

Early Lesbian Cinema

Undocumented Workers

RADICAL AMERICA

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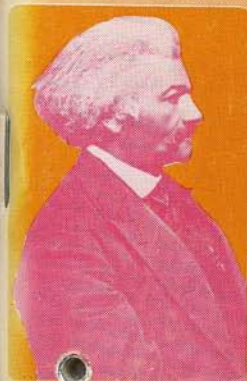
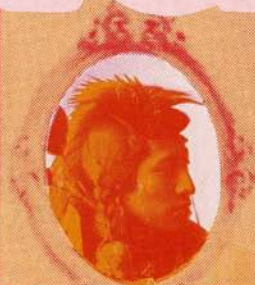
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INTRODUCTION

When *Radical America* decided to publish reviews of recent books in American social history to explore ways in which the movements of the last twenty years have forced a rethinking of history, and to consider the perspectives that “new” history can bring to political activism, we came face to face with the fragmentation within and between political activism and radical intellectual work.

Reckless military and imperial adventures, a virulent and reactionary cultural assault and a growing perception of a deep crisis in our way of life, define the political and personal crisis that many of us are confronting. The seeming lack of understanding and response adequate to the terms of this crisis deepens it even more. Several striking paradoxes characterize our current situation. In a period in which activism has moved outside the universities, and in which intellectuals, inspired by the social movements of the last twenty years have increased within them, there appears to be a growing lack of contact or connection with each sector’s interests and concerns. This gap reflects the continuing crises in our movements and in the meaning of radical intellectual work in a period of political and cultural retrenchment.

The perspectives and discussions that could interpret or challenge the terms of existing political struggles and break the isolation of movements around specific issues or interests, are not emanating from the university as they once did. Activists in search of information, insight, or analysis to illuminate the present, are confronted with a proliferation of historical studies from the left, from feminists, even a few from gays, whose motivation may be political but whose political meaning or relevance in the present situation is obscure. Interesting and useful information emerges from this work, as well as from the resurgent wave of teach-ins responding to the growth of militarism and the crises in Central America and the Middle East. Yet this information repeats the fragmentation besetting our movements. It

often fails to connect resistance to intervention in El Salvador, the threat of nuclear war, or the cutbacks in economic and social services to the crises in our daily lives. There is a striking lack of vision, and an inability to transcend the terms we are reacting to.

While student (and some faculty) energy continues to fuel movements like those against the draft, nuclear weapons and nuclear power and for women's and gay liberation, and while faculty are active in union struggles and defense against retrenchment, the university itself is no longer a terrain of political struggle and criticism. Radicals in the universities, without strong movements to push them and hold them accountable, are inevitably drawn into the existing terms of academic debate, however critically, rather than standing outside, setting their own terms and challenging the direction of academic discussion. Despite deep commitments as radical critics, social existence exerts its awful and hidden weight on the consciousness of history, and on the narrowed perspectives from which it is written.

At its founding in 1967 as a Journal of SDS Radicalism, *Radical America* took on the task of developing a theoretical and historical understanding that could comprehend and contribute to the new social movements — particularly among blacks and New Left students — that exploded without historical warning in the United States in the 1960s. While the new movements at once exposed the bankruptcy of the liberal-consensus interpretations of American history, traditional Marxism fared little better in providing a perspective from which to understand the newness or the significance or the dilemmas of the Black Revolution or the student movement. As Paul Buhle wrote in *Radical America* in 1968, "Marxists could explain in the crudest terms why underdeveloped countries were exploited, why blacks in

America were underprivileged — but they could not explain the growing sense of emptiness among the well-clothed and well-fed Americans, the deeply cultural crisis that swept across America." And George Rawick, posing the challenge represented by the emergence of Black Power, added the need to address the complex dialectic of consciousness, the contradictions and struggles within personality "where the social struggle begins before it becomes externalized and objectified."

A focus on the problems of culture and consciousness came to define New Left radical history. Marcuse was the key theoretical inspiration, William A. Williams and E. P. Thompson the historians who guided it. New Left historians absorbed Thompson's understanding of the power of capitalism to shape not only the terms of daily existence but even the terms of resistance to it — to confine the terms of revolt to the language of capitalism. If the first wave of revolt against the imposition of capitalist time disciplines and the reduction of all experience and motivation to economic categories and calculations embodied a refusal of the human terms of the capitalist project, subsequent protest accepted and fought within rather than against those terms. Not so much against time, but for more time; not against the domination of the economy over all of life, but assuming it.

From Williams came an understanding of empire as a way of life as well as a system of exploitation, a critique which pointed toward uncovering the connections between the government's military and imperial designs and the daily lives we led, toward exposing the cultural and political realities that sustained the empire. And from Marcuse, as Buhle wrote, came the political conclusion that "the death camps of Dachau are the symbol of our civilization: there can be no simple reconciliation with the old

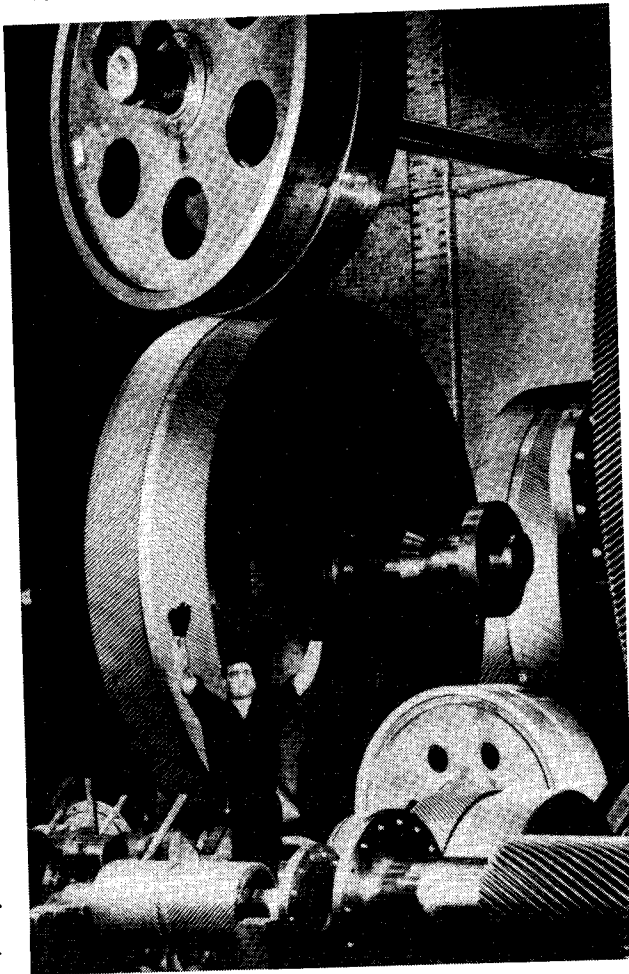
radical notion that American society possessed a healthy, democratic culture which only the militarists and corporation presidents temporarily polluted. The worst of the New Left's heritage is the Old Left's failure to break decisively with that culture, to willingly throw aside old illusions about traditions and begin to propose alternatives.

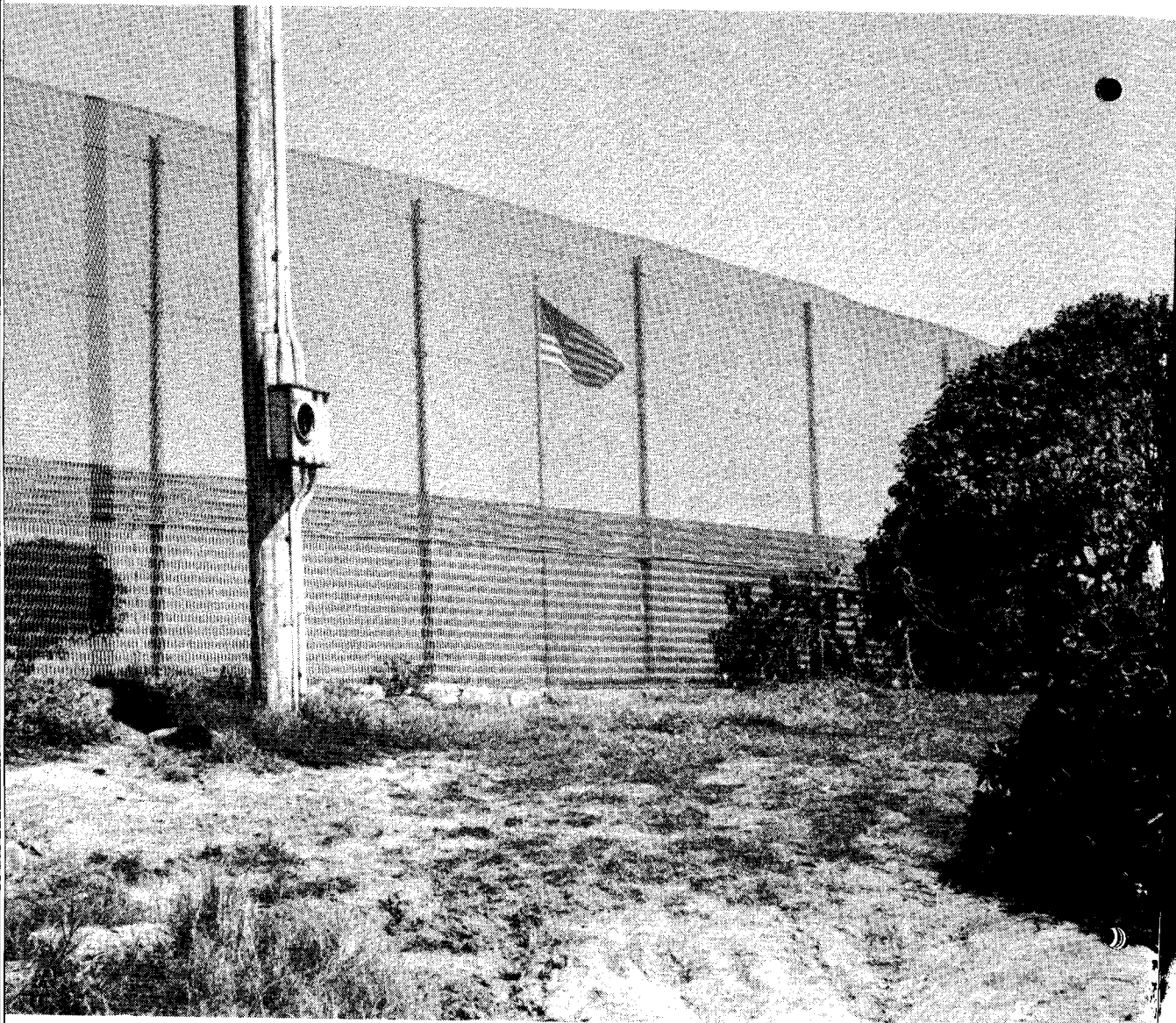
Radical America in this period attempted to stand outside the academic discipline — the intellectual expression of a rebellion against the fragmentation and reification of life. A movement that began to break through the frozen categories — the 'either-ors' of bourgeois existence — also refused the confining categories of bourgeois thought as well, and rebelled against the habits of academic, disciplined thought that tied our consciousness to the present reality. Radical historians took as their task the lifting of the tradition of the dead generations which weighed on the brains of the living, a critique of the consciousness of the existing world that pointed to the transcendence of its most basic terms and assumptions.

With the emergence of women's liberation and gay liberation in the '70s, similar challenges developed. Probably most crucial to defining radical historical scholarship of the 1960s was its vital connection to social movements that set its agenda and its location in a period in which the purposes and the culture of the universities were themselves the objects of challenge. In the absence of either of these conditions, the characteristic form of radical intellectual work today is its separation and consolidation into various disciplinary productions — journals and conferences of radical history, radical science, radical economics, radical sociology. Today we would like *Radical America* to provide a space for reflection on the politics of intellectual work that is sometimes hard to find

or create within the terms of academic production.

In this and our next issue, we are publishing a series of reviews of recent historical work which has been written in this paradoxical and shifting context and attempting to assess the contribution this radical history has brought to traditional history. In our introductions we will continue to address the broader questions of the politics and pitfalls and promise of radical intellectual work in this period of political crisis.





Carter's "Tortilla Curtain" as seen from Mexico.

(Photo: Eva Cockcroft)

ONE MORE TIME:

The "Undocumented"

Jorge A. Bustamante and James D. Cockcroft

Ever since the late nineteenth century, generations of Mexican workers have responded to the needs of a US economy that, despite fluctuations, has never ceased requiring Mexican labor. In recent years the demand for immigrant labor in the United States has not only persisted but expanded, even though US official unemployment rates have reached politically intolerable levels of 7 percent and up. Moreover, US demographic data indicate a growing scarcity of labor power in those sectors most in need of semiskilled or unskilled labor, which translates into an expansion in the next decades in the market for foreign "unqualified" labor.

This is a market with its own rules and its own history. One end of the market may be located in an impoverished *rancheria* (cluster of tiny farm plots) in a state like Michoacan (west of Mexico City), whose local economy has reproduced four generations of labor power. The other end of the same labor market may be located 2,000 miles away: a restaurant or automotive chassis factory in Chicago; an agribusiness field in south Texas or California's Imperial Valley; a garment or electronics factory in Los Angeles; or a middle-class household employing a domestic servant in any of the border states. This international labor system has a well-elaborated structure in which neither employers nor workers are left in doubt as to their rights and privileges.

The Mexican migrant worker, upon entering the US labor market, enters into a labor

relation in which the US employer has the unique power to decide unilaterally whether the immigrant is to be treated as a worker or as a "criminal." The current law (US Congress, 8 USC, Section 1324) permits an employer to hire "undocumented aliens," at the same time that "undocumented aliens" are made deportable. Thus, under what in fact is a labor law in the disguise of an immigration law, the Mexican migrant laborer is in a defenseless position. His or her relationship to the employer personifies the historical relationship between Mexico and the United States: slave-boss. It is conducive to "superexploitation," that is, payment of labor power below its value or what it takes for a laborer to sustain himself. Such low wages, in turn, help provide stability not only for industrial plants that might otherwise "run away" to other countries where cheap labor is available, but also for an ever more varied array of US industries seeking to combat the tendency of the rate of profit to fall by saving on wages.¹ The presence of an immense pool of job-hungry laborers in Mexico (whose combined rate of unemployment and underemployment has recently been around 50 percent) helps hold down all wages in both the United States and Mexico. Directly or indirectly, it helps all capitalists accumulate, in both countries.

The very fact that so many Mexican workers are available for migration is a byproduct of the growth of US-based transnational corporations in Mexico. Concentrated in the most dynamic sectors of industrial production, they have increased Mexico's unemployed population by inflating the amount of capital needed for each new job. They have also drained Mexico of immense sums of money: even as new US investment has increased rapidly, the outflow of dividends, interest, and other payments to foreign investors has been twice as large. The transnationals have added to unemployment in

Mexico rather than alleviating it.

Data obtained from interviews by Mexican researchers of hundreds of thousands of migrants in the late 1970s show that the migrant workers are not, for the most part, among the very poorest in Mexico; nor are they the least educated or the most likely to be unemployed. In other words, they are not at the very bottom of the social pyramid.

This system implies the reproduction of Mexican labor power at minimal costs to US capital — a kind of Mexican subsidy to the US economy in the form of human capital raised and schooled in Mexico and returning there on a regular basis. US capital does not have to bear the costs of educating or nurturing these human beings until they migrate in early adulthood. The costs of their subsistence — and therefore the reproduction of their labor power — are maintained at a minimal level through a system which encourages a migrant to come alone and to remit (by US standards) small amounts home for the subsistence of the migrant's Mexican family. Because of the intensity of their exploitation, the migrants themselves have their productive capacities "used up" relatively early in life and are then discarded to the margins of society to be replaced by new waves of younger migrants. (Most are between eighteen and twenty-five years old; most stay less than a year.) An undetermined number of migrants are killed or disabled in the course of their travels and labors.

Even though the total dollar value of this Mexican subsidy of labor power to the US economy may not be overwhelming by US standards, it is significant to Mexico, a country where resources for the development of human capital are limited. The inequality of the exchange of Mexican labor power for dollar remittances to the migrants' families is glaring. It undermines the claims of US government



Michoacan "ranchera" with most of the men in the US

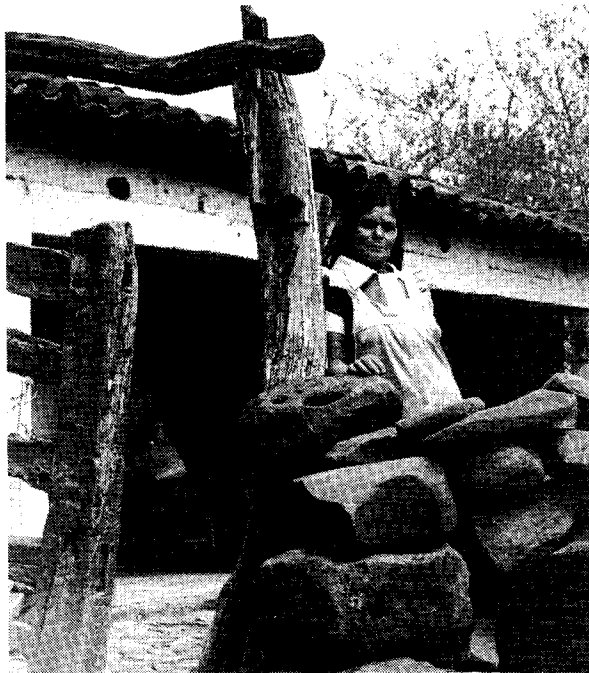
(Photo: Eva Cockcroft)

spokespeople that Mexican migration represents a cost for the US economy and a benefit for Mexico (on the grounds that migration allows Mexico to export "its" unemployment problem).

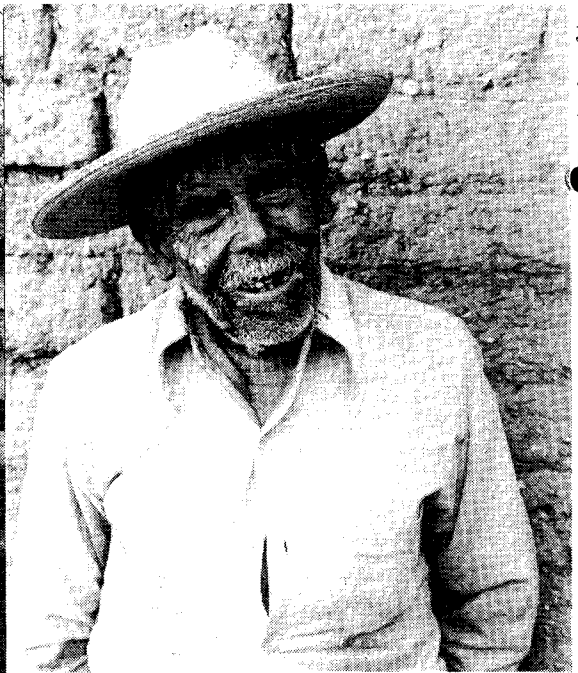
Scientific research has exposed many myths about the "undocumented," but it has yet to have an impact on US public opinion where emotional political definitions still rule over reason. Certainly the figures on the volume of the migratory flow of Mexican workers are much lower than what the US mass media have disseminated. All empirical studies on the size of the Mexican "undocumented" population in the United States at various points between 1975 and 1977 concur that the total is somewhere between a quarter-million and 2.9 million.

In general, these workers do not displace US workers, as they have been accused of doing. The "undocumented" belong to a labor market with special rules, and these rules are unacceptable to US workers. When an employer in the United States hires some of the "undocumented," he makes room not for just any workers but for those who are in the highly vulnerable and exploitable conditions specific to that category or workers known as "the undocumented."

A recurring feature of the economic crises (periods of depression or recession) of 1907, 1921, 1929-34, 1947, 1954, 1974 and 1980-81 in the United States has been that many of their symptoms — especially high unemployment — are attributed to the presence of Mexican migrant workers. In most of these crises,



Migrant home in Michoacan "ranchera".



Ninety-four year old veteran of earlier migrations.

(Photo: Eva Cockcroft)

the organized working class, particularly the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and later the AFL-CIO, firmly believed that Mexican immigration was an important cause of unemployment and demanded mass deportations and/or sealing of the border with Mexico. Such demands make a number of erroneous assumptions: (1) that Mexican immigration causes unemployment in the United States; (2) that the border can be made impenetrable to undocumented migrants with existing resources; and (3) that if the flow were to be seriously reduced, no dislocations in the US economy, particularly in certain regions and industries, would result. By scapegoating "illegal immigrants," US politicians, labor leaders, and journalists in effect absolve the US capitalist system of responsibility for creating unemployment.

It was not just the alleged employment

effects of undocumented migrants in the US labor force that have set the stage for massive deportations of Mexicans during each one of these crises. Xenophobia and racism have always played an important role as well. AFL president Samuel Gompers, for example, alleged that Mexicans had an inferior capacity to produce. The widely read author T. Lothrop Stoddard, asserted that Mexicans were culturally inferior and were undesirable immigrants because they were "born communist."³ Such nativist views were especially popular in the 1920s, but there has always been an undercurrent of racism in which Mexicans as such are seen not to be legitimate members of US society. In recent years we have seen such arguments as the one by the CIA's ex-director William Colby, who said in 1978 that Mexican immigration represented a greater future threat to the United States than did the Soviet Union.

Common to all these economic crises has been the contradiction between the ideological proposition that deportation drives should be undertaken or the border closed and the economic interests of employers who benefit from the availability of Mexican migrant labor. There was a standoff during the Carter administration, though. Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall proposed closing the border on the premise (typical of how some "liberals" reason) that this would benefit the Chicano workers who lived near the "undocumented" and were presumably the main victims of the labor-market competition. Debate continues today, even though it is within the Republican and not the Democratic party.

If history is a guide to what may be expected in the future, one may conclude that the ultimate resolution of the standoff hinges on the course of the present economic crisis. The greater the duration and intensity of the crisis, the more likely it is that policy will tilt toward a closing of the border or stricter controls on the migratory flow. The shorter and milder the crisis, the more likely it is that the policy will be to open the border or legalize the entry of substantial numbers of immigrants. Whatever happens, US policy formation will be the result of internal bargaining between restrictionists (strong in Congress) and employers (strong in the executive branch of the federal government).

