

Nina Mjagkij, Margaret Spratt, eds. *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*. New York: New York University Press, 1997. xviii + 311 pp. \$21.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-5542-6; \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-5541-9.



Reviewed by Sarah Deutsch (Clark University)

Published on H-Urban (January, 1999)

Few would dispute the centrality of the YMCA and YWCA both to the history of the middle-class and of the elite women and men from whose concerns they emerged, and to the history of the white collar and working-class women and men for whom they were created. Whether depicted as agents of social control, bringing an unruly urban population under the moral supervision of more elite surrogate parents, or as progressive agents of liberal reform and seedbeds of civil rights movements, they have figured largely in the social histories of recent decades. This collection probes the full range of topics that have interested recent social historians about the Y's, from their role in Protestant denominational transformation and institutionalization, to their role in company towns and labor disputes, from their creation to be safe havens for young, innocent women and men adrift in the city to their creation as safe spaces for the development of a gay subculture, and finally, from their origins in racial separation to their struggles with a new politics of integration.

Like most collections, this one is uneven, but many of the essays are pathbreaking, and many share underlying themes, such as tensions between the national level leadership, local leadership, and the membership. In some cases, such as that of the railroad YMCAs discussed by Thomas Winter ("Contested Spaces: The YMCA and

Workingmen on the Railroads, 1877-1910"), the membership succeeds in forcing locals into a pro-union stance that made the national and the local sponsors less than happy. Here and in the case of Cincinnati's YWCA discussed by Sarah Heath, the locals seem more progressive than the national. But in the case of Charlotte, North Carolina, examined by Michelle Busby in "'The Price of Integration': The Story of the Charlotte YWCA in the 1960s," the local managed to slip the leash of the national and subvert the national's progressive racial policies by engineering a simultaneous integration and suburbanization of the Y.

Busby's essay is particularly strong in its nuanced and complex portrayal of the racial, gender, and class dynamics, set in a larger shifting urban economic context. Two other essays make intriguing use of newer theoretical models. Paula Lupkin's "Manhood Factories: Architecture, Business, and the Evolving Urban Role of the YMCA, 1865-1925" brings a Foucaultian analysis to bear to demonstrate the increasing popularity in this period of the Y as panopticon, a theme picked up with a very different twist in John D. Wrathall's "Taking the Young Stranger by the Hand: Homosexual Cruising at the YMCA, 1890-1980." And in Nina Mjagkij's "True Manhood: The YMCA and Racial Advancement, 1890-1930," the author uses the new attention to historicizing

manhood to interrogate the role of the Y for black urban-ites.

It is impossible in a review of an anthology to do justice to all the contributions, and there are other useful articles in this collection, as well as one that covers YWCA and YMCA archival sources, valuable to anyone for whom these rich sources may be of use.

Review commissioned for H-URBAN by Georgina Hickey, <ghickey@gsaix2.cc.gasou.edu>, Georgia Southern University

Copyright (c) 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

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

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

Citation: Sarah Deutsch. Review of Mjagkij, Nina; Spratt, Margaret, eds., *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. January, 1999.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2657>

Copyright © 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.