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Presidential Address: Contested Space: The Politics of Canadian Memory

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Article abstract

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS/ DISCOURS DE LA PRESIDENTE

Contested Space: The Politics of Canadian Memory

Veronica Strong-Boag

Résumé

Neo-conservative laments about the state of Canadian history abound. Yet the old history with its preoccupation with white male elites and its common failure to interrogate power relations and address the reality of oppression within Canadian society has rarely been equipped either to characterize the reality of the past or to address the many pressing questions of the day. The treatment of the experience of women and gender, the whole question of "race," and the place of class in Canadian society in our founding journals provides hountiful evidence of a restricted vision. It is at the very least presumptuous, and inevitably short-sighted, to believe that our profession can offer advice on Canada's on-going "national question" without first of all addressing the meaning of the oppressive relations which have produced, for example, with much else that we have ignored, our ugly inheritance of child abuse, and violence in general. When historians expand their vision, through an acknowledgement of privilege and the creation of a pluralistic community of scholars, we will be a good deal closer to coming to terms with Canadian life. This is the first step towards constructing ways of living together, whatever their exact constitutional form, that no longer require some voices to be disadvantaged while others are allowed to monopolize decision-making about what constitutes truth, citizenship and identity.

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This paper is dedicated to my colleague, Neil Sutherland, whose studies of Canadian children and generosity to other scholars continue to enrich the historical profession. I would also like to thank everyone at U.B.C.'s Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations for their encouragement and sage advice. I am particularly grateful to those friends — Gillian Creese, Arlene McLaren, Joy Parr, Douglas Ross, and Mary Lynn Stewart — who took time out from their own work to read an early draft of this address. Finally, I would like to thank Peter van Drongelen and Frances Wasserlein for their research assistance, and the SSHRCC for its support of the on-going "Race and Gender" project.

On ne compte plus les plaintes néo-conservatrices à l'endroit de l'état de l'histoire canadienne. Pourtant, la vieille histoire à laquelle on voudrait retourner a rarement été à même de caractériser la réalité du passé, ou encore de se pencher sur les questions urgentes du moment, préoccupée qu'elle était par les élites blanches et masculines, incapable, le plus souvent, d'interroger les relations de pouvoir à l'intérieur de la société canadienne ou d'envisager tout phénomène d'oppression. Les revues de la première heure regorgent d'instances de cette étroitesse de vue, que ce soit par leur traitement des expériences des femmes et des problèmes sociaux de sexe — par leur approche de toute la question des races, ou encore par la place qu'elles ont réservée aux divisions de classe dans la société canadienne. Il serait donc présomptueux de croire que notre profession puisse offrir ses conseils dans les débats courants sur la «question nationale» sans qu'elle examine les relations d'oppression qui nous ont laissé, par exemple, un horrible héritage de brutalité envers les enfants et de violence en général. Ce n'est que quand les historiens auront élargi leur regard, en reconnaissant les privilèges et en créant une communauté académique plurale, que nous serons plus à même de réfléchir sur la vie canadienne. Voilà le premier pas en direction de la construction de façons de vivre ensemble, quels que soient leurs cadres constitutionnels, qui ne requerront plus que des voix soient désavantagées tandis que d'autres sont autorisées à conserver le monopole des décisions au sujet de ce qui constitue la vérité, la citoyenneté et l'identité.

Canada's historians, at least those employed in tenured academic positions, are in general a privileged lot. Not coincidentally, we are overwhelmingly European and middle-class in origin, heterosexual, and/or male. More than many other professionals, we are also increasingly unrepresentative of the nation we serve. Despite, and in fact often because of, our privilege, today's historians are likely to be a querulous and difficult group. Our more troubled members are said to "huddle together for warmth in a cold world"¹, mourn the loss of the profession's "grand old men" whose power they envy,² and fear that the high-minded search for a single truth is being undermined by the challenges of "Political Correctness, new methodologies such as feminist interpretations, and cross-cultural inquiry."³ The important history of important people, people who like themselves bear no resemblance to Belleville housemaids, has become the tragic victim, today's neo-conservative critics would have us believe, of unfair competition. Such sentiments are far from innocuous or uninfluential.⁴ They fuel the hostility that women and people

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1. "Dr. Jack L. Granatstein," *The Gazette* (Memorial University of Newfoundland), 26:6 (4 November 1993): 5.
 2. J.M. Bliss, "History Fragmented Canada," *University of Toronto Magazine* (Winter 1991): 6-11.
 3. J.R. Miller, "I Can Only Tell What I Know: Shifting Notions of Historical Understanding in the 1990s; a Presentation to the 'Authority and Interpretation' Conference, University of Saskatchewan, 19 March 1994."
 4. The popular press seems only too ready to echo negative views of the state of history. See, for example, Andrew Nikiforuk, "Fifth Column," *Globe and Mail*, 22 April 1994 and Michael Valpy's "Sailing Through History on Different Boats," *ibid*, 1 April 1994.

of colour report in some graduate programmes in particular, where they meet criticism about their supposed advantages.

