

Book Reviews

Harnessing the Power of Motherhood: The National Florence Crittenton Mission, 1883-1925

Katherine G. Aiken
Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1998.

Reviewed by Julie Thacker

Katherine G. Aiken's, *Harnessing The Power of Motherhood: The National Florence Crittenton Mission, 1883-1925*, presents the history of the National Florence Crittenton Mission (NCFM). This organization provided services for women and children in 73 American cities. It also attempted to change the public policy that created the need for these services. The history of the NCFM is an excellent example of identifying the aporia in society's beliefs and using that space to negotiate change. It provides unique insights for activists seeking to negotiate social transformation. It also models successful social programs for those individuals working as direct care providers to alleviate the oppression of women.

Katherine G. Aiken provides a balanced critique of the NCFM's activities. She shows how this organization identified motherhood as a common experience between different classes of women and used this knowledge to initiate progressive reform and persuade society to support its work of rescuing mothers in need or "unfortunate women." Her work also shows how some women used the organization's resources to meet their own agendas while bypassing those of the organization.

While emphasizing the positive contributions of the NCFM in helping women to adapt to their circumstances, Katherine G Aiken also documents the organization's internal problems. She shows how the common bond of motherhood was not always sufficient to allow volunteers to bridge class differences and develop rapport with their clients. Finally, she shows the tensions that occurred when the NCFM hired women trained in the philosophies of the newly

emerging field of social work which conflicted with those that the organization previously advocated.

The NCFM was ahead of its time in advocating that men as well as women be held accountable for their sexual behavior, that unwed mothers should be encouraged to keep their children, and that their lives should not be irrevocably damaged when they chose to do so. For example, it assisted its clients in taking fathers to court to obtain child support. It also provided job training and daycare for unmarried mothers so that they could adequately provide for their children and themselves and not become a burden on society.

Katherine G. Aiken's book shows how one organization contributed to the feminist agenda of decreasing women's oppression. It is an excellent example of the positive changes that are possible through awareness and acceptance of the common denominators among people. I found this book to be very readable. I recommend it as a positive model for women's shelters as well as individuals seeking to end women's oppression.

Women, Families and Feminist Politics: A Global Exploration

Kate Conway-Turner and Suzanne Cherrin
New York: Harrington Park Press, 1998.

Reviewed by Joyce B. Castle

At a time of increasing attention to the role and place of women in society and of ongoing debates on what it means to be a feminist, a book that deals with the reality of women's lives from a global perspective is welcome indeed. I was anxious to read this text precisely because of its international scope—here was a text promising to address the most important aspects of women's lives around the world.

The introductory chapter proved to be excellent reading. It presents the organization and conceptual framework of the text, and clarifies the perspective of the authors. Conway-Turner and Cherrin claim to be promoting cultural relativism, "the recognition that one culture cannot be arbitrarily judged by the standards of another" (4). They suggest that the major contemporary categories of feminism—liberal feminism, socialist feminism, and Marxist feminism—fail to fully illuminate the diversity among women worldwide and they caution Western feminists to temper their enthusiasm to liberate women around the world and to avoid Western constructions of women by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

The six chapters beyond the introduction deliver the larger message of the