



Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century

Sheila Rowbotham

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Amid the growth of globalized trade, mass production, immigration and urban slums that dominated the period from the 1880s to the onset of the First World War, an awakening was taking place among American and British women. Across the Atlantic and across political boundaries—anarchists to liberals, feminists and non-feminists—female pioneers shared a sense that social change was possible, and acted upon that belief.

Dreamers of a New Day explores a period, from the belle époque to the roaring twenties, when women overturned social norms and assumptions as they struggled to define themselves as individuals. Forming broad coalitions and movements, they transformed the conditions of their own lives, decades before the intellectuals of the 1960s conceptualized “everyday life” as an arena for radical activity.

Drawing on a wealth of original research, Sheila Rowbotham has written a groundbreaking new history examining how women came to be modern. Challenging existing conceptions of citizenship and culture, from ethical living to consumerism, sexuality to democracy, these dreamers shaped many of the issues that remain at the forefront of twenty-first-century life.

Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century Details

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From Reader Review Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century for online ebook

S. says

This book is dry in spots--name and movement dropping--which reminds me why I prefer history books that are biographies. But of course, by mentioning women from the past, this book can inspire you to pick up biographies on those who sound most interesting.

Tara says

Finely researched and well-written, with reference points for further study. Seeing issues of gender, class and racial equality converge at the dawn of the 20th century, both in Britain and America, provokes thoughts on the social unrest we're undergoing exactly a century later. It's also inspiring to see how creatively people respond to injustice at any given point in history. The only caveat I would add is that this probably isn't an ideal book for general readers (like me) - you'll get a lot more out of it if you have a specific interest in the feminist politics of the period.

Jenny McPhee says

Winnifred Harper Cooley, Ada Nield Chew, Mary Beard, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Goldman, Jane Addams, Mary Church Terrell, Mona Caird, Ernestine Rose, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Phillis Wheatley, Catherine Webb, Beatrice Webb, Charlotte Wilson, Mary Gawthorpe, Mary Ware Dennett, Octavia Hill, Margaret McMillan, Selina Cooper, Vida Scudder, Eleanor Marx Aveling, Annie Besant, Dora Montefiore, Olive Schreiner, Marie Jenny Howe, Nella Larsen, Voltairine de Cleyre, Edith Ellis, Elsie Clews Parsons, Suzanne La Follette, Rosa Graul, Angela Heywood, Lois Waisbrooker, Elmina Slenker, Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes, Rose Witcop, Dora Russell, Eleanor Rathbone, Alice B. Stockham, Georgia Kotsch, Crystal Eastman, Helen Campbell, Mary Macarthur, Hannah Mitchell, Lillie D. White, Lizzie Homes, Clara Zetkin, Christine Frederick, Lillian Gilbreth, Sarah Lees, C. Helen Scott, Helena Borm, Miriam Daniell, Isabella Ford, Eleanor Rathbone, Anna Julia Cooper, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Olive Schreiner, Maggie Lena Walker, Ellen Gates Starr, Vida Dutton Scudder, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Darlene Clark Hine, Sylvia Pankhurst, Jane Hume Claperton, Teresa Billington-Greig, Margaret Ashton...

These names represent only a fraction of the ordinary and extraordinary women, rich, middle class, poor, black, white, radical, conservative, liberal, socialist, communist who from the 1880s to the end of the 1920s in England and the United States, fought to reform, transform, and re-imagine every aspect of daily life. The agendas of these adventurous innovators were myriad, their policies and utopian ideals often incompatible, but their common goal was for an improved world economically, politically, socially, culturally, sexually, and spiritually, for women — and men. They advocated for the vote, equal pay, education, contraception, equal rights within a marriage, divorce, legalized abortion, free love, childcare, healthcare. They reconsidered their clothing, their role in the global economy, gender divisions, motherhood, housework, sex practices, language, even consciousness itself. Sheila Rowbotham's unique and revelatory book *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* is a seminal work of history profiling an

astounding number of visionary women who incontestably changed life as we know it — then were preeminently forgotten

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Jo says

Sorry I didn't get very far. Was a bit slow.

Päivi Brink says

Early feminism in England and America. Important work. Well written.

Gemma says

I enjoyed this short, punchy history of women in fin de siècle America and Britain. A solid 3.5.

Barbara Joan says

A brilliant source book for those interested in practical feminism at the outset of the 20th century.

Malcolm says

In 1891, the New York Consumers' League, very much the product of the Working Women's Society, drew up a list of stores to boycott for unfair labour practices in the production of their goods, but also a list to support for their ethical trading practices, while in 1890 the Women's Trade Union League convinced the London County Council to include women clothing workers in the fair wages provision it imposed on its providers – consumer power and ethical trading practices from 120 years ago.

At a time when 'austerity' is being used as an excuse to roll back the advances made by working people and other oppressed groups, while people's movements globally are working to find new ways of politics and new ways of struggle, Rowbotham's work reminds us of the long years of campaigning and the depth of our history of a politics of change. She explicitly outlines the relevance and importance of this book in the conclusion: "societies are recreated in more ways than meets the eye. The mundane, the intimate, the individual moment of anger, the sense of association: all contribute to the fabric of daily life. The rediscovery of their lost heritage is revelatory, and not only because these energetic innovators dreamed up so much that we take for granted in the world. They also staked out a remarkably rich terrain of debate around questions which are equally vital today. How to renew the body politic; how to take account of

specificities while maintaining a wider cohesion; how to allow for individuality while finding connection through relationships and social movements; how to combine inner perceptions with outer change; how to respect the insights and experience of the subordinated and still move from what is to something better; all these are as germane as they ever were.” (p240)

In exploring the lives and politics of women radicals and reformers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Rowbotham has taken us into the politics of struggle beyond women suffrage, important as it is, the drama and class basis of many of the leaders of the struggle have tended to overshadow other work by women – liberal, socialist, anarchist and other shades. The obscuring of these struggles hides women’s campaigns that lead to housing improvements, working class success and better lives, improved social conditions of existence, enhancements of reproductive knowledge and rights, and the political struggles of the everyday. Rowbotham acknowledges Dolores Hayden's excellent work on domestic design as an inspiration for this book: it s a worthy companion. Although she reminds us of how far we have come and how nearly everything we hold dear is the product of struggles the wrest away from the powerful, it is also a depressing reminder of both how far we have to go and how much we have forgotten.
