

Forum: Reflections on Radical History

Introduction

Ian Christopher Fletcher

In January 2000, *Radical History Review* held its second annual roundtable at the American Historical Association meeting in Chicago. Our topic was “Radical Historians and Political Engagement,” and two of the four presenters, Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Felix Masud-Piloto, were not affiliated with the journal’s editorial collective or associates group. The papers were subsequently published in *Radical Historians’ Newsletter* 82 (June 2000). In May, as part of what has become a continuing effort at outreach, *Radical History Review* asked a diverse group of forty-four scholars and activists from Canada, Mexico, and the United States to reflect on the practice, politics, and prospects of radical history. Sixteen were able to accept our invitation, and we are delighted to present their short but wide-ranging essays in this anniversary issue. Only one of our contributors, Ellen Carol DuBois, is connected to the journal.

We offered several open-ended questions as starting points for our contributors’ reflections:

- What can you tell us about your formation as an academic or activist interested in radical history? How do you understand the forces (social, political, discursive, institutional, etc.) that have shaped your identity and outlook? Do you have a sense of yourself as belonging to (or dissenting from) a tradition, generation, or community?
- What does “radical history” mean to you? Are there other terms that you prefer to use to describe your “take” on critical or oppositional history? What do you see as the

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leading ideas, central issues, key texts, and/or defining moments in the emergence of radical history as a field of inquiry and struggle?

- How do you think the political challenges, theoretical innovations, and other changes of recent decades have affected the project or practice of radical history? Have you rethought what radical history means as a consequence of the crisis or transition through which we are living?
- What do you think are the prospects of radical history? Are there new topics, tasks, perspectives, methods, or sources that excite you? How can (and why should) radical historians seek to speak to people in the general public as well as to academics and students? In what ways does our mass-mediated world offer opportunities as well as constraints for the elaboration and dissemination of radical history?
- How can radical history deepen or renew its connection to the left and the labor and social movements? What are the responsibilities of radical historians as activists, public intellectuals, citizens? Inside or outside academia, what has been your experience combining history and activism?

We encouraged contributors to write about what moved or mattered to them, and each of the resulting essays is a unique response to the questions. We hope readers will enjoy and learn from the variety of voices and views in this forum. They mix the personal, the political, the pedagogical, the programmatic, the philosophical, and even the humorous.

Obviously, short essays can't begin to exhaust the issues raised by this forum. We are interested in moving this dialogue forward. In that spirit, we invite readers to share their thoughts about the issues by contributing to *RHR*'s H-RADHIST discussion list and by joining us at our next annual roundtable at the American Historical Association meeting. For the Boston meeting in January 2001, the topic will be "Radical Historians and Transnational Activism." For more information, please visit our Web site at <http://chnm.gmu.edu/rhr/>.

Radical History Review is grateful to our contributors and to the other invited scholars and activists who could not participate but who nevertheless wished us success. I would also like to thank Yukiko Hanawa, a member of the *RHR* associates group, and Seth Fein for helping me contact colleagues, and Nell Irwin Painter for encouraging me to understand that "radical historians" must confront the exclusionary practices and conceptions of our own project if we are to reach out to other historians and a wider public and really open ourselves to the possibilities of dialogue, collaboration, and renewal.

One Single Catastrophe

Tani E. Barlow

Motion under compulsion
 Written successive growth and decay
 Its sticky saltiness
 Destroyed taken over the page
 That history told
 Blows and thirst.
 —Myung Mi Kim, “Anna O Addendum”

You might say that I became what I am now in flight from Benjamin’s angel of history. I became a historian, rather than some other sort of scholar, only because teenage me met and eventually married the influential writer Donald M. Lowe, my risk-taking professor who taught Marxism at San Francisco State University for thirty years, and he called *himself* a historian. I was also drawn to the radical social history movement exploding Westward from Cambridge, New Haven, and New York to the Bay Area, and historiographically from British and U.S. works into the new, left-wing fields of modern China studies and the Chinese peasant and women’s history projects it was fostering. What made it possible for me to play out fortuity and determination in such a way that fifteen years after the fact I can, in good faith, accept the task of writing about *having been formed* radical and historian is a memory of reading a Golden Book about Pompeii when I was four or five. There for the first time I saw drawings of the famous plaster people fleeing Vesuvius. In my child mind, the white casts of empty space that another human body had made under showers of killing ash and the freeze-frame of flowing lava had achieved visible solidity only because someone that I might grow up to be like had poured plaster of paris into a hole in the rock. (This preoccupation with sudden disaster and mummification persisted even after the end of the Cold War. When I finally got myself all the way to Pompeii I could not get in the gate to actually see the plaster casts because the park workers had gone on strike. It figures.)

Benjamin’s angel of history sees the one single catastrophe. The historians I studied with saw the chain of events. I seemed to have figured out that my job was to fill the empty cavity of the material past with my own plaster of paris. The line of influences runs from E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Barrington Moore, and social histories of the Chinese revolution (e.g., Philip Huang, Mark Selden, Marilyn Young, K. C. Hsiao, Yungfa Chen, Fred Wakeman, and so on), to Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roz Coward and *m/f*, Ding Ling, Joan Scott, Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Spivak. Each has helped me to consider if not a chain of events, then something less eschatological than one great catastrophe. Perhaps for these reasons I

retain in my own psychogeography a sense that “radical history” has largely remained a signifier for 1970s and ’80s neo-Marxist histories of the United States and Europe.¹ Even now Geoff Eley must struggle on in the precincts of radical history to draw attention to the overdetermined and necessary fiction of “the worker” in radical social history of labor.²

My wariness about radical history may also rest in part on its residual presumptions about centers (capital, development, colonizer, destination, imperialist, our ethnic diversity, etc.) and their purported peripheries (postsocialist, underdeveloped, semicolonial, migration from, anticolonial nationalism, etc.). If I ever had any doubts about the longevity of that political obstacle, they would be dispelled in the spectacle of recent debates on globalization and empire neatly recentering the attention of radical historians back on the putative West again, bypassing (again) what Fred Y. Chiu and Marshall Johnson call “agencies whose contingent patterns always admit the possibility of otherwise” in what they term loosely to be “Asia” and think about in relation to processes they call subimperialism and suborientalism.³

Under the weight of this and other burdens I turned to a kind of historical writing that considered again the question of how ideological languages in the past had conveyed social categories and relations of inequality. Looking back it seems to me that there were several basic reasons why historians like me made this turn when we did. Radical historians of China had a lot to rethink when the Chinese state and a vocal element of the people repudiated Maoism and collectivism. I first went to China and lived there in the early 1980s and consequently had to rethink my graduate school experience in relation to living people just before I wrote my dissertation. I rethought the women’s movement and sectarian politics on the left in the aftermath of the dismemberment of the People’s Republic of China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In light of the tragedies that have followed, my cohort and I turned toward other ways of thinking about social existence. We began paying more attention to interest movements and articulate minorities within the shifting boundaries of post-’89 recast state formations. The politicization of representational methods in scholarship that highlights ethnic, national, and gendered difference and takes seriously the relation of power and responsibility that writing about people outside one’s immediate community entails.

“Radical history” is too valuable to give up, of course. It is a necessary resource for those who would make historically informed criticism patiently self-critical, particularly in specialist or area studies where judgments made across national historical conventions are inescapable and where the region in question is not the West, though it may be the place where one is presently residing (see *Inter Asia Cultural Studies*, issue 1). I think to be true to the spirit of radicalism radical history should get completely out of the game of strict partition (e.g., center and periphery, global/local) and concern itself with the analytic or theoretical problem of

exactly where the presumption of heterogeneity leaves history writers.⁴ For instance, a position I take (indebted to the historians of the Subaltern Studies project) in East Asia studies debates is that China historiography might profitably consider the colonial origins of modernity when investigating the relation of Chinese semicolonialism broadly construed and the Chinese Revolution.⁵

A *détourned* radical history may in fact be another of those possible instruments—like cultural studies has proven to be in Taiwan, China, Japan, Singapore, India, etc.—for imagining political affinities across the many dimensions of our differences. Where radical history abandons habits keeping it confined to a U.S.-European self-referential grid, then other strict lines of difference begin to look less stable. And that has got to be a good thing for a historian whose craft obligation is to assume that the past was lived in the very messy tense of the future anterior. Periodization may have to be redrawn, as Claudia Pozzana and Sandro Russo have argued, in relation to the history of Chinese Marxism and the singularity of the Chinese Revolution.⁶ The problems of political subjects and historical representation, to say nothing of archiving and narrating practices, become, Yukiko Hanawa has elegantly shown, quite problematic, indeed.⁷ Yes, probably the relation of history and historiography will have to change. But no, a radical history *détourned* still loves the archives, still reads documents that are not all fictional, still tries to rethink the things that really matter in an internationalist, progressive politics which registers the crises of economic globalization.

Now that I work in a department of women's studies (which has refused to even consider renaming itself "women and critical gender studies," no matter how strenuously generations of students and many newly hired faculty remonstrate), the importance of teaching historical method is far more clear to me than it was when I taught in history departments. Happily, I send off a significant fraction of my students into Chicano/Chicana labor organizing, historical preservation and community work at Seattle's Wing Luke museum, racial justice and sexual minority rights work, law school, and just lately a new domain called policy studies. But even as I do, I agonize over how to write a history curricula that might forestall the slide of international difference into American multiethnicity, to borrow Nikhil Pal Singh's formulation. No, I argue to my students, the "People's Republic of China" is not an ethnicity or a racial identity or a problem for "feminism" that can be adjudicated using the logics of U.S. multicultural civility. I have to ask myself: what difference does a renewed connection with left labor and the new social movements make if the radical history my elite students learn from me just recycles their already unflinching national chauvinism and U.S.-centered neoliberalism? How can I convince them that "postcolonialism" is a polite way of saying The End to a radical history centered on them? And how long does it take to convince students that Marx does not belong to Europe, that feminism does not belong to them!⁸ The many crises of our time are

now being contained under the signifier “globalization.” Our students are receptive to this term, for they are not fools. But can they see that anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle are both a beacon of a new radical politics and a warning sign that until the matter of internationalism is sorted out, chauvinism (intellectual, student, labor, etc.)—nationalism in the guise of benevolent human rights and official U.S. feminism—will persist. Whose history? Whose catastrophe? Whose processes? Whose Vesuvius?

In 1974 Guy Debord was writing about the history of the disbanding of the Situationist International. “For anyone who has not forgotten the conflicted and passionate relations [of the group],” he wrote, “this [blueprint of a garden] must appear to be a sort of inverse Pompeii: *the relief of a city that was not built*.”⁹ I found this epigraph instructive since it obliquely points to both the passionate dead who cannot be buried and the historical blueprint of cities never built. Between the material plaster cast of a man in flight and this inverse Pompeii lies the process of “blows and thirst” that is history rather than nothing; and the “history told” that Myung Mi Kim utters in “Anna O Addendum” is particularly hard to write in just one language.

Notes

1. For the history of the theories of “drifting” and psychogeography as the Situationist International developed them see Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 69–104.
2. Geoff Eley, “Is All the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later,” in Terrence McDonald, ed., *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 226.
3. Johnson and Chiu, eds., “Introduction,” “Subimperialism,” *positions* 8:1 (Spring 2000): 2. See also “Questioning Asia,” *Inter Asia Cultural Studies* 1 (2000), which submits the regional focus of the journal itself to historical deconstruction.
4. Tani E. Barlow, ed., “History and Heterogeneity,” parts one and two, *positions* 6:1–2 (Fall 1998).
5. See Tani E. Barlow, ed., *Formations of Colonial Modernity in Eastern Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).
6. See Claudia Pozzana, “Spring, Temporality, and History in Li Dazhao,” *positions* 3:2 (Fall 1995): 283–305; and Alessandro Russo, “‘The Probable Defeat’: Preliminary Notes on the Chinese Cultural Revolution,” in *positions* 6:1 (Spring 1998).
7. Yukiko Hanawa, “inciting sites of political interventions: queer ‘n’ asia,” *positions* 4:3 (Winter 1996): 459–490.
8. For books to the contrary see Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); and Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, eds., *Cinema and Desire: The Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics of Dai Jinhua* (London: Verso, 2001).
9. Cited in Sadler, *The Situationist City*, 111.

Reflections of an Old New Leftist

Paul Buhle

1

Readers of the *RHR* have perhaps heard as much about my New Left venture, *Radical America*, as they will ever wish to, and assorted essays in *History and the New Left: Madison, Wisconsin, 1950–1970* helpfully fill in other blanks. But I have been lately concluding that elements of popular culture reached me much earlier with compelling historical messages. Fanciful films like *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1953) treating issues of memory and melancholy helped me establish a sense of more than personal loss; so did photos and drawings of the urban or rural scenes of the 1940s, as the last moment of a more exciting and hopeful time fast receding under the weight of the arms race, suburbanization, and sameness.

