

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Paul A. Cimbala, Randall M. Miller, eds. *Against the Tide: Women Reformers in American Society*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997. xviii + 172 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-275-95806-0.

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*Against the Tide: Women Reformers in American Society* is actually a shorter, paperback version of *American Reform and Reformers: A Biographical Dictionary* (Greenwood Press, 1996), although it includes one new essay on Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the black abolitionist.

The introduction, written by Randall M. Miller, explains the special importance of reform in the context of the American experience, the idea that, freed from the past, Americans somehow sensed a unique opportunity and collective responsibility to “reshape government, society, and even the human condition ... and that ... ”women have been central to that process“ (p. ix). Citing historian Daniel Boorstin (*Democracy and its Discontents*, New York, 1974), Miller also makes the interesting observation that in America the reform struggles were often those of the wealthy and educated on behalf of the less fortunate (pp. x-xi).

The volume contains eleven essays, arranged in roughly chronological order, and focuses on Catharine Beecher (Domestic Relations), Mary Ann Shadd Cary (Black Abolitionism), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (the Women’s Rights Movement), Dorothea Dix (Mental Health Reform), Frances Willard (Temperance), Jane Addams (the Settlement House Movement), Ida Wells-Barnett (The African-American Anti-Lynching Campaign), Jessie Daniel Ames (the White Women’s Anti-Lynching Campaign), Margaret Sanger (the Birth Control Movement), Dorothy Day (the Catholic Worker Movement), and Betty Friedan (the National Organization for Women.)

The writer of each essay is different, but all are his-

tory professors, independent researchers, fellows, or editors of historical texts. The focus and writing style of the essays is amazingly consistent, and all the writers manage to convey not only the history of their subjects, but the undercurrents surrounding them and the contradictions entrapping some of them. For example, in his essay, “Jessie Daniel Ames and the White Women’s Anti-Lynching Campaign,” Robert F. Martin points out that Ames and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), found themselves in the curious position of excluding “their black sisters from the ... organization” (p. 118), showing that the desire to improve the lot of the oppressed was often shaped and molded by the contexts for reformers.

Each essay is followed by notes and bibliographies which include a broad variety of sources including historical texts and journals, autobiographies, newspapers, private letters, lectures, declarations and resolutions, testimony before congressional committees, and editorials.

Although this collection of essays would probably not be classified as recreational reading, it could prove very valuable to Women’s and American Studies, as well as History and Sociology scholars. It would certainly be a good addition to any academic library.

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