
Barbara Turoff describes her work on Mary Beard as "an overview of her efforts to advance the position of American women" (p. 2). As such, the book provides a foundation for further study of this complex woman, who was a pioneer in the study of women's history, a reformer, a champion of labor, a proponent of women's archives, a feminist leader, and a co-author with her husband Charles Beard.

Turoff divides Mary Beard's contributions into three categories: making history, writing history, and educating women about their history. The author summarizes Beard's activities in the Congressional Union and National Woman's Party and describes her writings in support of suffrage and laboring women. As a writer of women's history, Beard is best known for Woman as Force in History, a polemic intended to refute the claim that women have always been an oppressed group. Beard argued that status was determined by class, not by sex, and that for centuries women had taken the initiative in promoting social change. Her major works on women were undertaken to demonstrate women's contributions through the centuries and to provide role models for twentieth-century women. In addition to writing, Beard attempted to persuade women, libraries, universities, and other organizations to collect material pertaining to women's history. Turoff describes the attempt to organize the World Center for Women's Archives and Beard's willingness to aid colleges such as Radcliffe and Smith in forming centers for the study of women's history.

In this brief book Turoff has summarized Beard's life, provided short evaluations of her contributions to history, outlined areas which need further research, collected an excellent set of photographs, and included a bibliography of works by and about Beard. Turoff has benefited from interviews, correspondence, and other aid from Beard's daughter and son. The result is a tantalizing introduction to Mary Beard's activities and work and to the relationship between the two.

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