The idea of *recovering* something lost in history leaped out at me as I watched *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (written pseudonymously, it turned out, by blacklistees whom I would meet decades later) on the first television set in the house. And an African American history teacher in eighth grade made a big impact. Then again, as a young radical or Marxist of the early 1960s, I soon discovered that apart from political work, “history” was the only thing that I *could* do. Instinctively, I began trying to recover lost radicalism. That I should have chosen that path rather than muckraking capitalism and its apologists may explain why, between civil rights and the peace movement, I joined a group of mostly elderly, Wobbly-like socialists; my arrival and departure from the Socialist Labor Party certainly deepened my interest in the history of the American left.

2

I’m comfortable with the term “radical history” despite media efforts to portray atavistic forces like “radical Islamic fundamentalists” as proof of the danger that “radicalism” poses to a rational business-led global society. Speaking only for myself here, I look to a number of old favorites, after Marx, for the origins of our work: W. E. B. DuBois and my political mentor C. L. R. James, twin giants; E. P. Thompson; William Appleman Williams, and the *RHR*’s own Herbert Gutman. Each of them provided—in scholarly texts but just as much through teaching, political writing, and personal conversation—the rationale of radical history as political practice. My good fortune in knowing them well (except, of course, for DuBois) no doubt adds to my sense of their personal example, but thousands touched by one or more of them can say the same.

3

The first challenge of radical history in my own past was confronting the cold war (or imperial) scholars' consensus without falling back upon the simplistic monopolists-against-the-people model of the Popular Front, or the reductionist working-class-as-a-solid-mass of previous Marxist movements. The New Left historians moved in that direction, but their own overuse of "manipulation" theories (David Horowitz and Ronald Radosh were the most vulgar; we had to apologize for them to undergraduates even when we taught their writings) and dismissal of working-class life, with all its complexities, showed a lack of seriousness toward historical understanding. That said, working out better, more thorough perspectives has required good social history and great faith in the collective scholarly process.

The collapse of social movements from the middle 1970s had a delayed effect on advancing scholarship in black history, women's history and still "newer" areas of gay history, Chicano history, and so on; but eventually the effect was inevitably felt, alongside (or joined with) the deconstructionist assault on *all* historical usefulness. By the Reagan era, history seemingly offered less to the radical or avant-garde student than English, or still better, media studies. Theorizing, once considered the heavy-duty cerebral project of Marxists like devotees of the Frankfurt School (a good portion of them nevertheless deeply involved in activism), became a substitute for scholarship and for politics.

By the middle 1990s if not before, these modes had practically exhausted themselves or at least exhausted the intense interest generated outward from Paris. "Antihistory" quickly became the real relic because history did not end with the collapse of the Soviet Union and recovery of self-confidence by global capitalism, but also because history as "story" never lost its popular interest outside academic life. From the historical novel and film or television version to the amateur societies, historical interests flourished, although definitely changed from the Fourth of July version to subjects less predictable.

In the long run, postmodernism has had the effect of validating or at least opening for view all sorts of hitherto ignored areas, from comic strips to the role of Communists in American film. This is largely to the good, despite widespread complaints about popular cultural presentation of historical issues. (Does Oliver Stone tell his own and sometimes wildly distorted version of history? Sure, but it is no less distorted than, say, Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s version—in some ways far less distorted, because Stone identifies "conspiracy" as the effective inside story of the security-state operations to which Schlesinger and Isaiah Berlin, as chief CIA assets in the Congress for Cultural Freedom, devoted their talents. Besides, Stone makes no claim to "objectivity.")

4

Our prospects today revolve around the popular presentation of history and the application of our knowledge to the worsening global economic, political, and ecological crisis. The need for transnational history, the identification of our national saga with the experiences of the new immigrant populations, is greater than it has been for a century. Last time around, mainstream historians flagrantly misused the opportunity to eradicate the discrete pasts and their possible meanings in favor of the Anglo-Saxon, William McKinley/Theodore Roosevelt/Woodrow Wilson version of the “American” mission.

To battle against that drive so clear among the elderly Schlesingers and youngish Ken Burnses of “Americanizing” the globe by making all other histories subordinate to a narrow (and falsified) version of U.S. history is no easy matter. The executives of the media monopolies clearly want their version to win. But undercurrents can be seen on all sides as well, from the stubborn recuperation of apparently dying folk musics (and languages) of indigenous peoples and others, to the “rebellion against boredom” so present even in the generations hard-pressed from early childhood to excel in marketable talents (or in high culture: the access route to the well-heeled gentility). The dawning awareness that the history of popular music from folk to jazz or rhythm and blues, for instance, is interesting because it brings together minority lives with rebelliousness, offers fresh possibilities for historians to speak to (and with) the public on subjects a thousand times more interesting, more meaningful, than dead generals, presidents, and bankers.

5

Radical historians need, for political purposes, most of all to exercise their inventive energies while they continue to do serious work in the archives and on the Web. The labor muralist Mike Alewitz, to take a useful example, works with historians and local folks in raising a ruckus with his always controversial wall paintings. He inventively found a path to progressives of the labor movement and through it links to workers in Mexico and elsewhere, part of the “invisible international” of common interests and potential solidarities that now must be rebuilt.

Other opportunities abound and will increase with the global turmoil. So simple and unobserved a matter as the deep sadness of older people at the destruction of their cities and their countryside offers potential for intervention: history can go to work protecting buildings, forests, and green space against developers (accurately identified in many children’s films as the face of a ruthless system) and the state. Historians have endless opportunities, tragically enough, to remind newspaper readers and radio listeners about the Nuremburg Trials, and to insist upon the responsibility of American leaders for war crimes in Asia and Central America, also urging American soldiers to refuse orders for recent and certain future crimes such

84 *Radical History Review*

as the dropping of the poisonous depleted uranium (DU) shells upon targets such as Iraq and the former Yugoslavia. Historians can speak out for native peoples and others desperately trying to hold onto their lands from exploitation and chemical victimization—the very heart of global economic expansion. “History” offers no past utopia, but the observation of disappearing biodiversity guarantees an issue for which neither Republicans nor Clinton-Gore Democrats can possibly present an acceptable answer.

Within academia, thuggish senior cold war ideologues still amazingly hold the positions of power in many history departments and think tanks, supported (or sucked up to) by mostly younger colleagues urgently craving the same power and perks for themselves—and not excluding, of course, some former radicals who found the road to respectability and obviously relish its benefits. (The more famous of them regularly appear, alongside their mentors, with their shamelessly vulgar flag-waving messages in the pages of the *New Republic*.) The struggle for dignity and respect by women and minority scholars often continues to have a positive role at the department level by breaking down the old-boy networks. Radicals who fight the good democratic fight in this way often feel trapped, but they also often make real democratic progress and set a personal example as well for new colleagues, for graduate and undergraduate students who instinctively despise the toadying model of the student/professor relationship at the heart of the old system.

But classroom, campus, and public-expression politics also have a large role. A democratic presentation is not a leveling-down presentation, but an effort to make history matter, especially to those students who do or may be brought to see the need for sweeping social changes. Professorial support and sponsorship of radical activities on campus is elementary, even if time-consuming. On another level, the message that the labor movement has in certain key ways changed for the better and deserves campus support needs to be explained as often as possible—and linked with reminders of how vicious and reactionary the old top labor leadership really was, how and why organized labor lost the social leadership it exercised before 1950. The same lessons apply to a wide range of issues now and in the easily foreseeable future. Our task is to use all means available to combat the global race to the bottom (and toward ecological hell); to help students, colleagues, and the public understand that capitalism’s much-vaunted “progress” endangers everything we hold dear; and to point toward efforts at cooperative solutions as part of an interrupted history to prevent the enveloping barbarism from destroying a beautiful world and all the human potential within it.

History and Feminism in Mexico

Gabriela Cano

The year 1979 was promising for new-wave feminism in Mexico. On March 8 of that year the National Front for the Liberation and Rights of Women (Frente Nacional por la Liberación y los Derechos de la Mujer—FNALIDM) was created; it gathered women's groups and leftist organizations around the topics of new feminism—autonomy of the body and the political aspect of personal life—joined in a radical Marxist discourse. Immersed in the voluntarism that characterized the left during those days, the FNALIDM was more oriented towards imagining the socialist feminist utopia than towards deepening its analysis of the complex and diverse reality of the present. Like other social utopias, the feminist socialist one searched for legitimacy in history. On the one hand, the FNALIDM reclaimed the heritage of international workers' struggles, symbolized by March 8, and, on the other, it declared itself heir of the Sole Front Pro-Women's Rights (Frente Unico Pro-Derechos de la Mujer—FUPDM), which during the 1930s, a decade of intense social mobilization in Mexico, struggled for women's suffrage and gathered many popular organizations around a program of social and economic demands of a Marxist nature.

That same year of 1979 I began my university studies of history at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, in an academic environment in which historical materialism, economic history, and the history of social movements enjoyed great popularity among students and some professors. Even when historicist positions had little prestige, they ended up being more influential in the long run. Historicism, heir of vitalistic philosophy, mistrusted the teleological sense of historical materialism while it insisted on the importance of historical interpretation and hermeneutics of documents considered complex cultural products.

My university studies and activities for the feminist movement remained unlinked until I learned about the work of the British History Workshop Movement, particularly that of Sheila Rowbotham, which showed me that the professional tools of history could be interwoven with my feminist interests. As a historian I could track the heritage of the feminist movement and contribute to building its legitimacy as a social movement of the left. My youth, professional inexperience, and voluntarism prevented me from imagining the complexity of such an endeavor.

In tune with the existing interest in my academic environment in the history of the workers' movement and social struggles, I chose for a thesis topic a teachers' strike that took place towards the end of the Mexican Revolution. I wanted to reconstruct the agency of the women teachers involved in the strike. They represented over 75 percent of the professors and had been, to borrow the title of Rowbotham's classic work, hidden from history.

I didn't succeed in my enterprise. I could only devote a few pages to describ-

ing the discrimination these women teachers suffered at their jobs. Difficulties around sources and, above all, reconstruction and historical analysis turned out to be a greater challenge than I had previously foreseen.

When I first succeeded in documenting specific aspects of the history of feminism in Mexico in the twentieth century, my work was well received among feminist groups. But I still couldn't find a way to solve the methodological problems of women-centered historical research. New gender studies, particularly Joan Scott's celebrated article on gender in historical analyses, became a great inspiration for my work. Even when they did not solve the problems I faced, they opened up new avenues for critical thought.

At the onset of the 1990s, I was still interested in women teachers and their relationship with the feminist current during the first decades of the twentieth century, a topic I dwelt upon in my Ph.D. thesis, in which I got to the bottom of some aspects of the gendered cultural constructions that forged their social, professional, and political identities. I believe one can, through history, profitably meditate on matters that resist change, such as the persistent exclusion of women from political power and their equally lasting invisibility as intellectual producers.

Women's organizations frequently demand historical information that legitimizes their identity, the same way they did twenty years ago, when the new feminism emerged. Even if I understand that necessity, I don't believe the task of history is offering "background" that justifies current political identities. From my point of view, the main value of historical knowledge lies in the contribution it may offer towards a critical review of the present, one that avoids simple and schematic interpretations.

History may show that gender norms and conventions, among other human constructions, are complex and lasting, but also that they are flexible and can be, to some degree, susceptible to change. A recent project about a transsexual person during the Mexican Revolution allowed me to show the flexibility of gender in social and cultural contexts in which gender identities and their symbolization are usually considered fixed.

Unlike the history of great social movements and structural transformations that I used to admire twenty years ago, now I believe microhistory, à la Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis, is a form of historical knowledge that may empower people as it demonstrates the importance of the possible changes within the immediate small universe of human beings. Emphasis on individuals and their possibilities for acting and transforming their internal and external world, expressed in a narrative, makes this kind of history a cultural expression that should enhance the construction of utopias and strengthen aspirations towards change.

Translated by Lucía Rayas

The Holy Grail of Radical History

Anna Clark

Writing popular history with a political impact is the elusive Holy Grail of the radical historian. The History Workshop Movement in Britain inspired me to aim toward this goal through its commitment to historical practice unshackled by academic pretensions and accessible to “the people.” When I attended graduate school at the University of Essex around 1980, the labor movement in Britain was still strong and connected to history, and debates raged between socialist and radical feminists. I returned to the United States torn between my desire to be a historian and a commitment to political action. A brief stint working for a PIRG organization disenchanted me with professional activism, so I decided to go to Rutgers to try to be a historian in the History Workshop tradition. I never envisioned actually getting a job, but I thought at least I could do radical history for a few years. I wrote my first book on sexual assault in the hopes that this historical perspective could reach a popular audience as a slim paperback.

