



# White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race

By Gloria Wekker

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In *White Innocence* Gloria Wekker explores a central paradox of Dutch culture: the passionate denial of racial discrimination and colonial violence coexisting alongside aggressive racism and xenophobia. Accessing a cultural archive built over 400 years of Dutch colonial rule, Wekker fundamentally challenges Dutch racial exceptionalism by undermining the dominant narrative of the Netherlands as a "gentle" and "ethical" nation. Wekker analyzes the Dutch media's portrayal of black women and men, the failure to grasp race in the Dutch academy, contemporary conservative politics (including gay politicians espousing anti-immigrant rhetoric), and the controversy surrounding the folkloric character Black Pete, showing how the denial of racism and the expression of innocence safeguards white privilege. Wekker uncovers the postcolonial legacy of race and its role in shaping the white Dutch self, presenting the contested, persistent legacy of racism in the country.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"*White Innocence* is a major contribution that provides us with new and distinct methods for investigating the cultural archives of colonialism, showing how they are at once national archives that include written documents and accumulated impressions, encounters, and experiences. Gloria Wekker takes the trouble of creating an itinerary of expressions of whiteness as innocence. It is a powerful itinerary. This book will reach out to readers, and draw them in."

(Sara Ahmed)

"Refreshingly innovative, conceptually sophisticated, and compellingly argued. . . . The outcome of a lifetime spent in the theoretical and political trenches, *White Innocence* breaks entirely new ground."

(M. Jacqui Alexander)

"Gloria Wekker's patient anatomization of the Dutch racial order is a major contribution to the growing global conversation about whiteness and its overcoming. Her authoritative survey of the willful innocence that underpins racism in the Netherlands should be widely read and studied."

(Paul Gilroy)

"*White Innocence* explains why white Dutch people seem unable to grasp the racism of Zwarte Piet: Assured of their own social progressivism, they can a priori think and therefore do no wrong. . . . ? Wekker concludes her work with a plea for 'another "embarrassment of riches,"' for acknowledging the racism staring us in the face. In the United States, we might start by recognizing that there is, and always has been, no more audacious identity politics than white identity politics, as Trump and his white-supremacist ilk gleefully demonstrate. At least the illusion of innocence has been stripped away. Or perhaps not?"

(Nick Barr Clingan *The Nation* 2017-03-14)

#### About the Author

Gloria Wekker is Professor Emeritus of Gender Studies at Utrecht University and the author of several books, including *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora*.

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