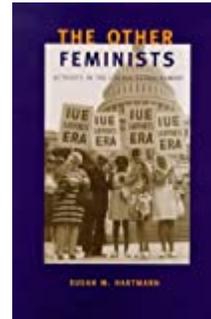


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Susan M. Hartmann. *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. v + 292 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-07464-2.



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Seek and You Shall Find

Susan Hartmann's book *The Other Feminists* proves yet again the secular truth of the old biblical maxim that if we but look for something we are likely to find it. In this case, the subject being sought is alternative sources for modern feminism. As Hartmann acknowledges, traditional scholarly analysis places responsibility for the reemergence of modern feminism with a series of events dating to the early 1960s: the creation of the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961; the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963; the inclusion of Title VII, which banned sex discrimination in employment, in the 1964 Civil Rights Act; the creation of the National Organization for Women in 1966; and the development of radical feminism within the civil rights movement and the New Left. Certainly this narrative dominates textbooks and lectures in modern U.S. history. However, as Hartmann indicates that focus comes with a heavy cost; it has ignored the reality of feminism and feminist activity in areas and segments of society not included in the standard story.

Hartmann contends that the demands and the strategies employed by the modern women's movement devel-

oped both prior to and contemporary with the reemergence of organized feminism. She backs her thesis with extensive research in the archives of the four mainstream liberal organizations whose activities provide the core of this book. She also includes a separate chapter on the feminism of black women. Her purpose is to elucidate "the actions of individuals and groups outside of organized feminism" so as to "help explain how a sea change in attitudes, practices, and policies regarding gender roles could occur throughout the social and structural fabric of the United States, despite the relatively limited personnel and resources of the formal organizations of the women's movement" (p. 2). She promises that her work will force the development of "different narratives" to tell the history of this social movement (p. 2).

By studying the International Union of Electrical Workers, the American Civil Liberties Union, The National Council of Churches, and the Ford Foundation, Hartmann unearths several significant facts. She exposes a working class feminism among union workers that included male-female cooperation to secure feminist goals like equal pay, pregnancy leave, and seniority rights in

the interests of all workers. The IUE was not the only organization to adopt feminist policies before the organized feminists. The ACLU fought job discrimination, lobbied for birth control and abortion rights, and litigated against sex discrimination before NOW undertook a similar agenda. Furthermore, it advocated a feminism respectful of class and color differences among women, specifically fighting against sterilization abuse of poor women.

Even though the NCC did not undertake significant feminist action until the 1970s, its religious feminism proved significant because it exposed the hypocrisy between Christian teachings and patriarchal church practices. Churchwomen in the NCC who had long chafed under these conditions undertook the consciousness-raising generally associated with late 1960s radical feminism several years before the latter. The result was women gained new confidence to assume leadership in parish matters and force consideration of women's concerns among which included removal of sexist language from worship services. Although women in all of the organizations studied dealt with internal sexism even as their organizations lobbied against external sexism, this reality was most obvious at the ostensibly liberal Ford Foundation. Feminism there emerged when women foundation workers challenged job-related discrimination first and then pushed the foundation to expand its equality rhetoric geared toward minorities to also include women through grant opportunities.

The book then suggests the need for a more complex definition of feminism and its sources. Hartmann moves her readers in that direction when she argues that "the development of feminist footholds in these organizations meant that American society experienced a broader

feminist change than that emphasized by the predominantly white and middle-class independent women's movement. Feminism was institutionalized in organizations whose missions had originated with or been modified according to other priorities—meeting the needs of blue-collar workers, poor people, and racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 215).

Hartmann's work is an important contribution to women's history. The questions raised by this book suggest numerous possibilities for future work. Would a similar story to that of the IUE be found among other unions? Were women's experiences at the Ford Foundation replicated in other foundations? These sorts of questions could have been answered by Hartmann had she provided more explanation of why she chose the subjects she did. Her separate chapter on black feminism, insightful because it contends "black women simultaneously labored to make feminist projects more inclusive even as they pushed feminism into racial justice agendas," suggests the need for more study about the intersections between feminism and women of color (p. 201). Furthermore, the book as a whole implicitly calls for analysis of feminism and feminist activity in a wide variety of other organizations such as political parties, schools, colleges, and universities. Finally, the book would have been strengthened with more analysis comparing and contrasting the various case studies. Ultimately, though, this volume will stand as a path-breaking revisionist work that no serious student of modern American history can ignore.

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