

who are agents, with social control apparently the aim and result of the emerging system. In section three, all sides act upon and benefit from the system. We are told, "In one way or another the mid-century common school movement satisfied both collective (societal) and individual ambitions" (p. 233). This last position is Gidney and Millar's, but the difference is that they argue it consistently.

Houston and Prentice's book was a decade in the writing, and as the two authors' views developed, drafts written earlier were perhaps not made adequately congruent with later ones. Regardless of how they arose, Houston and Prentice's diverse, sometimes disparate, interpretations might be negatively seen as lacking focus. On the other hand, positive verdicts can be drawn. Robert Stamp, for example, says that the book "marks the final death of the revisionist movement and the triumphant arrival of post-modernism in Canadian educational history....The book's post-modernist stamp derives in part from the authors' skill in examining issues from various points of view."⁶ Thus, while Gidney and Millar allow us to see a fixed slice of the past, Houston and Prentice may help us to unfix our reified notions of nineteenth-century schooling, getting us beyond the debates of the 1970s. However, despite Stamp's assessment, Houston and Prentice's book is still steeped in revisionist debates of past decades, especially compared to Curtis's more innovative interpretation.

Although we can identify different perspectives in the three histories, we can also pinpoint an essential topic they all share. All of them are about change and agency in nineteenth-century schooling. Furthermore, all three concur on key points. They agree that the schooling system was centralized at the expense of local autonomy. They also agree that during the second half of the nineteenth-century schooling was transformed into something radically different from what it had been during the first. However, although they agree on the significant change, they differ on the change's significance. They also present different interpretations on exactly when and how this change came about.

In Curtis's book, and in section two of Houston and Prentice's, the school promoters *act* while the school supporters *react*. The promoters are generally described as having conscious intents, often based on a clear sense of class interests. The school supporters, on the other hand, are usually portrayed in opposition; they struggle *against* the centre, but rarely *for* self-initiated goals.⁷ This portrayal is where Gidney and Millar disagree with the other historians. In their book, as in their previous work, Gidney and Millar argue that families, students, and teachers were principal agents in creating public schooling.

The authors also have differences regarding the class interests that schooling served. There is agreement among all of them that educational reform was not "always, only or unambiguously in the interests of the governing classes."⁸ They would also all agree, at least in part, that in the mid-nineteenth century the "emerging bureaucratic modes of administration were, in themselves, the necessary procedures by which the public would participate in the public schools."⁹ What rouses serious disagreement, however, is the results of that participation. Gidney and Millar describe a public who identify their own interests and who

wilfully engage in a political process to shape the bureaucracy so that some of those interests are served. With the other historians, the state, with its ruling-class interests, wins out in the end.

Thus, although all of the historians discuss resistance to the centre's encroachments, only Gidney and Millar consistently portray the resisters as achieving any of their ends. Houston and Prentice are at best ambivalent about the resisters' gains, and Curtis is pessimistic. Those that resist, he says, receive "pain" from the central authority and do not partake in the "pleasure" that is available to those who comply. But those who comply take part in their own subjectification. The school promoters thus lead people to govern themselves to act in compliance with the needs of the bourgeoisie.

By arguing that people who complied became self-governed, Curtis in a sense gets away from an external social control thesis. But the masses are controlled nevertheless, and resistance simply serves to reinforce hegemony. Thus, although Curtis is the one who acknowledges Marx, Gidney and Millar are the ones who are dialectical in their analysis. In their history, the masses and those who hold state power act upon each other, and it is the synthesis of their actions that determine outcomes. For Gidney and Millar, power is not one-sided.