Sometimes, when encountering such complaints, it is hard not to think of the bulgy bear who, for those of you who do not read C.S. Lewis' children's series on Narnia, meanders about the volume titled *The Last Battle*, confusedly muttering, "I just don't understand."⁵ I also like the harder-edged response of one of our younger colleagues who reflected on the problem of the privilege that refuses to speak its name in an article subtitled, "Cry Me a River White Boy." Given the documentable facts — that the majority of hirings, on-going appointments, and courses continue to favour the traditionally privileged among us, effectively constituting a long-standing affirmative action programme⁶ — why are we seeing such ill temper?

As with so much else, history is instructive here. Today's chroniclers of Canada generally do have a harder time, in some ways, than our academic predecessors. In the days of George Wrong, Chester Martin, and Adam Shortt, and, more recently, of Donald Creighton, Arthur Lower, and William Morton, we often held pride of place among the disciplines, whether as government appointees or media authorities. Even when we had to share the spotlight with upstart journalists like Agnes Laut or Pierre Berton, we were Mr., and even very occasionally Mrs., Canada. Now we often take second or even lesser place behind political scientists, economists, lawyers, and sociologists, not to mention Can Lit and Women's Studies people, as authorities on Canada. Indeed, even the awards and honours of our profession itself, not to mention talented students, are falling to those who question the familiar traditions. To some nostalgic defenders of the old ways, such a fall from anticipated grace seems unexpected and undeserved. Disenchantment is undoubtedly all the more poignant for those who have in the past themselves championed new approaches. They seem especially disconcerted to discover that the profession has moved further and faster in new directions than they had ever imagined.⁷

Self-criticism, or even rigorous self-examination, is notably absent in neo-conservative laments about the state of the discipline. In point of fact, the old history, like the old politics, or the old literary or philosophical canon, with their preoccupation with white male elites and their common failure to interrogate power relations and address the reality of oppression within Canadian society, has rarely been adequately equipped either to characterize the reality of the past or to address the many pressing questions of the day. We do not need more assessments where concentration on a narrow

5. Karen Dubinsky, "Who is Listening? Teaching Labour History to People Who Don't Want to Learn It (or, Cry me a River, White Boy)," *Labour/Le Travail* 31 (Spring 1993): 287-92.

6. On this see Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History; Writing Women's History," in Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall (eds.) *International Perspectives* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991).

7. See for example, the contrast between Bliss above and in "Searching for Canadian History," *Queen's Quarterly* 75 (1968): 497-508.

range of political elites, ineptly camouflaged as the “history of the greater collectivity,”⁸ ignores critical questions of oppression and injustice. Whatever its presumptions, this is not, and has never been, the “national history of Canada.”

Neo-conservative efforts to frame a consensus history, like those to inscribe a homogeneous citizenship,⁹ offer only the illusion of peace and agreement. The divisions within Canada are not so easily papered over. Planning for whatever we are to share in the future must begin with acknowledgement of responsibility for what actually happened in the past, from the theft of aboriginal land to the victimization of women and children from all nations. If it is to be fully told, our history needs many interwoven narratives where none, as has too often been the case in the past, excludes the others. As a historian who is both a feminist and a nationalist, I believe that the research and teaching of Canada’s past should include both responsible government and charivaris, both imperial conferences and the Fédération nationale St Jean Baptiste, both Passchendaele and sexual assault, both the CPR and Africville, both the King-Byng Affair and the Assembly of First Nations, both the Progressives and B.C.’s Operation Solidarity. Together they make sense of our past; in isolation they add only to our collective and individual confusion.

In addressing the reality of Canada’s “deep diversity,”¹⁰ we, like other disciplines,¹¹ are required to interrogate ourselves and our founding assumptions. This can be painful. It takes us places for which many of us have been woefully ill-equipped by much of our professional training and experience. Until very recently, race, gender, and class, not to mention sexual orientation and other important signifiers of experience and power, rarely received the serious attention they deserve. Like many of us, I reread my previous work with increasing awareness of its substantial errors of omission and commission with regard to these factors. And, of course, if I fail to note my own shortcomings my students and listeners are always willing to set me straight: an honesty for which I am at least intermittently grateful!

