

sometimes appears to emanate from the author's proclivity for a radical politics less encumbered by opposition to the Soviet Union than the majority of post-1960s leftist thought. Whilst there is nothing inherently wrong with such a position, its linguistic manifestation leads to a sense that Brown never quite lays his political cards on the table.

Overall, then, *The Historiography of Communism* manages to offer persuasive evidence that the history of the American left should be taken seriously precisely because any reflection on the future of progressive politics in the US (or elsewhere, for that matter) will have to reckon with its multifarious and often contradictory past. But the book should ultimately be seen as a missed opportunity. There is much more to be said about this significant topic, and many clearer ways in which to communicate that significance.

University of Nottingham

NICHOLAS WITHAM

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Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008, £24.00). Pp. 253. ISBN 978 0 2520 3298 1.

Anne Valk's *Radical Sisters* offers a compelling account of the interactions between grassroots movements advocating for the rights of women and African Americans in Washington, DC in the 1960s and 1970s. Through vivid and detailed descriptions of the fight for welfare rights and reproductive control, and against homophobia and sexual violence, Valk's cultural history provides a welcome relief from the theorizing that has tended to dominate academic discussion of feminism in recent years.

Valk's challenge to feminism concerns itself not with its possible contamination by essentialism or "quasi-essentialism," but rather with the extent to which it was a movement able to accommodate issues of racial and economic injustice – issues that both touch on and also push beyond feminism's most obvious interest: women. By providing detailed case studies of the ways in which civil rights, student and anti-war movements intersected with second-wave feminism, Valk aims to nuance existing scholarship that she claims has "typically ... treated the histories of these movements separately" (4). In addition, Valk's contribution offers a corrective to the tendency of much of this scholarship to perpetuate "a declension narrative that correlates the birth of feminism with the dissolution of other left movements and stresses the decline of radical feminism in the mid-1970s" (4). Instead, *Radical Sisters* demonstrates how feminist coalitions built upon and in turn influenced other leftist movements, anticipating future constellations of radical organizing.

Examples of these new forms of activism that evolved from this period of intense political activity are the "distinct black and Third World feminist movements" that Valk points to in her conclusion (186). Valk identifies the movement against sexual violence as a key precursor for these new developments. This movement surfaced disagreements between black and white women over the position of black men vis-à-vis sexual violence. Rejecting the line that all men are would-be rapists, many

African American women involved in this movement were keen to stress the ways in which black men have historically been oppressed by the same sexual economy that oppresses women, particularly black women – whose abuse at the hands of white men has been overlooked while black men could find themselves confronting a lynch mob if they so much as looked at white women. Many white feminists were, in the view of a number of black female activists including Angela Davis, colluding in this sexual economy with its origins in southern slavery by perpetuating “the myth that black men were the most frequent sexual offenders” (171).

Thus Valk’s narrative, rather than seeing black feminism as heir to the legacy of a fabricated “white feminism,” shows that black women were key shapers of feminism from the beginning, which, while harbouring racist currents, was never a “whites-only” affair. In this sense Valk’s account takes on both the antagonisms and the points of agreement between different sections of the feminist coalition. The expectation one gets from reading the book’s introduction – that the narrative to follow might be an all-too seamless story of feminist cooperation – is thus subverted.

What is missing from *Radical Sisters* is a sense of where it fits in with, and the extent to which it challenges, existing accounts of feminism. The book presents its readers with a wealth of description that is rarely contextualized by critical commentaries other than Valk’s own. This lack of a comparative angle is mirrored in the book’s focus on Washington, DC. While this location is significant for obvious reasons – among them its proximity to the federal government and the city’s large African American population – Valk does not go far in underscoring this significance, neither does she offer many comparisons with other strands of the national or international movement to contextualize her choice.

That said, at a moment when the potential clash between gender and race politics has become headline news as a consequence of the presidential election, a thoughtful and nuanced account of the intersections between race, gender and class is a timely intervention.

University of Birmingham

ANNA HARTNELL

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Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008, \$27.95). Pp. xvi + 412. ISBN 978 1 58648 496 5.

US foreign policy between the end of the Cold War and the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 – 11/9 to 9/11 – is the subject of this excellent study. Derek Chollet has already published important work on Bosnian policy, and Goldgeier an authoritative study of NATO enlargement; both authors held government foreign-policy appointments in the 1990s. They compare the 1989–2001 period to the years between the two twentieth-century world wars, with the policy choices made at the end of one conflict affecting the later one. In terms of US policy priorities, the 1990s were characterized by continued American preoccupation with the affairs of Russia and, increasingly, with China; by the continuation of American “Vietnam syndrome” inhibitions on the use of military power; by a conscious and complex public