book, about the incarceration of black (and to some extent white) women in Georgia from 1890-1930 or thereabouts. I think her portrayals are accurate, and the themes of white supremacists trying to "unsex" them as women is, as well. At times, I think she repeated these themes a bit too often, but then again, perhaps it bore being repeated.

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### **Zach says**

Haley has written a fantastic and important account of the history of black women's convict labor in Georgia and its relationship to the making of Jim Crow-era racial capitalism. An incredibly rich archive combined with incisive and rigorous interdisciplinary analysis more than does justice to the lives and struggles of the women whose stories Haley recovers, which making clear the stakes of these women's exploitation and oppression and their freedom dreams, acts of sabotage, and cultural practices, embodied in blues feminism, in the history of US white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. This is a text that should have a major impact on prison studies, labor history. African American Studies, Women's , Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and American Studies.

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### **Ai Miller says**

This book was so, so excellent. Haley takes stories of incarcerated Black women during Jim Crow and puts them into contexts of racialized gendered ideology to show how little change had been materially enacted since the fall of slavery, even as the way for modernity was literally being paved by these incarcerated women. Haley does an amazing job of weaving together historical sources with theoretical concepts done by other scholars--like damn if this is possible for a history book why can't historians write more like this!!!! (I

know why, but like ugh.) It's such a good, important book that any white feminist needs to read.

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