Ultimately, historians must share space and, more than occasionally, remove ourselves and those like us from centre stage. We must make room for other voices who have so often been silenced. Such humility is especially challenging if our expectations of privilege are considerable. As the recent debates within the Writers’ Union of Canada have already told us, some discourses, such as anti-censorship, which have been used

8. “Dr. Jack Granatstein.”

9. On the critique of this notion see Iris Marion Young, “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship,” *Ethics* 99 (January 1989): 250-274. On some of the debates within the Canadian context, see William Kaplan (ed.) *Belonging: The Meaning and Future of Canadian Citizenship* (Montreal and Kingston, 1993).

10. On this see Charles Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism* (Montreal and Kingston, 1992).

11. On anthropology see, for example, Dara Culhane, “Adding Insult to Injury: Her Majesty’s Loyal Anthropologist,” *BC Studies* 95 (Autumn 1992): 66-92.

only too regularly to shore up the status quo, are far more powerful than others, such as anti-racism or, for that matter feminism, which question traditional relations of authority.¹² Like other intellectuals on a host of fronts in our society, historians will not be able to contribute to more inclusive, and more authentic, narratives unless we honestly examine the implications of our own subjective positions. For most of us, including feminist historians,¹³ this means confronting our own privilege, whether it be in terms of gender, class, race, or sexual orientation. We can better tell Canada's individual and collective stories when we first expose the relationships that link us to and divide us from from those we seek to study.

A high degree of what some social scientists call, rather awkwardly, "single perspectivism,"¹⁴ together with its common associates, anti-feminism, racism, classism, and heterosexism, has made it difficult for historians to address the complexities of Canada's past, present or future. Resistance to a more inclusive mandate has come rather naturally to orthodoxy's defenders. The following disdainful dismissal of other points of view by Donald Creighton, a former president of the Canadian Historical Association, typifies our profession's recurring temptation to blinkered vision:

new historical interpretations which make their appearance in revolutionary times are usually the result, not of the search for truth, but of the need for historical justification. They are invented — or partly invented — to supply historical authority for a program of radical changes.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, this was the same man who harshly condemned the cultural pluralism of modern Canada, and attempted to deny it historical legitimacy or contemporary political expression.¹⁶

Fortunately, arrogance has never been the only response from those in the top ranks of the profession. Some scholars have championed the benefits of multiple points of view. In 1941 Arthur Lower wrote that:

Most social scientists like to think of themselves as detached observers, no more affected by the events and circumstances they are watching than is the astronomer by the stars. This is of course errant nonsense; we are all part of society in which we live, attached to it in a dozen different ways and affected by it not only through our minds but also our arts. . . . Further, most social science must be limited and impermanent: it is the

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12. On these issues see Marlene Norbese Philip, *Frontiers: selected essays and writings on racism and culture 1984-1992* (Stratford, Ontario, 1992).
 13. See Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale. White Women. Racism and History* (London and New York, 1992).
 14. Jeff Hearn, *Men in the Public Eye* (London and New York, 1992), 2.
 15. "John A. Macdonald, Confederation and the Canadian West," in R. Cook, C. Brown and C. Berger (eds.) *Minorities Schools and Politics* (Toronto, 1969): 9.
 16. The best statement of this is found in his *Canada's First Century* (Toronto, 1970), especially 106-109.

result of limited observation by an imperfect observer of a limited scene and therefore most writing, history, economics, sociology, etc., is in the nature of an interim report, to be revised as occasion offers.¹⁷

Twenty-three years later, as another former president of the CHA, he again testified to the on-going nature of our common project, concluding, "The whole business of the writing of history lies in 'clarifying memories'."¹⁸ The differences between these sentiments and Creighton's continue to characterize the poles of opinion among historians.

If we are indeed "To Know Ourselves,"¹⁹ Canadians need to understand their origins a good deal better than is now commonly the case. This means we cannot avoid the "bad news" of our own prejudices and that we have some hard lessons to learn. The conclusion of the Métisse author of *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) — that, whereas, "I always felt most of my memories were better avoided . . . now I think it's best to go back in my life before I go forward"²⁰ — is instructive for us collectively as a discipline as well as individually. A greater recognition of the complexities and contradictions of our past is finally the best contribution historians can make to the national debates that swirl around us today. Without the commitment to full disclosure, that includes accounts of public and private life, historians of any persuasion finally have little to offer in the creation of a more just world. As the Afro-Canadian writer, Marlene Norbese Philip, has observed, "in a racist, sexist and classist society, the imagination, if left unexamined, can and does serve the ruling ideas of the time."²¹

A brief review of our professional history helps put present debates about relevance and balance into perspective. Our discipline may be said to have begun in Canada with its appearance as a separate university subject in the 1880s and 1890s and with the publication, beginning in 1897, of the *Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada*, succeeded in 1920 by the *Canadian Historical Review*.²² Skimming some hundred years of these journals — required reading, I should think, for any president of the Canadian Historical Association — has confirmed certain assumptions and provided a few surprises.

