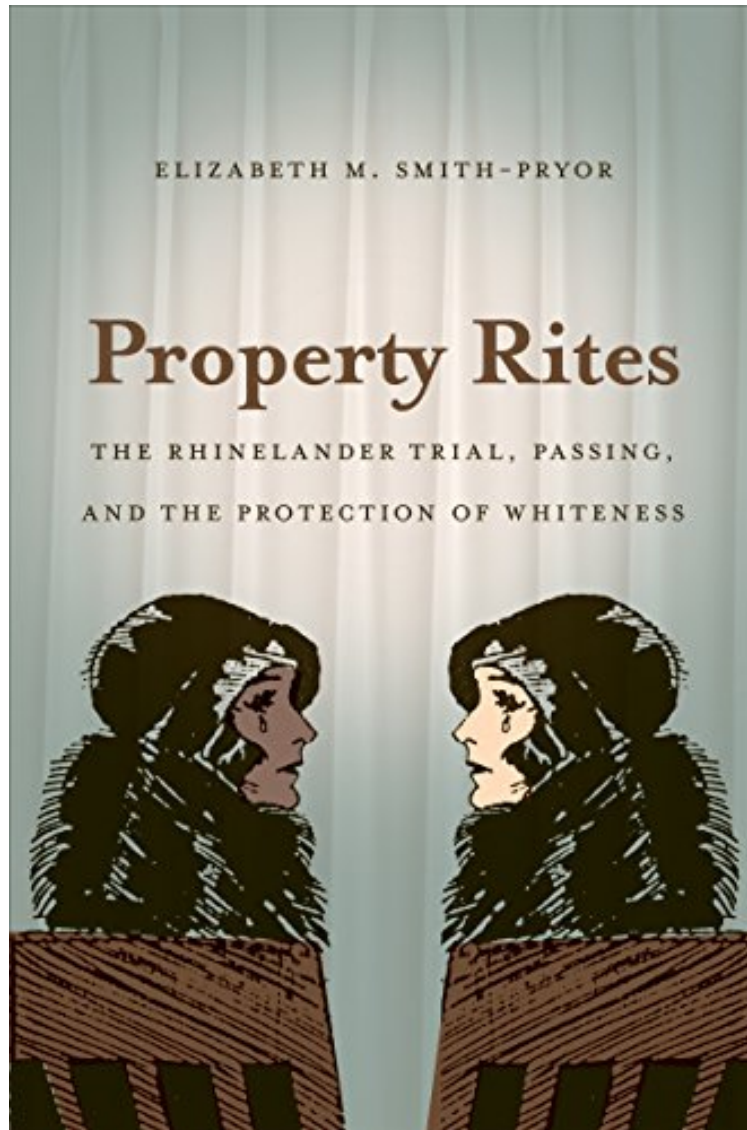


(Download) Property Rites: The Rhinelander Trial, Passing, and the Protection of Whiteness

# Property Rites: The Rhinelander Trial, Passing, and the Protection of Whiteness

*Elizabeth M. Smith-Pryor*

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In 1925 Leonard Rhinelander, the youngest son of a wealthy New York society family, sued to end his marriage to Alice Jones, a former domestic servant and the daughter of a "colored" cabman. After being married only one month, Rhinelander pressed for the dissolution of his marriage on the grounds that his wife had lied to him about her racial background. The subsequent marital annulment trial became a massive public spectacle, not only in New York but across the nation--despite the fact that the state had never outlawed interracial marriage. Elizabeth Smith-Pryor makes extensive use of trial transcripts, in addition to contemporary newspaper coverage and archival sources, to explore why Leonard Rhinelander was allowed his day in court. She moves fluidly between legal history, a day-by-day narrative of the trial itself, and analyses of the trial's place in the culture of the 1920s North to show how notions of race, property, and the law were--and are--inextricably intertwined.

Offers a fascinating thesis of why so many white Americans in the 1920s had become anxious about the concept of passing.--Flavour Magazine Compelling.--African American Offers other fascinating discussions of the ways in which shifting notions of middle-class manhood, courtship practices, and acceptable sexual behavior, affected the course of the trial. . . . An illuminating and engaging read that is particularly suitable for an undergraduate classroom.--History News Network Smith-Pryor uses the Rhinelander trial to weave a narrative of classification, confusion, and cultural dislocation in the Jazz Age. . . . Reveals much about how Americans in the Northeast lived in and across the color line and how, in the north as much as the south, white supremacy shaped property, place, and possibility.--Journal of Interdisciplinary History Smith-Pryor tells the trial's story in play-by-play fashion, alternating those chapters with analytical interludes that describe the complexities of race in the 1920s US. . . . Recommended.--Choice An enjoyable book that clarifies many of the complicated social and legal issues surrounding the dissolution of the Rhinelander marriage.--The Journal of American History Smith-Pryor's narrative of the trial and precipitating events is compelling. . . She delineates the complex past of the Jones family . . . with care and skill." --African American Property Rites is a fascinating, wonderfully well-rounded account of the notorious Rhinelander trial. Smith-Pryor does a particularly fine job of explicating the strategies of each of the lawyers, explaining the context of divorce and annulment law in New York, and highlighting the significance of property in protecting whiteness.--Peggy Pascoe, author of *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* About the Author Elizabeth Smith-Pryor is assistant professor of history at Kent State University. She practiced law in New York for six years.