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0521847338 - Early American Women Critics: Performance, Religion, Race

Gay Gibson Cima

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WOMEN CRITICS

*Early American Women Critics* demonstrates that performances of various kinds – religious, political, and cultural – enabled women to enter the human rights debates that roiled the American colonies and young republic. Black and white women staked their claims on American citizenship through disparate performances of spirit possession, patriotism, and poetic and theatrical production. They protected themselves within various shields that allowed them to speak openly while keeping the individual basis of their identities invisible. Cima shows that between the First and Second Great Religious Awakenings (1730s–1830s), women from West Africa, Europe, and various corners of the American colonies self-consciously adopted performance strategies that enabled them to critique American culture and establish their own diverse and contradictory claims on the body politic. This book restores the primacy of religious performances – Christian, Yoruban, Bantu, and Muslim – to the study of early American cultural and political histories, revealing that religion and race are inseparable.

Gay Gibson Cima, Professor of English and Director of the Humanities and Human Rights Initiative at Georgetown University, has published widely on feminist performance and critical race theory. Her work appears in anthologies such as *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies* and *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* as well as in journals such as *Theatre Journal*, *Theater*, and *Theatre Survey*. She is the author of *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage*. The American Society for Theatre Research has recognized her work on women critics through the Kahan Prize and a Senior Research Fellowship.

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*To Ronald J. Cima,  
Gibson Alessandro Cima,  
Anna Francesca Cima,  
Geraldine Smith Gibson,  
and the memory of Richard M. Gibson*

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## *Acknowledgments*

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Although female theatre critics make only a cameo appearance in these pages, they prompted my initial curiosity about women's entrances into cultural, political, and religious debates: Brooks McNamara and Maryann

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*Acknowledgments*

Chach kindly gave me a tour of the Shubert Archives years ago, and I happened to pull from the shelf a sheaf of script evaluations written by women working for the Shubert Theatre. I thank Brooks and Maryann for the tour which sparked my interest in writing this book.

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gift offered me a means of encapsulating my theory about women critics. My conversations with him always open up exciting new ways of thinking about performance. Anna first taught me about the evils of theodicy, and her insights prompted me to consider more closely the relationship between religious and political debates. She is a wizard woman. My mother and father gave me an invaluable legacy – a curiosity about life and hope for the future – and I wish they could know how very grateful I am.