While "political history" has been, as the editors of the *CHR* in 1977 put it, "the grandmother of the Canadian historical profession,"²³ other concerns also made an early

17. A.R.M. Lower, "The Social Sciences in the Post-War World," *CHR* 22: 1 (March 1941): 9.

18. Lower, "History as Pageant," *Dalhousie Review* 54: 1 (April 1974): 3.

19. T.H.B. Symons, *To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies* (Ottawa, 1975).

20. Beatrice Culleton, *In Search of April Raintree* (Winnipeg, 1983), 9.

21. Nourbese Philip, *Frontiers*, 279.

22. See Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History. Aspects of English Canadian Historical Writing: 1900-1970* (Toronto, 1976).

23. Robert Bothwell and David Bercuson, "Some Frank Words about the *Canadian Historical*

appearance. In 1898 one critic of William Kingsford, the early dean of Canadian history, spoke for others in rejecting an emphasis on elites and in arguing that "To-day it is the daily life of the people that demands elucidation from the historian."²⁴ Similar sentiments surfaced intermittently throughout the following decades.²⁵ Indeed, in a forty year retrospective, the founding editor, George Wrong, claimed: "My aim from the first was to take a broad view of what was meant by historical publications about Canada: imperial relations, economic questions, geography, even historical fiction that might reveal the atmosphere of the past."²⁶ The expansion in our discipline's "terms of reference" turned out to be rather slower than Wrong might have imagined, perhaps because (as he admitted in 1933) "Speaking broadly the historians tend to write with their fellow historians, rather than the public, in view."²⁷

In point of fact, until at least the 1970s, the limited number of subjects and individuals considered worthy of attention by professional historians is striking. It could be said, with the addition of gender, as was said about recent disputes in the Canadian Writers' Union about censorship, that much Canadian history was in fact an "argument by the white middle class, for the white middle class, about the white middle class."²⁸ The treatment of the experience of women and gender, the whole question of "race," and the place of class in Canadian society in our founding journals provides bountiful evidence of the restricted vision from which we have often suffered.

Except for occasional mention of Quebec's female founders and a few other extraordinary figures, women were largely invisible.²⁹ In particular testament to the general prejudice which J.B. Brebner acknowledged in his presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association in 1940,³⁰ women did not appear on the masthead of the

Review," *CHR* 58:2 (June 1977): 130.

24. Unsigned review of William Kingsford, *The History of Canada, IX (1815-1836)* (Toronto, 1897), in *Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada*, II (1898): 19.

25. See the questionnaire results in R.G. Trotter, "Historical Research in Canada," *CHR* 20: 3 (September 1939): 251-7 and G. Brown and D.G. Creighton, "Canadian History in Retrospect and Prospect," *CHR* 25: 4 (December 1944): 357-375.

26. G.M. Wrong, "The Beginnings of Historical Criticism in Canada: A Retrospective, 1896-1936," *CHR* 17: 1 (March 1936): 6.

27. G.M. Wrong, "The Historian's Duty to Society," *CHR* 14: 1 (March 1933): 7. See also Carl Berger's review of George Woodcock and Ivan Ivakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (New York, 1968) in *CHR* 50: 1 (December 1969): 454, where he says "The writing on immigrants in Canada has been superficial and amateurish. This may well be due to the fact that most historians have been drawn from . . . the two charter groups of citizens and that this has not only presented difficulties regarding language barriers but has also shaped their view of what was central to the Canadian past and what was peripheral."

28. Norbese Philip, *Frontiers*, 269.

29. On the comparable situation in the U.S. see Judith Zinsser, *History and Feminism: a glass half full* (New York, 1993).

30. "Canadianism," Presidential Address, *Annual Report of the CHA* (1940).