Mexico, at this writing, does not have an articulated policy with respect to emigration to the United States. Some US supporters of employer-backed proposals for an "open border" seek signs of Mexican backing in order to use it in the internal US debate under the guise of furthering bilateral relations, noting "the very high cost of ignoring a country so important as Mexico." These voices play up the notion of "helping" Mexico establish an "escape valve" for its surplus population.

In the 1980s, a number of bilateral issues will affect US decisions about immigration: oil, trade, common market, North-South dialogue, and so forth. There already exists widespread speculation that the issue of the "undocumented" will enter into (or behind the scenes already has entered into) negotiations on these matters. For example, legal admission of more Mexican immigrants may, publicly or behind the scenes, be linked to US endeavors to obtain Mexican energy resources on more advantageous terms, or to Mexican efforts to improve the terms of bilateral trade.

In spite of repeated rejections of the "North American Common Market" idea by President Lopez Portillo and Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau, President Reagan remains an advocate of a common market with Mexico and Canada. Whether publicly stated or not, part of President Reagan's strategy with regard to the issue of the "undocumented" may be to link a supposed resolution of the issue with a gradual advancement toward a common market. There already exists a burgeoning common market that in the United States has been baptized the "silent integration," one that for many years has operated in the border zones and is now reaching into central Mexico. It exists in sectors like automotive plants and in the "maquiladoras," labor-intensive assembly plants employing mostly women. Official US acceptance of a specified number of Mexican migrant workers could readily be converted into a "beachhead," or justification, for a further step toward making this "silent integration" an official common market. The establishment of a formal common market which builds on the existing economic integration is one of the most ambitious business projects of recent times among powerful sectors of monopoly capital in both nations, particularly in the north of Mexico and the southwest United States — a



Michoacan migrant's family left behind.

(Photo: Eva Cockcroft)

project long backed by Reagan and by other US politicians such as California's Governor Jerry Brown.

In mid-1981 Reagan announced his intention to resolve the question of Mexican migration by proposing legislation which would authorize the admission of Mexican workers with "guest worker" cards — at first in limited numbers (50,000 a year) but with the potential for subsequent expansion. The proposed program offered no assurances of workers' rights for the migrants. It envisioned a new category for

Mexican and other migrant workers known as "temporary residents," with visas renewable every three years. Under the Reagan program, a migrant worker would be required to pay taxes and contribute to the Social Security system like any other worker but would not be permitted to receive any of the benefits or services paid for by workers' taxes. Contrary to immigration law pledging assistance for reuniting families, the Mexican immigrant worker would not be allowed to bring his or her family until years after becoming a permanent resident alien.

(Only after ten years of continuous residence would he or she be allowed to apply for permanent residence.)

The Reagan proposal also called for an increased budget for the Border Patrol and fines on employers hiring four or more "undocumented" workers (many in the services sector hire fewer). The legislation contemplated by Reagan reportedly includes an "amnesty" for those "undocumented" workers who can show five or more years continuous residence in the United States. Few Mexican immigrants would eventually qualify for permanent residence since they rarely stay for more than a year or so continuously. In any case, "amnesty" is a process by which criminals or political prisoners are pardoned by the state; it is inapplicable to workers. Since when is it a crime under capitalism to sell one's labor power cheaply to an employer?

There is considerable opposition to the Reagan proposals. The AFL-CIO perceives them as favorable to employers and contrary to the interests of US workers. Every major Chicano rights group has come out against the Reagan plan. Herman Baca, director of the Committee for Chicano Rights headquartered in San Diego, has called it another bracero program equivalent to slavery which will "only lead to an increase in violence and to the creation of an apartheid-type system for Chicanos."⁴ Reflecting on the proposal which has been cloaked as one promoting a "good-neighbor" relationship, wags in Mexico have referred to it as one in which "we are the good and they are the neighbor."

What happens to Mexican migrants affects Chicanos as well as all US citizens of Latin American descent, a fact which partially explains why such groups oppose employer sanctions and increased deportations. While Chicanos no longer have as much in common

with the migrants as they once did, they nonetheless are subject to INS stop-and-search raids at their workplace, in their cars, on buses, or on the sidewalks of US cities. For the authorities, as for the Ku Klux Klan, all Mexicans — and most Latin Americans — are alike. Under the Carter "human rights" administration (with its proposals for deportation drives, employer sanctions, and the partially completed "tortilla curtain" of spiked wire fencing) as well as under President Reagan's talk of "amnesty," millions of the Spanish-speaking have faced the prospect of mass arrest or deportation and the daily terror of wondering if they have all the right documents. Paramilitary units of the Ku Klux Klan periodically roam the border, and the INS in early 1981 stepped up the pace of factory "roundups."

A primary cause of both Carter's and Reagan's policies is the growing organizing activity, including incipient unionization and strikes, among the "undocumented" workers themselves. In response to the Reagan plan, many of their organizations decided to unite into the National Coordinating Council of Mexican Workers in the United States. In Maricopa County, Arizona, Mexican farmworkers recently established a militant labor union after more than a century of superexploitation for thousands of field hands. In urban areas like Los Angeles-San Diego, "undocumented" Mexican workers have begun forming unions in the garment and electronics industries and have held successful strikes. The garment workers' ILGWU, faced with falling national membership, has begun to welcome the migrants into its ranks. Parts of the AFL-CIO, also facing declining membership, have also shown support for the "undocumented" even though the organization as a whole favors restricting Mexican immigration. The United Farm Workers of America, sharing the AFL-CIO position,

has a membership of 30,000, down from a peak of 50,000. US organized labor could benefit from the energy emerging among the "illegals."

Among its many goals, the Reagan "guest worker" proposal aims to nip in the bud this nascent unionization and militancy among Mexican migrant workers. It further aims to regularize and control the flow of cheap labor for the benefit of employers. The unpredictability of the migratory flow, its relatively unorganized character, and the potential social unrest in US society it can contribute to — all cause the state, as arbiter of the interests of all capitalists, to seek a regularization and disciplining of immigration in a manner that will make migrant labor more tractable and reliable. Finally, the Reagan proposal serves to further divide the multinational US working class along lines of racism, jingoism, and ethnocentrism at the expense of all Latinos and ultimately of all workers residing in the United States.

If implemented, the Reagan "guest worker" program will attract to US consulates in Mexico or wherever contracts are offered, tens of thousands of job seekers. Those who do not find a place within the quota will go anyway (without legal entry permits) and end up competing for the same jobs for which the "guest workers" have been contracted. Employers of all workers in states like California and Texas will likely use the legal presence of cheap Mexican labor as an excuse (and scapegoat) for holding all workers' wages down. Chicanos will protest the Mexican government's tolerating the program, creating a strong division between Chicanos and Mexicans. Any "pan-Mexican" working-class unity for better treatment of all workers on both sides of the border, an idea with a century-long history, will thereby suffer another setback. Specific capitalist interests in agribusiness, industry, and services will rejoice. But both the final form of the program and its



(Photo: Eva Cofuroft)

Migrant just returned to Michoacan "ranchera".

eventual implementation will continue to be a focus of political struggle and controversy, suggesting that once again the "undocumented" will not go away as a major issue in US-Mexican relations and US politics for years to come.

Footnotes

1. In the short run, heightened use of inexpensive labor power combats the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This tendency, inherent to the capitalist mode of production, derives from the growth in the organic composition of capital, or the ratio of constant capital (instruments and raw materials of production) to variable capital (labor power, the only source of surplus value). Although modified by the ability of monopolies to control prices, the

tendency of the rate of profit to fall is one component of the occurrence of periodic crises in capitalist accumulation. For elaboration on capitalist crisis, consult Manuel Castells, *The Economic Crisis and American Society* (Princeton University Press, 1980), along with various issues of *Monthly Review* and *Radical America*.

2. E.g., Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

3. Theodore Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Labor Against White World-Supremacy* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1920), pp. 107-8. Fashionable in the 1920s and 1930s, these racist arguments were "backed" by many books and articles, such as "Immigration from Mexico," by C.M. Goethe, in Madison Grant and Charles S. Davidson, eds., *The Alien in Our Midst: or, "Selling Our Birthright for a Mess of Pottage"* (New York: The Galton Publishing Co., Inc., 1930). Championing white supremacy, the article claims to demonstrate "scientifically" that Mexicans are racially inferior.

4. Herman Baca, various press conferences, and interview reprinted in Committee on Chicano Rights, *A Chicano*

Perspective on the President's Immigration Proposals (CCR, 1837 Highland Ave., National City, CA 92050, 1981).

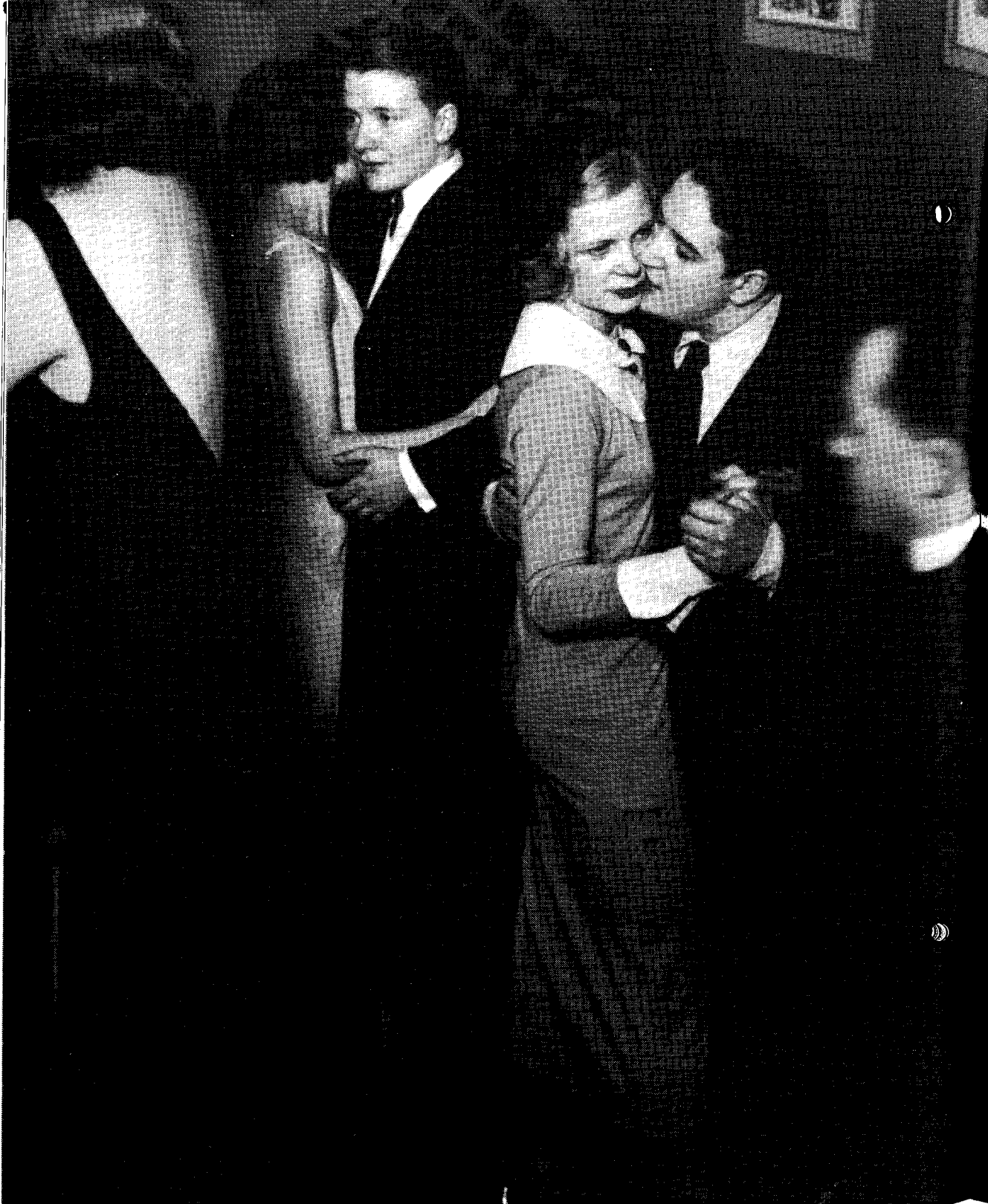
JORGE A. BUSTAMANTE is author of several books in Spanish on migration and US-Mexico relations. He is coordinator of the Colegio de Mexico's Programa de Estudios Fronterizos Mexico-Estados Unidos.

JAMES D. COCKCROFT has written several books on Mexico and Latin America, including *Capital Accumulation and the State* (Monthly Review Press, 1982). He is presently directing a research project on "Migration and Border Problems" based at the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana de Azcapotzalco in Mexico City.



Michoacan migrant tells of his experience.

(Photo: Eva Cockcroft)



• MAEDCHEN IN UNIFORM

From Repressive Tolerance To Erotic Liberation

B. Ruby Rich

What in God's name does one call this sensibility if it be not love? This extraordinary heightening of all one's impressions; this intensification of sensitiveness; this complete identification of feeling? . . . *I was Manuela, as she is Manuela, and everything that has happened to her has in essence, and other circumstances, happened to me. This incredible feeling of sisterhood.*¹

—Dorothy Thompson, upon meeting Christa Winsloe

There are moments when one historical period seems to beckon to another, offering the semblance of lessons to be learned or errors to be avoided. Certainly, that is true today for those of us reviewing the fate of progressive political organizations in the Weimar period preceding Adolph Hitler's coming to power in the inflation-torn and authority-hungry Germany of 1933. In particular, the history of women's-rights groups and homosexual-emancipation organizations is one that needs to be better known and analyzed. It is a testimony to our ignorance of the period that Leontine Sagan's film, *Maedchen in Uniform*, is generally assumed to be an anomaly, a film without a context, or else, is assumed to be a metaphor, a coded tale about something *else*, something other than what appears on screen. If we are to understand *Maedchen in Uniform* fully, it is important to keep in view the society within which it was made: the celebrated milieu of Berlin-avant-la-guerre, the Berlin with dozens of gay and lesbian bars and journals, the Berlin of a social tolerance so widespread that it nearly camouflaged the underlying legal restraints (which were to grow, rapidly, into massive repression). I would stop short of claiming an outlandish Rosetta Stone status for the film no matter how tempting, lest the reader lose faith. Yet, it might be

emphasized, *Maedchen in Uniform* is an exemplary work, not only for what it presents to us on the screen but also for the timely issues that its analysis must confront. It is the film revival most key to establishing a history of lesbian cinema.

Maedchen in Uniform was filmed by Leon-tine Sagan in Germany in 1931, based upon the play, *Yesterday and Today*, by Christa Winsloe (alias the Baroness von Hatvany), and repub-lished as a novel, *The Child Manuela*, also by Winsloe. The film, like the play, enjoyed a tremendous initial popularity, both within Ger-many and internationally; yet it has been nearly invisible in the past few decades within the academic study of German cinema. The film has frequently fallen into a seeming limbo between the silent German Expressionist cinema and the notorious products of the Third Reich studios. Despite its remarkable sound quality (praised by Lotte Eisner as the work in which "the pre-war German sound film reached its highest level")² and in spite of its evocative cinematography (which Siegfried Kracauer cited as transmitting "the symbolic power of light"),³ *Maedchen in Uniform* faded from the text books, the revival houses, and even eventually from distribution entirely. During the early '70s, however, Sagan's classic was resoundingly redeemed by the cycle of women's film festivals, gathering a solid cult following and the critical attention it had long lacked. The result, today, is that the film is back in distribution in a beautifully-recon-structed print (in contrast to the butchered, mis-titled print that made the rounds of the early festivals) and is accorded a secure spot in the history of pre-Reich cinema.

In part, the film's reputation rests upon stylistic components. It is visually unusual to Sagan's montage-inflected structure that manages to break away from the usually stagey and claustrophobic mise-en-scene of early

sound films. Her montages, no doubt Soviet-influenced, establish a persuasive counterpoint to the more theatrical scenes and mold them into a cinematic rhythm. Dramatically, her use of a large cast of non-professional actresses lends the film a fresh and documentary-like tone, while the performances of the lead actresses won widespread praise. Aurally, Sagan was a pioneer in her use of sound, not only as a functional synchronous accompani-ment, but also as a thematic element in its own right. However, most important to the film's reputation through the years has been its signif-icance as an anti-authoritarian and prophetically anti-fascist film. To be sure, the film has suitable credentials for such a claim. Any film so opposed to militarism, so anti-Prussian, so much in support of the emotional freedom of women, must be an anti-fascist film. Further-more, it was made through the Deutsches Film Gemeinschaft, a cooperative production company specifically organized for this project — and the first German commercial film to be made collectively. Add to such factors the fact that the film was made on the very eve of Hitler's rise to power, just prior to the annex-ation of the film industry to Goebbel's cultural program, and the legend of Sagan's proto-subversive movie is secure. In emphasizing the film's progressive stance in relation to the Nazi assumption of power, however, film historians have tended to overlook, minimize, or trivialize the film's central concern with love between women.

Today, we must take issue with the hereto-fore unexamined critical assumption that the relations between women in the film are essen-tially a metaphor for the real power relations of which it treats, i.e. the struggle against fascism. I would also suggest that *Maedchen in Uniform* is not only anti-fascist, but also anti-patriarchal, in its politics. Such a reading need not depend upon metaphor, but can be more forcefully

demonstrated by a close attention to the film's literal text. As I propose to read it, *Maedchen in Uniform* is a film about sexual repression in the name of social harmony, about the absent patriarchy and its forms of presence, about bonds between women which represent attraction instead of repulsion, and about the release of powers that can accompany the identification of a lesbian sexuality. The film is a dual coming-out story: that of Manuela, the adolescent who voices "the love that dares not speak its name" and who, in distinguishing between fantasy and desire, dares to act upon the latter; and that of Fraulein von Bernburg, the teacher who repudiates her own role as an agent of suppression and wins her own freedom by accepting her attraction to another woman. In this reading, the film remains a profoundly anti-fascist drama, but now its political significance becomes a direct consequence of the film's properly central subject (of lesbianism) rather than a covert message wrapped in an attractive but irrelevant metaphor. If *Maedchen in Uniform* is the first truly radical lesbian film, it is also a fairly typical product of late Weimar society, a society in which "homosexuality . . . became a form of fashionable behavior" linked to "the Weimar idea of making a complete break with the staid and bankrupt past of one's parents' generation."⁴ As such, it offers a particularly clear example of the interplay between personal and collective politics — and the revolutionary potential inherent in the conjunction of the two.

The film centers upon the relationship between two women. Manuela (Hertha Thiele) is a young student newly arrived at a Potsdam boarding school that caters to the daughters of German officers (who, in the mid-20's, are largely impoverished, as is the school itself). With her mother dead, her father unable to look after her, and her aunt/guardian icily uncaring, Manuela is left craving affection. Fraulein von Bernburg (Dorothea Wieck) is the

school's most adored teacher, champion of a maternalistic humanitarianism opposed to the school's Prussian codes. Harsh, ascetic, militaristic, the boarding-school environment is enforced by a totalitarian Principal (Emilia Unda) dedicated to toughening up her charges.

Manuela quickly develops a passionate attachment to Fraulein von Bernburg, who simultaneously nourishes and discourages her admirer. Manuela's infatuation is even more intense than the crushes that her fellow students have upon the esteemed Bernburg. Furthermore, Manuela carries matters to an unprecedented level by announcing her passion publicly, to all the school. The declaration occurs when Manuela, drunk and in male attire, celebrates her thespian success in the school play by offering up the news of her affections as a convivial toast. For such a transgression, Manuela is confined to solitary in the infirmary by the school Principal, who forbids students and faculty alike from so much as speaking to her.

The mounting crisis impels Fraulein von Bernburg to confront the Principal and finally to challenge her authority, which climax coincides with the desperate Manuela's own decision to solve the problem by committing suicide. Distraught at having to give up her beloved teacher, Manuela climbs the school's forbidden staircase (a central leitmotif for the film) and is about to throw herself from its uppermost railing when her schoolgirl companions, disobeying their injunction, come to her rescue. Their arrival is paralleled by the rush of Fraulein von Bernburg to the scene, confirming her affection for Manuela and her identification with the students' action. The aversion of imminent tragedy is a triumph for the forces of love and community, signalling the coming of a new order. The event seals the fate of the evil Principal, who retreats down the hall into the shadows even as Fraulein von Bernburg

remains in the light, united through cross-cutting with Manuela and the students, grouped above her on the staircase. On the soundtrack, the distant sounds of a bugle (audible throughout the film) can still be heard: an ambiguous reference to the forces still assembled outside the school's walls.

The Power of the Absent Patriarchy

As should be clear from the summary, the action in *Maedchen in Uniform* transpires entirely within an all-woman environment and, indeed, a thoroughly "feminine" atmosphere. However, the very first establishing shots of the film serve to inform us of the real power of the absent patriarchy and serve to remind us that an all-woman school in no way represents a woman-defined space. The montage of visual icons in the first few frames establishes an exterior world of military preparedness, steeples and archways, bugle calls, and the marching rhythm of soldiery. And this world of regimentation extends to the neat rows of students who, two by two, file past the gateway into the domain of the school. The link between the exterior authority and the interior order is explicitly visualized only this once, but it informs our reading of the film throughout (particularly as represented by the emblematic use of off-screen sounds and on-screen symbols, like the staircase).

On her first day of school, Manuela listens to the Principal's speech outlining her required duty and identity:

You are all soldiers' daughters and, god willing, you will all be soldiers' mothers.

The girls are there to be taught the Prussian values in order that they might transmit the Correct Line to their future progeny. They are destined to be the transmitters of a culture, not its inheritors. The learning there is not in any sense for them as women, in their own right, but



Manuela in school play in *Maedchen*.

only in keeping with their function as reproducers of bodies and ideologies. The extent to which the absent patriarchy (which at no point in the film takes the shape of actual men on screen) dominates the women's world is a theme constantly reiterated by Leontine Sagan in her many visualizations of classic Romantic leitmotifs. Barred shadows cross the women's paths, a sternly overbearing staircase encloses their every movement, a frantic montage marshals their steps into a militaristic gait, and even the school songs reinforce the authority of a demanding fatherland with a handful of schoolgirls in its grasp. The film's very title underlines this theme, with its play of meanings on the word "uniform" meaning (as a noun) the clothing of a regimented educational/military/professional institution, or (as the adjective) the regulated, all-alike behavior of "uniformity" dictated by the rules of the patriarchal order.

