In *Political Theory and Feminist Social Criticism*, Brooke Ackerly demonstrates the shortcomings of contemporary deliberative democratic theory, relativism, and essentialism for guiding the practice of social criticism in the real, imperfect world. Drawing theoretical implications from the activism of Third World feminists who help bring to public audiences the voices of women silenced by coercion, she provides a practicable model of social criticism. She argues that feminist critics have managed to achieve in practice what other theorists do only incompletely in theory. Complemented by Third World feminist social criticism, deliberative democratic theory becomes critical theory – actionable, coherent, and self-reflective. While a complement to democratic theory, Third World feminist social criticism also addresses the problem in feminist theory associated with attempts to deal with identity politics. Third World feminist social criticism thus takes feminist theory beyond the critical impasse of the tension between anti-relativist and anti-essentialist feminist theory.

Brooke Ackerly is Visiting Assistant Professor in the Political Science Department at University of California, Los Angeles.
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As the twenty-first century approaches, major new political challenges have arisen at the same time as some of the most enduring dilemmas of political association remain unresolved. The collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War reflect a victory for democratic and liberal values, yet in many of the western countries that nurtured those values there are severe problems of urban decay, class and racial conflict, and failing political legitimacy. Enduring global injustice and inequality seem compounded by environmental problems, disease, the oppression of women, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, and the relentless growth of the world’s population. In such circumstances, the need for creative thinking about the fundamentals of human political association is manifest. This new series in contemporary political theory is intended to foster such systematic normative reflection.

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Brooke A. Ackerly
For Annlyn and her world
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Acknowledgements

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