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That Others Might Live: The U.S. Life-Saving Service, 1878-1915

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conceded that “transforming” the peasant would require a cultural change that might take generations but Stalin, hoping to succeed where Lenin had failed—and establish his place alongside Lenin in the pantheon of revolutionaries—unleashed a revolution that resulted in the second enslavement of the peasant.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Pipes is a serious and influential scholar. His impressive ability to unearth evidence is apparent. But if the evidence does not always fully support his conclusions, it is probably because the author has consciously eschewed disinterested and dispassionate scholarship in favor of passing judgment upon the Soviet debacle. Who can deny that it was a debacle? Pipes should also be given credit for returning our attention to the role played by individuals, especially among Russia’s intelligentsia, in bringing about a revolution—even if his emphasis ends with Lenin and he ignores the extensive attention given by the so-called “revisionist” historians to the role played by social forces.

Perhaps this work’s most serious flaw is the author’s belief that “Soviet totalitarianism” (itself a dubious concept) is somehow the consequence of “Russian patrimonialism”—even more dubious. The author believes that Russia’s tsars treated everybody and everything as personal property to be used and disposed of at will. This Russian patrimonialism, “which underpinned the Muscovite government and in many ways survived in the institutions and political culture of Russia to the end of the old regime,” contained “unmistakable affinities” with the “Communist

regime as it looked by the time of Lenin’s death.” Not only do such conclusions constitute a sweeping, and erroneous, indictment of most of Russia’s history, but naive readers of Pipes might be excused were they to conclude that Russian patrimonialism, through Lenin’s totalitarianism, was responsible for Hitler’s National Socialism. More to the point, as Robert Conquest has recently noted in *The New York Review of Books* (14 July 1994), “it can hardly be maintained that Communism was no more than a continuation of Russian history.”

It is precisely such conclusions that undermine Richard Pipes’ formidable scholarship and place him perilously close to what Nicholas V. Riasanovsky called the historical “school of extreme and blind hatred.”

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Noble, Dennis L. *That Others Might Live: The U.S. Life-Saving Service, 1878-1915*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994. 177pp. \$27.95

Dr. Noble, a retired U.S. Coast Guardsman with a Purdue University Ph.D. in history, is the first to place the unique humanitarian federal agency, the U.S. Life-Saving Service (USLSS), within a national context. Previous works dealt merely with single lifesaving stations or those of one geographical region. Only Noble’s painstaking, decades-long research could document so faithfully the evolution of organized lifesaving in the United States.

The author's fast-paced and lavishly illustrated narrative describes the transformation of the service: from the earliest (1785) privately funded efforts along the coast of Massachusetts to the first federal aid for shore-based volunteer rescues; to subsequent federal funding for stations and their boats, equipment, and provisions; to the establishment of the USLSS with paid professionals in place of volunteers; and finally to the merger in 1915 with the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service to form the U.S. Coast Guard. Although designated by law as "a military service and a branch of the armed forces at all times," the Coast Guard is also tasked, in the USLSS tradition, with lifesaving; the media routinely recount the stirring rescues and other humanitarian activities of U.S. Coast Guardsmen.

That Others Might Live covers every aspect of the art of lifesaving. Particularly valuable are the author's explanations of the service's organization, administrative procedures, stations (primarily lifesaving, lifeboat, and houses of refuge), life cars, surfboats, beach apparatus, Lyle guns, Coston signals, breeches buoys, and the everyday routine of the lifesavers rescuing those in distress.

Noble highlights the growth, activities, and heroic deeds of the USLSS under its first and only superintendent, Sumner I. Kimball. The daring small-boat skippers and brave oarsmen were soon referred to as "storm warriors" and "soldiers of the surf" by the print media and became "as popular as the U.S. Cavalry" in the public's mind. In time, there were lifesaving stations located on the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, and Pacific coasts, as well as at Nome, Alaska.

Noble's valuable, pioneering sociological work dispels many of the popular myths surrounding the lifesavers. The "average" surfman in a Lake Michigan station, for instance, was a U.S. citizen and a resident of the state containing the station. He was a twenty-seven-year-old with a background in fishing and would probably serve only two years before leaving the USLSS to seek better employment. The "average" station keeper was foreign-born 40 percent of the time, a thirty-nine-year-old with several years of maritime experience; he would probably serve no more than ten years and be transferred at least once before departing for higher pay.

These hired men could look forward only to extremely limited disability compensation, almost nonexistent promotional opportunities, forced resignation when no longer physically able to withstand the rigors of rescue work, and no retirement pay. Despite these crippling employment drawbacks, the lifesavers never failed to push out into gale-whipped waters, risking life and limb to rescue shipwrecked victims.

I highly recommend this book. Its only weakness is its brevity, for which blame most likely rests with its publisher, not its author. Many readers, like myself, prefer a longer narrative, but Noble's dramatic coverage of shipwrecks, sailors under extreme stress, and daring rescues should appeal to most readers. Even the naval specialist will be satisfied by the author's meticulous portrayal of an aspect of maritime heritage too long overlooked.

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U.S. Coast Guard Historian, 1970-1976