The ultimate incarnation of the absent, but controlling, patriarchy is the school Principal. Her identity as the "phallic woman" is suggested by her reliance on an everpresent cane, with which she measures her steps and signals her authority, and by the phallogocentric codes of *kinder, kirche, kuche* which she is dedicated to instilling. Her mandates and bearing call to mind a vision of Frederick The Great, to whom she has often been compared. Perhaps coincidentally, though, her jowly face and disassociated affect are equally reminiscent of that other prophetic cinematic persona of demented authority, Doctor Caligari. Like the mad Doctor, this Principal is accompanied by an obedient assistant, a dark hunchbacked figure who carries out her orders. Unlike Caligari's missions of murder, the Principal's agenda is more properly "feminine" in its details of manipulation and reconnaissance. The henchwoman is a warped figure. Like the Principal shuffling with her cane, the assistant presents an image of womanhood carrying out patriarchal dirty work and physically warped by her complicity. Her hands huddled close to her chest, her eyes pinched and shoulders stooped, the assistant becomes a physical marker of emotional damage. If, in *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, it was madness and hypnotism that was held responsible for complicity in murder, then here Sagan is willing to pinpoint a more precise culprit: the dogma of an authoritarian ideology. Just as nuns have long provided an easy example of a woman's order subject to entirely male authority (in the form of priest, Pope, or God the Father, Son, and heavenly bridegroom), so, too, the institution of the woman's boarding school is shaped to the mold of the militaristic patriarchal society, poured like molten liquid into its empty spaces to keep it whole.

How, then, does the power structure within the school itself function? Specifically, what

are the roles assumed by the beloved Fraulein von Bernburg, champion of the emotions, and the hated Principal, enforcer of discipline? Traditionally, critical readings of the film have identified Fraulein von Bernburg as a sort of freedom fighter, a humanitarian standing up to the forces of repression, and have targeted the Principal much as I've described her, a tyrant ruling over a regime of denial. I would take issue with this romanticized view and trade its simplistic hero/villain dichotomy for a different model, i.e. a system of repression based instead on the "good cop, bad cop" pattern, with the Principal as the "bad cop" and Fraulein von Bernburg as the "good cop."

To comprehend the logic of such a system in the case of the boarding school, it is necessary to return to the point made earlier in the Princi-

FRAUEN,

so geht's euch im
»Dritten Reich«!

Die Frau muß wieder Arbeit und
Dienst wackend in die Natur finden.
Daher: Deshalb ist auch in der Politik
wackelhaft: keine Frage umwerfen.

Eure Antwort:
Kampf den Nazi - -
für die **Sozialdemokratie!**

VERLAG: I. B. Metzger, Leipzig

pal's opening speech. As she made clear, the young women are being bred ("educated") as transmitters of the patriarchal German culture ever present in encoded form within the world of the school. In order to ensure this training, preserve the young women's "honor" and most effectively carry out their special socialization, it is necessary for society to shape women within an all-female setting; in fact, prior to feminist movements, this was no doubt the primary reason for "separatist" institutions. What, however, is the danger to the patriarchal society presented by such an institution? It is a sexual danger: the threat that the heterosexuality required of these women may, in the cloistered pressure-cooker atmosphere of the boarding school, become derailed into a focus upon their own sex. The possibility that heterosexuality on the part of the women may become transferred ("warped" as the father might say) into homosexuality presents a powerful threat to a system geared for procreation and the rearing of male offspring.

Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex.⁵

The danger of the boarding school is that a concentration on the former entails a corresponding relaxation of the latter. Perhaps it is because the women's boarding school is the Achilles' Heel of the patriarchy that it figures in so much lesbian literature and cinema.

The school play is a favorite device of the boarding-school genre, necessitating as it does the pleasurable moment of cross-dressing in male attire. Manuela is the star of the play, a silly French drama of courtly love, in which she plays the appropriate role of a knight suing with a little hope for the affections of (his) forbidden beloved. Manuela throws herself wholeheartedly into the role, achieving a success that is applauded by one and all for its

remarkable sincerity. Despite the supposed object of her wooing within the play, Manuela is clearly pitching her lines to the beloved Fraulein von Bernburg in the audience. The teacher's equally fervent reception of her enactment is evidenced by Ilse's post-play report to the anguished Manuela:

It's funny. She didn't say a word. But she watched you. You can't imagine how closely she watched you.

Meanwhile, the kitchen maids (who constitute a sort of commentary upon the action in an Upstairs/Downstairs formulation) decide to reward the schoolgirls by spiking their punch, a move that leads upstairs to an outbreak of drunken revelry. In the front parlor, over tea and cakes, the Principal and her small circle of select aristocratic friends debate the parameters of the students' repression; they focus on what literature should be allowed and cluck warningly that "Schiller sometimes writes very freely." Ironically, the carefully protected girls are at this very moment dancing in each others' arms, disobeying the rules, and generally enacting their guardians' worst fears.

Drunk with punch, encouraged by the atmosphere, Manuela rises to deliver an impassioned toast in which she declares her love for Fraulein von Bernburg and announces the gift of the chemise as proof of its reciprocation. Despite the generally permissive setting, it is this act of pronouncement which constitutes the transgression of the school's most rigid codes. It is the naming of what may well be known, this claiming of what is felt by speaking its name publicly that is expressly forbidden (as I have discussed elsewhere).⁶ For her speech, which is overheard by the dread Principal, Manuela is immediately imprisoned, significantly enough within the confines of the infirmary in a reference to the pseudo-scientific view of homosexuality as a species of mental imbalance, a disease, but one

that nevertheless can be punished as a crime. Indeed, the first view of Manuela in the hospital bed traces her position in bed below heavy bars of light emblazoned on the shadowed wall above her head. The immediate wish of the Principal is to blot out history, to expunge the traces of the "scandal" and pretend that nothing ever happened. It is a wish that is initially reflected in Manuela's own coming to consciousness, as she emerges from her hang-over with the complaint that she cannot remember what has happened nor what she has done. So powerful is the taboo that amnesia is the consequence of its transgression.

The public speech, in fact, can be seen as an extremely powerful transgression, one which, unlike the private actions between Manuela and Fraulein von Bernburg, publicly disrupts and subverts the prevailing order of the school. The Principal's regime could tolerate the widely-acknowledged schoolgirl crushes and libidinous undercurrents as long as they remained marginalized and subservient to the dominant ideology. The homoeroticism had been portrayed graphically ever since the time of Manuela's arrival: Ilse told her how envious other girls were, asking if it was true that "the Golden One" really "kisses you good night, oh god, oh god..."; the laundrywoman explained the heart and initials on her school uniform ("E.V.B.") by laughing that "the girl who wore this dress must have been infatuated with Fraulein Elizabeth von Bernburg, thus the initials"; and pairs of girls were repeatedly shown holding hands, embracing by windows, or passing love notes. An unendorsed *de facto* eroticism could be contained within the reigning patriarchal order, but a double challenge could not be abided: the challenge of Fraulein von Bernburg's material action in presenting the chemise over and above the limits of egalitarianism. For this reason, amnesia was a possibility only for Manuela. Everyone else remem-

bered quite well what had occurred.

Unable to turn back the clock, then, the Principal opts for quarantine. Manuela is sentenced to solitary confinement, as though homosexuality were a communicable disease spread by social contact. As Manuela moves, distraught, through the final phase of the film, Fraulein von Bernburg moves increasingly into focus as she struggles (more consciously than the young student) to come to terms with her sexuality and acknowledge her feelings for her own sex. In her final meeting with Manuela, held clandestinely in defiance of the Principal's prohibition, she tries to tell the girl the exact nature of a "crime" she seems unable to understand: "You must be cured . . . of liking me so much." At the same time, she makes a telling complaint about Manuela's speech. She does not reproach Manuela for what the girl has brought upon herself, as we might expect, but instead she says: "What you have done to me, you know." There is more meaning to the statement than the fact of Manuela's speech, which to be sure has damaged her standing at the school but yet is not wholly different from countless other private declarations she has no doubt withstood. Rather, Fraulein von Bernburg may well refer to the terrible inner conflict into which Manuela's speech has thrown her. It is a conflict not unlike that felt by so many in-the-closet homosexuals of both sexes in this country following the opening-up of sexual boundaries during the Stonewall eruption and the succeeding gay liberation movement of the late '60s and early '70s, a time which for some carried an undesired pressure to identify a previously privatized sexuality (in Fraulein von Bernburg's case, to make that identification not only to others, but to herself as well). From the moment of this reproach on, the teacher's struggle to "come out" and emerge from the raging conflict within her becomes the central theme of the film. It is a theme concerned with

finding the courage to oppose an unjust authority, a courage shared, finally, with the other students of the school.

It is Fraulein von Bernburg, and the force she has come to represent, which prevails in the film's final scene: the rescued Manuela is cradled by the schoolgirls as the defeated Principal, bereft of her authority, beats a slow retreat down the long gloomy hall. The darkness of the hall deepens in her wake, her cane taps faintly on the floor, the sound of bells and finally bugles can be heard in the distance. It is a provisional victory, as the bugle cries signify, and yet the patriarchal order *has* been ruptured within the school by the liberation of eros among the women.

In terms of the interpretation which I have been suggesting, as well as the more traditional interpretation of anti-fascism, the ending of the film is extremely important. Yet the nature of the ending has been frequently obscured in the cinematic histories. Many reports of the film have cited a supposed "other" ending in which Manuela successfully commits suicide, and some critics have even cited the existence of a "Nazi" suicide ending and an "export" version like this one.⁷ However, as the testimony of several German sources can show, such was not the case.⁸ The original play, however, *did* have Manuela kill herself and ended with the Principal setting a cover-up in motion at play's end; but this is one of many differences between the play and the film, about which more later. In point of fact, the film *Maedchen in Uniform* concludes with an ending of rescue. What does this ending signify? Such an ending confers a unity upon the film's two themes, the widely-acknowledged one of anti-authoritarianism as well as the previously ignored one of erotic liberation, and shapes them into a consistent and harmonious whole.

It has frequently been argued that the preferred ending for a proto-Nazi film was suicide,

i.e. the ultimate abandonment of hope that leads the individual to throw herself/himself into the depth of oblivion or, conversely, into the hands of a superhuman savior. That was the scenario against which a film like *Kuhle Wampe* (by Slatan Dudow with script by Bertolt Brecht) rebelled, by refusing to end on a note of despair, insisting instead on the persistence of faith in the future. So, too, Sagan. Her anti-Naziism is nowhere more apparent than in the ending, which posits not only the maintenance of hope but also the vindication of resistance as a very different "triumph of the will" from Leni Riefenstahl's brand. In Riefenstahl's film of the same period, *The Blue Light*, the heroine (played by Leni) throws herself finally from a cliff, despairing, isolated from others of her kind, done in by an unsympathetic society. Not so Manuela. The schoolgirls of the boarding school integrate her sensibility into their own consciousness. Instead of closing ranks against her, they come to her (and, by extension, their own) rescue. The cliffhanger ending is at once a powerful statement of political resistance, both individual and collective, and a validation of lesbianism as a personal and public right.

The Principal earlier condemned Fraulein von Bernburg's feelings and actions as "revolutionary" and so they may indeed be. In a patriarchal society which depends upon women for the reward and procreation of its (his) own kind, a break in the link is disastrous:

What would happen if our hypothetical woman not only refused the man to whom she was promised, but asked for a woman instead? If a single refusal was disruptive, a double refusal would be insurrectionary.⁹

The ending of the film serves to validate Fraulein von Bernburg's difficult development from humanitarian disciplinarian to a free, stronger, and woman-identified woman. The progression of the scenario depended upon her

inner struggle and final evolution in response to the catalyst of Manuela's passion. At the film's end, Fraulein von Bernburg stands triumphant with the schoolgirls witnessing the Principal's melancholy retreat. She wins this position *not* by maintaining her power in the hierarchy but by rejecting it, *not* by tightening the reins of her repression but by casting them down, *not* by cooption but by refusal. Her place on the staircase at the end may be seen, then, as a reward for her "coming out" and acknowledging her sexuality, just as Manuela's rescue at the end represents a social legitimacy for her passion. *Maedchen in Uniform* presents a positive vision of lesbianism that has been largely disregarded for years, victim of a subtle critical homophobia that has insisted upon perceiving the literal as the merely metaphoric.

An analysis of this film today clarifies the meaning and can easily annex Sagan's work to our contemporary tradition of lesbian culture. But differences nevertheless persist in the perspectives of Leontine Sagan, making a film cooperatively in Berlin on the eve of the Third Reich, and most of us today. Differences are apparent even in the shifts of meaning between Christa Winsloe's original play and its metamorphosis into *Maedchen in Uniform*. And most surprising, perhaps, are the similarities that slowly become recognizable upon re-examining both the film and its period — similarities which in some cases are crucial for us to recognize as we proceed into the '80s.

Even at the film's end, when the two women and their student supporters seem most victorious, the ominous sound of the bugles reappears to accompany the Principal's retreat. While Siegfried Kracauer contends that the prominence of the motif at the end of the film proves that "the principle of authority has not been shaken" within the school,¹⁰ I would suggest otherwise: that the motif reminds the audience just how provisional the victory is,

and just how powerful the patriarchal forces with which any new order within the school must contend. It is a warning that separation from the dominant order does not automatically grant freedom from its dominance. It should have been a warning to lesbians living then in Germany that the time for strong collective action was upon them, as the forces of fascism gathered outside the windows. Instead, the Third Reich came to power, and most of those responsible for *Maedchen in Uniform* left the country.

Who were they? Little has been written, and little known, about the women behind this work. Their sexuality has been as thoroughly veiled as the lesbian theme of the film itself. Rumors, anecdotes, bits of stories, form the customary trail of unofficial history. Feminist and historian Blanche Cook is instructive regarding what *not* to look for. Commenting upon *Maedchen in Uniform*, Ann Elisabet Weirach's *The Scorpion*, and other works of this period and this genre, Cook warns against accepting the tragic tales of unrequited love and tragic abandonment as autobiographical fictions:

The truth is that these passionate little girls were not always abused and abandoned. They did not commit suicide. They wrote books about passionate little girls, death, and abandonment.¹¹

Not infrequently, the lives of the authors and their models display a depth and breadth of options not readily visible in the constructed tales. When, that is, their lives are recoverable at all.

Weimar Lesbian History

Leontine Sagan was born in Austria in 1899 and was married at some point to a doctor from Vienna. She trained as a stage director and actress. She worked with such directors as Bernofsky and Max Reinhardt, teaching for a time at Reinhardt's drama school. As an

actress, she appeared alongside Salka Viertel (the woman who would go on to write Garbo's screenplays) in an early production of the Ibsen play, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and also in a rare production of Franz Blei's *The Wave*. The circumstances of her taking on the direction of *Maedchen in Uniform* are not now available, though she was certainly a popular figure in the Berlin theatre scene. She left Germany soon after and went to England, where Alexander Korda sought to capitalize on her success by engaging her to direct *Men of Tomorrow*, a sort of "boys in uniform" film about Oxford; not surprisingly, the success was not repeated. Sagan worked in theatre in London, judging by the published script and cast list for a production of *Maedchen in Uniform*. The play, retitled "Children in Uniform," is listed as being "produced by Leontine Sagan" at the Duchess Theatre, London, opening October 7, 1932. Soon after, Sagan left England. She moved to the US for several years and thence to South Africa (where she co-founded the National Theatre in Johannesburg) until her death in 1974. So far as is known, she never made another film.

The two leading actresses in *Maedchen in Uniform*, Hertha Thiele and Dorothea Wieck, starred together in another film shortly afterward. Directed by Frank Wysbar in 1933, *Anna and Elisabeth* returned to the traditional view of intimate attachments between women as debilitating and demonic: Hertha Thiele played a young girl with miraculous powers who drove Dorothea Wieck to attempt suicide because Thiele failed to resurrect her husband! The women are portrayed as having an unnaturally close, almost supernatural, relationship; lesbianism is explicit only as the power of darkness. Both actresses are still alive today, and much additional material should be forthcoming from Karola Gramann (the *Frauen und Film* editor who has been interviewing Thiele).¹²

Christa Winsloe is the best remembered of the *Maedchen in Uniform* women, perhaps simply because her intimates wrote memoirs. Erika Mann, who herself played one of the schoolgirls in the film, remembered Christa (the Baroness von Hatvany) in her memoirs of 1939. Smiling and confident, dressed in white shirt and tie, Christa Winsloe looks out at us from a photograph captioned "once a maedchen in uniform." Erika Mann recalls Christa's life as a "beautiful and amusing society woman" who ran an expansive household in Munich, and hosted salons in Budapest and Vienna as the wife of Baron Ludwig Hatvany, a Hungarian writer and "grand seigneur." She made animal sculptures and ran exquisite dinner parties, at one of which Mann remembers her announcing her plan to write a play



Brassai

about her own childhood boarding-school experiences. Trying to explain the play's phenomenal success, Mann suggests:

How was it? Because Christa Hatvany had guarded in her heart, and now rediscovered, a simple, strong and genuine feeling, and because she could so express it that hundreds of thousands of people [sic] recognized the pain and ecstasy of their own childhood, their own first love, which had, in their own hearts, been overlaid, but never stifled. The poignant feeling of recognition. . . .¹³

If Mann holds to the favorite view of lesbianism as a phase through which "hundreds of thousands" of women pass during adolescence, she at least manages to hold out a phrase of reservation regarding the impulse which is yet "never stifled."

Certainly it was never stifled in Christa. Nor in Dorothy Thompson, the US journalist who was married to Sinclair Lewis when, in 1932, at her own ten-day Christmas party, she fell in love with Christa, who was then on the verge of getting a divorce from the Baron. Dorothy Thompson's diaries of the time reveal her struggle to name her experience, to try to understand how she can be "happily married, and yet wanting that curious tenderness, that pervading warm tenderness — there are no words for it. . . ." ¹⁴ When the party guests had left, Dorothy followed Christa to Budapest. In March, the two met in Italy where they shared a villa at Portofino for several months. Upon leaving the villa, Dorothy brought Christa back to the US with her. In August, the two women travelled back to Austria together. When apart, they wrote constantly. In early 1934, Sinclair Lewis had to be out of town for several months and Dorothy stayed in New York with Christa. "They were a couple," said their friend John Farrar. "If you asked Dorothy for dinner, you asked Christa too."¹⁵

After two years, however, relations between the two began to break down, with Dorothy

answering one of Christa's letters:

I feel that something between us has broken. . . . I had a strange dream last night. I dreamed I was putting out into a very rough sea in a frail ship, and the crew were all women. I was afraid, and woke up sweating. . . .¹⁶

By this time, Thompson was *persona non grata* in Germany, having been expelled on her last trip by Adolph Hitler himself because of an uncomplimentary interview (and, no doubt, her habit of laughing at Bund rallies). Christa couldn't return to her home, so went instead in 1935 to live in southern France. Their continued intimacy was so strong that, in 1940, when the Nazi occupation of France made it impossible for Christa to withdraw money from her Munich bank, Dorothy began sending her money every month to live on.

Christa Winsloe's life ended sadly: she was murdered on June 10, 1944, by a common criminal named Lambert who pretended to be operating as a member of the French resistance. His claim led to ugly speculation that Winsloe had been a Nazi spy and to an old friend's writing Dorothy Thompson at the end of the war (1946) to inform her of the death and beg help in clearing Christa Winsloe's name. The friend explained the rumor by referring to Christa's liaison at the time with a French-Swiss girlfriend, Simone Gentet, who was alleged to be a spy:

Christa once described her as a hysterical, disolute, morphine addict and alcoholic, but she certainly knew nothing of Simone's other activities, should the rumor be true. . . we know with such absolute certainty that Christa was the most violent enemy of National-Socialism and that she would never have made the slightest compromise. On the contrary, we were always worried that the Gestapo would grab her and we still believed this is what happened to her because she had helped many Jewish girlfriends get out of the country.¹⁷

Thus, the author of *Maedchen in Uniform* was killed by a man claiming to be a resistance fighter but whom her friends believed to be a Gestapo agent, an ambiguity that lends her death the same confusion that continues to surround the relationship between homosexuality and the Nazi era.

Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* established an early tradition of identifying homosexuality with fascism through his narrative of hearty male resistance fighters betrayed by a lesbian morphine addict and her Gestapo lover. Bertolucci continued the tradition by consistently portraying fascists as suffering from sexual repressions or "perversions" in his films (with time out, in *The Conformist*, for a lesbian resistance fighter in the person of Dominique Sanda, though he did equip her with a male mentor and suggest that her attraction to women was her weakness). The connections have not depended upon cinema, either Italian or German, for promulgation. The stereotype of Nazi campiness, of SS regalia as S & M toys, of the Gestapo as a leather-boy thrill, of the big bull dyke as concentration camp boss... all seem to have a firm hold in our culture's fantasy life and historical mythology. This, despite the facts of the Third Reich's large-scale massacre of homosexuals as a pollutant of Aryan blood and a stain on the future master race. Hitler, apparently, agreed with Manuela's boarding-school Principal in seeing homosexuality and lesbianism as "revolutionary." He didn't hesitate to purge his own ranks, as on the infamous "night of the long knives" of June 1934, when Ernst Rohm (the SA chief of staff and a well-known homosexual) and his followers were murdered on account of their sexuality, to make the SA, as Hitler put it, "a pure and cleanly institution."

Why the Nazis wanted to eliminate homosexuals along with Jews, communists, and various national minorities, is a question that seems

fairly well answered and understood by now in the light of Nazi ideology and the "final solutions" it proposed for the united, fascistic, patriarchal Aryan race. Why gay men, or any women, should have joined the Nazi party at all is quite another question. What circumstances led to the existence of a Rohm? What sort of outlook could have lent credence to Christa Winsloe's murder as an act of Resistance, or alternately, as an act of Nazi vengeance? What sort of lesbian community inhabited Berlin during the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Third Reich? What sort of women's movement was there to combat the Nazi ideology of woman's place? What were social and legal attitudes toward homosexuality? Who liked *Maedchen in Uniform*, and why? To answer these questions fully lies outside the possibilities of this article, but to address them at least in part is crucial to our understanding the film at hand and to our recognizing just how exemplary was Leontine Sagan's combination of personal liberation and collective action.¹⁸

Germany had had a radical women's movement in the early years of the century, beginning with the country's first large rally for women's suffrage in 1894. The movement for women's rights was part of a larger movement for overall reform known as the *Lebensreformbewegung* (the Life Reform Movement), which encompassed groups working on behalf of women and homosexuals as well as youth, natural health, clothing reform, and nudity. There don't seem to have been lesbian political organizations as such, but many lesbians were active in women's suffrage and feminist groups (notably Anita Augspurg and Lida Gustava Heymann who fought for suffrage and opposed World War I as "a men's war fought between men's states") and many others worked with the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee at a meeting on the common struggles of women's and homosexual rights groups, and complained



From Maedchen in Uniform, 1931

that women's organizations were "not lifting a finger . . . doing nothing, absolutely nothing" in support of homosexual emancipation.

