

Book Reviews

Kristen Welch and Abraham Ruelas, *The Role of Female Seminaries on the Road to Social Justice for Women*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR, 2015. 173 pp. \$32.47. ISBN: 9781620325636.

Women find a way.

From within the rugged homesteads of the American West, the raucous tents of the revivalist movement, and the vlogs and hashtags of modern-day feminism, women have pushed their way through social barriers into places of strength and social subversion.

And they're so rad.

The Role of Female Seminaries on the Road to Social Justice for Women offers a (somewhat scattered) history of the early stages of the American education equality movement. Beginning within the often-over-mythical Wild West and continuing past the Industrial Revolution, this book details the struggles, tactics, wins, and losses of the fight toward educational equality for women in the United States. Particular attention is paid to the intersecting advancements of women's economic independence and opportunities for social and spiritual leadership; unsurprisingly, these progress hand in hand.

While the use of the word "seminary" has changed throughout history, this volume focuses on formal secondary and higher education offered to females within the United States. Depending on the time and context, classes focused on home-based, social, or academic skills, often covering topics such as manners, needlework, music, literature, reading, spelling, math, or theology. Both the quality and content of women's education progressed slowly; it was limited at first to teachings on morality and household matters but eventually matched the quality and offerings of education provided for men. This history is one of struggle, which Welch and Ruelas pack into a small volume, weaving together a story of women's resiliency and artful subversion.

Unfortunately, the story is not so artfully presented; the text at times becomes dull, wandering, and unfocused. Caffeine is required to make it through the entirety of chapter 4. But the hardy reader who perseveres is rewarded in the final section with a well-articulated and vibrant feminist historical goldmine. The conclusion documents fascinating stories of the larger American women's rights and social justice movements, which hold the key to fully understanding the preceding chapters. Like water in a desert, these stories are deeply refreshing and needed.

Women find a way. When the revivalist movement focused on the urgency of

spreading the message of Christianity, women used the opportunity to speak and preach unapologetically and uncensored, and from church pulpits. When the notion of separate spheres for men and women was enforced, women insisted that formal education was a necessity. Schools were equipped to teach the delicate arts of morality, manners, and homemaking and paved the way for deeper educational pursuits. When Evangelicalism demanded female silence and subservience, women's groups flourished inside and outside of church walls, and they created networks and events for themselves, without the presence of men. Often these circles focused on meeting charity needs. The intimacy of these activities and spaces allowed women to open up, share ideas, and strategize. When the price and social consequences of alcohol drained families of financial resources, women worked together to spearhead the temperance movement, applying social pressure to their husbands in order to ensure economic stability within the home. This is just one of many examples provided of the power of women working together.

In depicting the history of female education in America, Welch and Ruelas make clear that not all benefited from this movement. White women who already held some degree of social privilege benefitted the most, while those who were socially and racially marginalized continued to be denied much. These divisions ran so deep that distinct movements were required. The authors devote three chapters to the efforts and progression of the Indigenous and African American education movements. This volume shows us one example of the dark side of social justice work. Social justice movements, in the United States as well as around the world, hold their own hierarchies and internal injustices. In order to be both effective and ethical, movements toward equity must encounter and take seriously identity politics as well as intersectionalities of experiences. Feminism is only worth pursuing if it benefits all.

To know our history is to know our future. The struggle for women's educational and economic equality is far from over. Racism, oppression, and social barriers persist, but so do women, who continue to find ways to strategize, subvert, and organize. We have done this since the beginning. We women find a way.

BRE WOLIGROSKI finds her way within ecumenical and social justice circles. Her seminary studies were scandalously co-ed, involving neither needlework nor manners. Bre's family settled on and holds responsibilities within Treaty 1 territory (Canada).

Frances S. Adeney, *Women and Christian Mission: Ways of Knowing and Doing Theology*, Pickwick, Eugene, OR, 2015. 300 pp. \$29. ISBN: 9781498217194.

“The church has been like a bird with one wing. That is not right. But we cannot stop the power of God. Women will be empowered.” —Evelyn Parkin, Australian