Houston, Prentice, and Curtis rest much of their argument about the centralization of power on their interpretation of the school acts of 1850 and 1853. The acts supplied the keystone of Ryerson's educational mansion.¹⁰ The foundation, they argue, had been put in place by earlier acts, so that "to all intents and purposes, by the time the Provincial Normal School opened its doors in Toronto in the fall of 1847, the essential framework of what in time would be known as the 'public school system' of Canada West was in place."¹¹ Houston and Prentice contend that "the laws of the 1850s established more firmly and elaborately than ever the administrative machinery of the provincial government. If the chief superintendent of schools lost some powers in the shuffle, they were few; the upshot was a central office with a great deal of authority to interfere, to advise, and to persuade, if not to coerce" (p. 125). Curtis clearly agrees.

Gidney and Millar do not. Their alternative interpretation of the acts of the 1850s is central to their argument. Undeniably, they say, the acts of 1850 and 1853 were important to the future of schooling's administration. But it was not these acts but those of 1865 and 1871 that were the real watershed (p. 94). The acts in the first half of the century did not lay the adequate foundation that Curtis, Houston, and Prentice say were there for the acts of the 1850s to build on. The apparatus was just not available for central control to become effective (p. 102). The result was that there was "no King in Israel" in the 1850s and early 1860s, the crucial formative years of the schooling system (p. 114). This meant that the customs and habits of people in local communities (or at least the middle class among them) shaped much of the system during these years (pp. 80, 317).

Therefore, crucial to Gidney and Millar's interpretation is their argument that, when centralization began to take hold in the 1860s, certain patterns forged by local communities had already become fixed. Ryerson and his inspectors had

to work within many of these patterns. Ironically, as the inspectorial gaze was able to peer further during the mid-1860s (to borrow a metaphor from Curtis), Ryerson faced more opposition and his powers actually decreased, not increased as Curtis and Houston and Prentice would have it. Gidney and Millar are careful to point out that neither now nor earlier does their analysis conclude that it was local demands alone that determined outcomes. Their point is rather that any analysis of change has to take into account the agency resulting from these demands (pp. 104, 191).

Again, Gidney and Millar are defending a case with a history. Lawr and Gidney presented the argument in a 1980 article.¹² Curtis argued against it at the 1985 Canadian Historical Association in Montreal.¹³ Houston and Prentice echo Curtis's argument in their book, challenging Gidney, Millar, and Lawr head-on on pages 154-55. The essence of Curtis's refutation is that the local demands did not shape the state but were rather a response to state actions already undertaken. As Houston and Prentice put it: "The demand for bureaucratic regulation followed, rather than preceded, the school legislation of mid-century" (p. 155). Gidney and Lawr's mistake, according to Curtis (p. 174), is that they view educational administration "largely as technique," without paying enough attention to its connection to political socialization.

But Gidney and Millar are not convinced. They use chapters four and five to lay the groundwork for their direct rebuttal on pages 102-103. There were no teeth in the school laws prior to the late 1860s. Locals were not forced to tie in with the centre by such laws that they could easily ignore. On the contrary, it was precisely in areas where there were no regulations that, when problems arose, locals made demands on the centre to provide mechanisms to help solve them. Gidney and Millar go so far as to say that parents "*created a new role for government*, making it the direct instrument by which they could provide a suitable education for their boys and girls" (p. 70, my emphasis). Such a line will never be written by a Foucaultian pen, and probably no former social controller, no matter how mellowed by the years, will ever accept such an interpretation. The debate, therefore, is not over.

Whereas in Curtis's and Houston and Prentice's histories Ryerson becomes essentially the master designer whose will creates a system, in Gidney and Millar's he becomes a brilliant man who contributes many ideas but has only some of them accepted. And what is crucial is that among those rejected are two of Ryerson's overriding principles: the primacy of the common school and the differentiation of superior education by curriculum and gender. The beauty of Gidney and Millar's skilled craft-work comes out in how they set up this key point. Throughout the early chapters they weave in two particular strands of Ryerson's educational fabric. We begin to see a little of them here, a bit more of them later on, until it increasingly appears that these two strands form the essence of Ryerson's design. However, as the story proceeds, these two strands become entangled with many others over which Ryerson and the central office have no effective control. Slowly these two strands become unravelled. By chapter nine

they no longer form the central motif in the fabric. How, therefore, can we credit so much of the fabric's final design to Ryerson? After 213 pages of setting this argument up, Gidney and Millar deliver the punch line:

Both Ryerson and Young could point with pride to any one of a large number of their proposals which had become provincial policy. And yet in some fundamental respects what had developed under Ryerson's tutelage was something quite different from what he had intended. From the beginning of his career as superintendent he had believed that Upper Canada's system of public instruction must be organized according to two central principles....Despite his best efforts, however, both had been problematic from the beginning, and during the decades of the 1870s they steadily lost ground. Even as Ryerson reaped the encomiums of thirty years of public service, the gap between his own vision of how things should be and the schools as they actually were was already too wide ever to be closed.

Aesthetically, this type of clincher is beyond the writing style found in Curtis's book. Its unity cannot be matched within Houston and Prentice's more scattered focus. But in achieving these artistic qualities in their history, Gidney and Millar had to forego others. There are thus some things that Curtis's history or Houston and Prentice's history can offer that Gidney and Millar's cannot.

Within each of the three books' strengths, therefore, are potential weaknesses. Tyack warns against the "simple additive eclecticism" that results when historians "mix interpretations promiscuously."¹⁴ None of the Ontario histories is a strong example of such eclecticism, but of the three, Houston and Prentice's multiple views leads them to the least theoretical unity. Tyack also cautions against the reverse problem: a reductionism that would force all historical data into a single, tight theoretical mould, one that would not allow for any shaping of contours by other perspectives. Although none of the three Ontario histories is reductionist to the extreme, Curtis at times comes close, and he would benefit from incorporating parts of Gidney and Millar's analysis. On the other hand, to build their substantial case, Gidney and Millar have had to maintain a dedicated focus for a decade and a half. They have had little time, and perhaps little inclination, to do more than glance at the Foucaultian and Gramscian debates that are so central to Curtis's work.

All of these histories are alike in that they share three components: a theoretical framework, an argument, and a depiction of events. They are unlike in that each of them puts more stress on one of these components than do the others. Curtis's principal strength is in developing an overarching theory that will forge new directions in the field. Gidney and Millar provide an exemplary model for a tightly-woven argument, marshalling all the facts and walking us through point by point. Houston and Prentice, despite the assaults on narrative history levelled by their graduate-days mentor Michael Katz, hold our interest

with a variety of insightful historical episodes. In sum, each of their histories can tell us something about the past; none of them can tell us everything. Together they tell us a lot.

NOTES

- * This essay was written while on a Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I thank J. Donald Wilson for sharing his insights on how these books fit within the historiography of Canadian education. The opinions in this review are, of course, my own responsibility.
1. E.g. *Schooling and Scholars*, 75, 192, 266-67; *Inventing Secondary Education*, 234.
 2. Michel Foucault, *Discipline And Punish: The Birth Of The Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 170.
 3. *Ibid.*, 173.
 4. *Schooling and Scholars*, xi.
 5. Chad Gaffield, "Back To School: Towards A New Agenda For The History Of Education," *Acadiensis* 15, 2 (Spring 1986): 169-90. For other "back to school" accounts, see chaps. 4 and 8 in Curtis, and chap. 6 in Gidney and Millar.
 6. Robert M. Stamp, Review of *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, *Ontario History* 81, 2 (1989): 153.
 7. E.g. *Schooling and Scholars*, 154-55; see also Bruce Curtis, "Policing Pedagogical Space: 'Voluntary' School Reform And Moral Regulation," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 13, 3 (1988): 295.
 8. *Building the Educational State*, 14.
 9. R.D. Gidney and D.A. Lawr, "Bureaucracy Vs. Community? The Origins of Bureaucratic Procedure in the Upper Canadian School System," *Journal of Social History* 13, 3 (1981): 453. In *Inventing Secondary Schooling* (p. 105), Gidney and Millar note with obvious relish that even Michael Katz now admits, "Within a large organization, democratic procedures require bureaucratic forms."
 10. *Schooling and Scholars*, 332.
 11. *Ibid.*, 123.
 12. D.A. Lawr and R.D. Gidney, "Who Ran the Schools? Local Influence on Educational Policy in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *Ontario History* 72, 3 (1980): 131-43.
 13. Curtis, "Policing Pedagogical Space," 295.
 14. David B. Tyack, "Ways Of Seeing: An Essay On The History Of Compulsory Schooling," in *History, Education, and Policy*, ed. Donald R. Warren (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1978), 89.

