

consistent) philosophy. Alexander's thin conceptual analysis makes him appear more political opportunist than visionary educator. Although the humanitarian accomplishments of the Movement are hard to ignore, one must wonder if Coady is the proper figure for adulation.

*The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today* is a useful introduction to the topic, especially as a casual read at the undergraduate level, but its considerable shortcomings make it of limited use to historians or educators. As history, it simply does not bring new insights or evidence to bear on a fascinating topic. As education, it promotes political bravado over careful philosophical consideration. At a time when many decry the lack of "vision" among adult educators, we must resist a vision of empty rhetoric fuelling mindless activism.

Eric Damer  
University of British Columbia

Doug Owrain, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, [10] 392.

Doug Owrain has produced the first book-length study of the English-Canadian middle class baby boom generation of the 1950s and 1960s. Historians usually shy away from the experiences of a generation. Owrain chose them since, in his view, boomers are one of the rare groups in history to think of themselves explicitly "in terms of generational identity." Owrain sees generations as historic rather than demographic phenomena, and convincingly identifies his subject as those born between the "late war and about 1955 or 1956" (as opposed to the more extended and common 1946–1962 benchmarks). He thus excludes generation Xers.

He is writing the history of the first twenty-five years of this generation, the period when baby boomers had the most influence and power. The author explicitly identifies his topic as white, English Canadian, middle class boomers: "[T]he very poor, the very remote, certain ethnic communities had a very different experience and ... did not fully participate in the generational sense of self..." This legitimate distinction raises thought-provoking questions others must try to answer: How did the working class and other ethnic groups of the baby boom differ from their middle class colleagues in terms of attitudes and behaviour documented in this study, and, more generally, How did they perceive themselves if not "generationally"?

Owrain peppers his study with comparative American data and developments. Although he does not try to account fully for differences between English Canadian middle class boomers and their American counterparts, he

often suggests possible comparative explanations. In this respect, Owrām's study offers more than it promises.

Not only is the topic of this study clearly laid out, but the analytical approach is easy to follow. Owrām organizes his material into chapters based on the life cycles of boomers from early childhood to university life. Briefly stated, his intention is to explain how boomers' experiences at each life cycle created a self-consciously unique generation and led to the restiveness of the 1960s. Indeed, one of the central contentions of this study is that the various experiences of the baby boom generation made them unique, as they lived through a long list of unprecedented and distinctive events and developments. Emphasizing distinctive features of boomers at every life-stage, Owrām carefully discusses their upbringing in his most original and enlightening chapters.

Owrām does consider various theses about childhood that may account for the rebellious behaviour of boomers in the 1960s. However, he combines and develops them considerably to produce more satisfying explanations. The essence of his argument is that as no generation before, boomers were at the centre of attention at every stage of their lives—whether in their families, in their suburban neighbourhoods, or at school—largely due to their numbers. Never before had Canadian society had to contend with so *many* children.

But Owrām goes beyond demographic explanations to look into the attitudes and expectations of the parents of this exceptional generation. With the help of telling statistics and prescriptive literature, he is able to demonstrate how the men and women, each according to their own gendered experience, just recently out of the War and able to remember the devastation wrought by the Depression, were a "fragile" and insecure generation who strove for the security and stability of marriage and family life. In fact, Owrām argues that "the young adults of the 1940s were the most domestically oriented generation of the twentieth century." More specifically, this meant that their children would be raised in what Owrām terms "filiocentric" families: boomers would be "more at the centre of the family universe than had been the case for any previous generation." They would be raised in more permissive families: "permissiveness suited the political climate of the age," and respect for democracy had to be instilled early in the home—which explains why parents of the 1940s and 1950s were so receptive to Dr. Spock and his permissive child-raising advice. But Owrām demonstrates that boomers' rejection of authority in the 1960s is linked to a wider range of causes than the prescriptions of one hugely popular doctor.

Owrām stresses the impact of unprecedented post-war affluence to explain boomers' carefree and optimistic attitudes and rejection of convention in the 1960s. Young people raised in affluence "with more disposable income than

previous generations... could take the time to investigate the world” and believe that it was theirs to conquer. Unlike many, Owram does not use this analysis to belittle boomers’ beliefs. Although he acknowledges their often naive optimism, he analyses their initiatives at face value, recognizing them as products of an era, not a pocketbook.

One is tempted to argue that the well documented and sophisticated analysis provided in these chapters on boomers’ early life points to another generation, the “domestic generation.” In addition to their distinctive experiences during the Depression and the War, the mothers and fathers of a self-conscious generation may have developed their own sense of generational identity in self-defense increasingly reminded as they were of belonging to the “over 30” crowd. Owram may have written the history of *two* self-conscious generations. He underlines continuities linking the decades of the 1950s and the 1960s, bringing out surprising yet clear behaviour patterns and values in both. Through this “unorthodox” perspective Owram argues effectively that “both decades were searching for personal well being.” In the 1950s, this search was couched essentially “in Freudian terms”; in the 1960s it was translated to a quest for “authenticity, or even LSD.”

Other chapters focus on boomers evolving into young adults within the university environment of changing music, drugs, dress, language, values, and attitudes. Owram avoids falling into platitudes about the 1960s, instead providing background material peppered with enlightening statistics and evocative quotations, and drawing apparently disparate developments into a cohesive story. Throughout the author is sensitive to the differing experiences and preoccupations of the young men and women at the time. We are not served up the women’s-history-in-the-footnotes type of gender analysis. His chapter on the “Sexual Revolution,” for example, provides a sensitive and well developed analysis of the contrasting experiences of young men and women in this era of the Pill, debates over legalized abortion, and the second wave of the women’s movement.

Owram’s style greatly enhances the appeal of this study. While providing all the necessary scientific data and qualifications to sustain his arguments, he infuses his text with cleverly written, illustrative *fictional* situations. Nor does Owram hesitate to engage the reader by passing judgements on the events and pronouncements he comes across. In this way he is close to reaching an ideal many historians pay lip service to but rarely attain: writing a remarkable study both for the “community of scholars” and for the wider public.

*Nicole Neatby*  
*University of Prince Edward Island*