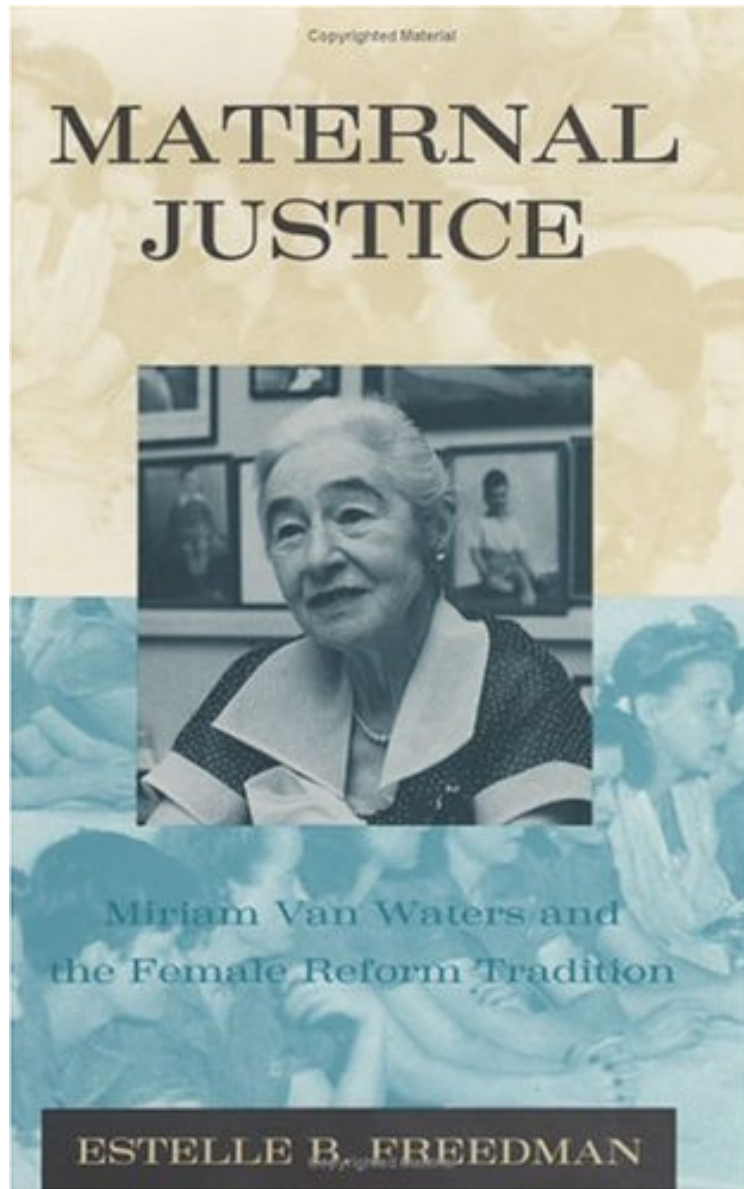


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Maternal Justice: Miriam Van Waters and the Female Reform Tradition

Estelle B. Freedman

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Estelle B. Freedman : Maternal Justice: Miriam Van Waters and the Female Reform Tradition before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Maternal Justice: Miriam Van

Waters and the Female Reform Tradition:

Celebrated prison reformer Miriam Van Waters made history for her sensational battle to retain the superintendency of the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women in 1949. *Maternal Justice* provides a compelling biography of this early lesbian activist by moving beyond the controversy to tell the story of a remarkable woman whose success rested upon the power of her own charismatic leadership. Estelle B. Freedman draws from Van Waters's diaries, letters, and personal papers to recreate her complex personal life, unveiling the disparity between Van Waters's public persona and her agonized private soul. With the power and elegance of a novel, *Maternal Justice* illuminates this historical context, casting light on the social welfare tradition, on women's history, on the American feminist movement, and on the history of sexuality. "Maternal Justice is as much a work of history as it is biography, bringing to life not only a remarkable woman but also the complex political and social milieu within which she worked and lived." Kelleher Jewett, *The Nation* "This sympathetic biography reclaims Van Waters for history." *Publishers Weekly* "The Van Waters legacy, as Freedman gracefully presents, is that she cared about the lives of women behind bars. It is a strikingly unfashionable sentiment today." Jane Meredith Adams, *San Francisco Chronicle Book Review*, Editor's Recommended Selection "This finely crafted biography is both an engrossing read and a richly complicated account of a reformer whose work . . . bridged the eras of voluntarist charitable activism and professional social service." Sherri Broder, *Women's Review of Books* "This is a sympathetic, highly personal biography, revealing of both the author's responses to her subject's life and, in considerable detail, Van Waters's family traumas, illnesses, and love affairs." Elizabeth Israels Perry, *Journal of American History*

.com A biography of Miriam Van Waters, a Massachusetts prison reformer who believed in individual and cultural transformation through good works. The daughter of an Episcopal minister, Van Waters received her doctorate in 1913. Despite the absence of women in politics, and especially in prison administration, her intelligence and work ethic, and a bevy of outside champions, buoyed her to the position of superintendent of the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women. Freedman recounts the hardships Van Waters encountered upon entering the good old boy network and the difficult decisions she had to make without support. Her unconventional methods finally lost her job, but her unyielding conviction led to vindication. From *Publishers Weekly* In her biography of Miriam Van Waters, an obscure Massachusetts prison reformer, Stanford history professor Freedman rescues her subject from obscurity and uncovers a life story representative of a cohort of women. The daughter of an Episcopal minister, Van Waters believed in individual and cultural transformation through good works. Add to that her advanced education (she earned a doctorate in 1913) and a personal and political inheritance that maintained the power of maternal nurture, and you have the formula for the "new woman" turned "municipal housekeeper." Freedman recounts all the requisite themes: a conflict between a buoyant public image and a deep private insecurity; administrative travails that came with newfound authority; the painful lessons of playing politics with the big boys; and the family of women that nurtured and sustained her. Freedman's attention to this classic set of concerns makes Van Waters's ouster from her position as superintendent of the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women in 1949 an almost inevitable, epic climax. A failure, a loss and a betrayal, followed by a struggle for vindication, that crisis colors every strand and strain of Van Waters's life. Freedman's poised and accomplished book may sacrifice some of her subject's originality?she appears, at times, to be living a plot line?but this sympathetic biography reclaims Van Waters for history. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* Freedman (history, Stanford) has written a readable and scholarly biography of the crusader who devoted her life to applying progressive methods to the rehabilitation of incarcerated women and children. Van Waters's innovations often met with disapproval from conservative critics, and the belief that she tolerated homosexuality at the Farmington, Massachusetts, Reformatory for Women culminated in her dismissal from her post as head of that institution in 1945. Her appeals against this dismissal became a cause celebre in Massachusetts and resulted in her reinstatement. Although attempts to discredit her did not cease, neither did her efforts to help less fortunate women. Burton Rowles's 1962 biography of Van Waters is out of print, recommending this thorough work for all libraries.?Sharon Firestone, Ross-Blakley Law Lib., Arizona State Univ., Tempe Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.