Bruce Curtis. *True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education and State Formation in Canada West.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. Pp. ix, 250. $60.00 cloth, $19.95 paper.

Recently, there has been much discussion about the use of foucaultian concepts in writing the histories of schooling. The opponents acknowledge that many valuable insights are produced but grumble about unnecessarily obscure and often bizarre language, frequent ignorance of previous scholarship, sloppy use of evidence, and dogmatic adherence to one form of explanatory scheme. The proponents tend to argue that they hit on a qualitatively new way of doing "history of the present," which disqualifies the pedestrian attempts at social history of their predecessors, and certainly puts paid to attempts to "test hypotheses" about social causality by historical sociologists.[1] Curtis manages neatly to sidestep this debate. He makes a significant contribution to history and sociology by utilizing some key insights from the work of Foucault and other theorists, but takes exemplary care with historical evidence and writes in an easy, witty style unencumbered by post-structural flourishes.

Government by Choice Men completes a project Curtis has been working on for some years, and which was the topic of his excellent *Building the Educational State.* The new book is built around a collective biography of the 37 district superintendents of education appointed under the school acts of 1843 and 1846 in Canada West. Relatively little has been written about these men, and Curtis' detailed study rectifies this neglect. But the book is written with a much more ambitious purpose in mind. Curtis argues convincingly that the activities of these men, appointed to the largest and most important early inspectorate in the colony in the key decade of the 1840s, were crucial in pioneering and establishing centralized modes of governance on which the modern Canadian state was built: many of the practices invented by these men came to be institutionalized as "efficient" administration. "Educational inspection was about state formation: the creation, stabilization and normalisation of relations of power, authority, domination and exploitation" (p. 32).

One of the first jobs the inspectors had to tackle was to actually find the schools they were to inspect, not an easy task on horseback, without reliable maps, on difficult roads in unfamiliar countryside, and following unreliable directions. It was only after the central office assembled the fragmented and primitive topographical and statistical knowledge, some won at great cost and some made up with much personal discretion by the early inspectors, that it had any chance of detailed control of schooling: "no

central state agency could govern a population about which it was ignorant" (p. 30).

Even at the time, establishing "proper" schools for children was only one of the explicit aims of inspection; an equally if not more significant one was the training in self-government that involvement in orderly and systematic school administration would give to the "responsible" adults in particular localities. "Bureaucratic administration was seen by political liberals as practical education, a 'normal school' for the people" (p. 7); many of the inspectors themselves took pleasure in structuring their whole life around often eccentric routines.

Such concerns suggest a social control problematic, and Curtis carefully distances himself from this form of argument. Rather, he sets out to depict an ever-contested and incomplete *process of rule*. According to him, the establishment of a "modern" inspectorate was an enterprise full of conflict, confusion, incompetence, cheating, approximation, contradiction, compromise, and inventiveness. Educational inspectors, typically respectable, Anglo-Saxon men of property, instinctively knew a good school when they saw one and felt eminently qualified to invent proper administrative procedures. Yet they often disagreed amongst themselves, some of them inspected hardly any schools, and one or two absconded with the school moneys entrusted to them. These men were without formal qualifications for the work they were undertaking: they were, and saw themselves as, amateurs. Yet Curtis argues that the underlying common sense, aesthetic values, moral standards, and sense of justice they shared helped shape the standards, criteria, and procedures which were later embodied in the more "professional" administration for which they helped establish the foundations. Paradoxically, the knowledge and experience imparted by the early inspectors to the centre made these men themselves replaceable and allowed the centre to curtail the very autonomy which made possible the gathering of educational intelligence in the first place—even as it gradually established more formal qualifications for the inspectors' less autonomous successors.

Government by Choice Men is tightly structured and well argued. Chapter 2 examines the context, both colonial and international, out of which inspection as a practice of government arose. It contains much valuable, original material and presents an overview of the most important early nineteenth-century experiments in educational inspection in Ireland, Scotland, Prussia, Holland, England, and the United States. North American school reformers were familiar with these experiments and used them frequently in their own thinking about education. The next two chapters discuss political conflict and debate over inspectoral organization in Canada West in the 1840s. Chapter 5 contains the collective biography of the district superintendents of education. Curtis then examines the activities of these men as inspectors, and looks in more detail at the marked differences in the practice of educational inspection in three colonial dis-

tricts. "Regional variations in the colonial class structure and variations in the political complexion of colonial districts shaped," Curtis concludes, "the practical operation of educational inspection and influenced the experience of inspectors. The regional events point to the creation of a novel dynamic of political rule involving central and local states." The last chapter examines the power of inspection and the pressure for administrative centralization, which are conceptualized in terms of a transition from class culture to bureaucratic procedure.