In 1909, however, a bill was proposed to criminalize lesbianism, which up until now had not been subject to the Paragraph 175 laws against male homosexuality. Seeing the bill as a clear retaliation against the gains of the women's movement, Dr. Helene Stocker (who in 1905 had founded the League for the Protection of Maternity and Sexual Reform) spoke at a meeting held jointly with the Committee to support its petition drive against the proposed bill and to denounce the criminalization of lesbianism as "a grave error." The arguments on behalf of both women and homosexuality were diverse and at times contradictory, with variations in ideology so wide that some elements could be supportive of the new Russian Revolu-

tion as a model while other elements drifted into support of National Socialism. Stocker's argument for keeping lesbianism legal rested on the defense of "individual freedom in the most private part of private life — love life;" Hirschfield rested his arguments on scientific theories of human sexuality/psychology and upon a human-rights-type plea for tolerance; certain other groups based their homosexuality upon theories of male supremacy and past models of soldiery and lovers-in-arms leading to an early Nazi identification; while other groups initially supportive of sexual freedoms for women, like those in the "sexual hygiene" movement, turned anti-abortion for racial reasons and ended up merging with the proto-Nazi "racial hygiene" groups.

Varying definitions of private and public life — and private versus public rights — are key to

the differences. Hirschfield, unlike many others, threw all his energies into effecting social education and legal changes (although with a tone of apology and tolerance-begging foreign to our styles today). The years of the Weimar Republic witnessed a flowering of women's rights and of struggles for homosexual emancipation, as well as a bursting forth of a large lesbian and gay subculture quartered largely in Berlin. The sexual theories of the times are fascinating. In 1919, Hirschfield opened the doors of his Institute of Sexual Science and won substantial support for the theory of "a third sex" that was neither male nor female: he called homosexuals "Uranians" and based much of his strategy upon this notion of a literally alien species. The move to criminalize lesbianism had been dropped with the advent of the Republic and the end of World War I, which had seen women move so totally out of the former spheres as to make such a bill ineffective as a stay-at-home device. Much of Hirschfield's Committee's efforts, then, went toward the repeal of Paragraph 175 prohibiting male homosexual practice. The Coalition for Reform of the Sexual Crimes Code (founded in 1925) worked to legalize acts between "consenting adults." The German Communist Party, following the lead established by early Soviet laws in support of homosexual rights, had a strong presence on the Reichstag committee for penal code reform — which succeeded in recommending for approval the repeal of Paragraph 175 (but unfortunately, its approval came on October 16, 1929, and the crash of the US stock market changed the whole nature of the political scene in Germany, leading to the tabling of the resolution and the quick rise of the Nazi forces). As antisemitism, misogyny, and homophobia grew alongside of the move to the Right in Germany, Hirschfield became an ever more popular target. Attacked in 1920, his skull fractured in 1921, fired upon in 1923,

attacked verbally by a Nazi delegate to the Reichstag in 1927, he had the dubious honor of seeing the library of his Institute become one of the first victims of bookburning on May 10, 1933, just four months after Hitler became chancellor.¹⁹

The cycle of free expression followed by total persecution experienced by Magnus Hirschfield was symptomatic of the treatment of the larger gay population and culture he had come to symbolize. Jim Steakley provides a partial answer to the obvious reaction (how could such a thing happen?) in pinpointing the Weimar contradiction "between personal and collective liberation."²⁰ It was a contradiction that was manifested in the simultaneous existence of a widespread social tolerance of homosexuality (including the flourishing of gay culture, the growth of bars, and de facto police acquiescence, at least in Berlin) alongside repressive laws and the frequent failure of most legal actions on behalf of lesbians or gay men. The history of Berlin's gay male subculture is fairly well known today; according to Steakley, there were some 40 gay bars and some 1-2,000 male prostitutes in the city by 1914, as well as some 30 homosexual journalists published during the course of the Weimar years. However, the same "invisibility" that granted lesbians immunity from the criminal laws has also granted the Weimar lesbians a less welcome immunity from the history books.

Recently, research has begun to yield materials that can outline for us the contours of the lesbian community that was so lively during the same period, especially in the larger cities of Berlin and Munich. In the same year that Christa Winsloe wrote her play, director G. W. Pabst gave the world the vision of Berlin that has stuck for so long, including lesbian passion in the decadent mode, in *Pandora's Box*, in which Louise Brooks (as Lulu) played object of desire not only to a succession of men but also

to Alice Roberts (as the lesbian Countess Geschwitz). Louise Brooks has reminisced about the mood of Berlin, recalling for example a lesbian bar, the Maly, where "there was a choice of feminine or collar-and-tie Lesbians."²¹ Alex de Jonge provides a more embroidered account in a male visitor's account of the Silhouette, which was "one of Berlin's most fashionable night spots." De Jonge, too, describes the scene of role-dressed couples on a night out, but makes an important point:

You could see women well known in German literature, society, the theatre and politics. . . . There was no suggestion of vice about the place. It was a usual phenomenon in German life.²²

While the Silhouette admitted men if accompanied by a lesbian regular, other women's bars did not; de Jonge mentions Die Grotte and Entre Nous as two of the "more exclusive" places, about which he therefore can provide no information.

Ilse Kokula has provided one of the most complete accounts of the period in her brief but tantalizing summary, "The Uranian Ladies Often Meet in Patisseries."²³ She expands upon the meaning of "uranian" by tracing its root as an epithet of Aphrodite taken to mean "celestial" or spiritual, and she reiterates Hirschfield's popular theory of "a third sex." The estimate of homosexuality in Weimar Berlin is placed at 50,000 out of a population of two and a half million (though the methodology behind the statistics is not specified). While bars, hotels, and saunas were there to service gay men, there were also, more surprisingly, various services for lesbians seeking to meet each other. For example, there were *Vermittlungsburos*, or agencies, that fixed up single lesbians. There were personals columns in which lesbians advertised for partners. One such ad from the period listed: "Fraulein, decent, 24 years old, looking for pretty fraulein as a girlfriend." There were also a number of

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sind die

Tanzveranstaltungen

in den Damenklubs

„HARMONIE“

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Central-Festsäle,

Alte Jakobstraße 32

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Jeden Freitag

Köhler's Festsäle

Tieckstraße 24

(2 Minuten vom Stettiner Bahnhof und vom Oranienburger Tor)

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Jeden Sonntag

Kolosseum

Kommandantenstraße 62

Bei diesen Veranstaltungen finden Sie Humor,
Stimmung, Saalpost, Bonbonregen usw. usw.



Ad for Weimar Era "Women's Club": "For women only/are the dancefloors/in these women's clubs: Harmony (every Wednesday)/Girlfriend's get-together (every Friday)/Wild Rose (every Sunday)./In these places you'll find humor, good moods, meeting places, candy raffles, etc."

social clubs for lesbians that met in cafes and *Konditoreien* (patisseries), such as one group of "Israelite" (Jewish) lesbians who met from 4:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon to talk and play chess. Balls were held regularly, run by and for lesbian women. There was a general attitude of self-recognition, with many lesbian couples eager to convince the world how well-adjusted they were and to combat the stereotype of depravity and tragedy.

From 1918 on, lesbian journals were part of the culture, usually presenting a perspective that was part political, part educational; they had such titles as *Frauenliebe* (womanlove); *Ledige Frauen* (unmarried women), and *Die Freundin: Weekly Journal for Ideal Friendship Between Women*. *Die Freundin* was published continuously during 1923-32 by the *damenklub* (women's club, or bar) "Violetta" — itself a coded name, as violets were considered a sign of lesbianism at the time. Some of Ilse Kokula's information is evidently derived from first-hand sources, as she is able to comment that many older lesbians still remembered the cafes "with great pleasure" and that one such woman, "Kati R.," remembers that the secret lesbian balls continued into the 1950s and '60s, with as many as 200 women attending. What emerges, then, is a picture of lesbian life as a widespread phenomenon, surprisingly above-ground, organized around its own publications, clubs, and rituals. And reflected in virtually none of the films or official histories of the time.

Maedchen's Lessons

Maedchen in Uniform emerges from such a review of Weimar's lesbian subculture, not as an anomaly any longer, but as a survivor. The film assumes a new importance when seen as something other than a curiosity, but rather as a clue, an archaeological relic pointing back to an obliterated people and pointing ahead, for us,

to a much-needed perspective on our current situation, here in the midst of our excavations and reconstructions.

At no point, either in its own time nor in ours, has the film been critically discussed as a lesbian text. And yet the histories specify its initial "success de scandale" implying an at



Alice Austen, Trude and I Masked, 1891.

least unofficial recognition of the film's true meaning. Most critics have been eager to harness its tale of schoolgirl struggle to an assumed "universal" of humankind's fight against fascism. With hindsight, however, we can equally read the film as a celebration of, and warning for, its most sympathetic audience: the lesbian population of Germany in

1931. Like Manuela and Fraulein von Bernburg, the lesbian community was proud and outspoken, romantic and idealist, opposed to a rejected bourgeois morality as well as to outdated models of woman's proper place. The schoolgirls may be stand-ins for the lesbian women they may surely become (if they pass through Erica Mann's famous "phase" intact). If the boarding-school was chosen as a literary and cinematic motif because it was more socially acceptable than the grown-up realities, then how ironic that it is all that remains for us to go by. We need more research into our history. We need more information on films of the period that have been almost entirely forgotten (like *Anna and Elizabeth*, like *Different From the Others*).²⁴ We need to heed carefully Blanche Cook's warning not to judge the authors entirely by their texts, lest social conventions of the time blind us to the unexpected. We need to recognize *Maedchen in Uniform* not only as a beloved fairy-tale but also as a powerful expression of its own time: an individual record of a collective aspiration.

Maedchen in Uniform has been extremely influential for other films and writers as well as for lesbian viewers down to the present day. Colette herself wrote the text for the subtitles of the French-release print.²⁵ None other than Hollywood mogul Irving Thalberg was a fan of the film. He quizzed Salka Viertel, as she worked on the screenplay of *Queen Christina*, as to whether she'd seen Sagan's film. "Does not Christina's affection for her lady-in-waiting indicate something like that?" he asked, and urged her "to keep it in mind" because "if handled with taste it would give us very interesting scenes."²⁶ Today we can acknowledge what Colette, Thalberg, Viertel, and Garbo all seem to have known: that *Maedchen in Uniform* was a film about women's love for each other. And what Louise Brooks knew: that such love was no rarity in Weimar Berlin. And

what Alex de Jonge knew: that it was no vice. And today we can also begin to consider what Jim Steakley knew: that there was a disturbing gap at the time between "personal" and "collective" liberation.

The first lesson of *Maedchen in Uniform* is that lesbianism has a much larger and finer history than we often suspect, that the film indicates as much, and that we need to do ever more work on reconstructing the image of lesbian culture that has been so painfully erased. The second lesson is that, in looking backward and inward, we cannot afford to stop looking forward and outward.

The bells and bugles that sound periodically throughout the film, casting a prophetic call upon the love of Manuela and Fraulein von Bernburg, are waiting just outside the gates for us as well. The ending of the film as I have suggested, can be interpreted as a warning to heed to forces mounting outside our narrow zones of victory and liberation. Such an interpretation, if it was perceived at the time, went unheeded by the film's lesbian audience in 1931. Today, the work on building a lesbian culture cannot afford to ignore the context of such labor in a society veering so strongly in the opposite direction. When, at the film's end, the Principal appears to be defeated, she exits through a darkened hallway — but at the end of the hallway is the light of the outdoors, site of the buglers and the patriarchal forces mobilizing against any such lesbian victory.

Today, we must begin to consider the contemporary gap between "personal" (or, life-style) freedoms and "collective" (or, legal/political) rights. We must begin to examine what the links and coalitions are, in our own time, between lesbian, gay male, and feminist organizations. We must learn strategy, and remember that when the pre-Weimar misogynist,

F. Eberhard, wanted to attack the women's movement, he accused the emancipated women of being lesbians and, therefore, depraved. The women's groups of the late Weimar period exhibited a distressing willingness to take such attacks to heart and try to accomodate themselves accordingly. Polite cooptation sapped the strength of the groups. Even Hirschfield persisted in seeing the fight for homosexual rights as "non-political" and therefore no enemy of National Socialism. Too late, many lesbians must have learned that patisseries do not grant asylum.

The struggle was postponed to a fatally late date due to false perceptions of homosexuality as a "private" issue that was being adequately handled and of lesbians/gay men as somehow more protected than others because of the history of social tolerance. Many women's groups turned to the right, taking up anti-abortion and racial-hygiene positions, supporting National Socialism in spite of its clear racist and misogynist platform; some gay men and lesbians supported it as well, again in the face of all evidence that should have suggested otherwise. In the '80s, our struggles for sexual freedom must be tied to the struggles against racism, economic injustices, rearmament, and growing US imperialism. The celebrations on the staircase must listen hard to the rallying cries outside the school. Today, we can't afford to ignore history, nor to repeat it. While lesbianism and feminism are certainly "revolutionary" (to quote the Principal yet again), the history of Weimar politics demonstrates that they are not *inherently* so unless linked to a pragmatic political strategy and set of principles. We have to do better.



Brassai

NOTES

1. Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History* (New York: Avon Books, 1976), p. 843.
2. Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1969), p. 326.
3. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 227.
4. Alex de Jonge, *The Weimar Chronicle: Prelude to Hitler* (London: Paddington Press, 1978), p. 138.
5. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Towards an Anthropology of Women* (ed. Rayna R. Reiter, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 180.
6. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see my article on "The Crisis of Naming in Feminist Film Criticism" in *Jump Cut*, 19 (1979) and the considerably revised version printed as "In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism" in *Heresies*, No. 9 (Spring 1980).
7. Variations on the theme of a double ending have been repeated by Nancy Scholar as well as by Sharon Smith (in her *Women Who Make Moves* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1975) and by Caroline Sheldon (in her "Lesbians and Film: Some Thoughts", appearing in Richard Dyer, ed., *Gays and Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1977)).
8. Both Eisner and Kracauer specify the averted suicide of the ending, and neither makes reference to another "home market" ending. In correspondence with me, German film critic Karola Gramann writes that Hertha Theile (whom she has just interviewed) reported that a suicide ending was filmed, but that it was never included in the finished film because it was too pathetic-looking. No one saw any such "home" version of the film.
9. Gayle Rubin, p. 183.
10. Kracauer, p. 229.
11. Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Women Alone Stir My Imagination": Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 4, No. 4 (1979), 722.
12. Information on *Anna and Elizabeth* is taken from: David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 37-38; and also from private correspondence with Karola Gramann.
13. Erika and Klaus Mann, *Escape to Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), pp. 50-51.
14. Katz, p. 841.
15. Marion K. Sanders, *Dorothy Thompson, A Legend in Her Time* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), p. 190.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
17. *Ibid.*
18. The three basic texts to consult on issues of feminism and homosexuality in Weimar Germany are: Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976); Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson, *Lesbian-Feminism in Turn-of-the-Century Germany* (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1979); and James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno Press, 1979). Relevant information in this article is culled almost entirely from these sources. For a superior review and perspective piece, see: Carol Anne Douglas, "German Feminists and the Right: Can it Happen Here?" in *Off Our Backs*, 10, No. 11 (December 1980). She discusses at length the political cross-currents I have barely managed to summarize here.
19. Interestingly enough, Hirschfield appeared in a film that he must have taken a part in producing. *Different from the Others* (directed by Richard Oswald in 1919) starred Conrad Veidt as a homosexual blackmail victim who is "saved" by the intervention of a philanthropic doctor played by Hirschfield himself. It was widely banned, but evidently more for reasons of anti-semitism (directed against Hirschfield) than homophobia, if such a distinction can indeed be made. The film was redone in 1927 as *Laws of Love*, again starring Veidt but this time minus Hirschfield, whose absence in this version led to Veidt's character's suicide.
20. Steakley, pp. 78-79.
21. Louise Brooks, "On Making Pabst's *Lulu*," in *Women and Cinema* (ed. Karyn Day and Gerald Peary, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), p. 81.
22. Alex de Jonge, p. 140.
23. Ilse Kokula, "Die urnischen Damen treffen sich vielfach in Konditoreien," in *Courage*, No. 7 (Berlin, July 1980), copy courtesy of Karola Gramann.
24. See note 19.
25. The French subtitles and a preface explaining Colette's role in writing them can be found in *Colette au cinema* (ed. Alain and Odette Virmaux, Paris: Librairie Ernest Flammarion, 1975). Unfortunately, the entire *Maedchen in Uniform* section has been omitted from the English-language edition (translated by Sarah W.R. Smith, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980).
26. Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 175. Viertel's memoirs are discreetly restrained on virtually all topics of sexuality and therefore shed no light on the nature of her relationship with Greta Garbo. Viertel wrote the screen treatments for Garbo's films and was her frequent compan-

ion. In his dirt-digging *Hollywood Babylon* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1975), Kenneth Anger wrote: "Garbo's genuine reserve held the gossips at bay for the most part. There was, however, occasional speculation about how close her friendship really was with writer Salka Viertel" (p. 172).

Maedchen in Uniform is available from: Films Incorporated, 733 Green Bay Road, Wilmette, IL 60091. (There are also offices in New York, Hollywood, and Atlanta, so contact the appropriate office for your geographic area.)

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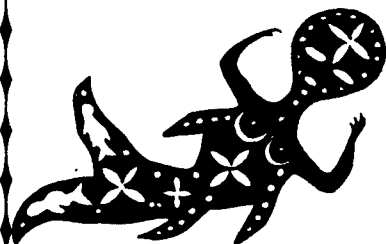
CLR James, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Immanuel Wallerstein, Julius Lester, Marge Piercy, Octavio Paz, R. Crumb, Phillip Lamantia, Jim O'Brien, David Roediger, Leonora Carrington, Al Auster, Jay Kinney, Edith Altbach are some of the writers and artists contributing to the final issue of CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE, "America from the 1960s to the 1980s." Subjects include Left writers (Ishmael Reed, Ursula Le Guin, Philip K. Dick, Marge Piercy), television, films, sports, humor.



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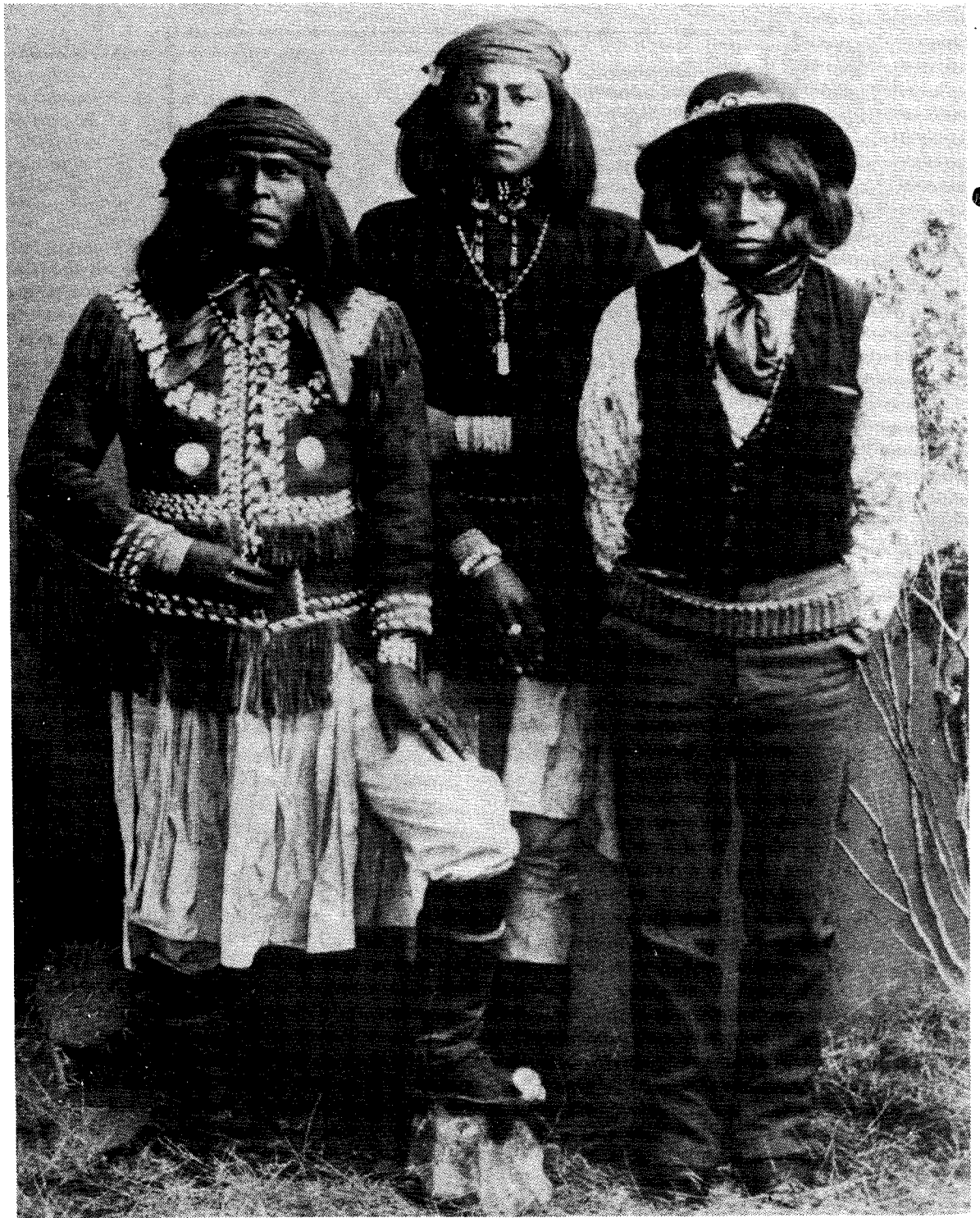
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INDIANS AND THE CONTEXT OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Jim O'Brien

Mainstream American history has traditionally been part of a protracted mopping-up operation for the European conquest. American history is thought to have started with Columbus (or sometimes the Vikings). The peoples who lived here for at least 12,000 years before that are either ignored outright or treated as a subhuman part of the landscape. In the racist usage that still prevails, the Europeans not only *discovered* America but also *settled* it. And why not? It was, after all, the New World. When American history is traced back before 1492 it is traced to the emergence of strong nation-states and a money economy in Europe; nothing that happened here counts.

