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Carl Mirra. *The Admirable Radical: Straughton Lynd and Cold War Dissent, 1945-1970.* Kent: Kent State University Press, 2010. 224 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60635-051-5.

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Staughton Lynd is a man with many legacies. Within activist circles, he is regarded as one of the nation's preeminent nonviolent activist elders, a man who made a name for himself in the late 1950s and early 1960s among radical pacifists, played an important role in the civil rights struggle as director of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Freedom Schools, garnered fame for his outspoken opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam, and continued his political efforts after the sixties through ongoing work on behalf of workers' and prisoners' rights. Academics, on the other hand, recognize Lynd for his intellectual achievements as a pathbreaking scholar and historian of the American Revolution, who helped usher in the New Left/new social history of the 1960s and yet was ultimately forced to sacrifice his academic career because of his political stance. These two dimensions of Lynd's public life come together in Carl Mirra's thoughtfully written biography, *The Admirable Radical: Staughton Lynd and Cold War Dissent, 1945-1970,* which highlights the dialectical relationship between Lynd's actions and ideas, and analyzes how both worked together in Lynd's efforts to construct a new social order.

The Admirable Radical focuses on two consecutive eras in Lynd's life. It begins by chronicling the formative years of Lynd's youth, from 1945 through about 1960, when Lynd experimented with how to live out his burgeoning commitment to pacifism, communitarianism, and democratic ideals. The book then continues into the 1960s when, as a mature activist and newly minted academic, Lynd made a public name for himself within the civil rights, New Left, and antiwar movements, and among professional historians and scholars. The book's narrative, grounded in an extensive array of archival resources, oral history interviews, and careful readings of Lynd's published and unpublished writings, provides a clear understanding of how Lynd's political beliefs and actions developed over these crucial decades and, in doing so, sheds light on important ideas and experiences that shaped post-World War II American radicalism.

Mirra starts his study by recounting Lynd's youthful journey toward radicalism and the surprising opportunities for dissent that he encountered during the early Cold War years. In an era known more for conformity than for dissent, Lynd and his wife Alice defied the currents of the time. As a young man who came of age in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Lynd read widely, explored the world around him, and sought out ways to act upon his idealist vision of how to work for social and political change. He joined an evolving set of communist-led and socialist organizations while at Harvard in the late 1940s, although none of these groups perfectly suited his political philosophy. As Mirra clearly explains, Lynd's emphasis on ethical over class concerns, his commitment to peace and nonviolence, and his egalitarian and participatory political perspective, stood in sharp contrast to the rigidly Marxist, centralized, and hierarchical politics espoused by his communist and Trotskyist peers. Despite the rising tide of McCarthyism and domestic antiradicalism, Lynd's high school and college years provided a fruitful environment for such searching.

By the time Lynd graduated from college and married his wife, Alice, in 1951, he had moved in even more unconventional directions. In December 1950, he declared himself a conscientious objector, a lonely and courageous position to take in the midst of the fiercely anticommunist and pro-militarist currents that flowed during the Korean War; he served in a noncombatant position for several months in 1953 until he was dishonorably discharged for his socialist beliefs. Shortly thereafter, he and Alice moved to rural Georgia to join the Macedonia Cooperative Community, an intentional, pacifist-oriented, and spiritually based community that was a precursor, in many ways, to the communes of the 1960s. For the Lynds, the decision to join Macedonia marked an effort to model in communitarian living the type of world they hoped to

create. But it also served as a form of revolt against the privatized and consumerized postwar American home, one defined by individualistic, apolitical ideals that undermined collective efforts for social change. Mirra describes Lynd at this time as a premature New Leftist, an activist whose commitment to bottom-up, consensus-based decision making and action prefigured the political ideals that took root more widely in the early 1960s. But Lynd's actions also built upon the new types of protest then being modeled by his contemporaries in the postwar radical pacifist movement. It was no accident that after Macedonia dissolved in 1957, Lynd moved to the Glen Gardner community (home to a number of radical pacifists, including David and Betty Dellinger) and then served on the editorial board of *Liberation* magazine. Like the nonviolent activists around them, the Lynds managed to carve out space for protest, dissent, and political discernment, even during this highly conformist and repressive time.

This space opened up in the years that followed. This is evidenced, in part, by the more familiar story that Mirra tells of Lynd's activism during the 1960s: Lynd's instrumental work with the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, his growing influence as an "elder statesman" among the young radicals of the New Left, his controversial trip to Hanoi with Herbert Aptheker and Tom Hayden in 1965, and his outspoken opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam. But Mirra also focuses his attention on the important opportunities for dissent that Lynd found within the normally staid walls of academia. In 1959, at the age of thirty, Lynd entered Columbia University's graduate program in history, where he began a new career as an academic historian, which he then followed to teaching positions at Spellman College and Yale University. Much to the book's credit, Mirra takes Lynd's scholarship seriously, subjecting Lynd's research on grassroots politics and everyday life during the age of the American Revolution to a rigorous intellectual and historiographical analysis that allows readers to understand the strong relationship Lynd saw between his activist and scholarly work. Lynd clearly used his new career to explore the historical roots of the kind of direct democracy he endeavored to practice in his own life, and to cast a new role for himself as a politically engaged scholar whose intellectual work was part-and-parcel of the larger struggle to build a new social order. The books and articles that Lynd published–which cast contemporary radicalism as the completion of the democratic goals of the American Revolution–provided important intellectual ballast for activists seeking theoretical and historical justifications for their radical practices and beliefs. At the same time, as Mirra explains, Lynd's contributions as one of the early practitioners of New Left/new social History "consistently challenged the master narrative of American history" by highlighting the significance of ordinary people and collective agency to our understanding of the past (p. 125).