INTERPRETING SCHOOLING IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY ONTARIO*

Donald Soucy

Curtis, Bruce. *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871*. Lewes, U.K., and London, Ontario: Falmer Press & The Althouse Press, 1988. Pp. 450. \$25.00

Houston, Susan E. and Alison Prentice. *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988. Pp. xiv, 418. \$40.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Gidney, R.D. and W.P.J. Millar. *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Pp. xii, 411. \$42.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Judging from recent reviews and conference sessions, three key books are shaping our current understanding of schooling in nineteenth-century Ontario: Bruce Curtis's *Building the Educational State*, Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice's *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, and Robert D. Gidney and Winnifred P.J. Millar's *Inventing Secondary Education*. While each of these books has been reviewed separately in this journal, here they will be looked at together. This comparison makes it clear that, just as two artists depicting the same subject produce different interpretations, so too do these historians describe differently the "same" past. Some of the books' interpretations complement each other, others contradict, and others are simply talking about different things. As in any history, the perspective in each of the books can explain some things but not others.

Different perspectives fit certain times, places, and purposes. Houston, Prentice, Gidney, and Millar have roots in the revisionist debates of the 1970s. Houston and Prentice were grouped with the so-called "radical revisionists" led by Michael B. Katz. Gidney and Millar, along with their earlier collaborator the late Douglas Lawr, were more moderate. They revised Whiggish interpretations, but, unlike the radicals, they did not pose a social control thesis. Curtis's work,

on the other hand, is a product of the 1980s. He arrived after the radicals and moderates had staked out their territories, so he went out and found his own. His degree and university position are in sociology, not history or educational history. He thus carries different professional baggage than the other authors, which prepares him to arrive at different positions.

Perhaps it is Curtis's non-historical academic background that in part accounts for some of the methodological differences between his book and the other two. Whereas Houston and Prentice and Gidney and Millar present succinct syntheses of their data, Curtis lists quote after quote, note after note, in a sometimes antiquarian fashion. In addition, Houston and Prentice, and even more so Gidney and Millar, are more careful than Curtis to describe subtleties that historical research is yet unable to answer. They organize their data throughout to let you know which facts go with which arguments, which data are crucial, and which raise questions yet unanswered. Curtis, in contrast, tends to present many of his arguments in groups, primarily at the end of the book, and to list both crucial and peripheral data all mixed together in other groups. He leaves it to the reader to figure out how best to connect everything. In short, compared to the others, Curtis is excessive in factual detail but deficient in outlining and historically backing up interpretive details.

In addition to the authors' dissimilar disciplinary backgrounds, there are at least two other reasons for their different handling of language and data. The first, quite simply, is that in these books Gidney, Millar, Houston, and Prentice are better writers than Curtis (or at least one of the authors in each pair is). Their writing is carefully crafted, with well-worded sentences, attention to precision in meaning, well-organized flow, and use of enough literary technique to keep the reading pleasant. Curtis's writing, on the other hand, is too often unpolished and ambiguous. A good deal of the blame lies with his publisher, The Falmer Press. They provided Curtis with neither substantive editing nor copy-editing—certainly not the way to treat such an important book.