Subsequent years proved disillusioning. The feminist approach of my book turned off traditional historians, and it did not reach a popular audience. It took two grueling years to find a tenure-track job. Teaching at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte forced me to revise my understanding of the politics of history. In the South, history is very popular, but a conservative, masculine, Confederate version of history. I began to understand that my direct political contribution came more in teaching than in writing: encouraging students reluctant to question authority to think critically for themselves and, eventually, teaching the history of sexuality as an open lesbian.

But I also acquired a more humble view of the historian’s political contribution: we delude ourselves if we think that the correct critical approach to the nineteenth century British labor movement or women’s experiences will have much of an impact beyond a few readers. Instead, if we really want to have an impact politically, we should engage in direct political action in today’s world. Living in the South for ten years also made this task more urgent, so I intermittently volunteered to protect abortion clinics, and help battered women, and became active in the lesbian and gay movement. This political activity also enriched my historical practice. I began to see that political commitment is only one reason why people join movements: they also seek a focus for their lives and a social life; outrage compels people into movements, and endless meetings drive them out. Of course, that is an autobiographical statement; my current involvement in politics is very marginal, but it is refreshing now to live in a city (Minneapolis) where local politicians vie to be the most progressive.

American academic history has, with some notable exceptions, moved away from any potential connection with a wider public, in part due to the fascination with

the linguistic turn. Intellectually, the postmodern/poststructuralist approach has led to necessary critiques of overarching theoretical frameworks that had ossified and failed to explain social change. It can keep us intellectually honest, aware of our assumptions and more skilled in our analysis of language. It has given us the tools to deconstruct the stories people invent about their experiences and their actions—and to deconstruct our own histories. As academics advance in our careers, we no longer struggle as desperately to survive economically, and we spend our days reading and writing; it is not surprising that we now regard language as the most important element of politics. I myself have followed this trajectory, moving away from working-class history toward deconstructing high politics through a gender analysis of political scandal.

Beyond our studies, however, the world is transforming, as global capitalism endlessly shape-shifts like a rapacious trickster. The linguistic turn has exposed the flaws in past theories, but it has its limitations in helping us understand vast social, economic, and political upheavals. It is time to take the insights we have gained in deconstructing discourses and to combine them with a revived materialism to again view society with a wider lens. Even as we deconstruct the stories people invent about their own social and economic experiences as fictions and fantasies, we still need to understand the impact these stories have. When do political rhetorics “work” and when do they conceal or fail to overcome pragmatic, material economic and political interests?

We understand, of course, that when historians write narratives they are constructing delusive stories. In Britain, women’s history books attract a wide audience, but only those which tell alluring tales of glamorous aristocrats or contented housewives, misleadingly arguing that feminism was irrelevant since conservatism allowed women a moral influence. However, popular audiences crave stories and personal narratives rather than austere critiques. We have come to understand, for instance, that the Chartist movement drew in huge numbers of working-class people, not because they had the correct socialist analysis of working-class identity, but because they constructed powerful metaphors and rhetorics which evoked working-class misery and promised a better day. Can we write stories which engage audiences from a radical, rather than conservative, perspective without delusions? If anyone has found the secret, please let me know.

Missing in Action

Martin Duberman

When I got my doctorate in history in 1957, I was a liberal, not a radical. More liberal than most of my colleagues at Harvard, which isn't saying much in a department that included Arthur Schlesinger Sr. and Jr., Oscar Handlin, and Samuel Eliot Morison. On the race question I was probably already radical ("force compliance in the South, and face up to the deep inequities that also characterize the North"). But my level of awareness on issues relating to class was dim; two of my first four books, on the privileged New Englanders Charles Francis Adams and James Russell Lowell, barely scrutinized the class context of their attitudes and actions. The other two, both relating to race, took a much less traditional stance. One was a collection of essays (*The Antislavery Vanguard*) that offered a positive reassessment of the abolitionists. The other was a documentary play (*In White America*) depicting the history of African Americans in this country.

As for the subject that has increasingly come to dominate my scholarship over the past twenty-five years—the history of queer people—that wasn't even a glimmer in the eye back in the late 1950s. Mine or anyone else's. There was already a gay movement—minuscule, mostly anonymous, and secretive—but there was no overlap at all between that brave handful of activists and closeted young gay scholars like myself who were busy making respectable careers and, in many cases, dutifully presenting ourselves for therapeutic "cure" of what the psychiatric profession all but uniformly agreed was "disabling pathology." Everyone I knew—meaning privileged white men who could afford it—was busily seeking confirmatory grounds for self-hatred in a therapist's office and concealing the truth of their lives from as many people as possible.

Today that all seems as foreign as glyphs in an ancient cave. Just a few weeks ago two news items appeared within a few days of each other: there is now an openly gay caucus within the CIA[!]; and the trustees of Exeter and Andover Academies have voted to allow gay couples to live in student dorms as faculty "role models." It's enough to make one feel prehistoric—and to give the lie to those temperamental doomsayers who are forever unable to acknowledge that progress of any kind, anywhere, has taken place. To maintain that posture, the it's-as-bad-as-ever-and-probably-worse types would also have to ignore the remarkable proliferation over the past few decades of once nonexistent queer scholarship—the mounting deluge of articles, monographs, books, and journals that make it impossible for even specialists to keep pace. That scholarship alone, with its proliferating set of challenges to receive wisdom, is testimony to a profound shift in the cultural climate.

And yet . . . many lesbian and gay graduate students are still being forced to hedge their bets. A few advanced "certificates" or "minors" in gay/lesbian/bisexual/

transgender studies exist, but there is no solid Ph.D. program anywhere in the country. Nor is campus demand—except among gay students themselves—for courses with queer content strong enough to have led to any proliferation in faculty hiring. And so most gay graduate students with training in the field are presenting themselves to job committees as specialists in “gender studies,” or “the history of sexual behavior,” or “the history of gender and sexual nonconformity.” And if any of the rest of us are tempted to call this “cowardice,” let *them* spend the rest of their lives driving cabs.

Equally grave is the ongoing patronization among nonqueer scholars of the entire enterprise of GLBT studies. Most heterosexual (the quaint het/homo binary, though yielding on the edges, persists—though it no longer describes how increasing numbers of people lead their lives) scholars pride themselves on their tolerance, but it is a tolerance usually so limited and opaque as to be useless, when not enraging. Radical academics love to condescend to the military, but in fact “don’t ask, don’t tell” is an all-American birthmark when it comes to the subject of homosexuality, and across the *entire* spectrum of political opinion, too. The prevailing attitude in straight academia (accompanied by a smug pat on the back) is, “What **THEY** do in private should be of no concern to anybody else.” Oh, but it *is*, or must be, since what we do in private, along with how we theorize our lives in public, is—if straight people would only expand their reading lists, or at least open their eyes and ears—of immense consequence to everyone, regardless of sexual orientation. Adopting the “privacy principle” is finally a form of self-protection, a shield for preventing too much subversive information from getting through. Yet with the exception of some feminist scholars, this is about as far as straight academia has gotten in taking seriously the lives and researchers of their lesbian and gay colleagues. And the loss is theirs, for reasons I will return to.

Thus the self-defined radical sociologist Todd Gitlin—his example could be multiplied many times over—has characterized identity politics as “groups overly concerned with protecting and purifying what they imagine to be their identities.” In other words, we may think we’re different, and have something valuably different to say, but apparently only Gitlin and other straight white men are qualified to judge that, and to know what is or isn’t a “real” identity.

Why do so many straight white male radicals like Gitlin so resolutely close off their minds and hearts to the actual complexity of gay lives and scholarship? Because they’re selective radicals: they’re willing to explore some (primarily class-based) challenges to the status quo, but refuse to join in questioning other “regimes of the normal,” those that protect their own sacred prerogatives.

They prefer to refer dismissively to our “supposedly oppositional cultures” and our “superficially transgressive ideas.” (Those particular put-downs are from Michael Tomasky’s *Left for Dead*). Supposedly? Superficially? The choice of words

is a dead giveaway that they've never read a word of queer theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Warner, or Judith Butler, who, though subject to a variety of rejoinders, are rather difficult to send packing for their "superficiality."

What do Gitlin and a host of other "radical" scholars, like Eric Hobsbawm and Bogdan Denith, who have expressed comparable attitudes, gain from such blind denigration? It's simple. They don't have to take seriously queer notions about the performative nature of gender, the fluidity of erotic desire, the anarchic multiplicity of attractions, fantasies, and impulses that lie within us all—insights which, if taken seriously, would have a transformative impact on the current arrangement of power.

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In its covering letter to those of us asked to contribute to this symposium, *RHR* included a set of "Questions for Consideration." One of them asked "How can we radical historians speak to people in the general public?" (or words to that effect). I'd like to suggest a variant: "How can we stop denouncing and start listening to *each other*?"

Long Live Radical History!

Ellen Carol DuBois

I am quite comfortable with the term "radical history" to describe what I do. It captures the period—the late sixties—in which I undertook this vocation and the social forces that shaped my understanding of my society and my work in it. The term says less about ideology than it does about passion for social change and critical distance from the centers of power. It also captures what about those years made me and so many others into historians. History doesn't always move at the same rate. For our students, history has moved so slowly that they must have great imagination to believe that it moves at all. But in my formative years, change occurred very quickly indeed, and this is what gave me the twin convictions that made me into a radical historian: (1) social, political, cultural, and economic conditions are ALWAYS changing; but (2) the nature of that change is rarely predictable and never consistent. This belief is what connects my history-writing to my history-making and allows me to endure as a citizen-participant: Sooner or later things will change and if you can just hang in there and live long enough, eventually they'll change in your direction. There have been times when my faith in the inevitability of historical change has been sorely tried—just about two-thirds through the Reagan/Bush era, I'd say—but what has happened since has certainly vindicated my conviction. Who could have possibly predicted the current revival of the American labor movement, for instance, with women and immigrants at its core?

Come to think of it, what distinguishes “radical history” for me from other sorts of subversive intellectual and academic postures is the degree to which it incorporates a commitment to remain active and engaged in historical change in the present, the discouraging nature of any particular period notwithstanding. The great gift of our profession, if we choose to take it, is having the long view, knowing that “it” has happened before, will happen again, and is always different.

Perhaps the most fundamental and certainly the most enduring element of the radical history perspective is the notion of “agency.” Whatever other conceptions younger historians bring to their work now, whatever influence for instance the “linguistic turn” and “cultural studies” has on them, they hold on to the idea of “agency” that my generation introduced into historical writing. They understand that human beings are always making their own history, regardless of their place in the social and economic hierarchy of their day. Perhaps it is even time to reexamine the concept of “agency.” Students tend to use it as a slogan. The notion of historical agency may need itself to be placed into history, treated historiographically, kept lively. Maybe someone out there could undertake a genealogy of the concept: Who first used it? How did it develop and how has it changed? To what degree do methodologies of the 1980s and ’90s about the constraints of cultural formations conflict with the idea of “agency”? Where are these conflicts being addressed and how resolved?

When thinking about what my generation of American historians has actually done, I am heartened. The substance of and approach to American history is so dramatically different from the unreflective, top-down, soporific national history that people my age were raised on that almost nothing of the old ways is left. And I mean this to describe not just what happens in the classroom and in our own journals and conferences, but in the world of public history, which is more vital and popular than I ever imagined it would be. Historical museum exhibits and documentary film projects are proliferating and provocative. The controversies that they have stirred up are all to the good. Who could have imagined, two decades ago, that the presentation of American history could be a political hot potato, a subject of impassioned national debate, something that really mattered and was really contested? Living as I do in Los Angeles, I’d like to see this process continue so that even commercial movies and television create more space for historical thinking, and not just about the cut of the costume either. I also hope that historians who work in popular venues will concentrate on teaching the public that responsible historical thinking requires interpretive variety and debate. The radical approach to the *substance* of history—who counts, as it were—has basically carried the day. The radical approach to the *method* of history—that the meaning of the past is constantly and necessarily changing—is the next thing to get across.

In this one area, understanding history, perhaps the sixties has really triumphed: radical history rules! Long live radical history!

Sure, I'm a Marxist

Rob Gregg

I don't read the *New Republic*. Honest. I'm a *Nation* reader. I have had my moments of doubt. I wanted Cockburn to keep his two pages; I may have even preferred the old format—less like the *New Republic*. The *Nation* can be dry, and sometimes I thank whomever (sure, I'm an atheist) for Katha Pollitt, whose “Subject to Debate” I find refreshing, though I have spent too many hours wondering who that “Last Marxist” might be.