CHR until 1977.³¹ The pioneering article on women, ironically enough posthumously by Isabel Foulche-Delbosc, appeared in 1940. Twenty-eight years later in 1978, the second appeared, this time by a man.³² The emergence of the modern women's movement shortened the next interval, with Ruth Roach Pierson writing on women during WWII in the March 1981 issue and Elaine Silverman's historiographic review of women's history appearing in December 1982.³³ The late appearance of women in the pages of our professional journals informed the observation of a 1976 reviewer who concluded that the "strong bias towards political and biographical history" could be equated with the "male bias ... of professional academics."³⁴

Related to the absence of women was the commonplace failure to acknowledge men's gendered subjectivity. As a group men appeared in history as curiously universal, almost genderless, subjects. The fact that particular notions and experiences of masculinity informed life from the picket line and the reserve to the prime minister's office was ignored. This failure was closely related to another: the failure to problematize sexual orientation in historical accounts of Canada. Historians, it seems, would have readers assume that Canadians were resolutely, and solely, heterosexual in their inclinations and affections. Until the present time, as with the initiatives represented by the "Out of the Archives" conference on the "history of bisexuals, lesbians and gay men in Canada,"³⁵ historical writing offered us no useful way of better understanding our lesbian, gay, and bisexual, not to mention our heterosexual, past or present.

In part because of the continuing political significance of Canada's "two founding European peoples," the *Review of Historical Publications* and the *CHR* revealed slightly more interest in "race" and/or ethnicity, although no articles were published in French until the 1960s. From the beginning, passing references, the occasional book review, and the still more occasional article, acknowledged Natives, Blacks, Asians, and other non-Anglo-celtic groups. Aboriginal peoples in particular were clearly within some Canadian historians' original cast of characters. Marking this early acceptance, regular bibliographies of ethnographic, archaeological and anthropological materials, appeared from the first volumes until 1955, when they were jettisoned as peripheral to the increasingly consensus-oriented Canadian history of the day.³⁶ Alfred Bailey's review of

31. Louise Dechene and Margaret Prang, the first for one issue only, joined the Advisory Board.

32. Angus McLaren, "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada," *CHR* 59: 3 (September 1978): 319-340.

33. Pierson, "The Double Bind of the Double Standard: VD Control and the CWAC in World War II," *CHR* 62: 2 (March 1981): 31-58 and Silverman, "Writing Canadian Women's History, 1970-82: an Historiographical Analysis," *CHR* 63:4 (December 1982): 513-33.

34. Kathryn Peterson's review of *Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930* (1974) in *CHR* 57: 2 (June 1976): 207.

35. Held at York University, Toronto, 13-15 January 1994.

36. On what seems to be a comparable tendency in political science in the 1950s see C.P. Macpherson, "After Strange Gods: Canadian Political Science 1973," in T.N. Guinsburg and G.L. Reuber (eds.) *Perspectives on the Social Sciences in Canada* (Toronto, 1974).

Stephen Leacock's *Canada: The Foundations of Its Future* (1942) embodies the spirit of the counter-hegemonic views which occasionally found voice:

The present author is impelled to take issue with the thesis that the continent was "empty" before the coming of the Europeans, or that the Indians were "too few to count." [There is] apparent disregard of the human rights of the Indians, and lack of appreciation of the integral role they played in the early development of our institutions. . . . They are invariably written off as either "treacherous" or "resentful," although comparable behaviour on the part of white men is condoned or unmentioned. . . . An unsound view of the role of the racial factor in history seems to underlie a number of statements throughout the book.³⁷

Unfortunately, identification of racism proved unusual. Much more common were dismissive references to peoples of non-northern European origin by writers who seem sometimes hard to distinguish from the advocates of Canada's "own master race" recently described by Angus McLaren.³⁸ By 1969, with the appearance of *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, signs of change were in the air.³⁹ In the 1970s the *CHR* at long last began regularly to find room for a range of scholarship on race and ethnicity.⁴⁰

The treatment of class, or more correctly its near omission from our professional accounts, is also noteworthy until the same decade.⁴¹ Except for the report of occasional clashes between capital and labour, the preoccupations of *Historical Documents* and the *CHR* remained for the most part elsewhere. To be sure, the middle class was often the focus of attention but its specificity, and social location, tended to be effectively conflated with the lot of most Canadians, or at least all those of European origin. Again, however, some voices like Fred Landon, H.C. Pentland, and Stanley Ryerson, challenged prevailing orthodoxies. But not until the 1970s, with the appearance of the Canadian Committee on Labour History and *Labour/Le Travailleur* (later *Le Travail*), did labour studies begin to emerge as anything more than an episodic and even eccentric, interest.⁴²

37. *CHR* 24:3 (Sept. 1943): 307. For more on history's shortcomings see also James St. G. Walker, "The Indian in Canadian Historical Writing," *CHA Historical Papers* (1971): 21-51.