My major problem with this excellent book concerns the relative invisibility of gender relations. To give him credit, Curtis keeps reminding the readers that he is indeed writing about men, that the practices and ideas which became enshrined in educational administration were those of *men* of property, that women were explicitly or implicitly excluded from virtually all the institutions of governance he deals with, and that in any case the nature of the sources gave no easy access to women at all. For example, "the women to whom the inspectors were married are almost impossible to identify, and relatively little can be recovered about family economy" (p. 114). This is undoubtedly true, but does not constitute a good enough reason to abandon this line of inquiry. Even though, for example, it might be altogether impossible to recover additional information about the women and children in the inspectors' families, enough is known about the family economies of *other similar* people to fill in other parts of the picture. Here, Davidoff and Hall's excellent book *Family Fortunes* comes to mind as a model; while Cynthia Coburn's *Brothers* is a classic example of a work that manages to talk about gender relations in a setting from which women are excluded.

My wish to see women and gender relations included in a story of men is not an antiquarian interest, nor is it a desire to see as many books as possible written about women. Examining bureaucracies and state institutions today, feminist scholars note their *gendered* as well as their class-specific character. In writing about a major transformation of the process of rule, Curtis is ideally placed to ask what precisely was [differently?] masculine or patriarchal about the new modes of governance, and thus elaborate concepts which in feminist theory often lack historical specificity. It is likely that the process of transferring power from men of property (whose private political power was never fully established in colonies such as Canada) to state agencies, constituted a shift between different modes of patriarchal governance, one which Weber (who was not really concerned about gender relations) called a change from patrimonialism to rational bureaucracy. Curtis hints at some of this when he writes about the erosion of the paternalistic right of men in the dominant class as individuals to know the lives of others, and the concomitant proliferation of impersonal forms of state knowledge. But the right to know the lives of others was possessed by wealthy women as well, while the state administrative knowledge was, for a long time, men's alone.

This neglected aspect of his work might one day send Curtis back to the archives for another couple of years. In the meanwhile, readers both in Canada and elsewhere will benefit from a valuable and important study whose relevance far exceeds the history of education. For these "foreign" readers, the brief general introductions to the history of education in Ontario will often not explain quite enough about some key events and personalities in Canadian history. The book, however, will remain worth reading.

1.See the arguments in *History of Education Review* 20, 2 (1991). For an interesting example of debate about the use of foucaultian concepts among historians, see D. Levine, "Punctuated Equilibrium: The Modernisation of the Proletarian Family in the Age of Nascent Capitalism," and replies to his article, in *International Labor and Working-Class History* 39 (1991), and the debate in *Past and Present* (1992): 131, 133 and 135.

Pavla Miller
Phillip Institute of Technology,
Melbourne

Harold and Pamela Silver. *An Educational War on Poverty: American and British Policy-Making, 1960-1980.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. 447, index. $64.95.

Reading Harold and Pamela Silver's *An Educational War on Poverty* is like visiting a familiar friend in a strange and far-away land. The friend is the idealism, the high hopes, the belief that education could be a mechanism for social justice that so marked educational policy-making in the 1960s and early 1970s. Familiar, too, are the names and references: equality of educational opportunity, the Coleman Report, Head Start, the Plowden Report, Basil Bernstein on language decoding. But the strange and the far-away are just as powerful, for the aspirations have nearly disappeared and the political and economic climate in both the United States and Great Britain has mocked those aspirations for more than a decade. It is easy to romanticize the hopes and painful to recall how anyone could have believed in them.

Harold Silver, formerly Principal of Bulmershe College of Higher Education and author of numerous books on educational history and social policy, and Pamela Silver, who has written extensively on education, tell two roughly parallel stories about the social purposes of education. The United States story begins with the discovery of poverty in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the ways it overlapped with race and the expansion of federal involvement in education. The British story is about social class inequality, or more precisely, about unequal access to secondary and post-secondary education which only in the late 1960s became linked to poverty (and belatedly to race).

The Silvers' goal is to restore what they call "a proper complexity" (p. 4) to what happened, "to rescue complexity from the oversimplifications