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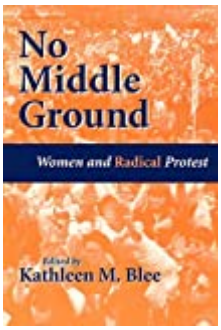

Kathleen M. Blee, ed. *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest.* New York and London: New York University Press, 1998. viii + 340 pp. $24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-1280-1; $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-1279-5.

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In *No Middle Ground*, Kathleen Blee offers a collection of essays about the radical activities of American women in the second half of the twentieth century. Blee, a sociologist and author of *Women and the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*, organizes this eclectic collection around her inclusive definition of radicalism which allows for research into the radical action of women from a variety of political or theoretical perspectives, focuses on goals rather than tactics, emphasizes the context of specific radical action, and places gender at the center of the analysis.[1]

The essays are uneven in style and content, yet, instead of being a weakness, this unevenness mirrors the collective experience of radical action–sometimes the product of political or religious beliefs, sometimes the result of arbitrary or oppressive action, sometimes the result of elevated consciousness, and sometimes, even, of incidental or opportunistic experiences. The writing also mirrors the concerns of the different authors, among whom are academics from sociology, anthropology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies, as well as a lawyer, an educator, several activists, and a policy consultant.

The first section of the book, "What's In a Name?," features essays that explore how issues of gender shape political identity and political action. In "I am Kathy Power," lawyer and political activist Pam E. Goldman analyzes the impact of an FBI and grand jury investigation on several communities in Lexington, Kentucky in 1975. In its quest for anti-war fugitives Susan Saxe and Katherine Power, the FBI questioned several people who may or may not have knowingly harbored the activists. In the process of the FBI queries and subsequent grand jury subpoenas, some people refused to answer the FBI's questions, others refused to cooperate after witnessing the high handed tactics of the FBI, and the lesbian and gay community mobilized against FBI harassment. As long-term activists brought with them their organizing skills from wine boycotts and strikes to be applied to the developing defense committee, the refusal to cooperate with the FBI and the grand jury took on national dimensions and radical groups from other cities discussed the political position of the "Lexington Six." Although the intrusion of the FBI and the injustices of the court system were a radicalizing experience for all who came in contact with them, many of the Lexington Six and their supporters defined their radicalism in terms of their homosexuality, comingling personal, political, and sexual politics. Two other essays in this first section situate women's radicalism within a much different world of women's activism. "Something About the Word" by Shirley A. Jackson utilizes interviews with African American women to demonstrate the problematic nature of the term "femi-

nist" for women who react to oppression based on both race and gender. Sonya Paul and Robert Perkinson interview Native American environmental activist Winona LaDuke on a variety of topics including organizing a benefit tour with the Indigo Girls and representing the Indigenous Women's Network at the World Conference on Women in Beijing. LaDuke articulates a theme echoed in many of the essays in this collection–that political power should rest with local communities.

The second section of the book features three essays organized around the theme of "Personal and Political." Sociologist Belinda Robnett's use of social theory to examine African American women in the Civil Rights movement complements an oral history piece by Beth Roy that contrasts the experiences of African American and white students during the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. Karren Baird-Olson's "Reflections of an AIM Activist" integrates both the theoretical and the personal as she analyzes the American Indian Movement's approach to radical activism and her own experiences in that movement.

The essays in the third section, "The Ties That Bind," take these links between the personal and political aspects of activism and situate them in larger activist communities of both the left and right, to demonstrate the complexity of activism by women that can make their activism on behalf of women and women=92s issues more problematic. For example, Susan E. Marshall's study of women in contemporary New Right politics, "Rattle on the Right," examines the writings of two different women's organizations–the Concerned Women for America and Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum–to demonstrate how women "function as standardbearers of opposition to policies that promote gender equity, a strategy that deflects criticism by pitting women against women and by using gender as a socially acceptable proxy for race (p. 156)." Kathleen M. Blee's "Reading Racism" examines women's participation in four American hate groups–neo-Nazis, white-power skinheads, Christian Identity sects and the Ku Klux Klan. She notes that the beliefs of women in these groups often veer far from the official agendas of these organizations, usually around issues of gender and childbearing. On the other end of the political spectrum, Cynthia Costello and Amy Dru Stanley's "Report from Seneca" recounts the experiences of women at the feminist peace camp built at the Seneca Army Depot in 1983 to protest NATO deployment of first strike nuclear weapons. They point out that the differences between feminist goals and the goals of the peace movement revealed themselves less within the camp and more within the context of the larger community which felt threatened by, among other things, the lesbianism of some of the women. The authors suggest that the interaction between the larger community and the encampment raises areas for further debate about divisions within feminist peace activists, organizational methods, and international feminist antimilitarism.

The next essay, "It's Our Party–Love It or Leave It" by Jane Margolis goes beyond the theoretical issues of relationships between feminists and the movements they support to the personal account of the author's reasons for joining a radical left political party in the 1970s and her decision to leave it ten years later, eventually leading her to her current research on understanding social conformity and group think.

The essays in the fourth section of the book build around the quotidian experiences of women's lives during periods of social activism involving such issues as boycotts, busing, union organizing and environmental concerns. Historian Margaret Rose, in "From the Fields to the Picket Line," demonstrates that, although tasks were often divided along traditional gender lines in the United Farm Workers unionizing campaign from 1965-1975, gender relations were also altered as women gained more self-esteem and men and women cooperated more in domestic relations. In contrast, the experiences of the women activists in Julia Wrigley's study of the Boston busing protest in 1974, "From Housewives to Activists," grew out of the ideology of motherhood where women entered the public arena to defend traditional values, rather than create new ones. Here, working class women opposed court ordered busing with meetings and marches. Wrigley notes that although a few women may have developed a sense of their own abilities, most did not undergo the life-altering experiences reported by women who joined the Civil Rights movement. She suggests that the "very process of activism can change people, but the change is likely to be profound only when it is linked to an ideological shift in what people want or expect for themselves" (p. 285). Such an ideological shift is seen in Sally Ward Maggard's "We're Fighting Millionaires," a study of an Appalachian working class women hospital workers' strike in the early 1970s. Although the participants saw the strike as an extension of the caring nature of women's work, they faced opposition on class lines from within the hospital, on gender lines from outside in the community where many people believed women should care for others at home and in the hospital, not on the picket line, and from their union, the Communication Workers of America and its pater-

nalism. Unlike the anti-busing advocates, however, the Appalachian hospital workers had an ideology of gender equity and, despite the mixed outcome (back pay but no union representation), most strikers felt transformed by the experience and said they would do it all over again.

The final essay, "Fighting for Environmental Justice" featuring an interview with Lois Gibbs by Multinational Monitor, a Washington, D.C. periodical, brings together many of the themes of the book. Lois Gibbs transformed her local concerns with toxic dumping in Love Canal to neighborhood organizing, then to the founding of the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste which provides technical and organizational support for grassroots environmental campaigns. By giving Gibbs the last word, *No Middle Ground* makes implicit that action based initially on traditional gender concerns (Gibbs, the housewife and mother, became concerned when she realized the school her children attended had been built on a chemical waste dump) can have wide-ranging consequences when its goals are universal. For readers interested in links between activism and its consequences for both society and gender, the diverse case studies in *No Middle Ground* present food for thought.

Note

[1]. Other recent works that complement this work are Cathy Cohen, Kathleen Jones, and Joan Tronto, ed, *Women Transforming Politics: An Alternative Reader* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997); Temma Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) and Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mother's Movement and World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

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