38. On the pervasiveness of the acceptance of racial hierarchy see Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race. Eugenics in Canada. 1885-1945* (Toronto, 1990).

39. On developments see Howard Palmer, "Canadian Immigration and Ethnic History in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17 (1982): 35-50 and his "Recent Studies in Canadian Immigration and Ethnic History" in Valeria G. Mayo (ed.), *From Melting Pot to Multiculturalism. The Evolution of Ethnic Relations in the United States and Canada* (Rome, 1990) and Dirk Hoerder, "Ethnic Studies in Canada from the 1880s to 1962: A Historiographical Perspective and Critique," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 26: 1 (1994): 1-18.

40. See, for example, Gary Pennanen, "Sitting Bull. Indian without a Country," *CHR* 51:2 (June 1970): 123-140 and H.M. Troper, "The Creek-Negroes of Oklahoma and Canadian Immigration 1909-11," *CHR* 53:3 (September 1973): 272-88.

41. On the failure to theorize class see S.R. Mealing, "The Concept of Social Class and the Interpretation of Canadian History," *CHR* 46: 3 (September 1965): 201-18.

42. On the development of labour studies in Canada see Greg Kealey, "Writing About Labour"

Our treatment of gender, race, and class has come a long way. To compare today's journals (and teaching and research in general) with what was happening even twenty years ago is to witness a sea-change of considerable magnitude. For the first time we see the possibility of constructing narratives that have some real claim to representing the Canadian peoples. It is this prospect which is producing a neo-conservative backlash supposedly in defense of political history. In fact, political history will not disappear from the deeper, richer picture that is now emerging.⁴³ Quite the contrary. At its best, it will no longer be deracinated and marginal to the experience of the great majority of citizens. By giving up its monopoly of privilege, political history promises at last to gain the significance to which it has long aspired.

Despite all our progress, from my perspective, we also have a considerable distance to go as historians. Our profession cannot expect to hear history's full range of voices until we share the advantages of salaried academic and other positions. Our departments and other institutions, like our professional and popular associations, will be left better than we found them if we do not replicate their gendered, racial, and class makeup. Only when we eliminate the unfortunate sameness about historians will that "unfortunate sameness about Canadian historical writing"⁴⁴ which Ramsay Cook identified in 1968 be truly at an end. As Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob have recently pointed out in *Telling the Truth about History* (1993)⁴⁵, greater diversity among historians will do much to overcome biases and compensate for blindness, constructing a narrative that ultimately has far greater credibility and that more greatly resembles truth.

Using all the insights that a generation of rich interdisciplinary work has now made available,⁴⁶ we also need to continue to re-examine our methodologies. As always, re-appraisal should begin with our sources. Our conventional preoccupation, with the written word, with the officially sanctioned report or the newspaper's public text, can do brutal disservice to truth. It is too easy to be paralyzed by print's power to counterfeit human life. In particular, we need to return to our origins as story-tellers, to remember the power of the spoken word. The anthropologist, Julie Cruikshank, the winner of our John A. Macdonald Prize for 1990 for her *Life Lived Like A Story. Life stories of Three Yukon Elders*,⁴⁷ offers good advice which goes well beyond its special reference to native history:

in John Schultz (ed.), *Writing About Canada. A Handbook for Modern Canadian History*, (Scarborough, 1990).

43. For a spirited discussion of this see Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Presidential Address/Discours de la Presidente. "National Unity and the Politics of Political History," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1992): 3-11.
44. Cook, "Good-bye to all that," *CHR* 49: 3 (September 1968): 277.
45. (New York, 1993)
46. See Liora Salter and Alison Hearn, *Report to the SSHRCC on Interdisciplinarity* (Ottawa, 1992) and Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: history, theory and practice* (Detroit, 1990).
47. In collaboration with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned (Vancouver, 1990).

Aboriginal oral tradition differs from western science and history, but both are organized systems of knowledge that take many years to learn. Oral tradition seems to present one way to challenge hegemonic history. It survives not by being frozen on the printed page but by repeated retellings. Each narrative contains more than one message. The listener is part of the storytelling event too, and a good listener is expected to bring different life experiences to the story each time he or she hears it and to learn different things from it at each hearing.⁴⁸

Our storytelling heritage embodies an old truth: historical investigation requires dialogue, indeed multiple dialogues, if reality is to be fully recovered.

