

H-Net Reviews

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JWA–Emma Goldman–Overview. Jewish Women’s Archive.

Reviewed by Judy Kutulas

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This site, part of the Jewish Women’s Archive’s Women of Valor exhibit series, is designed in conjunction with the Emma Goldman Papers. Goldman’s life intersects many aspects of history, as she was an immigrant, an advocate of free love, a promoter of birth control, and an anarchist. She has long been a popular subject of biographies. This site incorporates aspects of all of these Goldman subtexts. <p> The site is well designed and easily navigable. Each page contains citation information and each image has source information and a print option. Names, movements, and other important historical features are clickable, making it possible for those with more interest or less familiarity to follow up without disturbing the flow of the site overall. The narrative provides a basic sketch of Goldman’s life and her main achievements. Concepts like “anarchism,” “feminism” (and how it differs, for instance, from “suffrage”) are well explained. The images are of varied quality. One photo of Goldman and Alexander Berkman—both decked out in leisure attire—at San Tropez is particularly wonderful, while some of the newspaper headlines and clippings do not seem to add much to story. <p> The site does a particularly fine job of contextualizing Goldman within

both the radical movement and within feminism. The philosophy of anarchism is clearly explained, as is her attitudes toward violence. In the same way, Goldman’s differences with the mainstream women’s movement are treated with subtle detail. <p> Missing from this site, probably intentionally, is much information about Goldman’s personal life. Here, we receive only the most rudimentary sketch. Her long-time lover and manager, Ben Reitman, simply disappears from the narrative without explanation. Because we read about Goldman moving from place to place, touring or living in exile, it is impossible not to wonder: How did she live? Over the years Goldman has become a figure of legend, thanks to E. L. Doctrow’s <cite>Ragtime</cite>, Warren Beatty’s film <cite>Reds</cite>, and to the many biographic treatments that exist of her, by such authors as Alice Wexler and Alix Kate Schulman. This side of “Red Emma”—her place in popular culture—is not discussed at all in this otherwise comprehensive website. <p> The website would be useful in U.S. survey classes and women’s history classes, and is suitable for both high school and college level courses. It would also be a good starting point for students doing research on Goldman.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-survey>

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