

The society's founders were closely associated with the most radical fringes of abolitionism—not even William Lloyd Garrison outdid them in antislavery zeal. As nonresistants, they renounced coercive earthly government in all its manifestations, relying instead on their understanding of the Government of God. Retreating from the emergent competitive capitalism of their day, they proposed an economy based on agricultural cooperation.

Obviously, their aims in most respects ran counter to the forces that shaped the modern world, and thus the society's efforts were doomed. Although their notions of possibility were different from those of contemporary Americans, and although their solutions sometimes seem strange, the record of their lives nevertheless offers fresh perspective on the present as well as on the past and is therefore fully worthy of attention.

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Gentle Rebel: Letters of Eugene V. Debs. Edited by J. Robert Constantine. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995. Pp. [lvii], 312. Illustrations, index. Clothbound, \$34.95; paperbound, \$15.95.)

As the Socialist Party of America's founder, organizational leader, perennial presidential candidate, and principal spokesperson, Eugene V. Debs was American socialism's most public face and gifted voice in the early twentieth century. Born and raised in Terre Haute, Debs came of age as the conflict between labor and capital was intensifying and vast concentrations of economic power were calling into question the democratic promise of the American experiment. He served in the local Democratic party and his town's lodge of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen as a young man, counseling the harmony of labor and capital. Yet by the early 1890s he had broken with the narrow, conservative craft union whose journal he edited and formed an industrially organized, rival federation of railroad workers known as the American Railway Union (ARU). In 1894, he threw his support behind the boycott of Pullman cars in the most celebrated sympathy strike of the nineteenth century. Debs and his allies lost—the American Federation of Labor did not join the boycott, the ARU was destroyed, Pullman workers went down to painful defeat, and Debs landed in jail for violating a federal court injunction protecting the company. By the end of the century, Debs had emerged as the leading figure in the growing American socialist movement.

Gentle Rebel is a single-volume compilation of Debs's correspondence. It is a condensation of the impressive three-volume *Let-*

ters of Eugene V. Debs, published in 1990 by the University of Illinois Press, and the larger microfilmed *Papers of Eugene V. Debs, 1834–1945*, which appeared in 1983. Designed to reach a more general audience than these larger collections, the book omits significant annotation and includes a straightforward biographical sketch (a shortened version of the introduction to the first volume of the *Letters*). Although the letters reprinted here span Debs's life, the nineteenth century is given short shrift, while the decade and a half after 1910 receive the greatest attention. Brief background statements provide minimal context for each letter. Debs and his correspondents are allowed, to a large extent, to speak for themselves.

The letters chosen here vividly bring to life important aspects of Debs's beliefs and experiences. His speaking tours took him to hundreds of cities, where he mesmerized thousands of crowds. Letter after letter reveals the physical toll exacted by such a schedule. "I am willing to be killed for the cause but I don't want to die a fool's death," an exhausted Debs confessed with annoyance in 1915 after an open buggy ride through deep Idaho snow that left him "half frozen, chilled to the marrow," his throat raw and body aching. "Today I am unfit for anything. . . . Must I have such a damned killing dose as [this] administered to me on every trip" (p. 96)? Debs nonetheless found time to express his great love for literature and his appreciation of particular writers; among his valued friends he included Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, and Carl Sandburg. Glimpses of the private Debs reveal his reliance upon and love for his brother (who for years served as his secretary), his affection for Mabel Curry, and the tremendous passion behind Debs's beliefs.

Debs's correspondence with his friends, colleagues, opponents, and well-wishers also illuminates his views on a vast range of political, social, moral, and intellectual issues. Selections explore his staunch opposition to the intense factionalism that continually wracked the Socialist party, his sharp differences with communists, his internationalism and principled opposition to World War I, his hostility to prohibitionists, and his opposition to capital punishment and restrictions on political expression in both the United States and the Soviet Union. "If we . . . commit murder in the cause of justice, as the capitalists do, we are not a damned bit better than they whose system we condemn as criminal and whose ethics we renounce as barbarous and inhuman" (p. 210), he noted in reference to the Bolsheviks in 1922.

What comes across least effectively, curiously, are the content and contours of Debs's vision of socialism. Debs appears more the reformer—albeit with a distinct radical vocabulary—than the revolutionary. If Debs "popularized ideas and ideals that were denounced as radical, even un-American, early in the twentieth century," the editor concludes, many of them "later became ortho-

dox and are now viewed as traditional" (p. xxxviii). Yes, prohibition was repealed, but many of the forces that Debs opposed survived and flourished. Capital punishment, heightened corporate power, the dominance of the Democrats and Republicans, and persistent militarism—to name just a few of the targets of Debs's ire—continue to loom large on the political landscape. Debs's career was indeed "an honorable chapter in the history of American dissent" (p. xxxviii), but it was also much more. The significance of Debs's life lies less in the reforms he advocated and that American society eventually adopted than in the sheer power of his indictment of American capitalism and his vision of a socialist alternative, both of which were ultimately silenced.

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Ernie Pyle in the American Southwest. By Richard Melzer. (Santa Fe, N.M.: Sunstone Press, 1996. Pp. 176. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$18.95.)

Ernie Pyle's image is fixed in the American imagination. His daily travel column, describing people and places in an intimate and anecdotal style, brought pleasure to thousands of people in the late 1930s. The friendly persona he created in that column, which set new standards for human interest reporting, comforted Americans struggling through the Great Depression. Even more remembered is his work in World War II when as the friend and reporter of the ordinary soldier he became the most loved correspondent of the war. His unparalleled reputation among American G.I.'s accords him a special place in the annals of journalism. Until he died a soldier's death, the victim of sniper machine gun fire on the Pacific island Ie Shima near Okinawa, he was, as Richard Melzer notes, the "infantry's Homer" and the "G.I.'s Boswell" (p. 78). People of Indiana have long taken pride in the fact that Pyle was one of their own, and there was much in his writings to justify that feeling. Nevertheless, while Dana, Indiana, was Pyle's early home, Albuquerque, New Mexico, became his adopted home later in life.

Much of the last ten years of Pyle's life had a southwestern orientation. He and his wife Jerry became attracted to the region after a trip there in 1935. In his own words, affection for the Southwest was "like being in love with a woman. . . . You just love her because you love her and you can't help yourself" (p. 35). Melzer's purpose in writing this volume was to provide a fuller description of Pyle's association with the Southwest, especially New Mexico.