

osophy, but an economic strategy occasioned by the decline of value of Shaker men's marketable goods after the Civil War, and the increased economic value of Shaker women's crafts work. In addition, the Shaker spiritual equality was based upon a commitment to celibacy, thus reaffirming the lesson of the Texas Woman's Commonwealth, that true equality between women and men might only be possible if they have limited contact with one another.

The implications of these readings for educational historians are both theoretical and historiographical. Like alternative communities, schools and programmes of education have been formed with social visions and objectives in mind. Yet do students and teachers receive and experience those visions in the same way as the founders intend? To what extent do the daily experiences of participants conform to the visionary intentions of founders? What is the nature of participants' resistance, adaptation, or accommodation to institutional goals, and to what extent is their response determined by gender, class, age, and prestige within the institution?

The historiographical questions raised by this text are equally provocative, if troubling. The nature of available evidence is rarely discussed in these articles (with the notable exception of Beverly Gordon's excellent piece on the uses of material culture in social history). This creates serious problems for the interpretation and evaluation of these communities, since in some cases, the majority of resources used were those produced by the community itself. The evaluation

of the success of the Woman's Commonwealth in Texas is particularly questionable, since evidence of dissenters in the community is either unavailable or unused. Similarly, in an otherwise enlightening study of Sojourner Truth's participation in a number of ill-fated inter-racial communities in the North, we are left unclear about Truth's own experience or observations. The absence of historical sources is a problem that cannot be easily solved; but particularly when studying the experiences of those who are silenced—women, children, and the dissenters in closed communities—the absence of records can not be presumed to mean absence of critique. Educational historians who are struggling with the reconstruction of the history of students and teachers may find this problem, and the often contradictory pressures of power and progressivism, all too familiar.

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**Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds. *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. Pp. 303. \$16.95 paper, \$40.00 cloth.**

Edited by historian Franca Iacovetta and sociologist Marina Valverde, *Gender Conflicts* consists of eight essays and an introduction which explore "not only the conflicts that

characterized relations between men and women, but also conflicts among women of different racial, class and cultural backgrounds" (p. xii).

In addition to indicating themes and questions in the papers that follow, the introduction also reviews Canadian feminist and women's history from the 1970s to the 1990s. The authors pay tribute to those who researched and wrote about the lives of women at a time when the institutional supports for such work were nonexistent. While acknowledging the importance of these "pioneer" historians, however, the authors of *Gender Conflicts* raise different questions, explore different fields and sources, and look for different and changing meanings and relations of gender. In the process, they offer a critique of, and promise a corrective to, the biases and omissions they find in their foremothers' work. In some ways, therefore, the book deals with feminist conflicts as well as gender conflicts. That is, the book enters an ongoing debate in Canada and elsewhere about how feminist historians interpret the past. Should feminist historians write women's history or gender history, and what are the implications of either choice? How does "gender" work in feminist writing and in the lives of women and men? How are gender relations, gender experience, and gender identity interrupted or reinforced by class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, or religion?

While they do not claim to answer all of these questions, the papers in the book chart some important new domains for Canadian feminist history. All the authors demonstrate that "gender" does not hold a stable meaning,

and that a close reading of some surprising sources suggests that women experienced and negotiated gender in vastly different ways. Karen Dubinsky's interpretations of parliamentary debates which constructed "seduction" as a punishable offence and her incisive reading of transcripts from rural cases that were tried within this legislation, question any easy relationship between dominant moral discourses, on the one hand, and sexual relations between women and men, on the other. She shows that legislation was of little use for the women who sought redress against men through the courts. These women often found that it was their morality and sexual conduct that were at issue, rather than the behaviour of the offending men. As a source for historians, however, the documents from the cases that did come to the court's attention offer a unique glimpse into heterosexual relationships among rural youths, as well as into the construction of gender as a category in Canadian law.

There are some intriguing parallels and contrasts between the seduction cases that Dubinsky explores, and the tale told by Carolyn Strange of two murder trials against Toronto women. Both papers deal with rape and other forms of violence against women, although in the two cases that Strange describes, women killed their offenders, rather than taking what they perceived as a futile route through the courts, a route which frustrated and disappointed the women that Dubinsky followed. The two women standing trial for murder in Toronto were both acquitted. Strange argues that this outcome was not a result of a legal

process that was fair to women. Rather, she suggests that the male defence lawyers constructed a courtroom drama where they became the heroic saviours of wounded womanhood, in spite of the fact that killings were clearly deliberated in both cases. Based on trial documents and newspaper accounts, Strange's account depicts two very different constructions of femininity: in one case race and sexuality were crucial to this construction (Clara Ford was a black woman who liked to dress in men's clothes), while in the other a more conventional rural and maidenly innocence completed the picture of womanhood (Carrie Davies was a poor Irish girl who saved her earnings for her family).

Lynne Marks' paper also explores a domain that few feminist historians have touched, gender relations in the Salvation Army. While several Canadian historians have written about women missionaries and women in more established churches, Marks takes us into the life of a very different kind of organization. In a well-written chapter she argues persuasively that the public spectacle of uniforms, street parades, music, and public meetings drew many working-class women to the Army for short periods. For those who stayed, however, the comradeship among its officers, the relative equality between women and men, and the responsibility it afforded women were more important. It is interesting to compare the degree of gender equality in this largely working-class religious organization with that of women in explicitly political, left-wing groups and parties. Reading Marks' stories of women in the Salvation Army against

Jane Newton's interesting account of socialist women or Ruth Frager's interpretation of two strikes against Eaton's, it is rather striking to find that women might have found greater room for equality and support in the former rather than the latter. Both Newton and Frager show that women in socialist parties or in unions could not always count on the support of male comrades. On the other hand, as women and men on strike against Eaton's discovered, solidarity from women was not always forthcoming either, particularly when the strikers were Jewish. Both writers demonstrate that race, ethnicity, and religion were as divisive on the Canadian Left in the early twentieth century as they are today.

