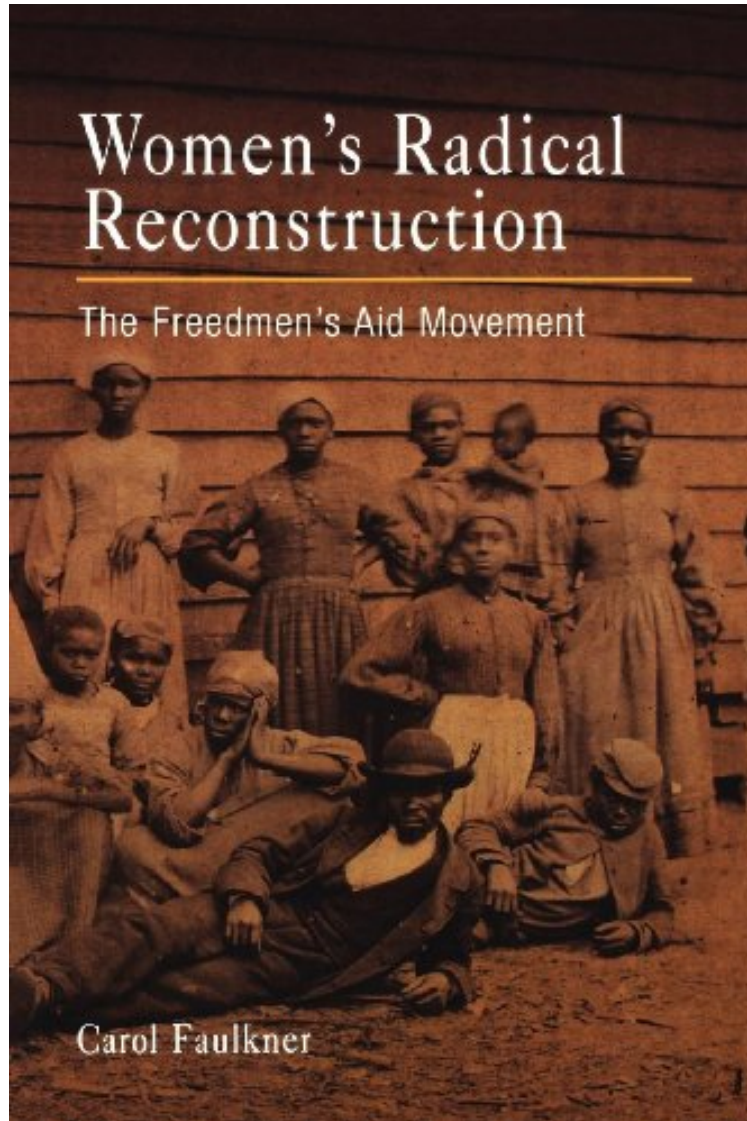


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# Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement

*Carol Faulkner*

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**Carol Faulkner : Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Major Contribution By Andrew Rieser Historian Carol Faulkner has made a vital contribution to the growing literature on women and state formation in the United States. Years before they gained the vote, we now understand, women activists pressured the government on issues like temperance, abolition, and education reform. From their efforts emerged new theories of government's role in preserving social

welfare, theories that would later underpin the reforms of the Progressive Era and New Deal. But while we know a great deal about antebellum reformers like Catherine Beecher, still more about Progressive-Era figures like Margaret Sanger, much remains unknown about the generation of women's activists who came of age in the 1860s and 1870s. Their efforts have for too long been overshadowed by the great cataclysms of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and by the tendency to view both as momentous battles between white men about black men over "men's issues" such as civil rights and free labor. Enter Carol Faulkner and her exciting new book *Women's Radical Reconstruction*. This book does far more simply renovate the tired old stereotype of the stern Yankee schoolmarm. It also illustrates how the debates sparked by the campaign for free labor were themselves thoroughly gendered. Women's rights activists found themselves in conflict with some male Freedmen's Bureau officials, who viewed their concerns as nettlesome distractions. Faulkner's insights into Reconstruction might be compared to Sara Evans's insights into the modern civil rights movement in *Personal Politics*-i.e., another instance in which middle-class women, brought together on in oppose the oppression of others, become newly conscious of their own oppression. Lucidly written and packed with vivid vignettes-and most importantly, at 200 pages, short- *Women's Radical Reconstruction* is an excellent book for undergraduate courses in both women's history and Civil War and Reconstruction. I strongly recommend it.

In this first critical study of female abolitionists and feminists in the freedmen's aid movement, Carol Faulkner describes these women's radical view of former slaves and the nation's responsibility to them. Moving beyond the image of the Yankee schoolmarm, *Women's Radical Reconstruction* demonstrates fully the complex and dynamic part played by Northern women in the design, implementation, and administration of Reconstruction policy. This absorbing account illustrates how these activists approached women's rights, the treatment of freed slaves, and the federal government's role in reorganizing Southern life. Like Radical Republicans, black and white women studied here advocated land reform, political and civil rights, and an activist federal government. They worked closely with the military, the Freedmen's Bureau, and Northern aid societies to provide food, clothes, housing, education, and employment to former slaves. These abolitionist-feminists embraced the Freedmen's Bureau, seeing it as both a shield for freedpeople and a vehicle for women's rights. But Faulkner rebuts historians who depict a community united by faith in free labor ideology, describing a movement torn by internal tensions. The author explores how gender conventions undermined women's efforts, as military personnel and many male reformers saw female reformers as encroaching on their territory, threatening their vision of a wage labor economy, and impeding the economic independence of former slaves. She notes the opportunities afforded to some middle-class black women, while also acknowledging the difficult ground they occupied between freed slaves and whites. Through compelling individual examples, she traces how female reformers found their commitment to gender solidarity across racial lines tested in the face of disagreements regarding the benefits of charity and the merits of paid employment.

"The author sheds light on the conflicted character of the freedmen's aid movement, offering vivid glimpses of the struggles that shaped the period more broadly. . . . She makes an important case for exploring further the role gender played in shaping a radical moment in the history of the United States." *Washington Times* "Important for its contribution to redefining women's activism." *Choice* "A pioneering account of the work for and by freedmen." *Journal of American History* "Faulkner's fascinating and important book focuses on the role of Northern black and white women in the freedmen's aid movement from roughly 1861 to 1877. She brilliantly captures a moment in U.S. history when these working relationships were possible." *Journal of Southern History* "Women's Radical Reconstruction will appeal to historians concerned with gender issues, abolition and slavery, philanthropy, and education. Faulkner draws upon rich primary sources from archives, historical societies, and rare book and manuscript collections to bolster her argument." *History of Education Quarterly* About the Author Carol Faulkner is Associate Professor of History at SUNY, Geneseo.