

**Robert L. Allen (with the collaboration of Pamela P. Allen). *Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States.* (Washington, DC: Howard Free Press, 1983) 356 pp., \$6.95.**

Allen, editor of *The Black Scholar* and chair of the Mills College Ethnic Studies Department, reviews in this volume the ideological impact of racism on six distinct social reform movements in United States history. Chronologically presented, the movements begin immediately after the war for independence and extend into the contemporary era.

Arguing from a materialist developmental perspective, Allen incorporates reports from black participants as well as information drawn from standard studies of the reform movements covered. Other non-white perspectives are excluded on the grounds that only blacks participated in social reform movements throughout the history of the United States.

The chapter case studies of the individual reform movements—abolitionism, southern populism, progressivism, women's suffrage, organized labor, and socialism—each explore the nature of the movement, its leadership, and internal dynamics. The final chapter attempts a theoretical synthesis, moving beyond a simple comparison of the movements. The intent here is to set each social reform movement, and the relationship and progression among them, into the larger context of United States and world history. Additionally, the social forces that brought each movement in its time into the limelight are explored in their relationship to the larger ideological framework of racism.

The complex and contradictory interests of race, class, and gender are intensively examined in the chapter covering the woman's suffrage movements. Emphasizing the "respectable" and conservative social position of the movement's leadership, Allen underplays the extensive support for labor found in early 20th-century women's organizations. Similarly, the long-lasting alliance between the women's movement and those who struggled for full equality for blacks is downplayed. Allen does acknowledge the role of black leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and others in the suffragist struggle. However, he is at pains to argue that greater oppression has been experienced by virtue of race than of gender, and on the basis of this understanding, criticizes divisive strategies employed by feminists in the early struggle for the vote. His description of the rape of black slaves and the powerlessness of their community to protect them could be an historical or contemporary observation on spousal abuse and marital rape, of a woman of any race, an equally "protected" crime. Allen fails to see the parallel between slave owners and husbands exercising their "perogative" and thus exaggerates the distance between the white and black women's situations.

His structural analysis of the decline of the women's movement is incisive and telling. Failure to diversify left the movement, once successful, without a *raison d'être*. The implications for other social reform movements are powerful—single causes leave no organizational legacy now, as then. In a sense, this is the weakness of the book as well. The exclusive focus on racism has given a tunnel-vision perspective to the analysis of the various social movements, leading to overstatements such as “White women totally betrayed their black sisters in the name of white solidarity” (270), and “The dominant trend in organized labor at the beginning of this century was a movement toward exclusionism and racism” (271). Although both statements are certainly true of some participants of the movements discussed, they miss the mark as general characterizations.

In another context, the postscript covering contemporary U.S. social reform movements, the authors offer a broader perspective in discussing the competition and suspiciousness affecting third world coalitions. In acknowledging this conflict, they point to a strategy for solution: “Whether this problem will be overcome depends on the emergence of an anti-racist leadership that can build alliances while also respecting and upholding the legitimate special concerns of each group” (338). This coalition-building strategy is presently employed by a number of multi-ethnic, multi-issue community organizing projects. Perhaps these projects will be the focus of attention for the authors' sequel. An ambitious overview such as *Reluctant Reformer* must be followed by a more detailed extension in the form of an ideological analysis of contemporary reform movements to be useful. It is equally important that the ideology of racism not be the only focus of such an analysis.

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**Elechi Amadi. *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1982) 120 pp., \$9.00.**

Elechi Amadi is a Nigerian-born member of the Ikwerre tribe. He was trained in the Nigerian University system, served in the Nigerian army, and was Head of the Ministry of Education. He has published several works of fiction for which he is primarily known. In this work, Amadi attempts to classify, describe, and analyze major areas of Nigerian ethical thought.