I happened to be given a recent issue of the *New Republic*. Likely story, I know, but a friend (one in spite of the fact that he evidently subscribes) had received two copies and gave me one. He wasn't trying to recruit me. I don't need to reveal his name. He doesn't need to be ferreted out and chastised for his lapse (I believe he is still a radical, also, in spite of his magazine subscriptions). Perhaps, I reassure myself, he gets the journal to find out what less radical people are thinking, to fashion his own counterpoint. Perhaps I should do that—hey, take me to the shrink! He just gave it to me as I was leaving his place and I took it home. I swear.

So I read the thing. No Sean Wilentz in a starring role swearing allegiance to the Chief—that's a relief. A rather Wieseltier-like proclamation about the need for nuclear deterrence, which had been one of the things in my old CND membership days (I did pay my membership while I lived in Britain, honest) that had turned me off the glossy rag in the first place. A fairly sound piece, seemed to me at least, about the problems facing that politician (name temporarily forgotten) now stepping into the New York breach against HRH Clinton. And then a review by Alan Wolfe of the much-touted book, *Bobos in Paradise*.

OK, so there is nothing new, it seems to me, about these bourgeois bohemians. Seems they've been around as long as I've been reading (or listening on the car tape player to) Somerset Maugham. Historians, reveling in their artisanal, pre-industrial work habits and their moral economy, have been card-carrying members of Bobo-dom for a while. Was Engels proto-Bobo? I ask myself.

But Wolfe made some interesting points in linking the author of the work, David Brooks, to other neoconservatives, and in highlighting a new trend among neocons towards the humorous. This trend I've certainly missed (NRA members, welfare reform, and death penalty advocates don't make great humorists in my book, not unless I'm trying out the well-worn tool of Byrony). But, more importantly for me, Wolfe claims that leftists take themselves too seriously, and only partake in “pious sermonizing, bureaucratic obfuscation, and old-folks resignation.” He twists the knife further: “One cannot find a single interesting radical nonfiction writer in America under (or over) fifty.” Dem's fighting words, surely.

Perhaps with regard to a lack of humor, Wolfe may have a point (though Michael Moore's “vote-for-a-shrub” campaign might be worth a look). Certainly, his-

torians on the left are not known for provoking roll-in-the-aisle laughter. Shouldn't we be writing books that borrow liberally from the much-mourned Ian Dury ("Dance of the Screemers" is a must for any self-respecting social theorist) and G. V. Desani (whose Hatterr delineates for us a postmodern landscape), or that receive "instant karma" from the most pretentious of 1970s British rock. At this point, I might possibly mention my own book (*Inside Out, Outside In: Essays in Comparative History* from Macmillan), but that would be too crass.

Recently, one historian was seen by another in Washington, D.C., protesting against the World Bank and IMF. He had turned himself into a walking billboard advertising all the ghettos of the world. The raucous inner voice of my Quaker ancestors—pioneers in this approach to street theater, donning drab clothing and looking dour as a comedic critique of commercialism and fashion—tells me that such street history is the way to go.

Of course, I hear from the wings, who can laugh at the kinds of things that have been done unto the less fortunate people of this world—torture, rape, maiming, murder, and so on throughout the annals of modern history? Quite simply, no one. But surely we can laugh at ourselves when we endeavor to place ourselves above and beyond these things; at the ways we immunize ourselves from complicity through our "objectivity"; at our notions of agency, that may have a stronger relationship to the concept of property than we would like to admit; at the irony of our radicalism, nurtured in jobs for life (we hope) working and consuming within the belly of the corporate beast. One of the bad guys in history, machine boss Richard Croker, once accused reformers, "who sometimes seem not to know that they live on graft," of hypocrisy. And I was just beginning to get over my military-industrial complex!

Marxism is dead, they say, killed by the fall of the Berlin Wall. *Au contraire*. Stifling, bureaucratic Marxism may well be dead. And good luck to it, as Bannerji would say. Now we can get down to the comic and liberating Marx—that theorist who could puncture the pretensions of the mighty with one flick of the quill. Marx may be "only a bloody cod," but he's one of the best we've got.

Many years ago, when Philadelphia's House of Our Own Bookstore had a "Well Red Reading Room" upstairs, I purchased a wonderful T-shirt with Karl Marx on the front saying "Sure, I'm a Marxist." On the back were to be seen those masters of subversion, Groucho, Chico, and Harpo. I gave the shirt to a brother in England—you couldn't wear that kind of thing in the United States in those days.

Historical Materialism's Task in an "Age of Globalization"

Harry D. Harootunian

Historical materialism is the self-knowledge of capitalism.

—Georg Lukacs

Michel Foucault somewhere observed that he couldn't tell the difference between historians and Marxists. Foucault seemed baffled by the persistence of a convention that insisted on separating historians from Marxists, even though both appealed to the form of the same narrative and continuist story line that moved like a fast-moving express train for a predetermined destination. Both, in short, were driven by a shared belief in the knowledge of the past whose secret order could be extracted (reconstructed) through the operation of a proper method. The differences between the two seemed slight and more often resembled disagreements over teleologies, agents, causal factors, and questions of periodization—a difference of accent rather than language.

Before World War II, Walter Benjamin had already called into question the claims of a historian's discourse that aimed to reconstruct the putative past of the present as it really happened and proposed a radically alternative approach based upon the construction of the past for a present weighted with danger. In the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin discounted both Marxist and non-Marxist historians for sharing a historicist conviction that history moved continuously and progressively along a chronological grid, where, he observed, a blank seriality worked to displace the present to an indeterminate past. Like many of his contemporaries in the interwar period, Benjamin was persuaded by the example of the Russian Revolution and its identification of the importance of the everyday—the durational present—and the unprecedented role played by the masses in the transformation of society. It was a primary aim of the Soviet achievement to replace an understanding of everyday life that had been previously linked to merely the "daily" and the "contingent" with one demanding political, social, and cultural transformation leading to massive dehierarchization of life and the establishment of a democratic order. With this transformation of everydayness into an active concept, conforming to Marx's own practice to analyze the "current situation," came also a radical rethinking of Marxist philosophy and theories of culture that would lead, everywhere the everyday was contested, to an abandonment of older practices based on naturalism (social Darwinist) and positivism. Benjamin and his generation had already seen how history itself had overtaken the program of historical stagism mandated by the Second International that still held Marxism hostage to the fantasy of progressive, linear story lines and the domination of stages "produced" by the

base/superstructure binary. At the same time, halfway around the globe, the Marxist philosopher Tosaka Jun had already positioned the everyday as a primary category for philosophic analysis and everydayness as the principle for measuring historical time. While Benjamin was calling for the formation of a new historical materialism capable of recognizing in the present a “moment of danger” and thus an entry point to constructing the past for it, Tosaka eschewed historical narrative altogether for a new conception of historical temporality based on the irreducibility of the space of everydayness. Benjamin was less concerned with retrieving a knowledge of the past, as such, than locating in the past a forgotten or repressed moment that could join with the experience of the present to constitute a dialectical image at standstill poised to usher in the “messianic cessation.” “A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition,” he wrote, “but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the ‘eternal’ image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past.”¹ For these thinkers it was necessary to start from the present, as Lukacs advised—a present that would dominate the past, from the “Now” (both Benjamin and Tosaka employed the same term, even though they could not have known of the other’s writings), capable of leading to history and history to revolution, rather than presuming the existence of historical knowledge of a fixed past.

Yet orthodox Marxian historiography has never moved beyond this conception of transition and addressed its consequence for a relationship between the past and present, to take this critique seriously and explore its possibilities for envisaging a genuinely critical and radical discourse. Nor has it often questioned the claims of certainty associated with epistemological categories that produce such a “knowledge of the past.” Instead, the response of its historical practice has shown only a disavowal of the very crisis of Marxism experienced by the interwar generation, even after recognizing the vast disjuncture between theory and the observable tendencies of capitalism and the necessity of bridging the growing disparity by rethinking the discontinuities. This failure of nerve led to a reassertion of the validity of theory and the temporary or transitory character of capitalism. Hence, history writing matched the “quietism and waiting”² sanctioned by the absence of political initiatives usually associated with the strategy of the Second International and “workerist” social democratic parties yet clearly repudiated by all those thinkers who, like Benjamin, saw the necessity of thinking through a program of political intervention based upon an analysis of the current situation.

Nowhere is this Marxian desire to custodialize the continuist story line more characteristically apparent than in those now “classic” discussions over the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which sought to reaffirm the primacy of the stagist paradigm by concentrating on what came in between. Moreover, these

discussions managed unintentionally to affirm the nation-state as the privileged unit of analysis. Embedded in this turn to the unit of the nation (its boundaries somewhat expanded by the "Brenner Thesis") was, of course, the accompanying, unstated presumption of cultural specificity as a universal criterion. The stages that British history was made to perform and the transition it was supposed to enact, like those in Japan, were actually culturally exceptional fantasies (what does it mean to live a transition?) that resulted in situating the race/nation-state as a metonymical stand-in signifying universal import. The consequence of this strategy was to couple the story line stage theory was authorized to narrate with the political problems it was made to resolve in the name of Marxian orthodoxy. What has always troubled me about this progressive, linear form of schematicization is its insistence to assimilate the world outside of Euro-America to its rhythms and exemplars or to simply ignore this vast region altogether when experience failed to match its workerist aspirations.

Founded on the orthodoxy of the Second International, Marxist historiography has been driven by distinct stages whose movement reflects shifts in the productive base. As one mode of production succeeds another, an appropriate superstructure appears to symptomize the immense shift, signaling an event or episode of geologic magnitude similar to the movement of continental plates. Implanted in this theory is a logic of inevitable historical change (continuist and progressive) and the dependence of superstructural forms on the productive base which is external to the social topography it directs. The consequence of this interpretative strategy has been to forfeit both the autonomy (or semiautonomy) of the political present, as was recognized by Benjamin and his contemporaries, and the historical experiences of the world outside Euro-America. Just as the fixity of the past took precedence over the present and the analysis of contemporary social formations, so the exclusion of the world outside Euro-America was relegated to categories like the Asiatic mode of production and their variations which vainly tried to account for differences but invariably exceptionalized Europe's uniqueness. This was evident as recently as the publication of Perry Anderson's two-volume study of state formation, which paradoxically enlisted the Weberian problematic of uniqueness to propose that Western state building derived from a culturally irreducible (and presumably exceptional) political endowment. Not even a "Western Marxism," produced in an environment that had clearly recognized that the state was not going to wither away, would manage to sensitize Marxists to other possibilities directed to freeing historical practice from its historicist moorings and elucidating the present as the site of analysis and "actualization." Such an imagined Western Marxism was not simply the mutation of Marxism in Western Europe between the wars but, instead, one that was for and about the West. It was thus made to appear not as an opening to an emerging, new world but a closing down of an old one and its final ghettoization or, if I can borrow

from Dipesh Chakrabarty, its “provincialization.” Yet in this narrative desire to identify a different kind of Marxism conceptualized in the ruins of orthodox failure, resulting in a cultural analysis that might replace the older economism and its narrow workerism, it was easily overlooked that its most ardent proponents were actually rethinking the primary importance of the present in any consideration of the past (Benjamin) and envisaging the autonomy of political formations released from bondage to the economy (Gramsci). In other words, the immense and important effort to refigure a unit of analysis that was neither shadowed by prior historical stages nor constrained by culturally specific referents opened the way to imagine a broader world (the repressed outside of Euro-America) and one not necessarily organized along the lines of the race/nation-state. Even more important, the reorganization of Marxism that is made to reinforce the mythic claims of a unified West (what, after all, is “Western Marxism”?) and its privileged and exceptional location must be seen as actually part of a larger, global process already disclosing significant contributions to the experience of theory and practice in China, Japan, and India that would prefigure broader reconfigurations after the war in a decolonizing world. A Marxism locked into maintaining the privilege of a specific and exceptionalized location no longer qualifies as a radical analysis for historical practice but only as romantic nostalgia.

