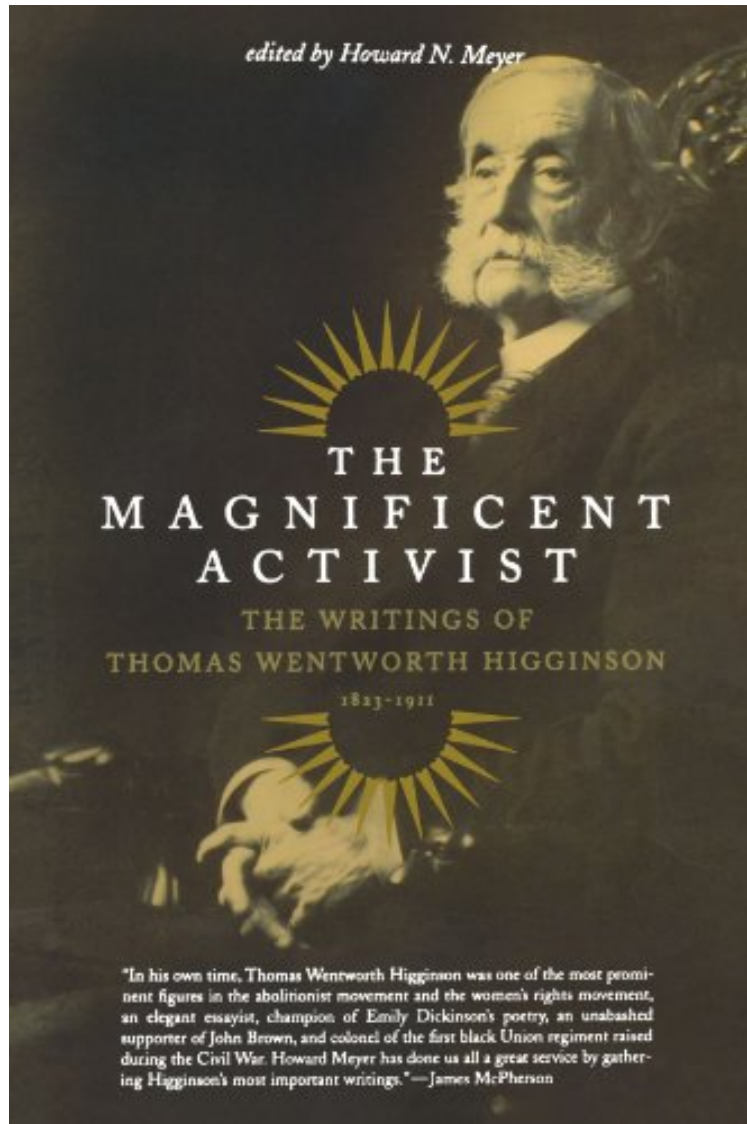


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## The Magnificent Activist: The Writings of Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911)

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Howard Meyer, Howard N. Meyer : The Magnificent Activist: The Writings of Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Magnificent Activist: The Writings of Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Artist, soldier and visionary By Simko Quite a revelation. A man who

deserves to be right up there with Franklin, Paine and Bob Dylan. Not a prominent political figure, but a man who put it all on the line and helped transform American life. His first hand, frank and respectful renderings of his life with the men of the first Black regiments of the USCT Corp. are golden. The missing link behind the movie, 'Glory' one day we will have the guts to own up to our heroes who can be heroes to everyone. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. a must read By Irving Penn Good reading, as striking as Brady's photography, and as clear thinking as Emerson these narratives execute the critiques of Twain 9 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Not a review; merely a comment on the subject By Eugene H Leache Howard Meyer is to be commended for his efforts at rescuing T. W. Higginson from the dustbin of history. All Americans, and especially African Americans, should know something of him. Clergyman, historian, author, early women's rights supporter, abolitionist, Colonel in the Union Army, T.W.H is a man worth knowing about - a true intellectual man of action. I have read Meyer's earlier works on T.W.H and benefited from them. While browsing at a brick mortar bookstore yesterday evening I came across Mr. Meyer's new book and casually fanned through it. I was horrified to see that the only (I think) photograph published within the book is that of a young college-age Wentworth, with unattractively long hair, and the look of an idle popinjay: imagine, if you will, a combination of Oscar Wilde and Virginia Woolf (and actually more of the latter). Howard, what in God's name were you thinking of? To potential readers: purchase the book and learn about a man of high caliber who not only talked the talk but walked the walk. If you agree with me about the photograph, excise it and mail it back to the publisher. Mr. Meyer's editor may thereby profit from the experience.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson is little known today, but during his own lifetime his remarkable activism put him at the very heart of the pivotal social movements reshaping America for the nineteenth century and beyond. Born in Cambridge, he was a fervent abolitionist, running guns to anti-slavery settlers and financing John Brown's raid. During the Civil War, he commanded the first black unit to fight for the Union, and their achievements (publicized in his classic *Army Life in a Black Regiment*) opened the way for further black enlistment. He also championed women's rights for sixty years, lecturing and agitating for suffrage. His lifelong correspondence with Emily Dickinson led to his editing her verse for publication, which some have called his greatest literary legacy. But in fact that legacy is here, in the essays he wrote about the many causes to which he dedicated his life. With this volume Meyer has guaranteed the rediscovery of a major American figure whose ideas made him a radical in his society but a visionary in ours.