Where nineteenth-century historians like Francis Parkman, John Bach McMaster, George Bancroft, and John Fiske slandered the Indians in order to justify an ongoing genocide (to McMaster, the Indian "was never so happy as when, in the dead of the night, he roused his sleeping enemies with an unearthly yell, and massacred them by the light of their burning homes"), the twentieth-century approach has generally been to hope that the subject, along with the Indians, will quietly go away.¹

Moreover, there has been distressingly little difference between progressive, and even radical, historians and the Euro-American mainstream. The classic instance of historical myopia toward Indians is Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s prize-winning liberal tract *The Age of Jackson*, whose 400-plus pages make not a single mention of Indian removal — universally regarded by Andrew Jackson's contemporaries as a central theme of his presidency. Similarly, Leo Huberman's popular Marxist history of the US, *We the People*, begins by saying,

“From its very beginnings America has been a magnet to the people of the earth. . . . First came the Norsemen. . . .”

The problem has not been a shortage of facts. Generations of Indian writers and speakers have tried to set the record straight, and there is even a long tradition of idealistic outrage from within the Euro-American population, going back to the vehement sixteenth-century priest Bartolome de las Casas. Nor is the problem *simply* racism, although there is plenty of that. The problem, rather, is that American history — especially its most refined and sophisticated branch, written mainly by wealthy gentlemen in the nineteenth century and by university teachers in the twentieth — has been written with a pervasive assumption of cultural superiority. Anger at the treatment of Indians has come much more easily to “amateur” historians, whose lack of methodological finesse has often allowed them to look directly at the human issues involved. And even they have often been baffled by the immense cultural gulf that separates the indigenous “New World” societies from the civilization that burst upon the scene after 1492.

As for white leftists, we have generally been full participants in American culture. Whatever the ambiguities in Marx’s own thought, the major traditions claiming his legacy have proclaimed that industrialization is progress, and that capitalism itself has served the valuable purpose of developing the “means of production” and thus making socialism possible. To most Marxists, the practices and beliefs of traditional societies, such as those of the North American Indians, are either recognizably reactionary or an opaque mass of mumbo-jumbo that need not be taken seriously. The possibility that modern technological society is a Titanic heading for disaster, and that older ways of doing things may have made



Probably J. N. Choate, 1880s

more sense, is rarely raised.

During the past decade, however, a historical revisionism has begun to emerge, in which Euro-American historians are recognizing the importance of Indians in what is called American history. A number of radicals are active participants in this new development. Because facts have never been the missing ingredient for an appreciation of the Indians’ importance, the main reason for the changing climate in the “historical profession” is the new-found receptivity of white historians.

This, in turn, can be attributed to the ripple effects of the civil rights movement of the

1960s, which forced reconsideration of the nation's entire past from the standpoint that slavery and its legacy were of central importance. In this general shakeup, Indian writers were able to get a hearing they had hitherto lacked. The rise of new Indian militancy, as dramatized especially by the Pine Ridge occupation in South Dakota in 1973, also helped to force the issue. Indians have *not* gone away, either demographically or politically. Finally, a lot of people — historians included — have been nudged by the environmentalism of the 1970s to reexamine the American past from the standpoint of how humans have related to nature; here the contrast between pre- and post-Columbian societies is so stark as to demand that historians take the Indians seriously.

The most interesting aspect of the recent non-racist writings is not the new information they provide but the advances they make in conceptualizing their facts. Taken together, these books use the interaction of Indians and whites to offer us glimpses of a new way of looking at American history as a whole. Although a number of books could be selected, the ones that stand out in this regard are *The Invasion of America* by Francis Jennings, *Facing West* by Richard Drinnon, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* by Michael Paul Rogin, *Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early America* by Gary Nash, and *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relations in the Fur Trade* by Calvin Martin.² It is worth examining each of them in turn.

Francis Jennings' *Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* is at one and the same time the most interesting and the least interesting of the books. He is the most deeply steeped in the historical sources after more than two decades of research and writing on Indian-European relations. With

scholarship, sarcasm, and indignation, he explores the relationship between the way the early English colonists depicted the Indian societies that surrounded them and the way these societies really were. He also attacks the latter-day partisanship of historians who have lined up with the colonists. He hits especially hard at the widespread notion that America was a "virgin land" when the Europeans came; he summarizes recent anthropological estimates that nine million or more people were living north of the Rio Grande at the time of Columbus, and he suggests the ideological gyrations that have been necessary to depict the land as "empty." The second half of the book applies his overall themes to the specific case of seventeenth-century New England, for whose Puritan gentry, Jennings says, "I have tried to practice restraint but not concealment of my distaste."

The virtue of Jennings' book is that it hits so hard with so many facts. The weakness is that it tends persistently to flatten out the real differences between Indians and colonists in order to highlight the colonists' hypocrisy in grabbing the land. His Indians seem to come across as just like Europeans, only more victimized. The rich and tremendously varied cultures that dotted the eastern seaboard are ignored in what seems at times to be a lawyer's brief over land rights. It is perhaps a measure of the pervasive racism that has traditionally colored the writings of American academic historians that Jennings, who could have written a much more complex book, found it necessary to write this one instead.

A book that is similar in tone to Jennings' but that goes off in a different direction is Richard Drinnon's *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*. This book is explicitly a study of white American culture as it absorbed the experience of

westward expansion at the expense of the Indians. Again there is a focus on hypocrisy, and a mixture of sarcasm and indignation. Drinnon examines both writers and decision makers to see how they justified what was very often outright genocide. He follows English-American civilization across the continent from Massachusetts. (Why do both Jennings and Drinnon choose New England and not the earlier Virginia colony? Presumably because the Virginians were more blunt and less prolifically hypocritical.) The new twist in his book is that he does not confine it to the Indians but carefully traces the continuity between westward expansion in the continental US and the conquest of the Philippine Islands at the turn of the century. It is astonishing to realize that the name generally given to the Philippine war by historians is the "Spanish-American war," even though the Filipino insurrectionists absorbed many times the amount of American firepower and casualties than Spain did.

Facing West offers a fresh look at American overseas expansionism by suggesting that it has been of a piece with the conquest of North America, both in military tactics and in the way descriptions of "the natives" can be manipulated to show the need for a firm hand. To drive the point home, Drinnon leapfrogs from the early twentieth century to the 1950s to inspect the career of the mysterious Major Edward G. Lansdale, primary adviser first to President Magsaysay of the Philippines and then to Ngo Dinh Diem during the critical period when the US first set him up as dictator of South Vietnam in the mid-fifties. Although this part of the book is the least successful because it is the most oblique, Drinnon at least shows that the themes he develops in analyzing the Indian conquest are alive today. This book helps us to understand the present precisely because, for all the changes that American society has gone

through, the stereotypes used to explain intervention in "backward" areas have remained strikingly constant.

Michael Paul Rogin's study of Andrew Jackson, *Fathers and Children*, also spotlights the process by which lands used freely by Indians were taken over for the use of whites. Andrew Jackson was a central figure, both as a celebrated "Indian fighter" on the southern frontier and as the president who pushed through a policy of removing the southern Indians from their remaining lands and forcing them into the "Trail of Tears" to the Oklahoma territory. Rogin studies Jackson's relations to the Indians in minute detail, and also tries to fit the subject into an analytical framework that is informed by Marxism and by Freudian psychology. He calls Indian removal in the South the American form of primitive accumulation, pointing out that the Indian lands were the basis for the spread of slave-plantation cotton growing across the South, and that the growing of cotton for export was the motor of American economic growth in the decades before the Civil War. He also sees in Jackson's inchoate ideology a search for a new patriarchal authority to bring order to the new market economy of laissez-faire capitalism. Just as Jackson the general saw himself as a father forced to punish the "childlike" Indians, Jackson as president sought to establish the power of a virtuous patriarchal government to regenerate the political and economic order.

Most readers will find Rogin's book hard to stomach, since the Freudian explanations (money as feces, for example) pepper the whole book rather than being stuck off to one side. Once again we are faced with the consequences of a racist tradition of historical writing. The narrative portions of the book should have been set down by other historians many decades ago; they should all have been common know-



Frances Benjamin Johnson

ledge by now, and Rogin should have been able to confine himself to a purely interpretive book. As it is, many people will read the book simply because it is the best available account of Jackson's Indian policies, and they will repeatedly stumble over the interpretations — which they will find a nuisance rather than the daring achievements that they sometimes are. Rogin is the first person to try to reconcile Jackson's careers as Indian remover and as domestic reformer; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., as we have seen, reconciled the two simply by leaving Indian removal out of his book.

All of the books we have discussed so far are essentially about white society, with the Indians appearing as victims. Gary Nash's book *Red, White and Black*, on the other hand, is a new synthesis of colonial history from the standpoint of the interaction of a multitude of European, Woodland Indian, and West African cultures. In writing about the Indians he emphasizes the extent to which inland confederacies such as the Iroquois, Creeks, and Cherokees learned lessons from the rapid defeats of the seacoast tribes. They adapted as many of the Europeans' techniques and social customs as



Byrons, before late 1916

they could, and they retained a striking degree of diplomatic and military power down to the time of the American Revolution, in the aftermath of which they were overwhelmed by superior numbers. Even aside from his specific conclusions, Nash's book is startling just for the lack of Eurocentrism in its overall framework. He undertook to work out an overview of the Atlantic coast colonies from the standpoint of what happened to all the people who lived there, not simply the whites. In effect, Nash plunks the reader down in the colonial era itself, an era in which the white colonists were constantly having to take the Indians' presence into account. Only in succeeding periods did historians contrive to make them invisible.

All of these books constitute a necessary groundwork for the serious writing of history concerning the Indians. They are a recognition from within the academic historical professions that Indians were and are human beings whose fate is important. It is not the authors' fault if their work is in some respects on an introductory level. In a fifth book, Calvin Martin's *Keepers of the Game*, we can glimpse the kind of imaginative history that may be possible in the near future, once the foundations are in place. Martin takes as his task the explanation of why certain Indian peoples, despite a worldview that had made them, in effect, first-rate conservationists, began a fearful overkilling of game animals once European traders showed up and set a price on the furs. He ends up arguing that cultural demoralization, caused especially by the onset of European diseases to which the Indians had no immunity, led to the abandonment of faith in the old mystical relation of people to animals. Animals were even blamed for the diseases in some cases. (Indian medicine, it should be noted, was not inferior to European medicine of the same period; the only difference was that diseases like measles,

chicken pox, smallpox, and mumps had long since become "childhood diseases" in Europe through a centuries-long process of natural immunization.) In stressing the profound cultural differences between Indian and European societies, Martin heightens the reader's appreciation of how big a cataclysm it was when Europeans appropriated the continent.³

Taken together, these books and others on more narrowly defined topics constitute a major trend in the writing of history by Euro-Americans. They recognize the Indians' substantial role in American history, and they dig below the layers of racist stereotypes that historians have long placed over the Indians. The work at this point is chiefly remedial. It is generally being done by writers who are on the left politically, though there is no special reason that it has to be done by them: Drinnon's *Facing West* is the only book discussed here that could not have been written by a conscientious middle-of-the-roader. As the field gets opened up and becomes an accepted part of "American history," the special role of sensitive left-wing writers will become clearer. In the future it will more and more be necessary to resist a flattening-out of the Indian experience in North America, to resist the tendency to read the ethos of modern capitalist civilization back into a far more complex past. If we look at the entire picture of human habitation of North America, we see that the five centuries since Columbus first landed are but a tiny fraction of the whole. It is during that brief period that the continent has been launched on a

frantic path of technical innovation and despoliation of the natural environment. Historians have to understand what came before these last five centuries, and they have to explain that development is not necessarily progress.

Footnotes

1. Virgil J. Vogel, "The Indian in American History, 1668" in Virgil J. Vogel, ed., *This Country Was Ours: A Documentary History of the American Indian* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 284-99. This essay is an extraordinarily trenchant and careful critique of historians' treatment of Indians, written by a long-time socialist whose own work (most notably *American Indian Medicine*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1970) stands as a notable exception to the traditional pattern of left-wing indifference to Indians.
2. Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975; Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980; Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian*, New York: Knopf, 1975; Gary Nash, *Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early America*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974; Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relations in the Fur Trade*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
3. A wide-ranging essay that complements Martin's book very well is Christopher Vecsey, "American Indian Environmental Religions," pp. 1-37 in Christopher Vecsey and Robert W. Venables, eds., *American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History* (Syracuse University Press, 1980). Overall this anthology is spotty but deserves recognition for breaking ground on an extremely important topic. The annotated illustrations are wonderful.



"CAN YOU KEEP 'EM DOWN ON THE PLANTATION AFTER THEY'VE READ ROUSEAU?":

Eugene Genovese's *From Rebellion to Revolution* and the Problem of the Origins of Black Politics

David Gerber

Among those writing American history today, no one has been more successful than Eugene Genovese in gaining a forum for Marxism as an intellectual system. But it is not clear what Genovese's historical thought means for the contemporary American Left, or what, in the case of this book, his analysis of the origins of black politics means for the construction of left theory in America.

Genovese's Marxism has served him well in asking questions about slave rebellion, if only because ideologically mainstream historians have not been prepared to take very seriously either class conflict within slavery or the slaves' role in creating their own world. For Ulrich B. Phillips,¹ a turn-of-the-century Georgian whose classic studies of the Old South consciously sought to vindicate the white master class, slave resistance and revolt were the entirely random products of criminal minds among the blacks, whom he saw as racially inferior and hence too ignorant to have politics or even be discontented with slavery. For later historians, writing in the 1940s and 1950s amidst strong reaction against segregation and ideological racism, it was not racial inferiority, but the consequences of cruelty and oppression which made rebellion impossible. Thus, Stanley Elkins, a conservative wary of all unguided change, contended that blacks, as victims of unrestrained capitalist profit seeking, had been infantilized by slavery.² More recently, Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman,

* *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*: Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979, xxvi + 173 pp., \$9.95.

perversely applying "free market" quantitative analysis to the relations between slaves and masters, came up with the wholly unproven (and untenable) notion that, so ample were the positive incentives wooing slaves to the system, blacks internalized values of hard work, self-discipline, and upward mobility.³ Rebellion was beside the point; and if, for Fogel and Engerman, slaves had any politics at all, they were bourgeois politics.

These crude formulations aside, left-oriented American historians, past and present, have not always brought us very far on the road to understanding either. Herbert Aptheker's path-breaking work, while based on a tremendous amount of research, is limited by economic determinism, evident in attempts to correlate slave revolts and business cycles, and by a failure to separate fact from rumor.⁴ Herbert Gutman's recent important work on the black family contains tantalizing insights into the means by which, through an emerging family and kinship system, an autonomous black culture was transferred from one generation of slaves to another throughout the South.⁵ But Gutman unfortunately failed to spell out the implications of his conceptualization of slave family and community for an understanding of black politics. Actually, the best work done on the Left, or anywhere else for that matter, on slave revolts is C. L. R. James's masterly *Black Jacobins*, a classic account by a West Indian Marxist of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the late eighteenth-century slave revolt-turned-revolution in that section of Santo Domingo island which became the black nation of Haiti.⁶ James's work has been most significant in shaping Genovese's view of the social meaning and historical significance of New World slave revolts.

Before we can explore Genovese's views on slave revolts, however, we have to be sure we

understand his complex conceptualization of the problem, spelled out in extended form in his much larger work, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, a controversial analysis of slavery in the American South in the decades just before the Civil War.⁷

For Genovese, nineteenth-century American slavery was a paternalistic institution, through which the white master class sought to create not merely a good and secure life for itself, but, in a larger sense, a civilization worthy of respect in a Western world increasingly won over to bourgeois conceptions of individual liberty. Underlying this effort to shore up ideologically and morally an archaic labor system, which was the antithesis of the mobile, wage-drawing "free" labor system suited to the needs of emerging capitalism, was a very practical reality. In 1808, by a provision agreed to at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the slave trade to American ports was put to an end. This action was prompted by mixed motives. Many northern delegates were against slavery, or at least appalled by the horrors of the Middle Passage. Many southern ones feared, in light of the black rebellion in the Caribbean, that a continued rapid increase in black population, based on imports of the always more rebellious Africans, would lay the seeds of slave insurrection in North America. But however confused the motives, the consequences of this cut-off of the trade are generally agreed upon. There was a rise in the domestic price of slaves, and this caused masters to seek to protect their investments by creating a standard of living conducive to conserving and reproducing black labor. Reinforced by the desire to ward off Abolitionist criticism, the result was the gradual development of paternalistic standards of minimal protection and care, which entered the law and took root in custom.

Genovese recognizes that frequently the

masters honored such standards more in the breach than in practice. Obviously on their own plantations, out of the reach of the law (which they controlled anyway) and their neighbor's critical eye, and driven by the mad pursuit of profit, planters were able to treat the slaves as they pleased. Still, violence and coercion play less of a role in Genovese's conception of slave-master relations than perhaps in any other recent historians of slavery except Fogel and Engerman.

Under any circumstance, however, Genovese contends, these standards were known to the slaves. In his view, the slaves, conscious of their lack of options and of the overwhelming white power they confronted, strategically accepted paternalism because, at its best, it promised protection, decent material conditions, and social space in which to develop their families and culture. Moreover, they felt they were due these things as a matter of fairness in exchange for their labor, the value of which was obvious to them. The denial of that labor, in fact, served as a tactic for making paternalist masters fulfill their own standards. But if the slaves accepted paternalism, Genovese says, they rejected racism, one of the pillars upon which their enslavement and paternalist ideology itself was built. He demonstrates that the slaves' Afro-American Christianity helped them view themselves not only as spiritual equals of the whites, but as special children of god, likened to the ancient Hebrews.

The knowledge of the value of their labor, reinforced by the dignity imparted through their unique cultural creation, Afro-American Protestantism, therefore, allowed the slaves a wedge by which they could contend for more of the varied benefits their work created. Still, Genovese contends, they acknowledged their dependence, and thus paternalism functioned to bind the slave to the master. This process of

ruling-class hegemony, which plays a profound role in Genovese's analysis, is in his view (and contrary to the appraisal of some critics) never ironclad. Genovese's slaves are not mirror images of their master's fantasies of an uncomplaining, docile, hard-working, and, above all, grateful work force. Nor do they create a culture for themselves perpetuating such traits, as his analysis of their religion proves. Yet, Genovese's conception of the relations between master and slave within paternalism necessarily leaves little room for the development of a black politics which looks beyond paternalism to liberation. His slaves may seek to improve their lot within bondage, and even dream of doing so to an extent unimaginable for their masters, but they do not seek to end bondage.



Clara Spain

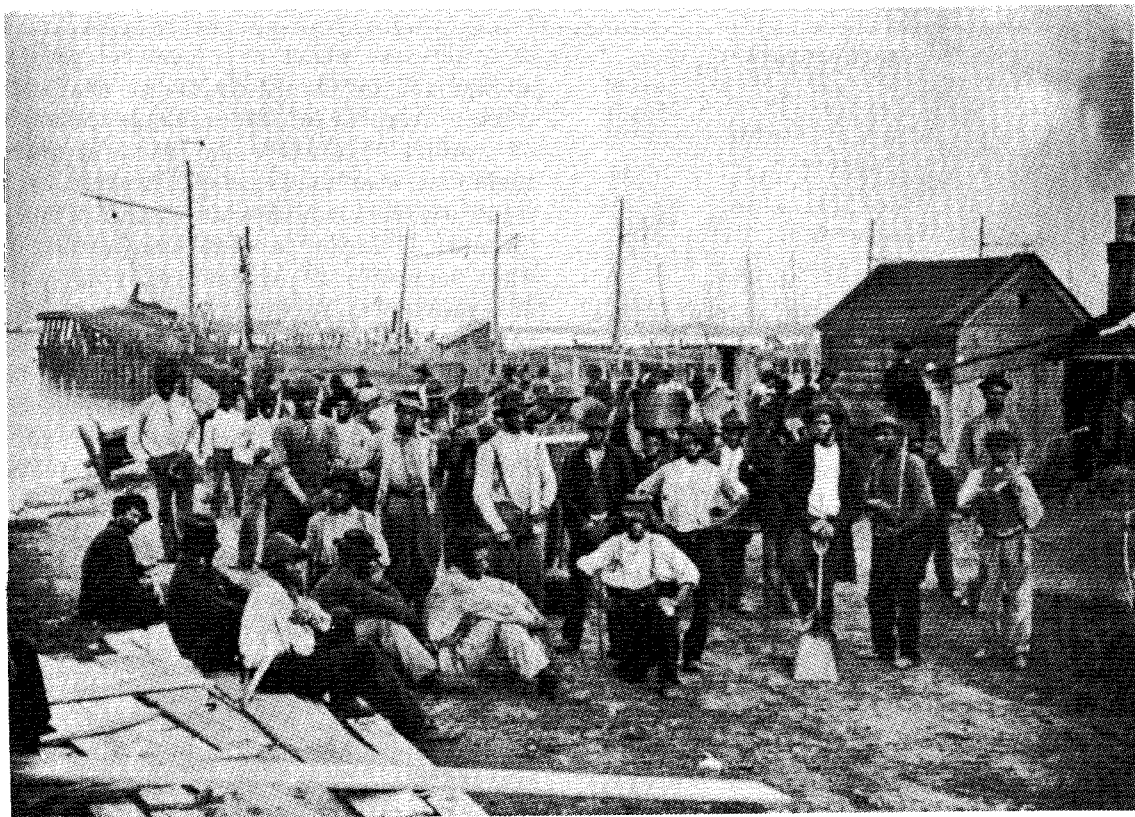
Believing that the slaves accepted paternalism, therefore, Genovese is led, with inexorable dialectical logic, to see what other historians have seen as the principal evidence available of slave resistance — what Raymond and Alice Bauer called “day-to-day resistance”⁸ — in a wholly different light. For him, such common acts, repeated daily on plantations and farms through the South, as tool breaking, food stealing, malingering, episodic absence from the plantation, and even arson may best be understood as the slaves’ responses to violations of the paternalistic standard of care and protection they had come to believe they were owed. Thus, much of what we may see as *resistance*, he sees as *accomodation*, since in impetus and in consequence these acts fixed slaves more insidiously in dependent bondage.