To regain the radical ground lost to a Westernized Marxism that was made to supplement an even more discredited stage theory of development and its workerist conceit, it was never necessary to rewrite the dominant culture within the symbolic spaces of capitalism as if the act signaled a difference and resistance. Such a recoding shows only that the everyday, the “irreducible remainder,” which Benjamin, Gramsci, and Tosaka had each, on his own, designated as a strategic “minimal unity” or trope capable of returning analysis and the past back to the present, would continue to be identified with capitalism rather than separated from it as the site for critical practice.³ It seems to me that the present moment marked by “globalization” is more propitious than ever to return to this tradition of earlier critique which sought to win back for historical materialism its radical vocation as it retraces for us the singular failure of its historical practice.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zahn, ed. and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 262.
2. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), 22.
3. See H. Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Problem of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Reflections on Radical History

Winston James

My identity and outlook have been very much shaped by my roots in the skilled working class of Jamaica, my experience of colorism in the Caribbean, and racism in Europe and later the United States, and my early encounter with and attraction to Pan-Africanist and Marxist ideas. I was not quite six years old when Jamaica gained its independence from Britain in 1962. So I am also very much a product and beneficiary of the anticolonial movement that swept the postwar world. I have been very inspired by the work of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Ho Chi Minh, Ché Guevara, and perhaps above all by the work of Amilcar Cabral, George Padmore, Claude McKay, and Walter Rodney. My encounter with Marx and Engels at the age of about sixteen was a great epiphany, and I still regard their work as indispensable to the understanding of capitalism and imperialism.

Most of my generation of Afro-Caribbeans in Britain was in one way or another profoundly affected by the Rastafarian movement that swept across the Atlantic to Britain in the early 1970s. Beseiged as we and our parents were by British racism, we welcomed its attack upon white supremacy and its attempts to decolonize our minds. From the United States, Black Power also came to Britain and we became familiar with the writings and struggles of George Jackson, Jonathan Jackson, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Angela Davis, and Stokely Carmichael. Malcolm X was also important to us, but my first encounter with his work was a shocking disappointment. I first read his posthumous collection *The End of White Supremacy*, with its nonsensical Nation of Islam creation myths. It was an unfortunate introduction to his work. It took me a good while to return to Malcolm and appreciate his more mature work and thinking, including his autobiography.

With the benefit of hindsight, I now think that a key part of my intellectual and political formation was my coming into contact with the rest of the Caribbean and Africa through not just study, but also through friendship and collaboration with people from different parts of the archipelago and the continent. At university in particular, I met people from every part of the British Caribbean. And because I was for several years the president of the West Indian Society on campus, I worked closely with my fellow Caribbean students and the local Caribbean community. Under my leadership we established even closer ties with African students on campus. My closest friends at the University of Leeds, where I did my first degree, were from Grenada, Guyana, and South Africa. I also had a close friendship with a comrade from Chile who had been driven into exile by Pinochet and I knew a number of Palestinians on campus. I also developed close friendships with Asian comrades from the Indian subcontinent and East Africa, many of whom had been radicalized by the insurgent and murderous fascism of the far-right National Front in the 1970s

and early 1980s. This type of comingling developed my internationalist and Pan-Africanist outlook and sensibilities.

I moved to London in 1978 to do graduate study at the London School of Economics and lived there until I came to the United States in 1991. My work at the LSE began with the political economy of the Third World, primarily Latin America and the Caribbean, shifted to a study of the economic history of Jamaica and finally ended, while I was teaching full-time, with a dissertation on the political evolution of Claude McKay. My teaching and work on McKay drew me in a more direct way than previously into the study of Afro-American and African diaspora history.

That, then, is the world out of which I emerged to practice history. I was formed by my class and African-Caribbean origin and oriented in the world by internationalism, Pan-Africanism and historical materialism. I also happened to believe that the world as it was and is, dominated by the capitalist mode of production and imperialism, was not and is not the best of all possible worlds.

Labels do not mean much to me, but a genuinely radical history should be characterized by its preoccupation, its methodology, its tough-minded commitment, and its clarity of expression. Its preoccupation should be the story of the weak, the little people, the sufferers, the oppressed, and the exploited; their dreams, desires, struggles, victories, and defeats, their strengths and weaknesses. In short, the lives they led and the part they played in the making of our world. History from below is a misnomer. The world of the subaltern cannot be adequately understood outside of the dialectic between the weak and the strong. But I am not especially interested in the strong in their own right. Insofar as I am interested in them at all it is in order to expose their crimes and schemes, debunk their myths, puncture their vanity, expose their contradictions, and further illuminate the world of the oppressed and the exploited. I am more interested in the resistance and the strategies of resistance of the oppressed, those resisters whom Booker T. Washington disparagingly called the “kickers.”

The methodology of radical history should be holistic; that is, it should place an experience within its widest historical context in order to fully understand it. It should not be afraid to be interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. It should imaginatively draw upon any available and valid resource to illuminate its object of analysis; it should be no respecter of disciplinary boundaries—artifices of the late-nineteenth-century professionalization of the academy.

Radical history should be tough-minded in that it should be able to cope with the contradictions in the lives of the oppressed, the errors and dead ends, the pathos, as well as the moments of exaltation, of little and big victories. It is not a profession for the squeamish or for the congenital lovers of happy endings. We should resist the blandishments of Whig history. Ours is a history of reversals and advances, ups and downs, detours and blind alleys. Tell of the downs as much as the ups;

indeed, we can learn more from the defeats than from the victories. Tell no lies, claim no easy victory, said Amilcar Cabral.

Radical history requires analysis and judgment, not just narration. It is not true that one cannot learn from history. We can, but only if we approach it intelligently. Its language should be clear in order to reach the widest audience. It should not be a tale told only to fellow historians and academics; in the wider scheme of things, they are not sufficiently important to warrant such attention and flattery. The work of the radical historian should not be judged only by what he or she does, but the language through which the work is communicated. The removal of unnecessary and pretentious jargon, the use of clear language, a language geared to a wide audience, in short, a democratic language ought to be an integral criterion of radical history. Marx's struggle with the language of *Capital*, to the extent that he effectively wrote a different book for the French translation, is a clear and humbling illustration of the revolutionary importance of clear language. It is true that there is no golden road to science, but we should not make the journey more difficult than it needs to be. Eric Hobsbawm, in particular, has shown that it is possible to impart complex historical information and analysis through good, comprehensible prose. Clear language should accompany clear thinking. The clever historian is not really that clever if he or she cannot express himself or herself clearly, not obscurely. Indeed, for the radical historian, as Walter Rodney has always insisted, it is a political duty. I lay stress on language because I see its misuse as one of the most baneful incursions into the historical profession over the last couple of decades; it has traveled hand in glove with the self-indulgent fad of postmodernism. It is a petty bourgeois affectation that is directly related to the downturn in political struggle in the heartlands of advanced capitalism since the 1980s, the product of the separation of the intelligentsia from the everyday world of ordinary people, an involuted world that feeds upon itself, talks to itself, in smug complacency and resignation. Radical history should resist such a posture.

The prospects for radical history are good. I am gratified by the growing desire on the part of people of goodwill, both young and old, for an unromanticized reconstruction of the past of those who have been largely left out of the history books. In my field, the study of the African diaspora, there are exciting developments, the most important of them being the breaking down of the parochialism and chauvinism that has long dogged Afro-American history in the United States. Indeed, it is becoming more widely appreciated that for a better understanding of the Afro-American experience in the United States, one needs to place it in a comparative and transnational framework. This type of work is perhaps more challenging than most are aware, including some who are attempting it. To be properly executed, it demands the learning of new languages and the mastering of not only a new body of learning but also new archives. It also requires great patience, humility, and

hard work. Nevertheless, progress is being made in the maturing of a new field of inquiry.

There are, in my view, serious limitations on what radical history can do to renew its connection to the left and the labor and social movements. Intellectuals, including radical historians, tend to have an overinflated view of their own importance and the role that they can play in transforming the world. One can use one's expertise to make clear the experience of the past, develop greater self-understanding of these movements, and illuminate the path taken to the present. This is best done in collaboration with these movements. It is not surprising that in both Britain and the United States (and to a lesser extent France), the best radical history has been written by members of the workers' movement who also happened to be historians. But the most important role that the radical historian can play in contributing to the present movements is to participate, and with humility, in them as activists—as citizens who also happen to be historians. The world will not be changed by its interpretation, even a superior interpretation, but by action, organization, and struggle.

A Better World

Nikki R. Keddie

I grew up in a leftist family in New York City in the 1930s and 1940s, and like many others for some years thought that communism, American style, could lead to a far better society. In high school, at Radcliffe, and then to a lesser degree at U.C. Berkeley, I was engaged in various political activities, including the peace movement, helping form a chapter of the NAACP at Harvard-Radcliffe, fighting to let women into the Lamont Library at Harvard, and others. I chose Modern European History and Literature as my major at Radcliffe, and thought that a real understanding of the past would help people understand what should be done in the present to lead to a better world. I did my undergraduate thesis on the Italian Socialist Party to 1924, with H. Stuart Hughes.

I got my M.A. at Stanford with a thesis on the philosophy of history of Giambattista Vico, and then went to U.C. Berkeley for my Ph.D. in the 1950s. I thought that not enough attention by serious or leftist scholars had been given to what was for a time called the Third World, and though my favorite Berkeley professor, Joseph Levenson, was in Chinese history, I decided to go into an even less known field, Middle Eastern history. I emphasized Iran, which was then in the Mosaddeq period and seemed about to shake the world, though in 1953 Mosaddeq was overthrown with CIA help, and Iran did not shake the world again until 1979. Although nobody then taught Middle Eastern history at Berkeley, I began to learn

Persian and wrote my dissertation, “The Impact of the West on Modern Iranian Social History,” which is still read by some people, though I would not today endorse everything in it. It was, however, useful in writing my 1981 book, *Roots of Revolution*, which has sold 30,000 copies and, I hope, influenced people to have a more informed and progressive view of Iran.

In my writings and teachings I have tried to stress the important role in history of underresearched groups, including peasants, nomads, urban popular classes, and women. I coedited the first scholarly collection on Middle Eastern women, *Women in the Muslim World* (1978), and the later collection *Women in Middle Eastern History* (1991) and have written several articles on women’s history, most recently on Iranian women since 1979 for a special summer 2000 issue on Iran of *Social Research*.

I no longer use the word “radical” for myself, both because I have somewhat changed regarding what is possible in the world and because the word is now overwhelmingly used for the radical right, not the left. I would call myself progressive, or concerned. I think that, whatever term one uses, there are opportunities to influence both the scholarly community and the wider world. Among these I would stress:

1. I think those on the left should not be seduced by postmodernist trends and should devote more effort to showing where these trends have diverted scholars from real-world struggles. This is not to say that some degree of relativism is incompatible with a progressive agenda, as is seen in works like Hobsbawm and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. But much of what is done under headings like discourse theory, gender theory, deconstruction, postmodernism, and even postcolonialism has turned people who consider themselves to be on the left away from understanding real struggles in the real world to recondite points comprehensible only to the initiated. There need to be more penetrating critiques of these writings and trends.
2. Along with this, leftists should make an effort to write comprehensibly, and in forums that reach more people.
3. The current period gives opportunities to work with the labor movement, and in unified protest movements, which I think should be taken advantage of more than they are. I think trends toward “identity politics” have gone so far as to undermine common agendas, and am glad to see trends in the opposite, combined and unity, directions, in the AFL-CIO and also in protest movements around the WTO, World Bank, and party and shadow conventions. In these, those on the left in their writings and actions can now take advantage of the participation of some fairly conservative people, as in the focus of the “Shadow Conventions” on campaign finance, the gap

between rich and poor, and the war on drugs. These three topics are among those that could benefit from writings and talks by historians who know how to research them historically.

4. In my own area of Third World studies, there should be more efforts to reach the public with good information on many of the issues involved, such as the horrible starving and deaths coming from our Iraq policy, a less biased view of the Arab-Israeli question, and the role of corporations and globalization in Third World poverty.

5. In general, historians and academics should seek out ways to write for, and have contact with, people other than academics and students. Entry into current programs regarding what is to be done in the schools is one of many ways to do this. Leftist historians are strong within the history profession, but not outside of academe.

Note

For more information about Nikki Keddie's life and ideas, see Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher, *Approaches to the History of the Middle East: Interviews with Leading Middle East Historians* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1994) and *Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie*, ed. Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Press, 2000).

Reflections on Radical History

Staughton Lynd

I am one of the New Left historians who in the 1960s espoused “history from the bottom up.” The honor of first advocating that particular set of words belongs to Jesse Lemisch. I believe he first used the phrase in a pamphlet by that title he wrote for Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). I recall that about 1969 there was an occupation of the University of Chicago administration building to protest denial of tenure to a sociologist named Marlene Dixon. Jesse and I conducted a teach-in at the sit-in. He described the project of retrieving the history of the so-called inarticulate: those who do not leave behind correspondence, public papers, and the like, whose thoughts must be teased from court records, from eyewitness accounts of street demonstrations, from the minute books of obscure popular entities like the Muggletonians or the International Order of Odd Fellows. I talked about a methodology that seems to me inevitable for historians who are serious about retrieving the insights of those who talk more than they write—namely, oral history.

There are two historians whose example has especially influenced me.

