

The Grace Abbott Reader

Suzanne O'Dea

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2009 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

O'Dea, Suzanne. "The Grace Abbott Reader." *The Annals of Iowa* 68 (2009).

Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1366>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

The *manufacture of consent* is a term associated with Noam Chomsky, but was originated by Walter Lippmann to describe World War I, as Capozzola points out. The “industrialization” of citizenship (my phrase) was a mixed blessing, but one of its unintended consequences was a more institutionalized recognition of the right to dissent.

The Grace Abbott Reader, edited by John Sorensen with Judith Sealander. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xxxv, 132 pp. Biographical timeline, notes, bibliography, index. \$21.95 paper.

Reviewer Suzanne O’Dea is an independent scholar. She is the author of *From Suffrage to the Senate: America’s Political Women, An Encyclopedia of Leaders, Causes and Issues* (2006); *Iowa Women of Achievement* (1996); *Legislators and Politicians: Iowa’s Women Lawmakers* (1995); and “The Immigrants’ Advocate: Mary Treglia and the Sioux City Community House, 1921–1959” (*Annals of Iowa*, 1990).

Grace Abbott (1878–1939) and her sister Edith Abbott (1876–1957), both natives of Grand Island, Nebraska, became two of the nation’s leading social reformers in the early twentieth century. Both women gained experience at Chicago’s Hull House, and then each pursued her own path, although neither strayed from working to improve the lives of the marginalized. Grace began her professional work in Chicago as an advocate for immigrants, later as an advocate for children, serving as chief of the U.S. Children’s Bureau from 1921 to 1934. The 18 writings in *The Grace Abbott Reader*, dating from 1909 to 1941, sample Abbott’s thoughts on immigrants, children, and women. Many of the pieces have been previously published; others are from the Grace Abbott Papers housed at the Nebraska State Historical Society. In these speeches, articles, and notes, Abbott’s passion, frustration, and commitment to the various causes shout from the page — as does her occasional sizzling sarcasm. Introductory sections written by Edith and others provide context.

Abbott’s essays and other writings emerge from her experiences as a native midwesterner who also became a professional in that region. In several of the essays, she draws on her observations and research at the local level, generally Chicago, to suggest national policy, especially in the areas of protections for immigrants and regarding restrictions on child labor. At the same time, the brevity of most of the articles makes them a series of snapshots, suggesting the range of her work but not allowing the reader to examine it in depth.