From Publishers Weekly Massachusetts-born Higginson was a 19th-century Renaissance man. He was an active abolitionist, a supporter of women's rights and an accomplished essayist. This collection of his essays captures Higginson's many talents and interests. "Obeying the Higher Law" offers a response to the Fugitive Slave Law. "The Fact of Sex" argues that it is precisely because men and women are fundamentally different that women need the vote. A woman "never can, and never will be, justly represented by" men. In "Negro Spirituals," Higginson gives thanks that during the Civil War, when he commanded an all-black Union regiment, he was able to learn some of the haunting melodies and arresting lyrics. "Scripture Idolatry" confronts the question of biblical authority; Higginson writes that advances in scholarship are bound to show that Scripture is not infallible, and he hopes that people's faith in God will not be shattered when the infallibility of Scripture is challenged. Several of Higginson's essays marry literary criticism with politics. In "Sappho," for example, he assesses the poet's work and also urges Americans to create a society where more women will be free to write great poetry. (Higginson was a crucial correspondent and friend of Emily Dickinson.) "The Clergy and Reform" takes ministers to task for failing to speak out against the "social evils against which we know that Christ if alive would have protested." There are dozens of similarly delightful, challenging essays in this volume; kudos to biographer and historian Meyer (*The Amendment that Refused to Die*) for making it possible for a wide audience of readers to once again enjoy the wit and insight of Thomas Wentworth Higginson. (Aug.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Largely unknown today yet highly regarded historically and part of the inner circle that included William Lloyd Garrison, Lydia Marie Childs, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Thomas Wentworth Higginson deserves to be a part of the nation's memory. This selection of his engrossing and eclectic writings illuminates his life and legacy. Though Higginson is probably most often cited for his discovery and support of Emily Dickinson, this book offers evidence of his activism and passion for racial and gender equality, literature, theology, nature, and anti-imperialist efforts. This reviewer couldn't help wishing that Higginson were alive today to lead the current debates on race, feminism, militarism, religion, globalism, and environmentalism. Edited by Meyer (*The Amendment That Refused To Die*), this marvelous collection has an equally marvelous introduction that provides a substantive biographical profile and discussion of an exciting period in American history. Recommended for academic and larger public libraries. D Sherri Barnes, Univ. of California Lib., Santa Barbara Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Higginson's name is one that educated Americans think they should know but probably can't quite place. Editor Meyer groups his choices from the prolific Higginson's works under headings reflecting the causes the activist adopted: "Abolitionist and Champion for Civil Rights," "Colonel of the First Black Regiment," "Crusader for Women's Rights," "Essayist as Activist," "Naturalist," and "Critic as Essayist." This final section addresses the achievement for which many remember Higginson: his preparation of long-time friend Emily

Dickinson's poetry for publication. Higginson was a tireless advocate, writing for New England papers and leading national magazines, such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, on the crucial issues the nation faced, from slavery and reconstruction to the temptations of imperialism in the early twentieth century. Higginson was a gifted writer, whether drumming up support for John Brown, describing his war experience, or critiquing Henry James. Students (and devotees) of nineteenth-century U.S. literature and history will welcome this collection. Meyer opens each section with a thoughtful introduction that supplies context. Mary Carroll

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