and Elizabeth. The vivid contrasts between Peggy Dow and Elizabeth Finney make clear an emerging feminist consciousness within evangelicalism. Sweet has taken definite sides in the now-familiar debate about the role of religion in shaping (or negating) early feminism in this country; his argument is detailed, wide-ranging, and persuasive. He is also persuasive in his somewhat more speculative explanations for the decline of the "Partner" image in the last third of the nineteenth century.

A few nagging doubts persist about his study. An opening chapter, describing Protestant ministers' wives from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, is too brief and hurried a survey. Typology is a dangerous device to be used in historical analysis. It may produce an overly schematic interpretive structure that blurs the complexity of historical reality. Sweet takes this possibility into account early on (pp. 4-5), but the difficulties implicit in his analysis are never entirely overcome. The author has mined very effectively the magnificent archival collection at Oberlin College for some of his most illuminating insights, but one sometimes wonders how "representative" the women of Oberlin, a widely recognized center of theological and social radicalism, were for many mainstream evangelicals during the antebellum era.

In conclusion, however, this extremely well-written and thorough monograph remains a stimulating analysis of women within evangelical Protestantism. For anyone interested in the history of women in nineteenth-century America this is a key book to read and savor.

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James Findlay


In line with his premise that "the social history of a people in a given historical period must begin with the testimony of the people themselves," Robert S. McElvaine has reproduced in this volume 173 letters from the "forgotten men, women, and children of the 1930s" (p. [xi]). The sources from which this material is drawn are the files of the President's Emergency Committee on Employment, the President's Organization for Unemployment Relief, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Civil Works Administration, plus the Eleanor Roosevelt, Robert F. Wagner, and Norman Thomas papers. The editor read approx-
imately fifteen thousand letters picked at random, selecting for publication those which were representative of the “themes that emerged from the larger body of letters examined” (p. 8).

The volume is organized around those themes. Part I consists of letters showing reactions to Herbert Hoover and the economic breakdown. Part II aims to illustrate “Conditions of Life in the Thirties” with subsections devoted to the economically distressed middle class, the rural poor, blacks, the elderly, and two-to-thirteen-year-old youngsters. Part III is headed “Reactions to the Depression” and includes a selection of letters revealing the wide gamut of attitudes toward relief followed by examples of conservative and right-wing views, desperation, cynicism, and rebelliousness. The concluding section presents views of FDR: on the one side, the skeptical; on the other, the hero-worshipful. In his over-all “Introduction” and in prefatory remarks to each set of letters, McElvaine does not simply provide historical context but also underlines what he regards as the more important motifs revealed.

Unfortunately, this reviewer must question what purpose this volume serves. No doubt many instructors will find the paperbound edition a useful way of introducing their students to the flavor of the period, and the publisher’s promotional activities appear designed to appeal to 1930s nostalgia buffs. But the extent to which this collection expands substantive understanding of the time is doubtful. McElvaine argues that the letters provide a more direct and truer picture of the feelings of the people than do interviews made long afterward (e.g., Stud Terkel’s Hard Times [1970]); the reports of FERA and WPA investigators (e.g., Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok’s Reports on the Great Depression [1981]); and even the interviews undertaken in the late 1930s by the Federal Writers’ Project (e.g., Tom E. Terrill and Jerrold Hirsch, Such As Us [1978], and Ann Banks, First Person America [1980]). He admits, however, that his selection constitutes no scientific sample. Letter writers were by definition people who felt strongly. Although probably more Americans felt strongly in the 1930s than at any other time in the country’s history, the authors of these letters must still be regarded as in a sense atypical. Most importantly, McElvaine fails to explain what principle he followed in allocating space. In other words, does the number of letters exemplifying a given attitude —say, for example, “desperate,” “cynical,” or “rebellious”—accurately reflect the distribution of that outlook among even the letters examined, much less the population at large?

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