

Daily Demonstrators: The Civil Rights Movement in Mennonite Homes and Sanctuaries. By Tobin Miller Shearer. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. xxiv, 360 pp. \$65.00.)

Tobin Miller Shearer's main contribution to scholarship on religion and civil rights may not be the argument he makes in *Daily Demonstrators*—it may be the model of research and interpretation that he provides. Shearer situates his research in the homes and sanctuaries of members of the largest Mennonite denominations during the civil rights era: the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Old Mennonite Church. He shifts the focus of civil rights scholarship from “the street”—a public place of protest, political engagement, and, too frequently, violence—to the private sphere of individual religious believers, arguing that Mennonite activism was not always recognizable to those who understood demonstration to be only public but that it was nonetheless an important contribution to civil rights (p. vii). That argument, however, too frequently lacks precision or explicit grounding in the literature of civil rights history and overvalues the contributions of Mennonites without quantifying them. However, the shift of scene asks readers to consider how the themes of the civil rights movement—desegregation, equality, interracial relationships, and, eventually, black power—affected and were reflected in the personal relationships of everyday people. Those questions are valuable.

Mennonites, if not unique, are an intriguing subject, for they face competing impulses: a biblically grounded belief that all people were created with dignity by God (a belief that drove their early opposition to slavery) and a commitment to nonresistance and nonconformity. Fearing that engaging civil rights in the street could “lead to coercive, worldly ways” that did not align with traditional Mennonite values, midcentury Mennonites were able to live out their theology of racial justice in personal relationships (p. 68). But when Mennonites erred on the side of being too private, their commitment to social justice was questioned; but when they engaged civil rights in more public and politicized ways, they risked alienating traditionalists.

Shearer analyzes these relationships through typical archival sources such as church meeting notes and religious reporting but also innovatively incorporates personal interviews, photographs, and analyses of material culture such as head coverings. While the arguments that emerge from his visual and material analyses are, at times, tenuous, the incorporation of these sources is notable, and Shearer’s analyses show sensitivity toward his subjects. Additionally, he intriguingly organizes his materials not by a strict chronology but in chapters that focus on different scenes within homes and sanctuaries—such as interracial friendships, interracial marriages, or the homes of rural white hosts of urban black children on Fresh Air Fund trips. Individual chapters serve as windows onto the private lives of Mennonites working out their faith commitment to civil rights in challenging broader contexts and contribute to the book’s larger argument that such “daily demonstrators” were vital in moving civil rights forward. While *Daily Demonstrators* too often overvalues the work of these personal moments, Shearer’s focus on the intimate aspects of activism is a scholarly direction to appreciate.

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