Even the concept of “prepolitics” won’t serve us here: Genovese’s slaves are not so much acting out of some traditional sense of justice when they malingere, as they are simply making the point that they want to be treated better. Moreover, with equally inexorable logic, Genovese sees chronic, individual “day-to-day resistance” as, a la U. B. Phillips, *deviance* — from the slaves’ own norms! His slaves are willing to work hard, at their own preindustrial pace, and proud of their capacity to do so. They know, too, that their own standard of living, even if determined in the end by others, may ultimately be dependent on their own exertions. Furthermore, the vengeance such acts of resistance brought in train could also imperil uninvolved individuals and families, victimizing others without necessarily ever desiring to make any point before the master which could serve the collective good. Thus, the malingerer, in Genovese’s view, far from being a hero, under certain circumstances may become a moral and practical threat to the slave community. Obviously, this conception of resistance

and of class morality, which appears to come close to blaming the victim for fighting back, has been very controversial. Equally controversial has been Genovese’s view of the long-term consequences of such acts of resistance: Genovese believes that such apolitical, immoral behavior sowed seeds of nihilism and mindless violence in black culture which continue to imperil and weaken black communities.

Within the narrow confines of this conceptualization of politics within slavery, Genovese went on, not illogically, to classify only two types of actions undertaken by slaves as political — running away to freedom (as opposed to running away, for example, to avoid punishment) and planned, group violence against the slave system. In *Roll, Jordan, Roll* Genovese dealt inadequately with the problem of the ideological and social origins of such liberating behavior, referring vaguely to the development of a “new quality” which reflected “a break — a qualitative leap — in the continuum of resistance in accomodation and accomodation in resistance.” This seeming arguing away of contrary evidence easily led some critical readers to question the soundness of the entire intellectual edifice Genovese had constructed in his analysis of the hegemonic functioning of paternalism. In a brilliant review, James Anderson argued that Genovese’s backing off from the problem of Black politics had, for all his Marxist theoretical apparatus, led him to rehabilitate the older view of slave docility. Anderson underscored his point by entitling his review “Aunt Jemima in Dialectics.”

In *From Rebellion to Revolution*, based on lectures given at Louisiana State University in 1973, Genovese is back to analyze in greater detail the origins and development of that “new quality,” which lent itself to the development of a politics of liberation within bondage.¹⁰ The enquiry proceeds along two fronts.



First, he examines the material and social contexts which appear to facilitate slave rebellion in this hemisphere; absentee ownership, with its depersonalized relations and cultural estrangement between master and slaves; economic decline or distress (such as famine); large concentrations of slaves, facilitating the development of leadership, the organization of plots, and the rise of slave culture; a relatively high ratio of blacks to whites; a predominance of African over creole (i.e. native-born) slaves, since the former had not yet suffered the full dislocations of the system, been intentionally "broken" of a spirit of independence, or developed, through families in particular, a reason to fear violent change or a reluctance to face

separation from loved ones; conflicts among the whites, which allowed slaves to play one side against the other; opportunities for the development of a privileged stratum of slave craftsmen, drivers, and preachers who could effectively lead the community of slaves as a consequence of greater geographical mobility, skills, possibilities for literacy, and so forth, and finally, the existence of rugged terrain and an unsettled back-country favorable to retreat, security, and the movement of raiding parties.¹¹

Much of this analysis culminates in one point: that conditions were less favorable in the American South than elsewhere in this hemisphere to the generation of slave militance. Absentee ownership was less frequent; planta-



Photo by Jack Delano

tions were often self-sufficient in food, shielding them from the impact of economic distress; plantations were smaller (indeed most slaves lived on farms which had fewer than twenty slaves); whites predominated in the population and hence supplied many of the services which a privileged group of slaves provided elsewhere; the slave trade from Africa ended in 1808, yielding an increasingly creolized slave population; the white South obtained a high degree of internal unity from the 1790s on; and the back-country was taken up by nonslaveholding whites who were not only loyal to the regime, but often intensely Negrophobic.

Under such conditions, the slaveholders were allowed to consolidate their power over the slaves, a power reinforced by the organization

of lower-class whites into local patrols and militias and by the utterly savage retaliation taken in response to slave rebellion or rumors of rebellion. Yet where and when, at times, conditions were conducive to rebellion, as in the largely black coastal areas of colonial South Carolina or during the American Revolution when the British offered freedom to runaways of rebel masters, American blacks seized their opportunities and made the most of them. Such opportunities, however, were few and far between.

While Genovese's argument here makes good sense in explaining the divergent political histories of slaves in North America and elsewhere, both in *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and *From Revolt to Revolution* there is a defensive, almost apologetic tone in behalf of American slaves. It is almost as if Genovese imagines himself locked in debate simultaneously with militant blacks who reject his cautions about the political traditions from which they claim lineage, or with those, like the black sociologist Orlando Patterson,¹² who see in the relative lack of slave rebellion proof of the debasement and infantilization of American slaves posited years ago by Stanley Elkins.

The second of Genovese's concerns is tracing the evolution of the ideological bases of black resistance to slavery. This surely is the most original of Genovese's contributions to the study of slave militance. Genovese contends that the French Revolution and the Santo Domingo slave rebellion, which ultimately became a revolution against all class privilege and wealth in the French colony, marked a turning point in the political history of New World slaves. Prior to these events, he contends, slaves — usually African-born — fought bondage primarily through *maroonage*, i.e. running away to freedom in the back-country, where they attempted to create a

hybrid Afro–New World existence based on memories of African models and on the exigencies of the present.¹³ Such maroon settlements, established in Brazil, Surinam, and Jamaica, for example, were therefore “restorationist.” They looked backward in time to the hierarchical, patriarchal arrangements and the spiritual ethos (including supernatural protection of traditional gods) of the African village. Moreover, the political ideology upon which their social coherence also rested was not universalistic in the sense of a commitment to the emancipation of all slaves. They did not understand themselves as beacons of freedom and black initiative to be signaled around plantation society, stirring up slave discontent. In fact, maroons often raided plantations, stealing from slaves as well as their owners and carrying off women for sexual use and to do their farm work. Moreover, maroons are known to have made deals with slave owners and colonial administrators (usually without coercion) to hunt fugitive slaves in return for guarantees such as freedom from attack. Genovese contends that the decisive break with maroonage came when the Santo Domingo blacks, influenced by radical formulations of the French Revolutions’s Rights of Man, transformed their revolt into a revolution in behalf of a new egalitarian society. (A lesser, but in the USA not insignificant role, is attributed to the moderate ideology of the American Revolution.)

Henceforth, he contends, secular, universalistic concepts of freedom, equality, and justice increasingly guided rebel slaves, who now at times showed an astute ability to differentiate between the various classes of white society, separating enemies from potential class allies. Genovese is not completely clear on how such ideas were spread among the blacks, but suggests reasonably that slaves were not isolated from information passed among whites,

who often said things in the presence of blacks that greatly aided the slaves’ efforts to learn about the world. Also, we know that the slaves certainly had their own “grapevine telegraph” for informing one another. In the USA, too, blacks observed the Fourth of July celebrations and election campaigns, and doubtless absorbed a good deal of rhetoric about liberty.

Unfortunately, there isn’t much evidence to sustain this bold conception, which seems, in the end, to subordinate the messiness of history to the neat turn of the dialectic. Anticipating criticism, Genovese qualifies his thesis so much (and yet still vaguely) that we don’t know where we are. He claims that it is not his intention to argue that none of the essential “restorationist” aspects — such as religious influence — continue to exist in the liberationist movements of the nineteenth century. Very reasonable, since change is seldom sudden and all-encompassing. But he fails to suggest adequately how and to what extent old and new mixed or, common sensically, the extent to which objective circumstances rather than ideology may have determined the choices that slaves made when mobilizing resistance.

The argument probably works least effectively for the USA, as Genovese himself seems to sense. (At one point, he gets left arguing the impact of the Santo Domingo rebellion on American masters, hence on the cut-off of the slave trade, hence on the improvement of American slaves’ living standards, as an example of the slaves’ agency in making their history. Which slaves and where? This is rather indirect causality.) The problems with applying the argument to our own history are clear when we examine the (only) three nineteenth-century revolts — two of them plots which were betrayed before they could act — about which enough is known to reconstruct events and, above all, to be sure we are not dealing with

rumor. The Gabriel Prosser plot of 1800, Denmark Vesey plot of 1822, and Nat Turner rebellion of 1831 all seem much more steeped in black culture, particularly, as Vincent Harding argued, in black religion, than in the Rights of Man.¹⁴

About Turner, there can be no doubt. He was a religious mystic, whose dreams of liberation were inspired by visions of black and white spirits warring in the heavens, and whose powerful religious exhortations convinced those blacks in Southampton County, Virginia, who followed him that he was chosen by God to deliver them from bondage.

Gabriel Prosser's plot, which occurred while the events in Santo Domingo were still in motion and word of them was reaching the USA, and when memories of the American and French revolutions were still fresh in many minds, had important religious elements. Prosser and his brother, a coconspirator, followed the news from Santo Domingo, and at times spoke the epigrammatic mottos of the great revolutions. But regularly and at great length, they exhorted on scriptural accounts of resistance to tyranny before their followers.

Denmark Vesey's plot followed years of struggle (1815-1818) in Charleston, South Carolina, for self-determination in religious matters, culminating in the founding of an independent "African Church" of the Methodist faith. Vesey, a free man and class leader at this church, knew of Haiti (he had been a sailor in the Caribbean) and of the debate over slavery in the Missouri Territory then taking place in Congress. Too, he regularly exhorted his followers on the struggles of the ancient Hebrews, and he told them that God looked with favor on their effort to free themselves. His coconspirator, "Gullah Jack" Pritchard, was also a member of the African Church, and he knew traditional African conjuring. He

employed both Christian and African appeals in mobilizing Charleston slaves. Evidently, it was not for nothing that nineteenth-century southern whites came to distrust black preachers and any other evidence of black initiative in religion.¹⁵

The point of this detail is not to suggest the irrelevance of the Rights of Man, but rather that what there was of revolutionary ideology was absorbed through the medium of much more powerful influences which were present in the slaves' own culture. Religion provided them with an emotional and conceptual framework for evaluating matters of justice, equality, and freedom. In their Christianity, they found both an endless series of parables of righteous struggle against evil and the idea, constantly explicit, of the spiritual equality of all before God. From there, was it not a short leap to suspicions of worldly equality, and thus of the immorality of worldly power arrangements based on hierarchy, oppression and exploitation? Strongly reinforcing the Christian message was the social organization of religious life. As DuBois recognized, it provided the setting for the practical exercise of independence and for functioning politically and a field of action in which to battle against white interference in black communal affairs.¹⁶

None of this is unknown to Genovese. *Roll, Jordan, Roll* contains insightful analysis of the development of black Protestantism; Genovese recognizes that Christianity contains vital communitarian and liberationist traditions which war with its individualist and otherworldly ones. And no historian writing about slavery today sees the slaves' religion merely as a crude device, imposed by the whites in order to stupefy the blacks. But his overly restrictive concept of politics and political understanding and his belief in the hegemonic functioning of paternalism, lead Genovese to blot out much of black

resistance from the realm of the political. They thereby prevent him from acknowledging the religious roots of a distinctive black politics. To his mind, the significant role of black religion under slavery was to provide a basis for a dignified self-concept and for the emotional forging of a sense of peoplehood among Afro-Americans. Religion, therefore, could make the slaves holy. It could provide communality. But it could not make them free in mind, let alone in body. It could not provide a means by which slaves came to a moral, and hence ultimately a political, understanding of the monstrously perverted social relations imposed on them. His

slaves are too deeply involved in paternalism to find a route to questioning it. They seem incapable of thinking ideologically. In this sense, one is forced to agree with the particularly searing criticism of James Anderson that Genovese's masters *think*, but his slaves *feel*.

We will never understand black politics until we understand its distinct roots in the Afro-American community and the distinctive communal feelings and shared outlooks which make it possible, in the first place, to speak of an Afro-American "community." Certainly without an understanding of black religion much of black history is impenetrable: Nat



Turner's and Harriet Tubman's visions; Bishop Henry McNeil Turner's interest in African colonization while remaining a committed Christian; Marcus Garvey's "African Orthodox Church"; the career of Martin Luther King, Jr. It would be a pity if the acquiring of such understanding were seen unthinkingly as a capitulation to separatist "black nationalism." We are not talking about separatist manifestoes, programs, or movements. Rather we are talking about the ways in which blacks come to understand their situation and create alternatives to race and class oppression based on the understanding of justice, equality, and freedom found in their culture. If acquiring such an understanding of black culture ultimately seems to be at odds with where Marxism is leading us, as I believe to be the case with a good deal of Genovese's analysis of black politics, either we have misconstrued the dynamic potential within Marxism, or we are taking the wrong road.

Footnotes

1. Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (Baton Rouge, 1967, paperback reprint). This was his most important work.
2. Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, (Chicago, 1959). Writing about the same time from the perspective of a liberal committed to integration, Kenneth Stampp reached a not dissimilar conclusion: that the cruelties of slavery led slaves to live in a cultural "netherworld." See *The Peculiar Institution* (New York, 1956).
3. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, volumes I and II (Boston, 1974).
4. Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1943).
5. Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York, 1976).
6. C. L. R. James, *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and The San Domingo Revolution* (New York, 1938).
7. (New York, 1974).
8. Raymond and Alice Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," *Journal of Negro History* XXVII (October 1942), 388-419.
9. Appearing in the *Journal of Negro History*, LXI (January, 1976), 99-114.
10. Actually these essays were in the works prior to the publication of *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, though not published until 1979. In other words, it appears that even before the publication of his definitive work on slavery, Genovese had begun to work out the inadequacies he sensed existed in the treatment of slave resistance and rebellion which would be found in that work. Perhaps this is an indication of the extent to which, his self-confident prose aside, the matter continues to bedevil him.
11. A fine summary and analysis of this section of Genovese's book is: Edward Royce, "Genovese on Slave Revolts and Weiner on The Postbellum South," *The Insurgent Sociologist* X (Fall, 1980), 109-117. My summary here owes a lot to this fine review.
12. Orlando Patterson, "The Peculiar Institution Again," *The New Republic*, November 9, 1974, 37-38.
13. For analysis of this phenomenon in slave societies throughout the hemisphere, see the excellent collection and Introduction in Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies* (New York, 1973).
14. "Religion and Resistance among Antebellum Negroes, 1800-1860," in August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, editors, *The Making of Black America*, volume I, *The Origins of Black Americans* (New York, 1969), pp. 179-97.
15. The description of the role of religion in the lives of the three black rebels is based on the Harding essay cited above. There is a wealth of documentation and analysis of the three lives, though much of the former, upon which the latter is based, has the usual problems of many types of evidence about the slaves which was generated within white, slaveholding society. On the other hand, it seems to me that the religious bases of the ideas of the three rebels are quite clear in the sources available to us.
16. W. E. B. DuBois, editor, *The Negro Church* (Atlanta, 1903), and relevant sections of his *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York, 1967, paperback reprint).

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VOTES FOR WOMEN

LINDA GORDON

One might have expected that the rebirth of women's history out of the 1970s women's liberation movement would have produced many studies of the feminist movements of the past. This has not been the case. The reasons are in themselves interesting because they reveal some of the politics, and political conflicts, within the women's movement and women's studies. First, left-wing feminist scholars, influenced by the socialist tradition and labor history, have often preferred to focus their research on working women and the conditions of wage labor, neither of which were central to feminism. Second, an opposite influence has been the pressure on women's studies scholars aiming at university jobs to produce work that will not be branded as feminist or biased. (Readers should be aware of the tradition in the academy that makes conservative or liberal scholarship considered unbiased!) Third, women's history was developed in the 1970s simultaneously with the "new social history," an emphasis on quantitative work, descriptive of the experience of "ordinary" people, de-emphasizing the study of leaders and of ideology, social struggle and politics. Ironically, therefore, some of the best women's history work of the past decade is already exceptional and may appear "traditional" in its reliance on more conventional kinds of sources — letters, diaries — as opposed to computer analyses of census data, for example. (Examples include the work of Gerda Lerner, Kathryn Sklar, Meredith Tax, Sheila Rowbotham, Mari Jo Buhle, Nancy Cott, Linda Gordon, Barbara Epstein, William Chafe,

and Allen Davis.

Ellen DuBois's *Feminism and Suffrage** is a fine example of the best of this traditional historical method applied to the history of feminism. She explains how an autonomous women's rights movement emerged out of a general radical and reform movement in the period 1848-1869. The central force behind its autonomy was the break between women's rights and the abolition of slavery as democratic reforms. Most leading feminists, along with the radical wing of the abolitionists, hoped to conclude the Civil War with guarantees of universal suffrage, regardless of race or sex. To campaign for this demand, they organized an Equal Rights Association composed of abolitionists and women's rights advocates. Instead they ended with the legal enfranchisement of black men, and the postponement of women's political rights for another sixty years; furthermore, the enfranchisement of black men was later repealed in practice by state Jim Crow laws and intimidation, a loss which a more powerful radical coalition such as the Equal Rights Association promised might have helped prevent.

There are few events in the history of US radicalism as important as the break between women's rights and abolition in the 1860s. It created the conditions for the extremely bitter alienation of the women's movement from the black liberation struggle. Understanding the sources of this fragmentation is important for radicals today, and DuBois's book is a good beginning.

Within the context of the narrative it offers, DuBois's book is opinionated and controversial in relation to several conflicts among practicing women's historians today. They are, on the whole, productive disagreements which serve to

**Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.

clarify political and methodological questions, and for that reason are worth discussing here briefly.

First, there has been a general polarization between those using traditional sources to write what has been called "political" history and those using more innovative methods to get at social and economic conditions of the mass of the inarticulate, those usually left out of the political history because they did not leave manuscripts and were not organizational nor intellectual leaders. In the 1960s the latter, the "new social history," appeared associated with the New Left in its inclination toward history from the bottom up. In the last few years, however, many radical historians, including Ellen DuBois, have been more critical of these methods which may describe the working class and other oppressed groups but which remove political and ideological questions from the framing of the subject. Census data can tell us how households were constructed, but they cannot let us in on intrafamily conflict, the influence of women's-rights ideas, or class consciousness. One might analogize the politics of the new-social-history orientation to a kind of populism which focuses on the working class but rejects those ideologies which, in their search for levers of radical change, appear non-spontaneous or even external to the masses.

Second, within the field of women's history, as within the women's movement itself, there has emerged a kind of cultural feminism which veers away from the political questions found in DuBois's work. The cultural-feminist emphasis is on the autonomy and values of the culture that women created among themselves — artistic, interpersonal, sexual. In a recent influential symposium in the scholarly journal *Feminist Studies* (Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 1980), DuBois published a sharp attack on a tendency to romanticize women's culture and to separate it from the feminist movement's critique of

male supremacy. "There is a very sneaky kind of antifeminism here, that criticizes feminism in history in the name of social history," wrote DuBois.

A third controversy to which DuBois has made a major contribution concerns the trajectory of the woman suffrage movement itself. Until DuBois's work, the leading scholarly interpretations, notably those of Aileen Krador in her *Ideas on the Woman Suffrage Movement* (1965) and William O'Neill in his *Everyone Was Brave* (1969), argued that the increasing focus of the women's movement on the vote, after the Civil War, was a conservative decision by the elite women who dominated the women's organizations. DuBois's book does not directly contradict this argument, because Krador and O'Neill focussed on the 1880s and after, while DuBois has stopped at 1870. Indeed, there is a great deal of truth in the

allegation that the movement became more conservative, but it is usually argued with the wrong evidence and logic. Particularly the Left, embittered at the failure of the woman suffrage amendment to alter the political complexion of the country, and angered by the race and class elitism of the suffrage organizations, has minimized the radicalism of the suffrage demand.

Against this interpretation, DuBois offers a compelling defense of the focus on the vote in that historical era, one which contemporary feminists should understand even if they decide not to agree. DuBois makes, implicitly, two arguments about the importance of suffrage in the course of her narrative. One is that suffrage has been under-recognized because it has been regarded as an "isolated institutional reform" instead of a social movement which allowed women to express their most ambitious and radical aspirations for equality and power.



Another is that, however powerless in practice, in theory the vote of the citizenry was the fundamental democratic principle, and that to build a *political* women's movement (as opposed to previous and subsequent feminist tendencies that attempted to support women and raise their self-esteem without challenging male supremacy) women had to claim the vote. In this argument it is vital to understand that, throughout the nineteenth century, demands for the vote often appeared as too *radical*, not too conservative, and that many women preferred to concentrate their efforts on improving women's status within their traditional sphere — the home — rejecting public political life for women.

The contemporary implication of all this is not that feminism should concentrate on legal rights. Rather, DuBois's work should be taken as a defense of a *political* feminist movement, one that directly challenges structures of male power in the *whole society*, not only in the private sphere. This strategy is not obvious. Today there are feminist tendencies that would concentrate more exclusively on private life, suggesting that one can remove oneself from male supremacy by declining to engage in intimate or sexual relations with men; and others would concentrate on what they see as the "positive," strengthening the traditional female culture and community, without working on a strategy for transforming the "negative."

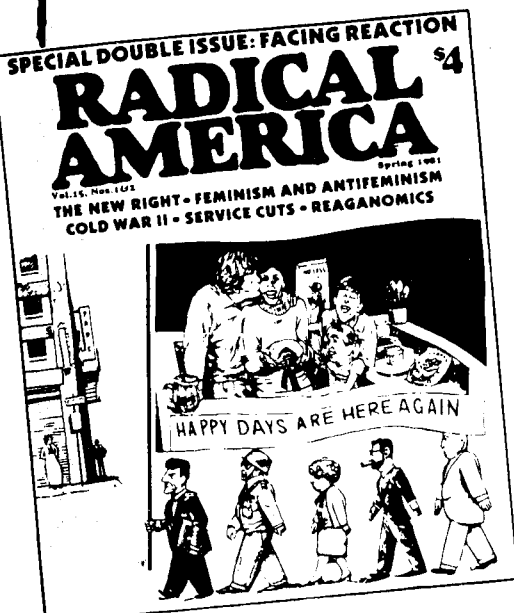
There are several other important aspects to DuBois's book. It corrects a tradition of blaming the women's movement for the feminist-abolitionist split, and places the blame where it belongs, on the machinations of the Republican Party and the sellout of Reconstruction radicalism. It also implicitly criticizes those who attack the women's movement for its elitism. Feminism in this period was not particularly more

elite than most other radical movements in the US, including abolition; and the very notion of including middle-class women in the elite denies what the feminists were themselves saying about the oppression and powerlessness of women.

