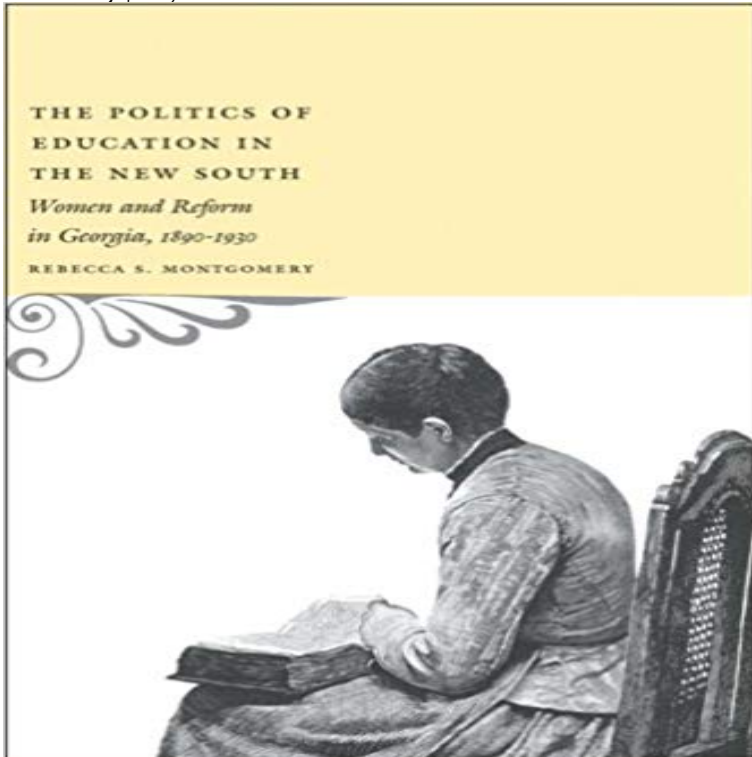


# The Politics of Education in the New South: Women and Reform in Georgia, 1890-1930



After the upheavals of Reconstruction, power in the South returned largely unchanged to white men and the state but for many southern women, change became imperative. Alarmed at the growing poverty, illiteracy, class strife, and vulnerability of women, female activists in Georgia advocated a fair and just system of education as a way of providing economic opportunity for women and the rural and urban poor. Their focus on educational reform transfigured public and private social relations in the New South, as Rebecca S. Montgomery details in her expansive new study. Montgomery argues that women's prolonged campaign for educational improvements reflected their concern for distributing public resources more equitably. Middle-class white women in Georgia recognized the crippling effects of discrimination and state inaction, which they came to understand in terms of both gender and class. They acted decisively on that knowledge in their subsequent push for rural school improvement, home extension services, public kindergartens, child labor reforms, admission of women to Georgia's state colleges and universities, and the establishment of female-run boarding schools in the mountains of north Georgia.

In the process, Montgomery explains, a distinct female political culture developed that stood in opposition to the individualism, corruption, and short-sightedness that plagued formal politics in the New South. Though women used the male-dominated state government to mediate between competing interests in their crusade, they also promoted a new concept of manhood in which honor and integrity were based on the obligation to serve family and society. *The Politics of Education in the New South* provides the first complete picture of women's role in expanding the democratic promise of education in the South and shows how concern about their status as female

citizens motivated women to Progressive reform on behalf of others.

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