

CHRISTINE L. RIDARSKY and MARY M. HUTH, eds., *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights* (Rochester: U of Rochester P, 2012), 245 pp.

The nineteenth-century American cultural landscape bears witness to a large variety of reform movements. *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, edited by Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth, approaches the diverse field of American women's involvement in these reform movements from a historical perspective. In outlining the multifaceted struggle for equal rights, the collection of essays focuses on the life and work of one outstanding figure among women reformers: Susan B. Anthony. The seven essays compiled in this volume explore the manifold sides of Anthony's involvement in various reform movements such as women's rights, temperance, and antislavery. While the collection successfully conveys a differentiated picture of the interconnectedness and involvement of this wide range of nineteenth-century reform movements and Anthony's influence on them, it remains vague in positioning itself in existing scholarship. More direct theoretical explanations and references would have been indispensable for demarcating the innovativeness of the collection's approach and for drawing a concise and distinguished picture of Anthony.

Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights is divided in four parts: 'Constructing Memory,' 'Anthony and Her Allies,' 'Broadening the Boundaries of the Equal Rights Struggle,' and 'Reconstructing Memory.' Four out of seven essays are concerned with portraying Anthony and her involvement in various reform movements, whereas the three remaining essays are devoted to shedding light on the lives and works of lesser known activists and their involvement with the struggle for equal rights of marginalized groups such as Native Americans or African Americans. The collection employs memory politics, both in the sense of constructing a certain story and reconstructing that story as history, as its structuring principle. The first essay by Lisa Tetrault investigates Anthony's role as a historian and her fascination with creating and controlling future generations' memory of the woman suffrage movement. In "We Shall Be Remembered," Tetrault proposes to rethink the image drawn of Anthony and the suffrage movement along the lines of memory construction. The essay gives a careful account

of the long and tedious process of compiling the *History of Woman Suffrage*, authored by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Susan B. Anthony. In unearthing "surprisingly unknown" (16) details about the editorial process of the *History*, Tetrault points to the importance of collaboration among women's rights activists and to their collaboration with other reform efforts, such as the abolitionist movement, in achieving their cause of universal suffrage. While the collection initially addresses Anthony's personal concerns with memory construction, it closes with Ann D. Gordon's "Knowing Susan B. Anthony," which traces the process of memory reconstruction from Anthony's contemporaries to scholarship and popular preconceptions today. Gordon compellingly argues that the process of memory reconstruction always stylizes Anthony as a singular persona, which then gets appropriated for particular causes by various groups and individuals (cf. 201). The multitude of images drawn of Anthony was equally appropriated by her supporters and opponents within the movement, as well as by scholars and biographers. Recent examples of engaging Anthony in public discourse include her invocation by anti-abortion activists or the unease communicated by the general public over the Susan B. Anthony dollar coin. Gordon thus expounds the ongoing process of memory reconstruction as distorting the image of the historical Anthony. However, the essay, as well as the thrust of the whole collection, remains vague in its construction of a concise memory of Anthony. While pointing to the multiplicity of images present in scholarly and public discourse, the collection refrains from taking a clear position. The closing words of the volume "[...] as long as we have a politics of gender in America, we will have a politics of Susan B. Anthony's memory," and the remark that Anthony "will endure as a symbol in political culture of ongoing contests over women's rights" remain strangely obscure (227). Thus, in attempting to grasp the complexity of memory (re)construction in nineteenth-century reform movements, the collection comes up short in drawing a distinguished and precise portrait of Anthony.

As the collection of essays is concerned with exploring Anthony's involvement in various reform movements, the second part of the book, "Anthony and Her Allies," describes Anthony's basic politics as originating from religious motivations, which lead her to reach

out and collaborate with the abolitionist movement. Kathi Kern traces the roots of Anthony's political activism in radical Quakerism, and Laura E. Free shows how the egalitarianism promoted in the circle of Progressive Friends prompted Anthony to believe in the universal category 'citizen.' Anthony's religious beliefs, which are also the reason for her engagement with the temperance movement in her early career, eventually made her seek new opportunities for reform work in the anti-slavery and women's rights campaigns (cf. 94). The two essays in this part of the collection convincingly argue that Anthony's politics are based on her faith in human equality, regardless of gender and race. Anthony's belief in the potential of merging women's and African Americans' efforts to achieve universal suffrage eventually induced her to found the American Equal Rights Association together with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Especially the rendition of Anthony's and Stanton's passionate speeches in front of the New York State Constitutional Convention of 1867 illuminate the great difficulties and disappointments the reformers had to endure in their fight for universal suffrage.