But DuBois is at the same time critical of the women's-rights advocates, in an historical and not a moralistic manner. She has an excellent chapter on the Working Women's Association, in which Susan Anthony and a group of wage-earning women tried to form a women's group which could both force its way into the male-dominated union structure and offer organized help to women wage workers. The effort failed in both goals and brought about the end of any direct feminist interest in such women for a long time, another event which marked (it hardly created) a tragic separation. DuBois has no illusions about the naivete and obliviousness of the suffragists toward capitalist industry and its proletariat. The strength of her approach is that her criticisms take into account the entire historical context, the options available, the nature of the social worldview of these activists, the immediate political and social taking sides that prevented unity except on the basis of unacceptable compromises. Here is a book from which one can learn a great deal about historical method as well as about nineteenth-century feminism.

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DOMESTIC REVOLUTION:

History of a Good Idea

Linda Gordon

In general, one influence of the New Left and then the women's movement on historians was to open (or sometimes to reopen) suppressed topics to historical investigation. Among them were aspects of "private" life often considered ahistorical, or, like sex, simply biological. As part of this new look at history, several works have appeared or are in process on the subject of the houses we live in.¹ Dorlores Hayden's *The Grand Domestic Revolution** explores one aspect of their history with exciting and unexpected results. Indeed, her book produces a small intellectual explosion by puncturing the balloon of convention that makes us tend to regard the patterns of contemporary living as inevitable and eternal.

A central point of Hayden's book is that our typical dwelling arrangement — the single-family house or apartment — was neither inevitable nor eternal. Instead, it has a history, and this history can help us see how the domestic division of labor, and hence much of the entire sex/gender system, is enforced. In a country like the US, where private home ownership was for so long a realistic aspiration for much of the working class, it also tells us a lot about how our class system was stabilized.

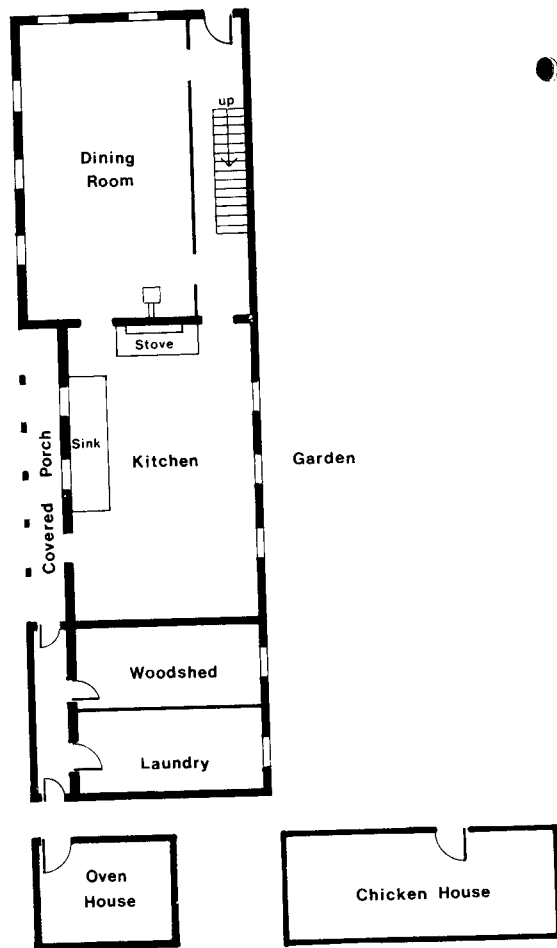
Hayden had previously written about "utopian" socialist communities and had become interested in their housing design.² This new book discusses feminist and utopian-socialist campaigns for cooperative housekeeping and the socialization of domestic labor — particu-

The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981.

larly cooking — in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They focused especially on the wastefulness of one kitchen per family and of one woman cooking for each family. So compelling were their criticisms, so convincing their alternative designs, and so optimistic their expectations, that by 1900 an informed radical would have expected the single-family living unit to be passe by the mid-twentieth century.

A great asset of this book is that it is about architecture by an architect. Almost half consists of pictures and plans for alternatives: model tenements, small apartments with central kitchens, large apartment buildings with many types of shared facilities, community dining clubs, delivery carts for cooked meals brought to your door (oh ecstasy!), whole cities with efficient socialized housekeeping services. Hayden also criticizes the implicit sexism in the home design of major modern architects. She allows her readers to look at their own homes in a new way. The designs for cooperative living are breathtaking in imagination and detail, moving in their hopes for a new social order of greater cooperation and leisure. Hayden's research brings us an aspect of feminist and socialist thought of the past that will be vital in the "utopian" planning we need for the future.

Generally there were two tendencies in these plans: one toward fully communal living; another toward small private apartments or houses designed primarily for nuclear families. The former flourished primarily before the Civil War; afterwards, the small socialist sects that continued the tradition remained a small and not very influential fringe. Communal living was only revived on a large scale in the 1960s. The other tendency dominated feminist thought after the Civil War, perhaps fitting the tendency of the women's rights movement as a



First

Plan of first floor of kitchen house, Amana, Iowa

whole after the 1870s to retreat from challenging the family and to focus on "public" demands. Thus the later plans in Hayden's book are primarily for tenements, apartment houses, hotels, or planned groups of individual houses designed for nuclear families, with the addition of collective facilities for childcare and cooking.

In her conclusion Hayden turns to the question of why these plans rarely happened, did not last long, and entirely ceased being produced after the 1920s. She argues that many requirements of capitalism combined to reinforce the nuclear household and the maintenance of privatized housewifery. Chiefly, American industrialists thought their interests would be damaged by having a lot of women in the paid labor force; they adopted the strategy of offering male skilled workers small suburban homes, to be purchased with mortgages, as a way of achieving greater industrial order (their concern with order being stimulated, of course, by a period of intense industrial disorder between 1909 and 1919). The usefulness of this private home to the worker, of course, depended on the presence of a full-time, private wife to run it. The homes represented also a big market for consumer durables, which were a major area of capital investment in the 1920s.

This explanation is not completely adequate. Certainly the new phase of capitalism, dependent on rapidly increasing consumption, was a major force. And Hayden is right to insist that we avoid the determinist view that what failed was therefore a bad idea. But I think she has not been critical enough of the goals of efficiency, industrialization, and mechanization that late-nineteenth-century feminists and socialists (including Marx) shared, and which affected the planning of alternative domestic arrangements. Ending women's personal domestic servitude by socializing domestic labor (instead

of, for example, demanding that men share it, which was not usually a part of these designs) requires economies of scale which require large living units. Most nineteenth-century social reformers liked largeness, and did not sense any negative ecological, emotional, or aesthetic consequences from it. Many of the later designs in Hayden's book are for enormous hotels or planned cities with rows of identical units. Many designs utilized dining rooms where scores of people ate all their meals restaurant- or cafeteria-style. Hayden ignores the possibility that such a living style is unattractive to many people. The success of selling the workers on single-family homeownership was not *only* a conservatizing capitalist success, although it surely was that, but also a reflection of the strengths of the nuclear family: its ability to offer its members emotional support, relative calm, and a sense of being special. Nor is the modern continuation of the peasant desire to own a plot of land necessarily reprehensible, any more than the desire for privacy, predictability, and control over one's environment is mere selfishness.

This criticism should not be taken as a defense of the family or of private homeownership. Millions of Americans live in housing projects or tracts far more monotonous than the most grandiose planned communities of these reformers, and live there without the benefits of childcare or cooperative food services or even large-scale housekeeping aids. But historically we must recognize that the demise of alternative plans was the responsibility of the socialist and feminist movements themselves as well as of capitalist counterpressure. There was virtually unanimous retreat from criticizing private-family, male-supremacist structures in the century between the 1870s and the 1960s, and a tendency for those still concerned with the "woman question" to try to

solve women's problems through industrial techniques that protected male privileges in private life.

In the revival of feminism private life is no longer immune from challenge. We have much to learn from the history which Dolores Hayden has brought us. We are also now in an historical position from which to be more critical of large-scale mechanization and just plain bigness than our feminist and socialist ancestors were — just as we can criticize their notion that only women could keep houses and children. We consider the possibility that many people prefer living in small groups. That women's domestic labor is oppressive should no longer be news; but recognizing this does not require denying that the personal "services" rendered in the private homes — serving meals, caring for children, nursing all kinds of wounds

— have emotional meanings that can be lost if one concentrates exclusively on questions like the mechanics of cooking. Reproductive work, while real and tedious labor, cannot always be distinguished from personal relationships.

That a book largely filled with blueprints can make one rethink how we live reflects how profound and thoughtful Hayden's contribution is.

Footnotes

1. See also Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and by the same author, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Pantheon, 1981).
2. Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).



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A black and white photograph of a woman in a long, dark, long-sleeved dress with a white collar. She is standing and using a vintage-style vacuum cleaner. The vacuum has a long, thin tube extending from the motor unit on the floor up to her hands. The background is dark and indistinct.

Hamilton Beach Vacuum Sweeper

Men come at eventide
to the home; but all
day long you are there,
beautifying it, sanc-
tifying it, adorning it,
blessing it. Better be
there than wear a
queen's coronet. Bet-
ter be there than carry
the purse of a princess.

—Rev. J. De Witt Talmage, D.D., 1901



SOCIAL CONTROL

Frank Brodhead

The intellectual foundations of the New Left included a new understanding of the repressive forces sustaining US capitalism. This understanding was based not only on an analysis of contemporary US society, but on an historical re-examination of the American past as well. One important concept to emerge from this re-examination was that of “corporate liberalism”, a concept which helped the New Left to distance itself from the tradition of twentieth-century reform movements, and provided a cutting edge in the evolution of a deeper, more comprehensive critique of modern US capitalism.

Developed most explicitly in the periodical *Studies on the Left*, and particularly in James Weinstein’s *Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900–1918* (Beacon Press, 1968), the concept of “corporate liberalism” maintained that the reforming ideals of the New Deal, and the Kennedy-Johnson era were rooted in the early twentieth century. It was particularly during the period of Woodrow Wilson’s “New Freedom” and the First World War, according to this view, that business leaders swung from opposing government intervention in the economy and society to saying it was the proper role of government to sustain and regulate an expanding market society in the interests of all classes and citizens — particularly business.

In the writings of Weinstein, Gabriel Kolko (*The Triumph of Conservatism*, 1963), and others, reforms as diverse as railroad and banking regulation, workmen’s compensation, the Pure Food and Drug Act, and the city-manager movement were traced to corporate leaders instead of detached “reformers.” This view was counter to the generally held liberal inter-

pretation of modern US history, which saw these reforms as directed primarily *against* business. In the startling view of New Left historians, therefore, the distinction between liberalism and conservatism began to melt away. Surface antagonisms were less important than a fundamental consensus on property rights and the subordination of labor.

In the past decade young(er) historians have continued to investigate the stabilizing or controlling forces developed in the Progressive Era. Benefiting from the work which has gone before, recent work by radical historians has been particularly concerned to show how corporate capital in the Progressive Era succeeded in penetrating even the daily life and private dreams of working-class people. In doing so it further narrowed the space in which an autonomous class consciousness could grow and flourish. The work of this new generation of historians helps us to see how the sources of legitimation and self-worth, of sex roles and personal values, were increasingly dictated by the market place and by the needs of corporate capital.

The transformation of work, of the production process, was perhaps the most profound change accompanying the development of modern capitalism. Production methods were increasingly divided into "conception" and "execution" — with the former reserved to management and their "experts," and the latter consigned to the new, unskilled mass worker. Thus working class life was assaulted on one of its most strategic fronts, the monopoly of skills possessed by craft workers in the post-Civil War era. While a number of works over the last decade have detailed this transformation, perhaps the most dramatic change in productive technique was that of Henry Ford and his assembly line, which is the subject of Stephen Meyer's book *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford*

Motor Company, 1908-1921 (Albany, 1981).

History books that treat the emergence of technological innovations and new work relations as part of class and shop-floor struggle are rare. The Ford company provides an excellent testing ground for this approach, however. Beginning in 1903, automobile manufacturing at Ford required 125 workers to produce 1,700 cars. In 1921, more than 30,000 workers produced nearly a million cars. Auto production evolved from carriage production. It was essentially the motorizing of a luxury item, and at the outset the production methods were the same as for carriages. One worker or a small team of workers would build the entire car. Meyer recounts Ford's successive experiments: dividing tasks into carrying parts and assembling them, moving the chassis to different parts locations where a cluster of related jobs were performed, and finally attaching the chassis to an endless belt which moved it past long lines of workers, each of whom performed a simple task, until a car was completed.

Ford's revolution in production technique was accomplished between 1910 and 1914. Its significance, however, was not simply that it made manufacture "more efficient" in some abstract way, but that it did so by controlling the pace of work. This could be done by speeding up or slowing down the line, or by redesigning individual tasks. The tasks themselves were designed to be learned quickly, and formerly complex tasks of the craft era were broken down into minute parts. Charlie Chaplin's portrayal of the new assembly worker in *Modern Times* captured the oppressiveness of this new form of production, and workers quit assembly line work in droves. In 1913, for example, there was a turnover of 200 percent, and 10 percent of the workers were absent each day.

Labor instability posed additional problems

for productivity. One solution was simply to hire more men and simplify jobs further. But Ford was disturbed that his assembly line was boycotted by all but recent immigrants, and so he began his next step in controlling the labor force: welfare work. In 1913 he hired a staff to set up an employment department, and to develop a system of skill and job classifications, as well as the classic paternalistic institutions such as an employee savings and loan association. A few months later he established the Sociological Department, which hired investigators to conduct home visits. The investigators' reports on the domestic life and general "Americanization" of the assembly-line workers provided the basis for Ford's subsequent step, the "Five Dollar Day." What Ford proposed to do was to pay his employees a wage, and to supplement this with a bonus or share of the profits, based on the character reports of the investigators, bringing take home pay up to five dollars a day.

The other face of this program of behavior modification was revealed during World War I. Wartime inflation and labor shortages began to undermine the stabilizing effects of Ford's welfare efforts, and his fanatic patriotism turned the Sociological Department into a network of spies searching out disloyal workers. In 1919, when the Automobile Workers Union organized a strike against a Ford supplier, the spy network made the transition from wartime to peacetime and became the basis of Ford's notorious antiunion goon squad.

Meyer's study is based on extensive archive research, and perhaps the most interesting parts are those recounting the findings of spies and investigators about the lives and opinions of the assembly workers. But the importance of the book, I think, is twofold. Meyer shows the limits of Ford's paternalistic and essentially old-fashioned approach to company welfarism.

Direct company control over workers lives was giving way to the indirect working of the market and the gradual absorption of welfare activities by the state. The second importance of the book is in showing the origins of the tradeoff between wages and working conditions in the auto industry. Ford went a long way to root the control of his workforce in the design of his technology, and more generally in the conditions of employment he designed for his industry. This transfer of skills from worker to management still continues, now focusing on assembly robots and numerical control for metal cutting.

While Ford was transforming the mechanical-engineering industry, a new industrial revolution was taking place. The rise of "science-based industry," particularly the electrical and chemical industries, shook up production and management techniques throughout the world. Unlike the first industrial revolution based on textiles, coal, and steel, however, the second industrial revolution did not overturn existing class relations but strengthened them. How and why this happened, and particularly what role engineers played in these developments, is the subject of David Noble's *America by Design* (Knopf, 1977).

While the first industrial revolution drew freely on scientific findings, it was chiefly rooted in workshop tinkering and traditions of craftsmanship. Science-based industries, by contrast, consciously organized the production of the scientific research by which it advanced. Chemical and electrical engineers were initially trained in the research labs of large corporations, and later in the industry-dominated engineering departments of a few large universities. Thus from the outset the chemical and electrical engineers were more

closely tied to management than were mechanical engineers, and they increasingly identified professional success with a place in the management of the few large corporations which dominated their industries — GE, Westinghouse, AT&T, Dupont, and Dow, for example — while mechanical engineers were tied to the small-shop culture which dominated their profession into the 1920s.

The integration of engineering and management hastened the advance of concentration and monopolization within science-based industries. The chief cause of industry concentration lay in the ability of corporations to train engineers and own the products of their research. The process of innovation became more programmed, less haphazard, and largely confined to industrial research labs or corporate-sponsored research in universities. By 1900 corporations had succeeded in changing patent laws to protect not the individual inventor but the corporation, the “owner” of the inventor. The process of inventing became more and more socialized and even proletarianized. By the last decades of the nineteenth century only large corporations could afford to maintain research labs, and thus the fruits of future scientific and technological breakthroughs were owned by large corporations even before they were conceived.

The domination of science-based industries by a few corporations, and the growing sums of money being spent on basic research and engineer training, encouraged industry to integrate institutions of higher education within their industrial structure. Industry’s penetration began in the 1890s, based at first on cooperative programs between corporate research labs and engineering departments of universities. Soon a few universities were producing most of the engineers for the few corporations that dominated each industry. The outstanding example of

this was MIT. Electrical engineering had the highest enrollment of any MIT school between 1891 and the 1920s; and at one time in the 1920s the chief executives of GM, GE, Dupont, and Goodyear had all been classmates at MIT. Links between industry and universities were hastened by the government’s attempts to enlist science in the war effort in 1917 and 1918. By 1920 the influence of industry on engineering was so great that MIT’s “Technology Plan” saved the school from financial disaster by putting it at the service of industry in return for money and contracts. The vertical integration of science-based industry was largely achieved by the 1920s.

Because science-based industries were so dependent on the carefully organized production of knowledge as well as commodities, it is not surprising that these industries were in the forefront of the development of modern management. Noble says that between 1880 and 1910 the literature of the scientific-management movement is found exclusively in engineering journals. While “Taylorism,” or scientific management, got its start in machine shops, it was quickly taken up by the electrical and chemical industries and transformed into “human engineering.” The goal of this management movement was “personnel management,” fitting the worker to the job, and more generally to the needs of corporate capitalism. Merging corporate welfare work with rationalized production techniques, electrical and chemical engineers diffused corporate liberal management reforms to General Motors, Goodyear, Sears Roebuck, and Standard Oil of New Jersey. Gerard Swope of GE, a leading spokesman for corporate-liberal management, even proposed to William Green that the AF of L organize GE’s workers in the 1920s, but this was too radical for the craft-conscious AFL.



Bill Owens, *Suburbia*, Straight Arrow Books, 1973.

Thus while the leaders and technology of the first industrial revolution were instrumental in changing class relations and overthrowing an old order, the engineers and managers of the second industrial revolution succeeded in containing the effects of new technology within the existing political and economic framework. The integration of engineering and management, a result of the integration of scientific training and research into a few large corporations and their university appendages, encouraged engineers to identify their own goals with those of large units of capital. Thus their skills and products, and particularly their orientation toward planning and rationalization, were used to stabilize the rule of commodity production, rather than to replace it.

The influence of business was not limited to

the government and the factory in the Progressive era. The fast-changing composition of the working class encouraged business to seek to mold or deflect working-class consciousness by all available means. One of the most accessible institutions for business in this effort was the school system, and over the last decade many historians have helped to draw up a comprehensive picture of the role of educational institutions in controlling the working class and creating a labor force consonant with the needs of a major capitalist power. Many of these studies are summarized and interpreted in David Nasaw's *Schooled to Order: A Social History of Public Schooling in the United States* (Oxford, 1979).

Nasaw focuses on three crucial developments in the evolution of the US school system: the emergence of the publicly funded "common school" in the pre-Civil War era; the rapid

expansion of high-school education for adolescents in the Progressive period; and the provision of mass higher education in the 1960s. In the course of his book he shows that our educational institutions evolved in response to three intersecting forces: (a) the demand by the working class for education for themselves and their children, and, by implication, the demand for a better life and an escape at least for their children from the drudgery of manual labor; (b) the demand of the business community, at different stages in its own development, for a skilled labor force (at first simply literate, then more skilled, and always tractable and docile) and (c) the efforts of the more or less professional "reformers" and educators, who claimed that more schooling was the solution for social unrest and the lack of discipline of a heterogeneous, largely non-WASP working class.

Each educational campaign discussed by Nasaw — the campaign for common elementary schools in the pre-Civil war era, for comprehensive high schools in the pre-World War I era, and for mass higher education in our own time — has radically changed the institutional settings for growing up in America. The campaign for mass high-school education in the Progressive era was particularly dramatic. Where common school reformers like Horace Mann had emphasized the role of education in molding the character of the individual, the high-school reformers abandoned Mann's goal of educating children to rise as far as they might in the open, small-business society that characterized early capitalism. Modern capitalist industry now required an educational system that recognized permanent class differences as a fact of life. At the beginning of the present century, business needed skilled workers for clerical and commercial jobs, and increasingly skilled technical workers. Initially business

supported a system of industrial schools, intended to give advanced training to "American" boys. They assumed that immigrant youths could not afford to attend high school. But somehow they did, and rather than concentrate on vocational subjects as they were supposed to, they flooded the Latin and classical courses. The problem for business and educators was thus twofold. To establish separate high schools for classical and vocational curricula would run the risk of institutionalizing class differences among young people in too blatant a fashion. But to allow all youths to study liberal arts subjects, irrespective of their expected future class position, would risk raising expectations that could not be met. The solution was the modern comprehensive high school, with democracy in home room, athletics, and social events, and class and gender stratification in the "tracking" system that divided students into their expected class positions and family roles.

Another avenue of capitalist control of working-class life and consciousness was advertising. In *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (McGraw-Hill, 1976), Stuart Ewen discusses the transforming effect of mass production and mass marketing on our society. Through the advertising of mass-produced goods in the new mass-circulation newspapers and magazines, and soon through radio and later TV, advertising became a powerful force in influencing the character of daily life and people's conceptions of how they were living and how they should live.

While low wages, only partly offset by the beginning of installment buying, limited the development of mass marketing and thus the importance of advertising until after World War II, its formative period lay in the 1920s. Advertisers faced many of the same problems



persuade people that this or that brand of soap was preferable, but that store-bought soap was a necessity, that bodily smells were uncivilized, that a certain brand would maintain a woman's youthful beauty longer, and that the proper consumer choice would lead to love and happiness. Thus needs were deliberately created or transformed into something that could only be satisfied by purchasing things.

