

Rebelles américaines au XIX^e siècle: Mariage, amour libre et politique (American Women Rebels in the 19th Century: Marriage, Free Love, and Politics). By Françoise Basch. (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1990. 225 pp. Paper, ISBN 2-86563-163-6.) In French.

Françoise Basch's *Rebelles américaines au XIX^e siècle* begins with a difference: The front matter speaks first of suffrage and marriage in France, thereby addressing an audience distinct from that to whom American historians are accustomed. *Rebelles américaines* itself is both familiar and foreign—in its American historiography (for example, the work of Ronald Walters) and in its European psychohistory (which is built upon primary sources). The book has two main focuses: first, the various and overlapping communities of feminist reform in the United States from the 1830s through the early 1870s and, second and more intriguing, two radical figures—Ernestine Potowsky Rose (1810–1892) and Victoria Claflin Woodhull (1838–1927). Rose and Woodhull are only vaguely familiar to most historians because they were not at the ideological core of the movement for woman suffrage, which until recently provided the central narrative of nineteenth-century women's history.

American historians in the United States have tended to focus on suffrage, antislavery, and temperance; Rose and Woodhull espoused not only woman suffrage but also reformation of the institution of marriage. The label "free lovers" was not exactly fitting, but it applied more or less to both women. Woodhull, who opened an office on Wall Street and announced herself a candidate for president in 1872, has received more scholarly attention than Rose, who remained among reformers and who was, until now, encountered mainly in primary sources. If only for the comprehensive and sensitive biography of Ernestine Rose, Basch has done historians an enormous service.

A senior French Americanist who teaches Anglo-American civilization and feminist studies at the University of Paris VII, Basch offers American readers more than valuable narratives that keep their subjects in view when they leave the United States, as did Rose in 1869 and Woodhull in 1877. In a perceptive chapter entitled "Rose d'Amérique et fille d'Israël," Basch presents a psychological portrait of Rose (her Enlightenment individualism, her physical and psychological fragility, her bitterness, and, finally, the self-effacement that makes it so difficult to trace her history), and

she explains Rose's character through her identity as an exile who had renounced her Jewish origins but who still had to confront the conventionality and occasional anti-Semitism of the woman's rights community in the United States. Unlike most post-Holocaust histories written in the United States, *Rebelles américaines* does not hesitate to examine Rose's Jewish identity despite and in light of her self-proclaimed atheism.

Basch's insight extends to her study of Victoria Woodhull, whose public stance, emotional life, and personal trajectory were intimately connected. In Basch's analysis, Woodhull's long-time bohemian milieu and her spiritualism (the spirits told her to reveal Henry Ward Beecher's affair with Elizabeth Tilton) contributed directly to her isolation after 1872 and also explain her refashioning herself in England into a eugenicist whose complete respectability represented a denial of her American persona.

Basch contends that these two liminal figures allow historians better to understand the main themes of nineteenth-century feminist reform. Without conceding this point, I recommend *Rebelles américaines* as creative and rewarding feminist scholarship.

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