



Rebel Lives: Helen Keller

Helen Keller, John A. Davis, Ocean Press, John Davis (Editor)

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This unique book presents a generally unrecognized aspect of Helen Keller's life: her radical socialism, her defense of the IWW and her pacifist stance during both world wars. It includes texts written about her, by figures such as socialist leader Eugene V. Debs and Mark Twain.

"Her liberal views and wide sympathies ought to shame those who have physical eyes, yet do not open them to the sorrows that encompass the mass of men."—*New York Call* (1911)

"We were born into an unjust system. We are not prepared to grow old in it."—Bernadette Devlin

Rebel Lives books feature writings both by and about individuals who have played significant roles in humanity's ongoing fight for a better world. The series shows the not-so-well-recognized political views of some well-known figures and introduces some not-so-famous rebels. Strongly representative of race, class and gender, these books are smaller format, inexpensive, accessible and provocative.

Rebel Lives: Helen Keller Details

Date : Published July 1st 2003 by Ocean Press (first published 1903)

ISBN : 9781876175603

Author : Helen Keller , John A. Davis , Ocean Press , John Davis (Editor)

Format : Paperback 88 pages

Genre : History, Biography, Nonfiction, Politics, Disability, Womens, Writing, Essays

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From Reader Review Rebel Lives: Helen Keller for online ebook

Faye says

Helen Keller was a rock star! This collection of essays show her true spirit of activism and action, a side to her character they don't cover in sanitized stories for the masses.

Joseph says

A portrait of an American socialist radical, painted by the woman's own sharp and sincere words. This short collection of editorials and letters quickly and movingly dispels the sanitized popular vision of Helen Keller as a simple woman epitomizing the American opportunity to pull oneself up by the bootstraps to overcome even blindness and deafness together. Keller was acutely aware of the extents to which her privileges afforded her increased chances to overcome. She describes herself as easily and directly set upon the war path by her study of the social and economic causes of her and other disabilities according to which affected members of society were routinely neglected or disregarded. Her keen and inspirited intellect quickly grew maturely aware of the extent to which the political, social, and economic disenfranchisement of any insular population is tied-up inextricably with the oppression of each of the many by all of the very few.

Keller was a socialist and an avid supporter of the laborer, outspoken in her opposition to capitalist war-mongering and her support of the suffragist movement - a support bounded by her criticisms of the system of civil and political rights into which women sought entry, which she saw as having ever-failed the working man with regards to his subjugation by his rulers.

I commend this book to all persons, but especially those who seek an inspiring example of the kind of well-integrated and self-confident social and political zeal with which we are called upon by our consciences and the sufferings of our country-kin to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Veronica says

I really really learn about Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan

Paul says

To light a fire. To call to arms. To sway a redeeming flag made from the brilliant flesh of humanity as a universal concept. To restore & reintroduce, to me, ideals I had long forgotten having been worn down after all these years. To revisit the naivety & audacity needed to bring about such auspicious change. Passion. Her fury excites me. Her compassion & altruistic nature is inspiring. She is an agitator with love as a weapon. Everything about this book is inspiring. Her well known triumph over deafness & blindness. Her embracing of socialism. The fight for women's rights & suffrage. I see she faces the same problems of liberals today. A large faction of conservatives denying facts. Being shamed into silence. Shunned for passionate opinions. It shines a light on topical events which have since been buried in obscurity. It is in her own words that this

book is made possible & for that I am grateful for the insights. The power & educations she carries. The passion of youth. As socialist ideals flow from her mind & onto the page, I wonder about the pragmatism of implementing such ideals. I whole-heartedly identify with her plight but how to enact it in a realistic sense begins to baffle me, & realistic implementation, or the notion of, would serve her cause better than lofty ideology, though it is edifying to know her particular Socialist views. It is amazing to hear her accounts of what realizations were born once she left the imprisonment of deafness & blindness. The innocence of her imagination was robbed. Her senses did fail her, but never did her mind. The brilliance of her imagination, of her optimism, of her benevolent nature, stepped from the sealed off corridors of blindness & deafness into the cold reality of the world. She was shocked to find what man had done to itself despite being completely physically capable of doing otherwise. Humanity did not aid itself as she had always been. It was cannibalistic. She was born again when at last she had escaped those sensorial shackles but was baptized by fire into the cruel realizations that we have all become sadly accustomed to. It tells me much of her pure soul, uncorrupted when left to its own devices. Indeed songs of innocence & songs of experience. My, how it wears. Her support of pacifism based on the argument against the industrial military complex using the populace as a massive machine to enrich those in power with their mass media support to perpetuate violence abroad. She actually goes as far as to name one in detail, J.P. Morgan. It is violence as profit with drownded up support by the bought hand of the media. Think Halliburton circa WWI & II years. In the case of WWII, history proved her to be on the wrong side of opposition but her heart was in the right place, trying to save the lives of young American men & women. I might add in my personal opinion that WWII was the last war fought for a noble cause.