The first is Howard Zinn. The sit-ins had begun, and I had informed my teachers at Columbia University that I wanted to teach in a “negro college” in the South. Howard recruited me at the Columbia history department’s smoker in December 1960. I can still see in my mind’s eye his lanky form, then topped by black hair rather than white, making its way across the floor to me.

The Zinns and Lynds spent some time together in New Hampshire during the summer of 1961. As he has described in his autobiography, *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, “we decided to climb a mountain together and get acquainted”:

That mountain-climbing conversation was illuminating. Staughton came from a background completely different from mine[,] . . . had been raised in comfortable circumstances, had gone to Harvard and Columbia. And yet, as we went back and forth on every political issue under the sun—race, class, war, violence, nationalism, justice, fascism, capitalism, socialism, and more—it was clear that our social philosophies, our values, were extraordinarily similar.

(History requires me to add that it was not Mt. Monadnock, as Howard writes, but Mt. Chocorua.)

It was when I arrived at Spelman College and began to teach with Howard that I learned most from him. Fresh out of graduate school, I asked him what scholarly papers he was writing and what academic conferences he planned to attend in the near future. He looked at me as if I were speaking a foreign language. I came to understand that although Howard Zinn was *making a living* as a college teacher, he seemed entirely indifferent to academia. That which absorbed his intellectual attention was to clarify what strategy the civil rights movement should pursue in overcoming institutional racism. We had long conversations about alternative strategies of social change: “all deliberate speed,” as in school desegregation, as compared to mandated change from above, as in desegregation of the armed forces. We struggled with the role that radical intellectuals could and should ask the national government to play.

One day I walked unannounced into the Zinn apartment. (The Zinns and Lynds lived next to one another on the Spelman campus.) Howard was tape recording an interview with two African American young men, field secretaries for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), who had just been released from jail in Albany, Georgia. A lightbulb went on behind my eyes. It was not Studs Terkel, nor was it my native genius, that led me to oral history: it was Howard Zinn.

More than anyone else I have known, Howard has a magical ability to make emotional contact with an audience. Self-evidently, this gift stays by him when he writes. I believe that those who consider themselves radical historians need to grapple with the fact that Howard Zinn’s *People’s History of the United States* has probably done more good, and influenced more people (especially young people), than

everything the rest of us have written put together. And I believe the key to why this is so is Howard's indifference to the usual rewards and punishments of academia. He was abruptly and scandalously fired by Spelman College. He got a job at Boston University as a *political scientist*. He made tenure there.¹ On his last day of teaching, he ended class early so as to join a picket line of campus workers. Throughout, he has steadily directed what he had to say to an audience off campus, and thereby taught us all.

The other historian who has most influenced me was Edward Thompson. I met him only once. In the course of a brief conversation he administered political shock therapy. Somehow he challenged me not to give up on the political possibilities of industrial workers in the advanced capitalist nations. He set me on a path in 1966 that I have been traveling ever since.

As I have come to know Thompson better through his writings and writings about him,² I feel I have encountered in his life the same paradigm that I experienced closer to hand with Howard Zinn. I suspect that most radical historians in the United States who knew Thompson personally made his acquaintance at the University of Warwick, or in the years after 1965 when Thompson began teaching there. To me by far the most interesting period in his life is the seventeen previous years (1948–65) when he was a staff tutor in English and history for the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at the University of Leeds.

It is recalled about Thompson (whose background was as upper middle class as my own) that people who got to know him “admired and trusted him.” Each tutor taught four or five classes and had to travel long distances. A common pattern was that an initial recruitment of fourteen or fifteen lost six or seven during the autumn but gained two or three latecomers. Colleagues did not live near each other. Obviously, as with Howard Zinn in his relation to SNCC, and I should like to think, as with myself in relation to working-class colleagues in Youngstown, during these years Thompson drew emotional sustenance less from fellow professionals than from his students, with whom he often joined in political demonstrations.

Accounts of Thompson in these years make clear that then, as in his posthumously published book on William Blake, he was preoccupied with two different notions of workers' education. One was the idea of workers laboriously bringing themselves up to middle-class standards so that they might participate effectively in a capitalist society. In this pedagogy, the emphasis was not on “what students bring to their classes, but of what the tutor had to do for them.”

Of course, Thompson's approach was entirely different. He stressed how much he learned from his students. “Within living memory, it seems, miners have worked lying down in eighteen inch seams, children have been in the mills at the age of nine.” One assignment—thirty of forty years before this assignment became commonplace in the United States—was to find an older person to talk about their

younger days. Of one literature class, Thompson wrote that it had learned to work “in the spirit so desirable in the Workers’ Education Association—not as tutor and passive audience, but as a group combining various talents and pooling differing knowledge and experience for a common end.” Sheila Rowbotham recalls a class on the history of mining when one student finally told the instructor: “Give me the chalk, Mr. Thompson.”

The bottom line was expressed by Dorothy Greenald. She came from a miner’s home where there was only one book. Edward Thompson, she later recalled, “brought it out that your background wasn’t anything to be ashamed of . . . that changed me really.”

The Himalayan fact is that *The Making of the English Working Class* was written in those years of teaching extramurally, “outside the walls.” Somehow, defying the idea that intellectual work and political engagement are at war with each other, Thompson did his greatest scholarly work during the period of his fullest immersion in working-class life. *The Making* was initially envisioned as a survey text for workers’ education classes. As he came upon original sources, Thompson shared them with his students and asked them to comment in class. The book is dedicated to Dorothy and Joseph Greenald.

In describing these exemplars I have run out of space to say more. What Zinn and Thompson model for me is the idea of a radical intellectual who is only incidentally an academic; who is an “organic intellectual” in the sense that, whatever his or her personal background, he or she lives out a professional life in the midst of social struggle; who “accompanies” the poor and oppressed, not only by thinking and writing about them, but by living near them and being available to them day-by-day.

Notes

1. On pages 184–185 of *You Can’t Be Neutral*, Howard tells the story of how he got tenure. The BU trustees were to meet to consider, among other things, tenure for Howard Zinn. On the same day, outside the same place, students decided to hold a rally to protest the presence of Secretary of State Dean Rusk. They asked Howard to speak. He accepted with fear and trembling, believing he would be only one of many speakers. Arriving at the rally, he discovered he was the only speaker. He spoke and learned a few days later that the trustees had voted him tenure earlier in the day!
2. What follows is based on Peter Searby and the editors, “Edward Thompson as a Teacher,” in *Protest and Survive: Essays for E. P. Thompson* (London: Merlin Press, 1993), 1–17, and on Bryna D. Palmer, *E. P. Thompson: Objections and Oppositions* (London: Verso, 1994), chapters 2–3.

¡Basta! Radical History for the Classroom and Community

Enrique C. Ochoa

On January 1, 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement was implemented, a campesino army rose up in Chiapas, Mexico, declaring *¡Basta!* (Enough!) to corporate globalization and its deleterious impacts on indigenous and working people. Similar cries of *¡Basta!* have been heard in places as diverse as Brazil, Ecuador, France, the Philippines, and South Korea. In the United States, the 1999 demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle are a symbol of popular challenge to the structure of the world economy and represent the potential for an international social movement.

Radical historians can play an important role in such movements for social change by connecting research and teaching to struggles for social justice. Similar to the ways that New Left activists drew upon William Appleman William's critiques of U.S. imperialism and E. P. Thompson's studies of the working class, radical historians can collaborate with social movements to challenge corporate globalization, racism, sexism, and heterosexism. In this era of media monopolization, engaging a broader audience requires creative and multidimensional approaches. My own development as a radical historian has been influenced by my position in U.S. society and the communities in which I have lived and worked.

My vocation and political commitment have been shaped by my parents, who as public school teachers possessed a passion for history and egalitarian ideals. Early in life I learned the importance of challenging imperialism and class domination. It was U.S. imperialism, in part, that stimulated my father and his parents to migrate in 1950 to the U.S. from Nicaragua, a country occupied by the U.S. Marines for the first two decades of my grandparents' lives. My mother, a second-generation Italian American whose father was an organizer for the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union in New York, instilled in me a critical view of capitalism and a determination for social justice.

It was the Nicaraguan Revolution that awakened my political consciousness. The final revolutionary offensive occurred as I entered high school and I witnessed how it impacted and divided my family. I eagerly read the work of Juan José Arévalo, John Gerassi, Walter LaFeber, and Gregorio Selser to learn about revolutionary struggle and U.S. intervention in Latin America. As a college student in the 1980s, I was influenced by radical Latin Americanists who, inspired by the Cuban Revolution, challenged scholarship that justified U.S. domination.¹ At UCLA, where I studied, E. Bradford Burns was a courageous critic of U.S. intervention in Central America. His scholarship demonstrated the devastating impact of colonialism and Latin American strategies of resistance. His ability to convey this in vivid detail to a general audience and to hundreds of undergraduates was inspirational.

By the late 1980s, such passionate community-based scholarship dissipated as radical historians grappled with the demise of the USSR, and revolution in Central America was thwarted with the aid of the U.S. Studies of U.S. imperialism receded as revolution and socialism were proclaimed dead by neoliberals, and class analysis waned as Post-Marxism influenced the academy. Such developments curbed much of the exciting campus-community activism that once existed. While the work of radical historians of Latin America influenced textbooks, it increasingly lost its counter-hegemonic edge and its audience narrowed.

The current resistance to neoliberal globalization can potentially reignite campus-community activism. As neoliberal policies severely punished the Latin American working classes, radical movements such as the Landless Movement in Brazil and the Zapatistas in Chiapas organized at the local level and addressed global issues. Scholar-activists can draw lessons from these experiences by working collaboratively with local communities and becoming part of a broader movement. This means that scholar-activists have to confront the academic marketplace that, like the global marketplace, discourages faculty from committing to their local community if they are to remain “competitive” for “better positions” at “more prestigious” universities.

At California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA), I have worked to foster critical perspectives in the classroom, campus, and surrounding communities. CSULA is a working-class campus where the majority of students are of color (approximately 50 percent Latina/o, 25 percent Asian, 15 percent white, and 10 percent African American) and are first-generation college students. Teaching Latin American history in Los Angeles enables me to draw upon and make connections between the Latin American roots of the city, the experiences of students, and contemporary issues. Students live, study, and work in a city that reflects the profound contradictions of our society: a booming, globally connected economy with growing income inequality; a demographic shift in which people of color are the majority population yet are the targets of a growing backlash that has criminalized immigrants, repealed affirmative action, and ended bilingual education. Rooted in working-class Los Angeles and with ties to Latin America, students bring numerous perspectives to class. My challenge is to encourage them to understand their lives and communities in the context of macrohistorical forces.

The classroom is an important arena for challenging hierarchy and authority in academia and in society. The sole use of lecture replicates the authoritarian structure of society, while a blanket use of cooperative learning groups can reproduce the flexible production model of the “new economy.” Instead, employing Freirian methods can help students strengthen the critical reasoning skills necessary for conscientization. This demands a collaborative atmosphere where students can relate current

issues to historical patterns and to struggles for liberation in ways meaningful to their lives.

While engaging students with the subject matter in relevant ways is challenging, the use of *testimonio*, films, and guest speakers within a theoretical and historical context reveals the ways people have resisted oppression and have sought to transform society. Guest speakers enable students to hear views that may not be sufficiently reflected in the readings. For example, students in one of my classes were challenged to rethink their understanding of gender and revolution after a talk by a Nicaraguan feminist-labor activist. She argued that while the Nicaraguan revolution created opportunities for women, revolutionary leaders were not sufficiently responsive to gender issues, and this led to disillusionment with the revolutionary leadership, although not with revolution. Reading feminist critiques of revolutions and hearing the Nicaraguan speaker facilitated students' understanding of the ways that gender and class oppression are related.

To connect the classroom to the surrounding communities, I offer a participatory action research component in some classes. In collaboration with local solidarity groups, immigrant empowerment organizations, and labor unions, students have organized immigrant workers, created briefing packets for solidarity tours, and conducted research for community-based projects. In class, they analytically reflect on their community work by connecting the knowledge they acquire to course readings and devise questions for examination. Through such campus-community collaborations, students can experience the relevance of historically based research and how it can contribute to community empowerment. These collaborations can also deepen ties with social movements, thereby having long-term significance.²

Radical historians can connect directly with grassroots activists to develop mutually beneficial projects. At CSULA, in 1999, we worked with a number of labor unions, solidarity groups, immigrant-rights organizations, students, and academics from different disciplines to organize a three-day conference with over a hundred participants. The themes, speakers, and format reflected common areas of interest, and each panel was comprised of academic and community participants. The structure of the conference and the collective planning process contributed to a large and diverse turnout. Other campus-community activities in which we are engaged include the planning of conferences on the teaching of Latin America in the public schools, developing a journal that combines academic and activist voices on globalization and its impacts, developing a public-access talk show, and the creation of a labor and working-class studies minor for students and labor activists.

