

Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement: Essays from the Charles DeBenedetti Memorial Conference. Ed. by Melvin Small and William D. Hoover. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992. xxii, 300 pp. Cloth, \$34.95, ISBN 0-8156-2558-8. Paper, \$17.95, ISBN 0-8156-2559-6.)

This is an interesting and significant collection of essays, suitable for classroom use as well as for scholarly reflection on the antiwar movement. The fourteen essays were selected from papers presented at the Vietnam Antiwar Movement Conference in Toledo, Ohio, organized by the editors in 1990.

This anthology differs from many studies of the antiwar movement in two significant ways. First, the themes emphasized in the essays are ones that have generally been avoided: feminism, the counterculture, and the role of Vietnam veterans. Moreover, the time frame examined includes the period after Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) self-destructed in the summer of 1969. Most analyses of "the 1960s" mechanically stop with the end of that year, thereby all but ignoring the high point of the movement in May 1970 and the vital importance of feminism, the counterculture, and Vietnam vets (it was in the early 1970s that their effects were most fully experienced). To the credit of this anthology, these constituencies occupy center stage, and the tiresome and oft-repeated division of the sixties into "good sixties and bad sixties" (a division essentially biased in favor of male, middle-class hegemony of the movement) is thereby subverted (although Maurice Isserman is permitted to repeat this Manichaeian myth, for no readily apparent reason).

Since the editors' point of view emphasizes

social movement organizations, the countercultural, women's, and vets' organizations are afforded prominence: the May Day tribe (which converged on the nation's Capitol on May Day 1971 in an attempt to shut down the government), Women's Strike for Peace, and Vietnam Veterans against the War are all discussed in more detail in this volume than in any five other works on the antiwar movement that come to mind. Since many of the authors were movement activists, their accounts are far from dry. At the same time, however, the editors' reliance on their belief in organizations to structure the volume is a weakness of the book. Reflecting the grass-roots, self-organizational capacity increasingly characteristic of post-modern social movements, the antiwar movement never was one centralized, hierarchical organization. When it reached its high point in May 1970 with the largest single strike in the history of the United States, no organization, with the possible exception of the Black Panther party, provided national leadership or coordination.

In this anthology, several movement myths have yet to be shed. The Weather Underground, for example, is described as the "breakaway cutting edge of SDS, [which] openly advocated a countercultural revolutionary politics." A better description would be that they cut SDS off from its massive constituency; and it would be more accurate to state that it depended on the day of the week and the latest whim of the Weather Underground national office whether or not they supported countercultural politics.

Moreover, the organizational history offered is sometimes an extension of "great man" (bourgeois) history in the epoch of what has been called the "organization man." In the essay on May Day 1971, for example, Rennie Davis's role gets pages of treatment while the hundreds of vets who threw their medals over the White House fence get a phrase. David McReynolds discusses how the "central committee" of the antiwar movement gathered at Cora Weiss's house in upper Manhattan on April 30, 1970. Missing in McReynolds's account of this important date are the thousands of formally unorganized antiwar activists who were gathering in New Haven on the same day to support Bobby Seale and the Black Pan-

thers. It was they, not any central committee, who called for the national strike, formulated its demands, and mobilized the campuses. The “central committee” invented by McReynolds actually succeeded in stopping the grassroots drive for militant civil disobedience in Washington, D.C., after the Kent State massacre, thereby blunting the internal momentum of the popular movement and disillusioning activists about the efficacy of national organizations.

That these issues resurface twenty-five years after 1968 is a tribute to this book's success in reformulating questions of historical and political significance. I recommend it as a means of stimulating both classroom discussions and scholarly debate.

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