As *The Admirable Radical* makes clear, Lynd paid a high price for this political and intellectual dissent. Although this fact is often forgotten, even during the protest-laden years of the late 1960s, taking radical positions involved considerable risk. This bit of analysis provides an important corrective to much of the scholarship of the sixties, much of which emphasizes how the events of this decade stood in stark contrast to the constrained politics of the earlier Cold War years. Mirra, however, emphasizes the historical continuities between the 1950s and 1960s, not only by chronicling the roots of sixties dissent in the activism of early decades (and thus deepening our understanding of the "long sixties"), but by paying close attention to the ongoing forces of political suppression and control. Lynd felt the chill of the domestic Cold War firsthand when, in 1967, after just a few years at Yale, he found himself unemployed and blacklisted. Despite the various excuses that Yale's administrators gave for terminating Lynd's contract, including alleged budgetary constraints and inadequate scholarship, Mirra convincingly demonstrates that Lynd lost his job because of his public activities in opposition to the Vietnam War. The repercussions of these politics followed Lynd to Chicago, where he applied for numerous academic positions and received at least five job offers, only to have each and every one rescinded by the schools' top administrators and boards of directors. As Mirra argues, "Lynd's rise and fall in academe serves as a case study of the political repression that many radical historians faced during this time period" (p. 122). But Lynd's blacklisting also reveals a broader story of the social, political, and economic constraints faced by many sixties-era activists, not just those involved in academic pursuits. On the streets, in the midst of major demonstrations, it may have seemed as if anything was possible. Nevertheless, within institutions of power that controlled much of American politics and culture, there remained little tolerance for dissent.

Mirra's thorough analysis of these events, and of wider efforts to challenge liberal antiradicalism within the structures of the historical profession (including a fascinating discussion of the conflicts that occurred at the 1969 meeting of the American Historical Association), reveals that perhaps the greatest threat to efforts to foment fundamental social change came not from conservatives, but from the movement's erstwhile liberal al-

lies. As Mirra explains, Lynd had already learned this bitter lesson at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, when Mississippi civil rights activists found themselves sold out and shut out by the liberal political establishment. Lynd's experiences within academe only reinforced his skepticism about fostering change within mainstream institutions, while highlighting the ongoing power of Cold War antiradicalism to police the boundaries of dissent.

Above all else, however, the concept of praxis–the links that Lynd made between theory and action, reflection and protest–stands at the center of *The Admirable Radical's* analysis. "The ideas [Lynd espouses] are not abstract intellectual theories," Mirra argues, "they frequently proceed from the … social movements that encircle Lynd's life" (p. 9). Mirra's research forcefully demonstrates just how fully Lynd rooted his intellectual pursuits in his political actions. At one level this involved the lines of intellectual inquiry that Lynd pursued, such as writing about bottom-up democratic impulses during the age of the American Revolution, or exploring the historical roots of contemporary American radicalism. Of equal importance were the venues in which Lynd practiced his craft–from his work on the editorial board of *Liberation* magazine in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to Spelman College during the height of the civil rights struggle, to the Freedom Schools of Mississippi in the summer of 1964, to the talks that he gave at teach-ins and demonstrations during the Vietnam War. Through these actions, Lynd became more than a public intellectual, but an intellectual activist whose work advanced a framework that emphasized the right to dissent, the importance of ethical concerns, and an egalitarian politics embodied by horizontal consensus-based decision making.

The primary title of this book, *The Admirable Radical*, which references a description that Lynd provided of Henry David Thoreau in a 1963 article he wrote for *Liberation* magazine, reveals the high regard with which Mirra holds Lynd's life, work, and historical significance. This title does not do justice to the book's more complex claims, however, highlighting a notable weakness in Mirra's writing: the lack of an explicitly stated and clearly foregrounded set of arguments. Nevertheless, this is a thoughtful and well-researched study, written in a lively, accessible style. Mirra's research provides great insight into Lynd's life before and after he achieved public notoriety, furnishes a solid analysis of the scholarly significance of Lynd's published work, and forcefully highlights the opportunities for and limits to dissent during the first half of the Cold War. Readers interested in Lynd's life, the debates that shaped the direction of historical study and the profession, or the dynamics of protest during the 1950s and 1960s, will find much of value in this book.

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