In her paper on Toronto social workers and immigrant families in the 1950s, Franca Iacovetta draws on a huge number of case files to consider the everyday negotiations of ethnicity, gender, and class relations of women and men who sought the assistance of social workers. While many who came to the agency were clearly in distress, and while one of the mandates of the social workers was to "Canadianize" their clients and to "reform" their families, the reality of interactions between clients and social workers was far more varied than this first impression would suggest. It seems that many clients used the services of several social agencies in a pragmatic fashion, behaving not at all like helpless victims. At the same time, some workers subverted the official ideology of the agency they worked for, and efforts to "Canadianize" clients were rather unsuccessful.

Iacovetta's close and detailed reading of case files from the 1950s provides an interesting link to Mariana Valverde's paper on the racial and sexual metaphors and meanings of early twentieth-century feminist discourse. If the social workers in Iacovetta's paper are "the mother of the race" in Valverde's account, then something has gone amiss between the generations. Or perhaps it offers hope that women (and men) often resist and subvert racist and sexist discourses? Valverde's historical territory will likely be more familiar to readers of this journal than the other papers in the collection. However, she offers a new reading of how evangelism, science, and tourism influenced the discourses of early feminists. Notions of race, sexuality, and reproduction were especially important in shaping feminist politics. In her re-reading of early feminist discourses, however, Valverde is not proposing that the meanings of these terms were stable or self-evident. Nor does she propose that political outcomes followed as simple effects of discourse. Rather, she provides a detailed investigation into particular organizations and their strategies to show both the constraints and the variety of Anglo-Saxon, middle-class feminist politics.

Cynthia Wright's paper moves into a different domain than the others in the book, both in terms of its arguments and in its sources. Wright claims that although consumption is widely recognized by historians and sociologists as "women's work," there are surprisingly few feminist researchers who have taken this activity seriously as an area of inquiry. More-

over, the research that has been done tends to treat shopping as a relatively uniform and mundane set of tasks. In contrast, Wright suggests in this well-argued paper that shopping, and especially the advent of department store shopping, is in need of a nuanced gender history, a history that would consider the pleasures of shopping, how stores were spatially organized, how goods were presented and advertised, and how stores such as Eaton's catered to particular groups of women. She suggests in her conclusion (and I think she is right) that a history of consumer culture could form "a key component of understanding the reorganization of class and gender relations in the twentieth century" (p.250).

In terms of the feminist conflicts that began this review, I think there may be more continuities than discontinuities between *Gender Conflicts* and the work of the preceding "generation" of Canadian feminist historians. As the authors acknowledge, the papers focus on central, English-speaking Canada, and all the contributors are white women with a graduate education. Nevertheless they approach questions of gender conflicts and differences between women in a direct way, proving, perhaps unwittingly, that their social location has not prevented them from interrogating matters of class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality. Although none of the papers deal with topics that are usually contained under the rubric of education history, they have much to offer in terms of their methodology, their range of sources, and their writing. These are superbly told stories, full of drama and suspense. Finally, *Gender Conflicts* is

also suggestive of possible future research in the history of education.

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**Lutz Niethammer.** *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?* trans. Patrick Camiller. London: Verso, 1992. Pp. 158. \$43.95 Cdn., cloth.

We who came to the history of education in the heady days of the early 1970s thought we knew why we were doing the history we did: our work was informed by our politics and would, in turn, contribute to social renewal. In the mid-1990s, the social purposes of studying the history of education are not nearly as clear: reforming schools alone, much less laying the foundations of a new social order, seem distant, utopian projects in the current cynical and despairing climate. The subtitle of the volume under review, addressed to historians, asks whether history has come to an end: i.e., have we seen the demise of intellectuals' meaningful engagement with the processes of historical change? Lutz Niethammer deals with the grand sweep of twentieth-century European intellectual history, next to which our own political-intellectual biographies may appear diminutive indeed. But he means us to think about our larger responsibilities as historians and in fact, he challenges us to do so.

Apparently common currency in German intellectual circles, the word

"posthistoire" will be unfamiliar, I suspect, to most North Americans. A seemingly French word, its origins actually lie among post-war German intellectuals. Posthistoire refers to a world in which life is lived without any seriousness or struggle, "in the regulated boredom of a perpetual reproduction of modernity on a world scale" (p. 3). It recalls poststructuralism, post-modernism, and the other "posts" which are part of the epistemological confusion of the current intellectual moment. "The inflation of the various 'post' concepts might suggest that we are no longer able or willing to define the content of where we are and where we want to go....What used to appear self-evident or desirable has lost its innocence, and now words more or less fail us" (p. 10).

But while these allusions point us in the right direction, there remains a long journey through dense verbiage to understand what this book is about. Niethammer is a prominent German historian, far more at home with speculative philosophy of history than most Anglo-American historians. While ultimately the intricate thickets of his translated German yield glimpses of shining clarity, the question facing English-speaking readers is, is the difficult read worth it?

Consider the following postulate offered without further argumentation, as if we all understand, accept, and are guided by it in our historical practice: "As a rule, meaningful history is created through advances in the interpretation of traces of real events from the past. However, for the relationship between history and any practical endeavour, what is decisive is that the