Part Three of the book, "Broadening the Boundaries of the Equal Rights Struggle," sheds light on the lives and works of lesser known activists, such as Matilda Joslyn Gage or Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and their respective involvement in the struggle for equal rights of marginalized groups such as Native Americans or African Americans. In her essay, Alison M. Parker discusses the black woman reformer Frances Ellen Harper as a symbol for the potential, and at the same time, failure of a true interracial women's collaboration in affecting constitutional change. Harper put her faith in a strong central government to empower African Americans by guaranteeing them full rights as citizens (cf. 145). She eventually sought white women's support by turning to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union as her vision was to build a Christian community that could serve as a model of interracial cooperation (cf. 153). However, her belief in a common humanity was disappointed as white women's prejudices and racism persevered. Similarly, Melissa Ryan explores the ambiguous attitudes of white women reformers towards their Native American sisters. In tracing the reform work of women like Alice Fletcher or Matilda Joslyn Gage, she convincingly argues

that white women's definitions of Indianness are shaped by their rhetorical needs of the moment (cf. 123). Whereas Ryan and Parker are concerned with expanding the boundaries of the equal rights struggle in the direction of race, Tara M. McCarthy moves it towards the issue of class, more precisely towards the reform work of Irish American working-class women. McCarthy shows how the potential for reform originally directed towards the improvement of working conditions for a certain social class, such as the work the Ladies' Land League attempted to achieve, can cultivate a tradition of activism that is concerned with more universal topics such as equal rights and economic justice (cf. 190).

Each essay expertly discusses its subject matter and gives voice to another facet of the equal rights struggle. However, it remains unclear how much the portrayal of these minor figures and their reform work contributes to our understanding of "the ways that Anthony helped shape those struggles" (1) as the introduction promises. At best, Anthony is mentioned in an anecdotal manner in these essays. Thus, the reader is left wondering what the main focus of the volume is, whether it attempts to give a comprehensive overview of women's involvement in various reform movements in the nineteenth century or seeks to expand and differentiate our understanding of Anthony's reform work. It is precisely here where the main problem of the collection is rooted. Growing out of a conference, the collection struggles to cohesively present Anthony's role in the complex struggle for equal rights. To explore "the rich and variegated tapestry formed by women's rights campaigns in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States" (2) and, at the same time, attempting to offer a revision of Anthony's image constructed by her contemporaries, scholarship, and the public today, remains an only partially successful endeavor. While Lisa Tetrault's "We Shall Be Remembered" explicitly points to the danger of constructing a certain image of Anthony by reading the *History of Woman Suffrage* as if it were an archival record rather than a highly subjective work pieced together by Anthony and her coauthors, and while Ann D. Gordon notes in "Knowing Susan B. Anthony" that biographers such as Ida Husted Harper, Rheta Childre, and most recently Kathleen Barry over time created their own narrative of Anthony, the collection remains vague in constructing

its own narrative.¹ Tellingly, Nancy A. Hewitt concludes the introduction by asserting that Anthony “left her powerful imprint on both the battle for equal rights in America and on the stories we continue to tell about it” (11). She does this without further specifying how the collection positions itself in the ongoing process of reassessing Anthony’s role in the nineteenth-century reform movements.

One would have wished for more direct theoretical explications and references to existing scholarship on Anthony and her reform work. Hewitt notes in the introduction that, in recent decades, “historians have documented myriad paths to women’s advancement and gender equality” (2) and declares that *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights* “extends these analyses in new directions” (2). Yet neither the introduction, nor the in-

dividual essays clearly position the collection within existing scholarship on Anthony. Such explicit demarcations would have been essential for gauging the innovativeness of the collection’s approach. Instead, Hewitt mentions existing scholarship in passing only (cf.1).² Despite these shortcomings, the essays collected in this volume offer excellent insights into the interconnectedness of the multitude of reform movements in the nineteenth century and give new impulses in reconsidering the role that Susan B. Anthony played in them. The volume might be especially useful for readers who wish to get a first yet differentiated understanding of Anthony’s politics and her manifold involvement in different strands of reform.

Mainz

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¹ See Ida Husted Harper, *Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*, 3 vols. (1898; North Stratford: Ayer Press, 1998); Rheta Childe Dorr, *Susan B. Anthony: The Woman Who Changed the Mind of a Nation*. (New York: Frederick A. Stookes, 1928); Kathleen Barry, *Susan B. Anthony: A Biography of a Singular Feminist*. (New York: New York UP, 1988).

² See footnote 1 on scholarly work conducted on Anthony. Other biographies include Alma Lutz, *Susan B. Anthony: Rebel, Crusader, Humanitarian*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959); Katharine Anthony, *Susan B. Anthony: Her Personal History and Her Era* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954).