These efforts to extend radical history in the classroom and in the community are being challenged by the corporatization of the university. Mirroring corporate downsizing and "efficiency-based" plans, public universities are implementing reactionary reforms that involve the hiring of faculty on part-time contracts, attacks on

tenure, and the use of outcomes-based assessment programs and content standards, “merit” pay, and distance learning. This is leading to the deskilling of the professoriate and is a threat to academic freedom and quality education. Radical historians must engage in efforts to combat such threats.

Radical historians have played an important role in expanding areas of inquiry, asking provocative questions, interrogating the record, exposing misuses of the past, providing an accessible explanation of how we have arrived at this point in time, and pointing out that nothing is inevitable or natural about it. In this era of growing disillusionment with the structure of the world economy and its local reverberations, it is time for radical historians to step up our efforts to connect with social movements and a broader audience to challenge inequality and injustice on campus, in the community, and in the world.

Notes

1. Mark T. Berger, *Under Northern Eyes: Latin American Studies and U.S. Hegemony in the Americas, 1898–1990* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995).
2. Enrique C. Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa, “Linking Theory, Experience, and Practice: Latin American and Latina/o Studies in the Age of Neoliberalism,” presented at the Latin American Studies Association Congress, Miami, FL, March 2000.

Reflections of Self and Society

Gary Y. Okhiro

I must confess to beginning with myself. My admission is all the more glaring in the light of discursive and social formations and the theoretical and political failures of experience and identity politics. But as I write this in the enveloping spaces of my study with its solitary window to the outside world, upon reflection I return to selective and vivid memories of my past.

The sun cast long shadows in the early morning chill of October 1968. I taught science at a rural high school in South Carolina and was walking on my way to school. I remember the day well because just in front of me was a group of students, one of whom wore an oversized pair of leather shoes without laces or socks. It wasn’t fashionable; it was mired in need. The picture of this young man remains with me today, some thirty-two years later, mainly because it was a snapshot of the poverty that surrounded me and to which I could never get accustomed.

I was in the South among African Americans and the rural poor, training for the Peace Corps to teach in southern Africa. The Peace Corps had this peculiar idea that hanging out with black folk in South Carolina would prepare us for our work in Africa. I was fresh out of graduate school, and I entertained cocky dreams of middle-

class luxuries and false assumptions of unrestrained privilege. And here I was in South Carolina in the midst of momentous civil rights struggles and an increasingly ferocious war being waged by the U.S. in Vietnam.

I recall stepping into the home of the Singletons, black sharecroppers and my gracious hosts for the night, and seeing on the wall a framed certificate. “Oh,” I said in acute observation, “one of your children must have graduated from college.” “No,” Mr. Singleton replied. “That’s our daughter’s high school diploma.” My cheeks still burn with embarrassment over my innocence of struggles engaged and achievements gained. I had failed to recognize that impoverished black children in South Carolina often failed to make it through high school. The diploma was a singular accomplishment—I had to learn that hard truth.

It was not always so with me. I was tutored into extravagance. In truth, I was a child of poverty, having grown up in a sugar plantation camp in rural Hawai‘i without the benefit of hors d’oeuvres or pocket change. We weren’t rich. My mother was a barber, maid, and laundry worker, and my father a sugar-mill worker, garbage collector, and janitor. I should have known. My mother never made it through elementary school, and my father, through middle school. Neither had a high school diploma. They didn’t have a chance.

So when I decided on African history in graduate school, I thought I could make a difference. I would unearth the foundation of great African civilization, I thought, extol African liberators from imperial and colonial oppression, and plunk African nuggets from the tailing of European history. I would right past wrongs. And when Asian American studies met me on my return from Africa in 1971, I embraced it with the same passion I felt for the African past. It was a career and a cause.

Asian American studies began in 1969 as a people’s liberation movement. I knew it immediately. I chafed at white boots marching in an Asian land and resisted the draft and war. I felt the anger swell within me when I saw African workers in apartheid South Africa being whipped with leather intended for cattle. I knew that my grandfather and father, men in their sixties and forties at the time, were not “yard boys” for the bosses whose lawns they clipped. Our past, properly understood, I believed, would free us from the prisons of colonialism and exploitation, racism and discrimination. It would inform our present and determine our destiny. Or so I thought.

Now with hindsight, I must say that we in ethnic studies have erred in our once radical demand for revolutionary change. We, the founders, figured race as the central object of study and racial politics as the means toward our liberation. We diagnosed the problem correctly insofar as hegemony, in the form of white racial politics, mandated inclusions and exclusions in textbooks, the curriculum, the racial formation, and we pursued its counter—colored racial politics that sought inclusion even as it more or less excluded whites, the inauthentic, wider social formation of class, gender, sexual-

ity, and nation. We've since had diffident relationships with those constituent parts of the social formation, wedded as we are to the racial formation.

White racial politics determined much of our projects. Third World liberation movements were anticolonial, anti-European struggles, but they also installed European-inspired nation-states with their elites and masses. Likewise, ethnic studies in the U.S. (led by men) promoted nationalist agendas that resisted the white nation but also replicated some of its vicious hierarchies. Patterned on European states, the rise of nation promoted homogeneity and repressed heterogeneities for the sake of union. It was also and obviously patriarchal and hostile to feminist critiques and aspirations, and bourgeois and exploitative and repressive of the working class.

Whites defined the field of racial contest. They named themselves and others, and designated members and nonmembers of their community. Exclusions promoted desires for inclusions by nonmembers—integration—but they also inspired nationalisms patterned upon the original. Today, separatism, begun as self-determination, is normalized such that the U.S. Census counts and therewith allocates resources in large measure on the basis of racialized categories, and 50 percent of America's youth, according to a 1999 national poll, express comfort with the idea of a racially segregated society as long as everyone has equal opportunities. We might yet see the return of the past in the notion of “separate” but equal.

The once radical strategy of colored politics plays into the hands of the dealer—white politics—by reifying race and its assumed salience and solitude, by equating significance and democracy with numbers, and by erecting barriers to discourage and restrict border crossing. And is it possible that what was once temporary—a strategic essentialism, a means toward an end—has become, like other bureaucracies, academic disciplines, and politics, extravagant and self-perpetuating? Ethnic studies, so defined, is at an intellectual and political dead end.

Instead, ethnic studies and our politics should embrace the social and not the racial formation, and insist that race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation are related social constructions—the systematic exercises of power to maintain privilege and poverty. We do know that, but lack of ability, within the cells of our making, to articulate the links that bind us or envision the means for our liberation. Race-based ethnic studies is essentially conservative intellectually and politically. And our decision some thirty years ago to reclaim our America for our liberation has yielded us a putative revolution that has reshaped, but has also been complicitous with, the designs of the ruling class. If the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line, it was because of whites and their opposition, colored racial politics. But the problem of the twenty-first century will continue to be the social formation in all its confounded complexity and fetching fullness.

Radical Public History in the City

Max Page

Tradition is alive and well in Atlanta. Just look for the Georgia (a.k.a. Confederate) flag high atop the capitol building. Or keep your eyes out for the hundreds of bronze markers placed in the 1950s and 1960s that litter the roadsides, offering hour by hour, infantry by infantry, accounts of the Battle of Atlanta, 22 July 1864. Or pick up an issue of *Atlanta Magazine*, where the closest thing to history is a recent note about Booker T. Washington's "Atlantic Compromise" speech which, the editors claim, launched the "New South's role in racial reconciliation."

But history, and especially radical history, continues to lose the battles in the city. Georgia State University, my old university, moved rapidly to remove a block of historic structures in the Fairlie-Poplar neighborhood at the heart of downtown Atlanta, including the site of Leb's, where a sit-down strike was held in 1963–64 against the segregated delicatessen. With the Klan marching across the street, protesting the desegregation of another restaurant just a block away—Herren's—student protesters in the 1960s forced the issue on Atlanta's downtown businesses and ultimately forced the desegregation of commercial establishments. With the buildings now cleared, construction has begun on the new Aderhold Building (built, ironically, with the construction profits of one of the city's long-time preservationists). There are no plans to mark the events that took place on the site.

A similar travesty took place a few years earlier when most of the Rich's Department Store complex was torn down to make way for the Atlanta Federal Center. Those concerned with the civil rights history of the site (it was there that Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested for first time in 1960 in connection with a civil rights protest) complained that there were no concrete plans for memorializing this crucial event in our city and nation's history. Almost a decade later, the fingers are still being pointed and the history of Rich's role in the civil rights movement remains untold. A "gentlemen's agreement" stipulating that the federal Department of General Services will in some way "mitigate" the loss of the historic structures is all that stands between memory and forgetting at this important site.

The sacking of history goes well beyond these few key civil rights sites. The history of cotton mill laborers, the city's structural segregation, the Leo Frank case—all of these are absent from the physical places of the city. Atlanta has seemed to thrive on the construction of its own past and the submerging of its true past. The continued growth of the city—it has been over the past decade one of the fastest growing cities in the country—has gone hand in hand with cloaking the past. It has seemed to Atlanta's elites that the city's success as a world center for commerce requires the crafting and protecting of a consensual, essentially positive history of the city's racial past. The notion of "a city too busy to hate" is at its core a choice and

an interpretation about Atlanta's history that continues to influence the cultural life of the city. Those stories have allowed Atlanta's elites to continue to sidestep some of the deep economic and social inequities of the city.

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My experience in Atlanta's recent history wars prompts this thesis: Radical history must be public history and public history must be radical history. Activism, like history, begins with the telling.

Public history should by all rights be a radical undertaking. For, at its heart, public history is about bringing history to a wider public, about challenging citizens out of complacency about their past and creating spaces for forgotten stories to be told. And yet public history has often served the opposite role. Not a small portion of cultural history concerns how public history (in the form of historical paintings, popular historical writing, monuments, historic preservation) has been used to promote and strengthen existing power structures. Past and present political regimes have understood that the calculated telling of a community or nation's past can solidify control and deny space—intellectual and physical—for alternative stories. One role of radical historians is to challenge those involved in the practices of public history—museum exhibits, public memorials, historic preservation, filmmaking—to tell fuller stories of our past.

More significantly, radical historians should go beyond advocacy for better public history; radical historians must more readily become the public historians. Radical history is, by my definition, public. Those practicing radical history, far more than other historians, hope to impact the present political situation through investigations into the past. The eye of the radical historian is always looking beyond the academy. But too often the ideas remain between the covers of the *RHR* or other academic journals. It has been easy for radical historians to dismiss public-history efforts as either tainted by association with conservative forces or as “watered down” scholarship, or as simply ineffective tools in pursuing radical political aims. (That an article in *RHR* is good for those seeking tenure, and a museum exhibit or radio show on history is not, also plays into the reluctance to engage in public-history projects).

Radical historians will have to follow the lead of some of our members and expand the stage on which we act. We will have to treat as equals our historical interpretations and the way we communicate those stories to a wider public.

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A corollary thesis: Radical public history must find its home in cities. Cities are crucial barometers of a society's attitude toward preserving the past. On the one hand, cities are by their very nature defined by a “creative destruction” of the urban environment. The physical remnants of the past are necessarily more rapidly demolished

and removed from sight. On the other hand, cities carry, as E. B. White has written, “the unexpungeable odor of the long past,” created by the generations and millions that have inhabited a small bit of earth.

Thus, how memory is “collected” in the public places of the city shapes public discourses. I specifically do not use the term “collective memory,” which seems to suggest a shared, consensual understanding of the past; it unfortunately suggests a community’s past as something bringing common purpose and understanding. Instead, I would like us to adopt James Young’s phrase, “collected memory,” to suggest that memory is a process, an action—it is never a noun, fixed and permanent, but more rightly “memory-work,” a continuous remaking of the past for present needs and purposes. And, most importantly, “collected memory” implies that individuals and groups are doing the “collecting.” Remembering, recalling, and telling the past is an essential human act—like breathing—and was thus the most democratic act even before there was a democratic ideology to name it. But the power to have certain memories heard and seen in public and gain acceptance in the public life of a city or nation is a power held unequally. Certain groups gain the power to “collect” the memory of a town, or group, or nation and thus shape what comes to be called “collective memory.” The phrase suggests power relationships, and thus politics.

Memory and politics and cities are inseparable. This seems a good starting point for a revitalized radical public history.