Her letters harken back to an age where diseases were beginning to become "conquerable misery" as she puts it, & where machines began to perform all the tasks of men. It is a reflection that we have not advanced as far as we'd like to think peering into a history which is not so different from our own. Anti vaxers would seem to like to revive that bygone era of preventable diseases. She, as the educated do today, had to battle with prevailing ignorance as well. What a richly embedded mindset that ignorance.

The progress we have made is apparent but it is noticeable that oppression is quite persistent. One might feel the compelled to crumble to curl into a fetal position & accept such crushing truths. The fight might seem overwhelming. Often I think of the sloth movement of humanity towards progress. What is made apparent is the realization of a birth into harsh realities & a resilience to continue fighting. A glimpse into the quality of life or lack thereof during the industrial revolution. The culture of times. The treatment of women, of union workers, of the disabled, of children. All seen as disposable in the name of profit. The heart begins to moan with the pressure of such stresses but soon it begins to pulse with the affirmation of its existence & in this actuation a resistance is formulated. It is to be nurtured. It is to grow, disrupt & uproot such atrocities which seek to create barriers sealing off growth. Anger is a gift, Joe Strummer once said. There is a deliciously defiant scent which lures all those who seek to fight for the grander causes of humans. The fight for equality & against exploitation. I feel her plight, trying to educate the unwilling masses. Whether it is out of apathy, laziness, resentment. She refuses to be bottled up. & yet she grows older & more silent. Speaking up wears you down. Sucks life from your bones.

In her I find a kindred who champions humanitarianism at all costs. Mainly the economic for what is to be valued above human life? I love her steely reserve & audacity to say what she wishes, despite criticism, & at times, even to be proven wrong in her assertions. She is sincere in her discerning & they always come from a nurturing place, yet they are never lacking in fortitude. Rather they are as a mother bear or lioness always strong in the protection of the vulnerable, & yet, many would say because of her physical disabilities she is vulnerable herself. To the contrary. Her strength has me in awe, a multidimensional awe, at that. I highly recommend this book & series.

S'hi says

While it is inspiring to read the words of Helen Keller that have so long been kept from the broader public, it is also disheartening to realise how much harder it is to talk openly and adequately about the issues she raises. Much of her ability to speak as she does comes from the privileges she has received. Much of my own also comes from that limited but greater space of choice than the majority of people seem to have access to.

What do I mean by this?

I mean that the sense of privilege arises from the hard struggle to make use of what becomes tantalisingly available. If resources are displayed but never likely to be available to a person they are not going to work for them until they can work with them. An empty promise is more damaging than no promise at all.

An empty promise turns a person's hopes and dreams into a festering sore, a cancer. That is the true disturbance at the heart (or heartlessness) of capitalism. That no matter what one achieves through it there is always the push to achieve (want, need) more. This is for no other purpose than the self-aggrandising principle of capitalism itself – to become The Head.

But people are not heads alone. They are not only Mind. People are bodies and hearts and minds and spirits.

It is this enormity of the human presence that makes it so difficult to talk about all the issues that arise when considering things economically. Economics is a means of exchange of energy. But it is only ones means, on one particular plane as we have so far lived it.

While we continue to consider economics as only materialism we deny its influence in other human exchanges. While we consider human exchanges to only be between humans, and not into and beyond the human presences, we fail to appreciate (and that is what economic growth is really all about) the value of each and every resource available to us within and of itself and to itself.

To fully appreciate the value the human being can add to all those resources is not to extract them from their own place in the world and demand that they live by human rules and regulations. Rather it is by fully appreciating them as themselves, beyond what any human effort could ever achieve, that we expand ourselves and our capabilities.

To value is not to diminish the other (whether person, labour, thinker, designer, interpersonal co-operator or physical and material substance, spiritual concept or attitude). To value is about the “you-ness” that the individual does not possess of themselves. To value is to add that you-ness to the I-ness so that the partnership transforms each beyond its own boundaries into a whole range of potentialities that neither could access without the other.

When we honour the qualities, the substance, of the resources available to us we use them in their strength for the benefit of each and all. To diminish any specific one is a failure of the all.

Thus the separation between individual self and collectively identifiable selves is bridged – not by annihilating the individual but by embracing the individual within the whole.

It is not I versus they but IndI-vIsIbility: the ability to see what each individual does that no other individual does that allows they to become we.

There is in truth no division of individuals. There is in truth no social collective without the individuals that make it possible. It is not either/or but both – AND.

When I negotiate a “contract” it becomes meaningless at the very moment that I deny my full self within its parameters. It becomes of less value to me if I diminish the possibility of the other that I am joining myself to in some venture as well.

So why do we contract?

We cut down our vision of other possibilities to choose this alliance for the amount of time and effort of its duration. We let others who are not part of this contract know that we are engaged by it so that we are not so much contracting each party to the contract, but diminishing the presence of the rest of the world for that partnership. In this way it is a marriage in all the sense that word holds.

