

A novel chronicles resistance to the Vietnam War & the draft

Daniel Holland

2023

a review of

Passages of Rebellion by Fran Shor. Smart Set, 2021

Passages of Rebellion, with its focus on 1960s activism, feels perfectly curated for 2023 readers.

Just as the country was polarized and divided in the 1960s, today's activists challenge convention and institutions, albeit with far more sophisticated technological capabilities, but with similar intent to their messaging.

Prioritizing human life, Fran Shor presents a unique angle through which themes of freedom and community are explored.

Draft resistance during the Vietnam war is an under-covered issue, so this fictionalized account of actual events offers up a fresh perspective. The story's central character Franklin Roosevelt Goodman's battle for justice leads him through a complex plot that never shies away from its acute criticism of the government.

As Frank negotiates between the varying agendas for protest strategies of old left peace organizations and new left youthful militants, it is almost comical to realize that today's old left is composed of those youthful militants of the 'sixties who are now being confronted by a dynamic new youth movement.

The story begins in August 1970 as Frank prepares for an escape to Canada, fearing potential arrest for participation in the destruction of draft files at Selective Service draft offices in Minnesota. In a dream-state flashback to 1967, he relives the events that brought him to this precipice.

The ensuing chapters jump back and forth in time, perhaps a jarring construction at first, but it begins to make sense as the story unfolds. The writing is engaging, the pacing is brisk and taut, and the characters are authentic and nuanced.

While Frank struggles with demons both personal and political, we can empathize with his soul-searching as he careens from militant protester to merry prankster to nonviolent moral witness and forlorn lover. There is humor, adventure, mystery, and romance in this historical period piece based on real people and real incidents.

Shor delineates the anti-war and draft resistance objectives and tactics while also exploring the subjective perception of reality and the duality of human nature. There are captivating scenes that resonate today as inspirational for Frank's stand against unchecked political power despite personal consequences.

Together with his resistance comrades, Shor's protagonist devises plans to challenge the authoritarian power structures of the local university, the military induction center, the police, and the federal courts. The tactics they develop, focused on noncompliance, are particularly relevant to anarchists today as they seek to engage with the current politics of deceit and misinformation.

According to Department of Justice records, local draft boards accused 209,000 men of Selective Service violations, out of an estimated 360,000 draft resisters, resulting in 21,400 charges. These numbers overwhelmed the federal courts and undermined the ability of the Selective Service System to provide the bodies needed to prosecute the war, clear proof of the efficacy of resistance.

Shor also investigates some of the origins of current issues of women's rights, civil rights, gun control, political divisions, and sexual and domestic violence. We are even treated to an eerie dream that portends a frightening monster of present-day reality. A gripping and gut-wrenching epilogue makes for a satisfying conclusion to this unique novel.

Full disclosure: I met Fran Shor at the University of Minnesota in 1967 where we were both students. He was strongly opposed to the war in Vietnam, a draft resister, and an inspirational public speaker.

Before the end of my freshman year, I was a draft resister and working full time in the same resistance organization with Fran.

Daniel Holland is the author of a memoir, *Death Wins All Wars: Resisting the Draft in the 1960s*. See Sharp Press (2019)

Fran Shor is Emeritus Professor of History at Wayne State University and the author of five nonfiction books, including *Weaponized Whiteness: The Constructions and Deconstructions of White Identity Politics* (Haymarket, 2020), and is a contributor to the Fifth Estate.

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