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Judith Ezekiel. *Feminism in the Heartland.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002. vii + 339 pp. $26.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8142-5098-3.

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The history of women's rights, whether first or second wave, is often told from the perspective of the east or west coasts, leaving readers with the assumption that activists living in the nation's mid-section followed suit. In this thoroughly researched and richly textured study of feminism in the "typical" middle-American city of Dayton, Ohio, Judith Ezekiel questions the image of a movement characterized by two parts: on the one hand, a younger women's liberation movement distinguished by consciousness raising groups, and on the other, liberal feminism with its more formal organizational structure. Giving voice to previously underrepresented participants in the feminist movement, Ezekiel acknowledges the importance of place in shaping a social movement. Challenging the hegemony of previous interpretations, she argues that time and place have a significant impact on the evolution of feminist ideas.

Ezekiel's work is critical on several levels. First, it emphasizes the importance of region in exploring the spread of social movements. Book-length studies of second-wave feminism published prior to *Feminism in the Heartland* perpetuate an eastern bias because they are based upon many of the same collections of primary sources. Alice Echols's *Daring to Be Bad*, for instance, justifies a focus on East Coast groups, arguing that "with few exceptions these were the groups that made significant theoretical contributions."[1] Such logic validates the notion that social movements are merely "toned down for the Heartland" or conducted on "a small-scale version" (p. viii). As Ezekiel's work convincingly reveals, this is a false assumption. *Feminism in the Heartland* is significant for a second reason: in her nearly two decades of research for this book, the author began the important process of preserving the voices of grassroots feminist activists. The author, who had lived in Dayton briefly during the early 1970s, returned to conduct oral interviews with fifty-nine people (listed by name rather than pseudonym) who represent a balanced number of leaders and "self-identified feminists in the ranks" (p. 295). Finally, research for this book called attention to the importance of ephemeral materials (newsletters, notes from speeches, leaflets, meeting minutes, etc.) that all too often elude the collecting efforts of research libraries and archives.

For those who wish to emulate Ezekiel's methodology, it is described in an appendix entitled "Research Methods and Sources" (pp. 293-297).

Seven chapters, structured chronologically, examine four successive, and at times overlapping, movements: Dayton Women's Liberation (DWL), the Dayton Women's Center, Dayton Women Working (DWW), and Freedom of Choice (FOC). Chapters 1 and 2 explore the significance of consciousness-raising (CR) groups in the creation of Dayton Women's Liberation, an umbrella organization that began in September 1969 when twenty women met to discuss women's liberation. White women in their twenties and thirties, they included many wives and mothers who had not attended college. Meeting regularly, they blamed the system, not men, for women's oppression and they envisioned systemic changes that would result in a changed future. CR groups played a critical role in bringing Dayton women into the feminist movement and, according to Ezekiel, evidence survives to document the existence of more than forty, "each consisting of six to fifteen members" (p. 14). The chapters also shed further light on the organizational structure of DWL--its founders, philosophy, and the issues it addressed. The latter, consistent with issues discussed nationally (marriage, motherhood, divorce, etc.), helped DWL spread throughout the community, but also contributed to its eventual dissolution.

The Dayton Women's Center, an offshoot of DWL that eventually eclipsed it, is the focus of Chapters 3, 4, and 5. The Center not only created a physical space that enhanced feminism's visibility in Dayton, but also stressed service orientation, including therapy and educational workshops. The younger, more educated socialist feminists who became key players in the Center criticized DWL as too utopian, leaderless, and structureless. Ultimately, the conflict that ensued between the two groups led to the DWL's dissolution. Members of the Center worked to provide a Clergy (and Lay) Consultation Service, an abortion clinic, and a rape crisis center. While such cooperation enabled the Center to expand and diversify, it nonetheless led to its co-optation by mainstream groups. Ultimately, the Center's "diminished vision," argues Ezekiel, "made it indistinguishable from the outside world and led to its collapse" (p. 251).

Chapter 6 explores the history of an offshoot of the Center known as Dayton Women Working. Serving as a laboratory for socialist feminists, it embraced a narrower focus than had the DWL, examining such issues as affirmative action and sexist employment practices. De-emphasizing feminist analysis, it instead stressed the intersection of race, class, and gender. Chapter 7, which is devoted to a fourth group, Freedom of Choice, confirms how far feminism in Dayton traveled in the course of just one decade. De-radicalized and increasingly pragmatic, this coalition brought together feminists, liberals, and such parafeminist organizations as Planned Parenthood in a coordinated response to the anti-abortion movement. In a manner similar to the nineteenth-century's first-wave feminists, it employed the use of petitions and protests as it pursued a single goal, reproductive choice.

Although this is a model piece of research, a few readers may find the details a bit tedious, while others may wish for more in-depth analysis in several areas. Ezekiel struggled to incorporate black women into this narrative despite the movement's strong ties to the civil rights movement and the city's significant African-American population. The role of lesbians in Dayton's feminist groups also deserves deeper analysis. While they participated in CR groups and the Women's Center, one is left wondering what roles they played in the prioritization of causes and the proliferation of conflict within the movement locally. The author's provocative analysis of this Midwestern city also leaves the reader wanting to know even more about the power of place. Can links be made to Dayton's utopian past (for instance, to the

utopian feminists and free lovers who held meetings and published radical weeklies there in the 1850s, and to Ralph Borsodi's back-to-the-land movement of the early 1930s)? Finally, this study leaves the reader with questions about Dayton's religious heritage, especially the extent to which the city's Catholics shaped feminism's development. Answering some of these and related questions will give voice to the African-American women, lesbians, Catholics, and members of Dayton's intermittently established National Organization for Women, all of whose competing visions of what constitute liberation are essential to our understanding of feminism's complexity.

Feminism in the Heartland is a powerful narrative that has the potential to reframe our understanding of the second-wave feminism. In it, Ezekiel decenters the history of second-wave feminism by convincingly arguing that Dayton's feminist movement developed from its liberationist rather than its liberal feminist roots. Not a mere reflection of East Coast feminism, it developed differently because of the community's working-class and religious composition. Such observations have particular relevance today as federal and state restrictions chip away at Roe v. Wade and in an election year in which choice has become a political football. On the book's final page Ezekiel laments the waning of feminism's original revolutionary fervor and calls for renewed activism: "Watered-down visions are not enough to inspire women to brave the departure from familiar and seemingly secure life styles.... If we truly want to aim for the stars, we need to restore the 'liberation' to the women's movement" (p. 251).

Note

[1]. Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 20-21.

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