Perhaps the most important impact of advertising was on the family and roles within the family. As the family ceased to be a center of production and became instead center of consumption, the transformation of the roles and relationships of fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, and children was hastened. Advertising, for example, emphasized youth and beauty. These were now things that could be purchased. But by commodifying "youthfulness," the meaning of the genuine thing was focused on, fetishized, transformed. The effects of advertising on women in the home were even greater. Because women were the main purchasers of the 80 percent of the household goods that a family purchased on the market, advertising was particularly directed at them. Women became "homemakers," the coordinators of the family. Yet without an income of her own her survival depended on keeping her man, through a combination of efficient management and youthful sex appeal. Advertising told women how to buy both.

One of the book's central arguments is that industrial capitalism and patriarchal authority were undergoing a dual crisis in the early years of the twentieth century. Into this crisis stepped the nascent advertising industry, which succeeded in implanting the essentially middle-class ideology of consumerism into working-class life. The former authority of the father was now transferred to the marketplace, and the father's basis of legitimacy now became success

as did capitalists as a whole. The working class was rebellious, largely immigrant, and retained at least a portion of the production necessary to sustain it in the home. Part of the socializing and transforming effect of advertising was to hasten the transition to a totally commodified world for the American worker, in which nothing — not even recreation, or emotional satisfaction — was "homemade." Thus advertising's early function was not merely to



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in the marketplace: money and the things it could buy. It is hard to evaluate the role of advertisers in this transformation, or whether the transformation was as thorough as the book implies. The transformation from country to city, and thus to a world where survival depended on money rather than access to land, would seem in itself a powerful force in commodifying the necessities of life. And the emphasis on a woman's efficiency in the home would seem to have several sources, including the feminist movement. What weight we should give to advertising, as compared to the proliferation of settlement houses, domestic-science courses, and gender-tracked high-school education for working-class girls, is unclear. But it is clear, as Ewen points out, that there was no shortage of (counter-) socializing institutions that were particularly eager to take the children of working-class immigrants in hand, and to "Americanize" them according to the new corporate ethos.

In the decades bracketing the First World War, advertising, education, and new management and production methods were infused with a repressive class content. In most respects these developments were the beginning of a running jump, and it was not until the post-World War II period that nearly everyone was brought within the controlling nets of mass education, consumerism, and modern, "scientific" management. The one-dimensional world that Marcuse and others have characterized as ours has its roots in the transformation of US capitalism at the beginning of the century, when business achieved a state-capitalist synthesis and trained an army of "experts," managers, and ideologues to develop techniques for coercing and channeling labor power while maintaining the facade of democracy. I have the feeling that the books under discus-

sion, like their older counterparts in the 1960s, tend to overstate the thoroughness of this counterrevolution of consciousness, and the coherency and efficiency of the new capitalist world order. Yet such studies are good medicine for those of us who tend to greet each crisis of social relations with the hope that an age of autonomous working-class development is surely at hand. The continuing historical work on the institutions of social control in this country will help to remind us of the immense task involved in exorcizing the devil of the marketplace.

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FROM HOMOSEXUAL TO GAY TO ?

Recent Work in Gay History

Joe Interrante

In recent years, some gay socialist historians have worked to integrate homosexual experience into written history — not simply in the interest of fairness to a “minority” but, more importantly, in order to understand more clearly the forces of historical development as a whole. In particular, they have called into question Marxist theories (especially those of the Freudian left) which see homosexual oppression as a necessary effect of the capitalist organization of patriarchy and “the” family. As Michel Foucault has argued in *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), the Marxist view of the “need” for capitalism to “repress” various forms of sexual oppression — female sexuality and homosexuality in particular — cannot account for the active promotion of sexuality in capitalist societies within the last two decades. Nor can this theory account for the cultural differences and historical changes in the meanings societies have given to homosexual behavior. The works reviewed here argue convincingly that the separation of people into “heterosexuals” and “homosexuals” (or, when these do not fit, “bisexuals”) is a relatively recent social practice whose origins lie in the nineteenth century. Their attention to the modernity of our sexual categories has led them to challenge the notion of sexual “orientations” as biologically based essences, whose characteristics are inscribed within the universal bases or “taboos” of human culture. They thereby contribute to a radical revision of our understanding of sexuality.

This rethinking of sexual experience is based upon several important distinctions. First, these historians distinguish between homosexual behavior, which can be found throughout

history, and the ways in which societies regard that behavior. They argue, for example, that pederasty within the citizen class of ancient Greece cannot be understood through modern terms because the Greeks did not differentiate or regulate male sexual behavior on the basis of object-choice. Second, these historians stress that the sense of difference felt by those engaged in homosexual behavior, which seems to exist wherever and whenever the behavior is stigmatized, does not have the same meaning in all historical situations. For example, they emphasize that the sense of difference informing the creation of homoerotic verse in the twelfth century cannot be assumed to be the same as the modern notion of homosexuality (an assumption made by John Boswell in his *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*). These historians argue that only the modern idea of homosexuality involves a sense of difference defined in terms of personhood, a concept crucial to the development of gay-identified politics.

These distinctions have grown out of work which sought to recover the prehistory of contemporary gay movements, especially the emergence of a homosexual identity and consciousness which made such movements possible. Jeffrey Weeks's *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977) argues that this identity developed in the late nineteenth century in response to a deepening hostility to homosexual behavior. It was in this period that homosexual behavior was singled out from other forms of nonprocreative sex for special condemnation in a series of legal changes culminating in 1885. These laws, their application in the trials of Oscar Wilde for "posing as" a sodomite, and their justification by a medical model of homosexual "sickness" together contributed to a

new view of homosexuality as an exclusive condition with certain causes and certain characteristics. (Indeed, the word itself was new, coined in German in 1869 and first introduced into English in 1897.) Reflecting male views of female "passionlessness", the laws did not apply to women. However, a separate lesbian role emerged in the early twentieth century, as part of a general reaction against feminism and the growing economic independence of women. It emerged specifically through the public censure of lesbian experience in incidents like the trial of Radclyffe Hall's book *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928.

These social roles of homosexuality and lesbianism made it possible for people with experiences described by them to develop a consciousness of and for themselves as a distinct, stigmatized group. And this consciousness spawned a variety of reform and radical groupings in Britain from the 1890s through the 1970s. These movements are the focal point of *Coming Out*, and Week's critical and exhaustive analysis of them is worth reading. Among other things, he documents the importance of socialism and feminism to the early piecing together of a homosexual identity by men like Edward Carpenter, the socialist lecturer and "prophet of the new life." And Weeks reveals the early use of certain ideas — an understanding of personal life as political, and a belief that a homosexual liberation movement could only be the task of homosexuals themselves — which would be "discovered" in the 1970s. Week's discussion of the early importance of socialism can be compared to, and enhanced by John D'Emilio's excellent articles on the origins of the American Mattachine Society in the 1950s (*The Body Politic*, November 1978, December 1978-January 1979, and February 1979). D'Emilio describes the radical background of the founders of the Mattachine as members or

fellow travelers of the Communist Party, and details the redbaiting which drove them out of the Mattachine during the McCarthyite hysteria of the early 1950s. In both countries, the twentieth-century movements slid away from their more radical beginnings to stress education and legal reform as goals.

The most important parts of *Coming Out* remain the early sections on the emergence of homosexual and lesbian roles. Weeks's use of the "homosexual role" thesis, first elaborated by Mary McIntosh, represents a major advancement in gay history. The important distinction which he makes between homosexual behavior and a homosexual identity enhances our understanding of the interplay between oppression and resistance in important ways. At the same time, *Coming Out* raises questions about the emergence of this role, which Weeks's understandably summary discussion does not answer. First, Weeks links the emergence of these roles to "the restructuring of the family and sexual relations consequent upon the triumph of urbanization and industrial capitalism," but has little to say about the specific manner in which this process occurred. Second, while he looks at the twentieth-century reform movements as one response to the deepening hostility to homosexual and lesbian behavior (the correlative of point one), he does not examine another kind of response, the emergence of a predominantly male homosexual subculture with established meeting places and methods of communication. Yet this subculture lay behind the growth of movements and the emergence of the homosexual role itself. In Weeks's account, it seems that this role was the creation of doctors, lawyers, and politicians in isolation, rather than in interaction with the people they arrested and the subjects whose "case histories" provided the raw material for the medical model of homosexuality. Moreover, his treatment of the

homosexual role almost makes it seem as if there was an absolute and smooth "fit" between this role and the identity which homosexuals developed, thus making its incorporation into the law a kind of turning point in this process. However, the gradual construction of the medical model from the 1870s, on the one hand, and the equally slow incorporation of those ideas into other institutions like the media



Oscar Wilde. Photo by Sarony

through the early twentieth century, on the other, suggests that the process was far more complicated than the description in *Coming Out*. Finally, the existence of a subculture previous to the formal articulation of a homosexual role and identity suggests that the process by which family and sexual relations are reconstructed stretches back through the nineteenth and even into the eighteenth centuries. The transformation of "sodomy," a sin that existed potentially in every man, into "homosexuality," a condition limited to a group of "deviant" men and women, is sketched rather than detailed. Nonetheless, *Coming Out* is important simply because it redefines the question of homosexual oppression in this way.

Since the publication of Weeks's book, a number of other studies have addressed precisely these questions (itself an indication of the impact of his work). John D'Emilio's article "Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco's Experience" (*Socialist Review*, 55, January-February 1981), outlines the evolution of an urban gay male subculture, from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, traces its explosive growth in San Francisco during the years after World War II, describes its relation to the beat counterculture, and shows how its exploitation in two political scandals in 1959 and 1960 led to visible and widespread lesbian and gay political activity in that city (long before the Stonewall riot of 1969, commonly seen as the beginning of the modern gay and lesbian movements). D'Emilio emphasizes that the domestic social disruptions of World War II facilitated "something of a nationwide coming out experience." He also argues that the failure of the reformist Mattachine Society to deal with the police harassments of bars and gays increased by those political scandals led to a separate kind of political activity based in the bar culture, with strengths and weaknesses dis-



Duane Michels

tinct from those of organizations like Mattachine. D'Emilio helps to broaden our understanding of the prehistory of contemporary movements by detailing the variety and complexity of the context in which those earlier organizations existed.

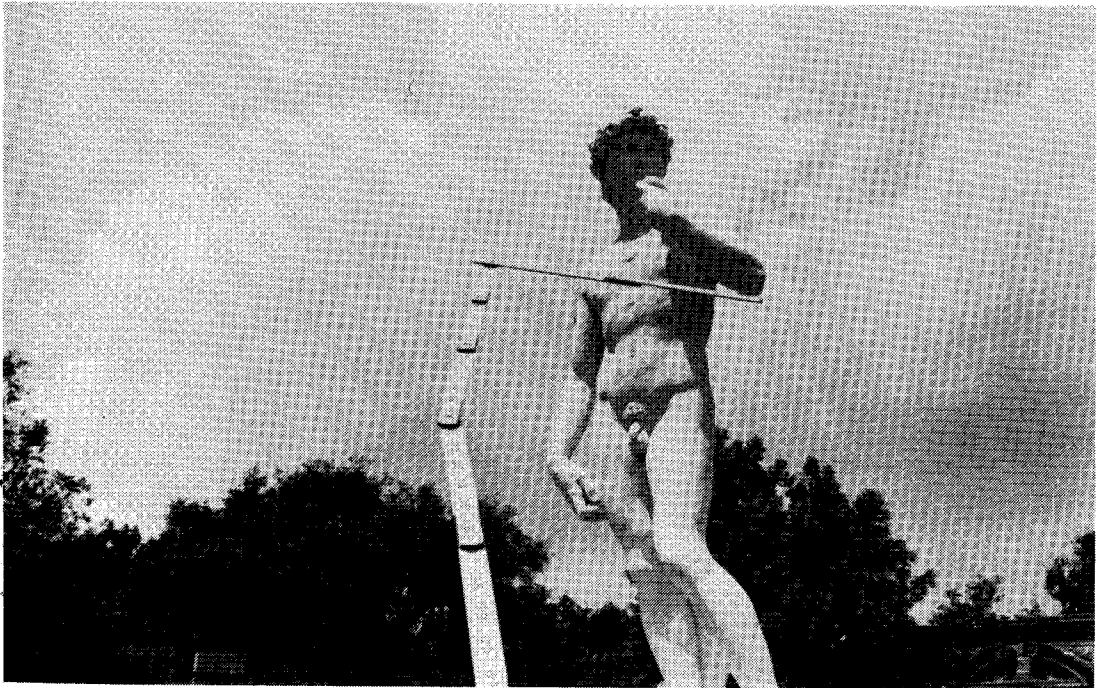
The experience of World War II is explored in greater detail in a slide show created by Alan Berube of the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project (PO Box 42332, San Francisco 94101). "Marching to a Different Drummer: Coming Out in World War II: A Slide/Talk with a Focus on Gay Men" (printed in part in *The Advocate*, 328, October 15, 1981, pp. 20-24) documents that World War II not only offered opportunities for gay men and lesbians to participate in a group life which was oriented specifically to same-sex relationships, but in many cases gave meaning to desires which before that experience were only vaguely understood. For example, some men discovered the meaning of their feelings from medical examiners who had developed tests to screen homosexuals out of the armed forces — tests based upon medical literature about homosexuality which had not been accessible to these men, but whose use encouraged these men to question the nature of their feelings. This minute detailing of

the interplay between the ideology of the homosexual role and the lived experience of building a gay identity begins to flesh out the process by which such an identity is assumed. Berube is available to present his talk, and it is an opportunity which should not be missed.

In addition to these works, Jonathan Katz's *Gay American History* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1976) is an invaluable source of documentary material about lesbians and gay men, the social practices which oppressed them, and their negotiations of and resistance to those practices. Rightfully regarded as the fountainhead of modern gay history, Katz's book emphasizes the situational nature of same-sex experience. "There is no such thing as homosexuality in general," he argues, "only particular historical forms of homosexuality." However, *Gay American History's* documentary

format inhibits Katz from offering much analysis about those changing forms; indeed, his paradoxical references to "gay history" and "gay people" from the sixteenth century to the present makes it seem as though the historical forms are merely variations within a distinct transhistorical minority experience. Still, this book is an important collection of material which can be used to elaborate the issues raised by Weeks, D'Emilio, and Berube.

Katz will publish a second volume in early 1982, called *A Gay/Lesbian Almanac* (New York: Crowell), concerned directly with these issues. It will present many previously unpublished documents related to what Katz sees as two distinct sexual economies, the "Age of Sodomitical Sin" (1607-1740) and the era of "the Invention of the Homosexual" (1880-1950). By detailing the very different meanings



Kenneth Josephson

which these two American societies gave to same-sex experience, Katz's new book should add a great deal to our understanding of the transformation of sodomy into homosexuality.

All these works may be set into the context provided by an anthology edited by Kenneth Plummer, *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (London: Hutchinson, 1981). The resemblance between this title and that of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is not coincidental. The goal of this collection is nothing less than an examination of the creation and evolution of "homosexuality" as a modern way of experiencing sexual attraction and gender behavior that is bound up in a specific historical and cultural setting. Moving from considerations about the eighteenth-century origins of the homosexual role to analyses of its present-day manifestations, this book works toward an understanding of "sexual identity" similar to that which Thompson provided for "class." It argues convincingly that homosexuality is a relational identity which cannot be studied in isolation but must be seen as one part of a society's organization of sexual experience in general.

The Making of the Modern Homosexual is a good introduction to this perspective. An article by Plummer traces the sociological work on "deviance" which lay behind the creation of this perspective, and the anthology reprints the classic article to formulate the problem in this way, Mary McIntosh's "The Homosexual Role." It also contains an interview with McIntosh in which she discusses some of the problems with that model, as well as articles which elaborate the sociological and historical issues raised by it. In particular, an article by Donna Faraday argues against the male focus of this research which tends to subsume lesbianism under gay male experience. The book as a whole argues strongly that homosexuality and

lesbianism must be examined separately, as related but asymmetrical experiences of the organization of same-sex behavior. (However, this is *all* that the other articles say about lesbian experience — that it is different.)

For readers familiar with this perspective, especially its use in *Coming Out*, this anthology both refines and elaborates upon the questions we need to begin asking about sexual experience as a historical phenomenon. Jeffrey Weeks broadens his earlier discussion of the historical evolution of the category of homosexuality, and discusses critically the various theories which can be used to explain it. Following the work of Michel Foucault, Weeks challenges the idea of some easy "fit" between capitalism and the organization of homosexuality. He argues, instead, that we need to see homosexuality as the product of specific social practices in



Barbara Morgan

concrete historical situations. Moreover, these practices — religion, law, medicine — are discontinuous: medicine treats homosexuality as a sickness, while laws continue to treat it as a criminally responsible act. Thus, the construction of a widely-held view of homosexuals as distinct persons is a long and complicated process, related to the transformation of bourgeois family relations, but not a simple product of them. This larger issue — the organization of sexual experience in general — is the subject of Weeks's forthcoming book, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality 1780-1980*

(due date 1981 or early 1982).

This argument suggests that homosexuality is an evolving relation, which did not end with the formal articulation of the homosexual role in the nineteenth century. Articles by John Marshall, Dave King, and Gregg Blachford examine the contemporary evolution of that category. Marshall traces the separation of gender-role from sexual attraction in the homosexual category — that is, the separation of effeminacy from homosexuality — during the 1950s. While the previous association served to keep men behaving like men, by labeling men



Frances Benjamin Johnson

who deviated from the norm as “pansies” or “sissies,” Marshall argues that the contemporary separation (a response to the visible activity of gay men) controls male behavior by shaping homosexuals to behave more like men. King argues that as the homosexual category was “masculinized” in this way, new categories of “travestism” and “transsexualism” emerged to describe forms of effeminate behavior. Finally, Blachford examines the way in which masculinity pervades the contemporary gay bar and disco subculture, and argues that such masculinity serves to reinforce the dominant culture even as it has allowed gay men to challenge some forms of homosexual oppression.

An especially good feature of *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* is its attention to the class and gender specificity of same-sex experience. It also suggests that the evolution of homosexuality as a category must be grounded in the social, economic, and political contexts of particular countries. The evolution of subcultures, for example, may be common to western capitalist societies, but they evolve in distinctive ways; this point becomes clearer the more information we discover about those subcultures in

the United States and England. Indeed, gay historians are only beginning this work: the exploratory nature of the field can be seen in this review, which has considered books on English history because they are the sources of important theoretical developments, and articles on US history because few books besides *Gay American History* exist.

Yet these works already contribute in important ways to our understanding of historical development. First, they bridge the gap between “public” and “private,” between what is supposedly “natural” and what is “social,” and thus help to revise our ideas about the historical and political nature of sexual experience. Second, by challenging older theories about capitalism “repressing” homosexuality, they bring new perspectives to the debate over “base” and “superstructure,” the relation between “economy” and “politics,” and the distinction between the state and civil society. Finally, by viewing homosexuality as part of an evolutionary relationship, they give us fresh perspectives from which to examine and understand the contemporary politics of lesbian and gay movements.



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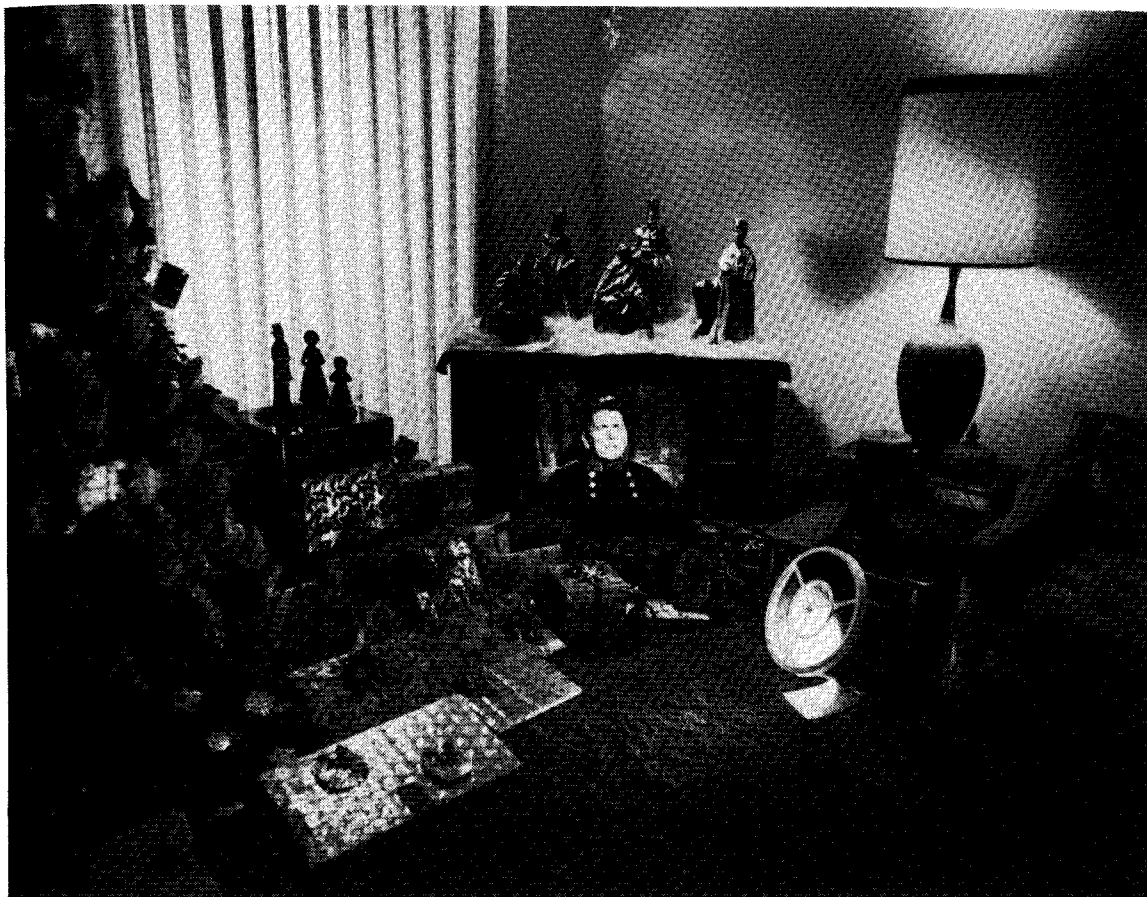
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