Appreciation of this multiplicity means that we can better evaluate the merits of the conventional sources for Canadian history. The case of the treatment of Aboriginal peoples is again instructive here. As another anthropologist, Wendy Wickwire reminds us:

... the big question is what ultimately, we are to make of the non-Native historical record based on the observations of a single male operating in an official capacity with a reputation at stake. In contrast, the Native accounts draw on a vastly larger tapestry of people that spans several generations. . . . Here we have surely a wider, deeper "history," a history that does not rely on dead documents many steps removed, but on a collective memory traced directly to the many who were there. Here it is the written that is the more limited and problematic; the oral is the history that lives and is alive.⁴⁹

Our profession's recurring failure to attend properly to the promise of stories told in forms that we have not celebrated as synonymous with historical reality has meant that, willingly or not, we are contributing to prejudices and misunderstanding. B.C. Chief Justice McEachern's use of supposed "history" in his rejection of Gitksan Wet'suwet'en land claims in 1993 is a case in point.⁵⁰

One First Nations writer, Emma LaRoque, has identified the consequences of our profession's common shortcomings very precisely:

It was not too long ago that Native peoples were referred to as voiceless, even wordless, sometimes with the association of these with illiteracy. But were Indian and Metis voiceless. . . . Did it mean native peoples spoke no words? And since illiteracy is often associated with lack of literature, even lack of intelligence, did it imply that native peoples were bereft of literature or of knowledge?⁵¹

48. Julie Cruikshank, "Invention of Anthropology in British Columbia's Supreme Court: Oral Tradition as Evidence in *Delgamuukw v. B.C.*," *BC Studies* 95 (Autumn 1993): 33

49. "To See Ourselves as the Other's Other: Nlaka'pamux Contact Narratives," *CHR* 55: 1 (March 1994): 20.

50. See the special issue "Anthropology and History in the Courts," *BC Studies* 95 (Autumn 1992).

51. Emma LaRoque, "Preface or Here Are Our Voices — Who Will Hear?," in Jeanne Perreault

Nor is hers a solitary voice. So-called “new charter groups” are asking similar questions of our histories and our historical writers.⁵² If we are to get beyond the distortions which have disabled our collective memory as a nation and damaged so many who live in the northern half of North America, historians need to examine realities which have too often escaped our notice.

There are many areas of Canadian history which require greater sensitivity to diversity but one in particular stands out. Newspapers and broadcasts daily expose us all to brutal evidence of recurring violent abuses of power. Such stories, whether they occur in Rwanda, Bosnia, Canada’s northern communities, or our own backyards, are often extremely painful to hear. Indeed few of us are well-equipped to make sense of violence even, and probably even more so, when it happens at home. Indeed a reading of the conventional canon in Canadian history would suggest that conflict has been essentially foreign to the “peaceable kingdom,” providing only dramatic backdrop to more important national developments. Connections between violent behaviour in one setting and that in others have been generally ignored. This failure is startling because it is clear, even from partial reporting, that relationships of trust, involving women and men and children and men, provide the context for most injury. Public behaviours, from the picket line to the battle-field, constitute only the outcropping of a deeper vein of endemic brutality. Wherever it manifests itself, violence also takes forms that are often gender, race, and class specific. In other words, for all neo-conservative complaints, not everyone suffers equally. This mother lode of stories has, however, rarely been recognized as the stuff of serious mainstream scholarship.⁵³

Our profession’s limitations are exemplified by the failure of many of us, with the honourable exception of pioneers like Neil Sutherland, Joy Parr, Pat Rooke, Rudy Schnell and a few others, to take children, and most particularly, violence against children seriously, as central to the Canadian “story.” If we listen, courageous female and male survivors of brutal families, orphanages, residential schools, and other institutions have told and are telling the terrible histories that have handicapped so many human beings, in everything from schooling, to earning a living, and raising a family.⁵⁴ These stories,

and Sylvia Vance (comps. and eds.) *Writing the Circle. Native Women of Western Canada* (Edmonton, 1990), xv.