Such a contract is a means of holding ourselves accountable in time when we are not necessarily present in space. It is a curiosity of human conception to defy what is known of physical dimensions. It is a testing of our own theories of existence.

But much of our perception of the exclusivity of space, that no two items can occupy the same space at the same time, has altered with our continual development of tools of increasing perception.

Mostly we find we have only defined objects from one dimension of their being for our own convenience, rather than acknowledging that within themselves each object is as multifaceted as we are ourselves.

Whatever category we wish to place ourselves in is only a temporary social identity while our I collectively contains all our potential categories and our unique wholeness which cannot be captured by any category with others in it at all.

This ability of the individual to contain all potential categories is indeed what human potential is. It may grow in any chosen direction with ourselves as director. That director negotiates with each environment it finds itself in. That director identifies the similarities and differences for their multiple advantages and uses them by degrees for whatever purpose it sees fit.

By this means the survival of the fittest is in fact the survival of the most flexible, rather than the most rigidly capable within a specific stream as we have tended to believe.

The more individuals I meet the more flexible I become. Not because I necessarily alter myself in any way, only because I allow the other to play with me, work with me, work against some immovable object within my own perception and help me be moved by that experience of other possibilities than my own.

The hardest thing in reading of time-specific attempts to improve the lives of individuals that one has not met, is this very sense that we don't really know who or where they are. We can only ever imagine them through our own perceptions.

Thus any reading I might give to the words of Helen Keller filter through my own personal meetings with people of varying abilities and their struggles for recognition as themselves and not as role definitions set out impersonally and at a distance.

I hear the rhetoric of religious fervour that attempts to lift the downhearted into political action. I consider

the pincers of such attempts to retain individuality between two such hard and demanding social roles that are often labelled as separate from each other and yet in practice so often work like opposing sides of a vice.

It is not so much the call to this action or that action, this thought or that ideology, that compels me to speak as it is the sense that the individual must not allow themselves to be squeezed out of their own existence by the roles they feel forced to fulfil by others who are not prepared to be present to their own struggles.

Just as we have outsourced so much of our own life effort by allowing others to be employed for our benefit, so we must retain our own life effort to be able to consume what they produce for us. We must remember our value to each other as the overriding purpose of every economic exchange we engage in. No matter how we may be conglomerated statistically, each individual transaction we direct is for our own purposes and those we engage with. If we diminish each other for some greater statistical purpose those statistics are diminished by just so much as they deny what we are really doing with each other in that specific moment.

It is not by some far distant struggle that we bring freedom. It is by exercising the freedom within each and every moment that we live, each and every exchange that we transact, that we retain our individuality for the greatest good of all.

While seeing how someone else does that may be inspiring, ultimately it is the actions one takes oneself that the potential of inspiration is turned into life itself.

Leftist Critic says

I enjoyed this book thoroughly. It is a relatively quick read, only numbering 88 pages in all. Despite that, it covers a lot of content. Karen Fletcher and John Davis, the editors, do a good job in dividing the content into four sections: "disability and class," "socialism," "women," and "war." Each section has about 5-7 speeches/statements in it. I don't want to say anymore about this except that it does provide a corrective to those who just know Helen Keller as a blind woman in the 20th century. She is obviously much more than that and this book shows that well. I was disappointed that the book was so short, but it was a fast and simple read.

Maisey Runkel says

"I have entered the fight against the economic system we live. It is to be a fight to the finish and I ask no question. " Helen Keller is known to be the woman who is blind and deaf but there is much more to her than doesn't meet the eye. Rebel lives by Helen Keller shows her perspective on not just life but on socialism and the IWW. And because she has such a complex opinion on life the book was very hard to follow.

The book is told by Helen's perspective and parts of the book that was written about her. The book did not have a plot really but was told in sections about different topics. It wasn't a book about her life story but it was about the other side of her. It told the reader her views on the world and her complex thinking. She mostly talked about socialism and the IWW. Socialism as she explained it was an opinion about political and economic organization of people and because she is deaf and blind she thought strongly about that. She also talked about IWW which is the Industrial Workers of the World. Throughout the sections there were letters and other parts told by other people about the topics and about her opinions on the topics so it told many

people perspectives and opinions on the topics.

With all the different point of views and the complex topics I found myself rereading many pages and not fully understanding what the book was talking about. But the upside was that sense the book was only 88 pages It didn't take too long to read and I had time to reread a lot of pages. In addition, I liked that it told a different side of Helen Keller that I never knew. And I would definitely want to read her other books about her life and growing up. The writing was very complex and was definitely for an older audience. I also think that the book would be very good for research on Helen Keller or even if you're researching the IWW or socialism. But the book Isn't a very interesting if you're just reading it for fun. In conclusion, I would not recommend reading this book if you're reading for pleasure but is a great education book that you could learn a lot from.