The second reason that Curtis is less careful about interpretive details is that his theoretical concern is more with the larger picture. Thus, in Curtis, but not in the other two, we have heavy borrowing from Marx, Foucault, and Gramsci. Although Curtis appears to have a dim view of certain power relations, it could be argued that he has adopted Foucault's strategy of limiting analysis to how those relations came about, not whether they are good or bad. It is primarily by describing events in Foucaultian and Gramscian terminology that Curtis links the institutionalization of schooling with the formation of the Canadian state. He argues that the centralization of educational authority, along with schooling's "subjectification" of individuals, its "remaking" of popular culture and family relations, its moulding of moral character, and its "solidification of genial habits," all worked in unison to create ruling class "hegemony" by imposing a "popular intelligence" that would accept "bourgeois ideology" as normal and natural. The education system was a pioneer in establishing a centralized state apparatus that

could “gaze” upon citizens. Thus schooling played a vital role in building the capitalist state.

Curtis’s use of Foucaultian and Gramscian terms leads to more than stylistic differences between him and Houston, Prentice, Gidney, and Millar. Underlying the terms are concepts and analyses that allow arguments unavailable in the other two histories. The result is that Curtis’s book goes the furthest of the three in setting new theoretical directions for the 1990s. For example, all three histories stress the role of discipline in nineteenth-century schooling.¹ But neither Gidney and Millar nor Houston and Prentice comes up with as far-reaching and speculative analysis of discipline as Curtis achieves by adapting Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault asserts:

Discipline “makes” individuals; it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise....The success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination.²

It is by echoing these concepts throughout his book that Curtis is able to present a much different perspective on discipline than is found in the other two books.

Curtis posits that discipline, “self-formation,” and self-policing were all intentions of school reform. Education authorities sought to observe the “pedagogical space” through a complex network of intelligence gathering. “Tours of inspection, annual reports, report cards, public examinations, and so forth made visible the activities of those involved in schooling” (p. 376). Curtis finds a striking parallel between Foucault’s “analysis of ‘panopticism’ as a model of disciplinary power and the education office’s conception of pedagogical authority” (p. 165). Curtis paints a picture in which the educational reformers—especially Ryerson—consciously try to build an educational “space” that fits what Foucault describes as the “perfect disciplinary apparatus,” a space that

would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned.³

Curtis describes Canada West’s Education Office as this type of central point (e.g. pp. 366-67). Using different conceptual tools, neither Houston and Prentice nor Gidney and Millar could validly sum up their own positions on discipline as Curtis does in one of his more quotable lines: “Education, for Ryerson was not a *means* to government; education *was* government: government of the self” (p. 110).

This last sentence also typifies another way that Curtis differs from the other historians: its conclusion is inferred from much less evidence than would be allowed in either of the two other histories. Curtis achieves this inference through a technique he uses throughout his book. He selects historical events, or he takes quotes and actions by nineteenth-century figures (as often as not Ryerson), and describes or paraphrases them in terms (often metaphorical and Foucaultian) related to his overarching theory. He then infers that his subjects understood their own lives within the framework of these terms. From there it is easy to leap to the inference that his overarching theory explains causal factors for the events and for the motives behind his subjects' actions. The lawyer's precision with which Gidney and Millar argue such details is not Curtis's mode. Thus we can gain from him insights into Foucaultian interpretations, but we should turn elsewhere if we need solid evidence on details such as Ryerson's actual motives and beliefs, such as whether the Superintendent really believed that education "was government" as opposed to a "means to government," or whether he even viewed the situation in such terms.