Community Scholarship

Vijay Prashad

The only way to live on this planet
With any human dignity at the moment
Is to struggle
—Asian Dub Foundation, “Committed to Life”

For me, it started with the Soviets. Each year two of them would come to my school and sell books at a very low price. When I was in Class 10, I bought Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, and it put paid to my liberalism: never again would pity for Calcutta’s poor suffice. The next year, one of the Progress Publishers’ agents sold me some Marx at a cut price, and I was hooked. The Soviets interested my friends and me, for they were the only consulate officials who drove themselves everywhere (no hired Indian drivers) and they showed the best movies at their cultural center, Gorky Sadan. Besides, the Reds in India are held in high esteem, both by the intellectuals and even by those who are not too keen on politics (“at least the communists are honest, even if misguided,” that sort of thing). So it was Tolstoy, and then Marx, that first got me on the road to rad-

icalism—their books, but not in isolation, for one can hardly be unaffected by Calcutta's starkness of life and its political struggles. In the eighteenth century, officials of the English East India Company fabricated what Marx called a “sham scandal” (the “Black Hole”) to justify their own barbarity; in our own times, the sham scandal of the helpless poor hides capitalism's hand in the production of such grief.¹ Being raised in Calcutta, surrounded by the sharp and creative struggles against poverty and injustice from the Indian left, was pedagogy enough for radical hope.

Unlike so many of my colleagues who, like some sort of red Judases, deny knowledge of what is a theoretical and political force, I feel that it's important to pay tribute to the Soviets, for all their failings. And too many of us make much of those failures far more than we acknowledge the merits of the experiment, or that the experiment is alive and well.² Cuba, Vietnam, West Bengal, Kerala—in the realm of necessity, people struggle to produce some form of social justice, while we, here in the realm of freedom, unctuously suck up to the powers that be with our post-Marxisms and other fallacies. Many years ago Perry Anderson wrote that “the hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is thus that it is a politics of *defeat*.”³ Detached from workers' struggles and encumbered with an unadulterated belief in socialist progress, how could a generation (or two) of European and U.S. Marxists not be crushed by the collapse of the USSR? In West Bengal, as in Nepal or in South Africa, Marxism was never restricted to what happened in the USSR, for the terrain of struggle was quite different, and many of the movements in these countries lived with the certainty of a polycentrist universe.⁴ Several brands of Indian Marxism make the discussion fertile, not arid. This was my theoretical universe and it was not entirely put into crisis during the 1990s: *My radical is red, so there!*⁵

I came to history like I came into the academy, to escape the ravages of the neoliberal world being produced by Reagan and his confederates. It was a defensive and partly cowardly gesture—to flee other careers for the place of the mind, where academic freedom allows for much more flexibility than in any other occupation. Conveniently, the profession of history provides one of the media for radical political activity: ideology critique. To be a radical historian, then, is by definition to be a public intellectual, someone who takes it as axiomatic that our work is related to popular struggles. A populist account would hold that we must write for the broadest audience about things that are already within the ambit of our readers. Although it comes from fine instincts, the upshot of this populism is that it condescends to those whom it attempts to reach.⁶ The task of a radical historian, following from the lineage of Marxism in which I live, is to engage with “public” structures (law, religion, state, etc.) and ideologies (which are structured into practice by the “public” institutions). The “public” is not just an agglomeration of individuals, but it is also those structures (and structured ideologies) whose complexity we can record, without being too reductive, toward political practice of some kind. To be a “public”

intellectual, then, is not just to chat away on CNN, but it also means to delve into the way our “public” spaces are demolished as we, within the jet-stream of political struggle, constitute the “public” of our future.

My book *The Karma of Brown Folk*, for example, was written in the midst of engagement within the South Asian American community, as well as in dialogue with those who persist in using *desis* (South Asian Americans) as a weapon in the war against black Americans.⁷ Furthermore, and importantly, I wrote the book in the aftermath of the draconian 1996 Immigration Act which was the paragon of fierce anti-immigrant times, and which revealed some of those structural features of political economy otherwise at work in the basement of social existence. *Desis*, in bad faith, accommodate ourselves to a neoliberal racism and xenophobia during these tense years, mainly because it allows us, as immigrants, to duck the barbs directed at migrants of color. I suspect that the book was enabled by the New York taxi strike of 1998, the emergence of radical *desi* organizations in the last decade, and the 1996 Immigration Act (and its systemic sway). I didn’t write the book thinking of the “public” as some sort of market fetish to increase sales; nor did I think of my readership as being other scholars. I wrote the book as part of the struggle for social justice engendered by the political activity of radical *desis*. I didn’t sign up for the academic guild in order to hide our secrets. I only came here because I was too scared (and by dint of my visa, legally unable) to become something like a full-time organizer. All that hooey about being free to do what one wants to do is a bourgeois aesthetization of our work: we are not here for entertainment.

Most of my generation is now set to make the transit into tenure or toward some other kind of accommodation with the exploitative mechanisms of the teaching machine. Many of us are part of the milieu that was some combination of second-generation (in immigrant terms), third-wave (in feminist terms), fourth world (in political terms) people deeply unhappy with the multicultural neoliberal condescension of our times—where diversity may be something of a fetish to flatten our complexities rather than to allow us space to breathe as political animals. Those of us who write history within ethnic studies or women’s studies take the world as our canvas both to make the U.S. experience parochial and to show how our struggles here have been tied to those of the world outside. Such scholarship is impatient with the boundaries of the nation-state, and it writes a planetary history to undermine the exclusions that are endemic to our profession. Few of us stop twice to think about the idea of the “public” or of our responsibility to some larger movement than ourselves: young artists and intellectuals took the lead on 11 September 1999 to create Mumia⁹¹¹ (in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal); scholars and artists banded together to form SAWSJ in solidarity with workers’ struggles; in the antiracist and antixenophobic circles, intellectuals and scholars bear witness to a long tradition of public engagement. We are not trying to insert ourselves into a “public” long colonized by

the capitalist media; we are trying to create our own “publics,” our own circles of engagement with our own media (either in ’zines, videos, pamphlets, Internet periodicals, or discussion circles). We are writing in step with a movement, stumbling to keep up with it.

Notes

Lal Salaam to Lisa Armstrong, agitator of our world and of my mind.

1. The quote from Marx is taken from John Hutnyk, *The Rumour of Calcutta: Tourism, Charity, and the Poverty of Representation* (London: Zed Press, 1996), 91. My views on the image of Calcutta and on the place of Mother Teresa in the international imagination can be gleaned from “Mother Teresa: Mirror of Bourgeois Guilt,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8–14 November 1997; a shorter version appeared as “Mother Teresa: A Communist View,” *Political Affairs* 76, no. 9 (September 1997).
2. For an introduction to some of the suppleness of this contemporary communism, see *A World to Win: Essays on the Communist Manifesto*, ed. Prakash Karat (New Delhi: Left Word Books, 1999).
3. Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979), 42.
4. The richness of the left movement across the globe received a filip from Togliatti’s concept of “polycentrism,” which gave some theoretical clarity to the idea of the “national roads to socialism” (*VIII Congresso del PCI* [Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1956].) I’m reminded of Eric Hobsbawm’s comment that “each communist party was the child of the marriage of two ill-assorted partners, a national left and the October revolution. That marriage was based both on love and convenience” (“Problems of Communist History,” in *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays* [New York: Pantheon, 1973]), 3.
5. To clarify what I mean by “left” or radical, see Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction* (London: Polity Press, 1996). Several of the problems in the book are sorted out in a spirited debate between Bobbio and Perry Anderson in *New Left Review* 231 (September/October 1998): 73–93.
6. Several years ago, I worked at Direct Action for Rights and Equality in Providence, Rhode Island. As our executive director Mark Toney and I cowrote a report on tobacco advertisements in our low-income neighborhood, he was adamant that we use footnotes and not be too reductive in our prose. I owe him much for that piece of advice.
7. Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

Coming in Late

David Roediger

The process of radicalization, or as Robin Kelley calls it, “catching the Holy Ghost,” remains deeply mysterious. Historians can rarely describe its workings convincingly at the level of individual transformations. Radicals, despite a century and more of “How I Became a Socialist” stories, have hardly been more convincing. Attuned to broad social forces, their accounts are often extremely reticent about the personal. To

ask radical historians to describe their own leftward movement therefore invites trouble. Because I've tried to discuss the impact of growing up in a union household and around both bitter racism and freedom movements in the introduction to *The Wages of Whiteness*, I'll sidestep those troubles here, with one limited exception.

The exception grows out of hearing it argued—I've tried hard to recall where—that those activists who came to the New Left in 1970 and after constitute a “microgeneration” with a quite different experience from the “rise-and-fall” narratives which describe the experiences of earlier activists. Coming to Northern Illinois University in 1970, and heading SDS there as it collapsed everywhere, I never thought revolution was right around the corner and never suffered profound disillusion when it did not appear. Although close to the sectarian left, especially International Socialists, I did not join it and therefore also missed the rise and dashing of revolutionary hopes writ small. For me, women's liberation and Black Power were exciting new realities and not wrenching departures from older movement norms. I hoped that we could help end the war (we did) and build institutions which could sustain a long struggle (mostly, we didn't). Doing small things over the years—rebuilding the Charles H. Kerr Company as a radical labor publisher, strike support, cooperation with the Chicago Surrealist Group, bookstore collective building, solidarity with South African liberation struggles—was what I expected and hoped to do. My closest mentors and role models as radical scholars, Margaret George, George Rawick, Marvin Rosen, and Sterling Stuckey, all spoke with great calm born of knowing that freedom struggles are long but that advances are made even when we do not see them, and they contributed to this long-run orientation.

Coming so late to the New Left also meant that I entered graduate school at a time (1975) when the new “radical history” was becoming an established fact rather than an insurgent project. The maturing presence of “new labor” and “new social” histories was important not just because these approaches formed my work methodologically but also because they seemed substantial and thriving enough to criticize. Unlike a slightly earlier microgeneration, I did not feel enjoined to pledge allegiance to beleaguered new histories. I could emphasize very strong connections of my work to Old Left thinkers, including the Communist historians Philip S. Foner and Herbert Aptheker as well as C. L. R. James and W. E. B. DuBois, in ways which young scholars choosing and establishing the new histories just a decade earlier could likely not have so easily done. Thus for me the key texts defining radical history were Susan Porter Benson's studies of department store workers and Marx's *Capital*; David Montgomery's *Beyond Equality* and DuBois's *Black Reconstruction*; Herbert Gutman's *Work, Culture, and Society* and Foner's *History of the Labor Movement*. Undoubtedly I have carried the luxury of being able to be critical of the new labor history farther than most and have at times missed the good reasons why some historians (especially those only *slightly* senior to me) reacted defensively to such crit-

icisms. Being neither chastened by dashed hopes nor defensive in the face of a seemingly hostile profession also likely contributed to my maintaining that the bar for what counts as radical history ought to be set high. Indeed it seems to me that both political and theoretical changes over the last thirty years argue for a *more* radical history.

Given this micro-generational experience and a host of personal ones with mentors and movements, I apprehend radical history as being a project which shows that alternatives to socially produced misery have continually been created. It often begins “from the bottom up” but with a keen sense that the exercise of power also shapes events and dreams. Such history must be critical—of itself, of systems of oppression, and even of the working people with whom it identifies. It need not be at every turn popularly accessible—a difficult book like Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* makes critically important radical contributions—but radical history at its best does show a sustained awareness of audience and often of the historical moment in which it is produced.

Just before settling into writing these lines, I read a literally incredible feature article in which a *New York Times* reporter set out to show that postcolonial studies *causes* protests against the World Trade Organization and sweatshop labor. In this never-never land, academics radicalize social movements. In real life, social movements and political economic ruptures create effective and creative radical intellectuals. It is therefore presumptuous to predict whether radical history, in and of itself, has a future. Its future lies precisely in its engagement with social movements, and it cannot call those movements into being, although the university is one important site of intellectual ferment and, increasingly, of labor protest.

Nonetheless it seems to me that grounds for very high optimism exist. My generation of historians, for example, very seldom sustained analyses which wove together race, gender, sexuality, and class, although we called for such analyses often enough. Academic and political experience tended to make us think in terms of which category deserved primacy. We did not know, from a technical point of view, how to write such multivalent history. Often enough we told each other privately that such writing perhaps was impossible. Now we have George Chauncey’s *Gay New York*, Tera Hunter’s *To ’Joy My Freedom*, Lisa Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* and a growing number of other studies which makes such pessimism seem ridiculous. Academic debate produced such advances but so too did social movements which demand complex analyses. Labor historians now write, for example, in dialogue with a union movement whose unprecedented diverse rank-and-file has changed far more dramatically than its leadership and with an unorganized working class with identities and dreams which far transcend a desire to be “labor.” To see such realities in the present has helped us to see their predecessors. Radical history must take its poetry from the past, from the present, and from the future.

