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Larry Gara, Lenna Mae Gara, eds. *A Few Small Candles: War Resisters of World War II Tell Their Stories.* Kent, Ohio and London: Kent State University Press, 1999. x + 207 pp. $28.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87338-621-0.

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Shedding Light on World War II Draft Resisters

During the 1990s much energy was directed at remembering and celebrating America's participation in World War II. Most of this attention focused on the men and women who served in uniform or in the nation's war industries. Generally, these individuals were honored for their sacrifices while fighting what most America's believe was "the good war." Certainly the attention paid these people is largely well-deserved. Yet, one cannot help but suspect that a good deal of nostalgia colors much of the remembrance. So much so that the fact that there were those who opposed US participation in the war, both before and after Pearl Harbor, has been ignored or forgotten. A Few Small Candles: War Resisters of World War II Tell Their Stories, edited by Larry and Lenna Mae Gara, reminds us of those who did not believe that World War II, or any war, was "the good war."

A Few Small Candles is a collection of memoirs by ten men who refused to submit to the draft and refused alternative service during World War II. For their refusals, each served time in prison. The memoirs make clear that each man based his decision to resist the draft and alternative service for deeply personal reasons. These reasons were rooted in both religion and philosophy. Most indicated that they were inspired by the work of Mohandas Gandhi in India. Most also demonstrated a great pride in what they did during the war.

In reading through the individual memoirs one is struck by a number of things. First, it is clear that these were (and are) men of deep convictions. Their beliefs were deeply and honestly held. They came to them through a process of reflection and struggle. Young men at the time of their imprisonment, many had not yet fully worked out all of their ideas and beliefs. It is clear though, that the ideas and beliefs that drove them to war resistance in the 1940s formed the foundation for their ideas, beliefs and actions throughout the rest of their lives. They resisted war not only during the time when they would have been called to fight, but have resisted war throughout their lives. Second, these men not only resisted the war, they also resisted the racism of the time, participating in a number of non-violent protests of racial segregation in the prisons. In this way, their stories are not only a reminder of the opposition that existed to World War II, they also remind us efforts on behalf of civil rights

predated the mid-1950s. And third, one also comes away with a suspicion that the memories of these men have also been colored with a bit of nostalgia. Some men do acknowledge differences and disagreements between various war resisters and they also recount their experiences with a few in American society who could not accept their decisions, but most seem to remember more times of happy fellowship and the support of friends and neighbors.

Another theme that runs throughout the book is the rejection of authority on the part of many of these men. All the men knew that if they decided to resist both the draft and alternative service they would go to prison. Initially, most seemed to accept that. Once there, however, a number of the men seemed to reject the idea that they had done anything that merited a stay in prison and some being held in minimum security prisons even threatened to simply walk away. Others violated the conditions of their parole as, seemingly, they did not wish to submit to any form of restriction of their freedom as a result of their actions. For this reader anyway, that was the hardest part of the book to grapple with. Pacifist or no, it would be hard to dispute that these men acted on very heartfelt beliefs. And one can support their non-violent opposition to abuses of authority. However, the rejection of any restriction on their freedom as a result of their resistance is a little harder to fully accept. That seemed almost an extreme of individualism.

Overall, however, one does come away from this book with a greater appreciation and respect for the convictions of these ten men who resisted the war. They did not come by their decisions lightly and many of them continued to question and struggle with their decisions. Theirs is a story seldom told and, thus, largely forgotten. It should be noted, though, that this book is not a history of the war resistance movement. It is a collection of really rather individual memories of individual resistance to war. There is no attempt to demonstrate how representative these men were of the six thousand who served time in prison during World War II for refusing both the draft and alternative service. The editors did, though, include a short bibliography of broader works, including one on women war resisters, for those interested in more of the story. Despite its limitations, this book sheds valuable light on a part of the history of World War II Americans should also know and remember.

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