Another characteristic that sets Curtis apart from the others is his use of language. Though rich in potential meaning, it is often ambiguous. He never, for example, clearly defines so key a term as "educational state." In contrast, the exactness Gidney and Millar use in setting out an argument goes hand-in-hand with their accuracy in use of terms. They spend a good part of their introduction surveying the changing meaning of key words, letting us know what the terms meant in the nineteenth century and how they will be used in the book. Throughout their history, they take time to introduce us more thoroughly to both unfamiliar terms, such as "collegiate institute" (p. 199), and overly familiar ones, such as "school" (p. 121) and "science education" (p. 287). They, like Houston and Prentice, "pay careful attention to words, to their shifting meanings over time and to the ways in which nineteenth-century usage differs deceptively from today's."⁴ In comparison, Curtis is more anachronistic in his use of terms.

None of the authors, however, gives precise meanings of terms related to class. Gidney and Millar use a loose notion of class as one of their major units of analysis, the others being sex (pp. 15-19) and families (pp. 26-32), and to a more limited extent geography (pp. 282-83). They outline factors of social class in chapter two, and they attempt a definition of "middle class" in their introduction. The definition is broad: the middle class "includes the people who could afford the opportunity costs and other expenses of keeping their children in school for a few years longer than the majority of Upper Canadians, and whose children formed the clientele of the senior classes in the common schools, the grammar schools, and the colony's various private and collegiate schools" (p. 8). This definition is clearly circular when it is coupled with their contention that these schools were middle class (the middle class is defined as those who go to high school; the high schools are therefore middle-class institutions). But it is generally a workable definition for most of their purposes. They admit that the definition is "theoretically unsatisfying" (p. 8), but they also tend to avoid the need for a

correct class theory (is there one?) by identifying more easily measured variables such as parental occupations.

Curtis also says that class is one of his major areas of concentration (p. 12). But though he assigns actions, intents, interests, and ideologies to specific classes, he never outlines the factors that determine the structure of each of these classes. At different times he categorizes the "educational state builders" and theorists as the "governing classes," the "ruling classes," the "respectable classes," the "bourgeoisie," or even, curiously, as the "middle class." He never gives us even a Gidney and Millar-like crude definition that would help us to know what, if anything, distinguishes these classes from each other or from the social classes of what he calls the "school supporters." Like Gidney and Millar, Curtis can present his case even though he lacks a clear framework of class. But his history suffers more from this lack than does the history by the other two, since he does not compensate for it with careful accuracy in other areas.

One way Curtis and Gidney and Millar are alike is that they present one clear argument as the crux of their history. Not so with Houston and Prentice. They divide their book into three sections; and whereas Gidney and Millar's chapters generally lead from one to the next, Houston and Prentice's sections do not. In fact, their sections at times present differing points of view.

In their book's first section, "Interpreting Pioneer Schooling," Houston and Prentice stress family strategies. They argue that, for Upper Canadians in the early nineteenth century, most education took place within the household. Families transmitted skills from one generation to the next, and they determined where and with whom children would attend formal schools (pp. 58-60, 81). Many of these schools, especially the private-venture ones, were very much family affairs (pp. 56, 69). Given the scarcity of historical sources on education during this period, Houston and Prentice do an admirable job describing it. Their bottom-up focus on families is achieved through using certain types of evidence. They piece together their story from diaries, popular writings of the period, letters, sermons, newspapers, and from official documents and secondary sources. For their description of the programmes and teachers of private-venture schooling, they depend primarily on newspaper ads, as do Gidney and Millar.

In their second section, "Mid-Nineteenth-Century School Reform," Houston and Prentice suddenly shift their focus from families to legislation. They also call upon different sources. Whereas the first section allows for some voices of school consumers to be heard, the second gives voice primarily to the promoters, especially Ryerson. The emphasis is now top-down, with official documents and reports providing most of the historical evidence. In their book's last section, Houston and Prentice take up Chad Gaffield's (1986) call to "go back to school."⁵ Unlike the first two sections, in which voices from below are heard separately from the voice of above, this last part is better at letting both types of voices speak to us in the same conversation.

As can be seen, Houston and Prentice deliver mixed messages. In section one, families shape events. In section two it is Ryerson and the school promoters