52. See also, inter alia, Adrienne Shadd, “Institutionalized Racism and Canadian History: Notes of a Black Canadian,” in Ormond McKague (ed.) *Racism in Canada* (Saskatoon, 1991), Roxana Ng, “Sexism, Racism, Canadian Nationalism,” in Himani Bannerji (ed.) *Returning the Gaze. Essays on Racism. Feminism and Politics* (Toronto, 1993) and Becki Ross, “The House that Jill Built: Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto,” *Feminist Review* 35 (Summer 1990): 75-91.
53. On this abundant evidence see the report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence — Achieving Equality* (Ottawa, 1993). See also Gillian Creese and Strong-Boag, “Taking Gender into Account in British Columbia: More than Just Women’s Studies,” *BC Studies*, forthcoming
54. See Judy Steed, *Our Little Secret: Confronting Child Sexual Abuse in Canada* (Toronto, 1994) for a discussion of one aspect of abuse.

with all their disclosure of forces fundamental to society, including sexism, racism, and classism, are critical to understanding Canada. The abuse of children is not outside of history, an unchanging feature of human arrangements. Nor for that matter is it, as some neoconservatives would have us believe, a product of a modern constellation of forces such as wage-earning mothers, the decline of religion, and the social security system.⁵⁵ To incorporate awareness of violence against children into our collective memory is, potentially, to demonstrate the significance of historical research to the issues of today. It is also an essential beginning to finding solutions to many of the problems that beset Canadians as a community.

Despite an enormous weight of testimony over the years, rejection and disbelief have been the frequent response, from authorities, from the public in general, and from relatives, to disclosures from victim-survivors. In 1974 and 1975, for example, complaints from boys and their parents to Newfoundland's child welfare services which identified the Mt. Cashel Orphanage in St. John's as a "hell-hole" for children, were either ignored or covered up. The power of the Catholic Church was sufficient to condemn hundreds of young boys to the grossest kind of mistreatment by the Christian Brothers.⁵⁶ Nor earlier, despite decades of rumours and evils beginning in the 1930s, did anyone come to the aid of the so-called "butter box babies" of the Ideal Maternity Home in East Chester, Nova Scotia.⁵⁷ Similar indifference, or at the very least lack of action, long greeted repeated complaints by Aboriginal parents about the treatment of their children in residential schools such as those at Fraser Lake and Kamloops in British Columbia.⁵⁸ Canadian incest survivors from both privileged and under-privileged homes across the country have also found, until very recently, that no one wished to know their plight.⁵⁹ Nor have most street children been as fortunate as the writer-poet Evelyn Lau,⁶⁰ in finding escape or a hearing. The 1991 Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba is one of many documents to confirm that the Canadian justice system has too

55. For neo-conservative views see William D. Gairdner, *The Trouble with Canada* (Toronto, 1990) and *The War Against the Family* (Toronto, 1992) and Betty Steele, *The Feminist Takeover. Patriarchy to Matriarchy in Two Decades* (Richmond Hill, Ontario, 1987) and *Together Again. Reuniting Men and Women. Love and Sex. Mothers and Children* (Toronto, 1991). See also Veronica Strong-Boag, "Independent Women, Problematic Men: First and Second Wave Anti-Feminism in Canada from Goldwin Smith to Betty Steele" forthcoming in *Histoire sociale/Social History*.

56. See Michael Harris, *Unholy Orders. Tragedy at Mount Cashel* (Markham, Ontario, 1990).

57. See Bette Cahill, *Butterbox Babies* (Toronto, 1992).

58. See Bridget Moran, *Stoney Creek Woman. The Story of Mary John* (Vancouver, 1988) and Celia Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal. Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Vancouver, 1988).

59. See Janice Williamson, "'I Peel myself out of My own Skin': Reading *Don't: A Woman's Word*," in C. Potvin and J. Williamson (eds.) (in collaboration with S. Totosy de Zepetnek), *Women's Writing and the Literary Institution/L'écriture au féminin et l'institution littéraire*, (Edmonton, 1992).

60. See her *Runaway. Diary of a Street Kid* (Toronto, 1989)

long been fundamentally indifferent to the plight of women and children, victims of racism, of sexism and of unconscionable levels of domestic violence.’⁶¹

The repetition of such cases in a host of communities and time periods makes it all too clear that few people have cared to hear, and fewer still to challenge, the violence and brutality that call into question the very foundations of our social arrangements. Instead, victim-survivors have been only too likely to be blamed for their own suffering. Backlashes such as the “false memory syndrome” movement, just like the pressure in an earlier period on Freud to disavow the possibility of widespread incest,⁶² have routinely greeted disclosures that highlight the consequences of inequality. Historians have too often been little better. Like other elites, we have not been reliable champions of the disadvantaged. Too often our research and teaching adhere to a hierarchy of significance that leaves out children, and violence, as if both were not central expressions of everything we are as a community. Too frequently we have ignored the extended record of abuses that continue to scar today’s women and men. No wonder Canadians, like those elsewhere, are too often historically illiterate, often appearing to believe that they are encountering a strange new phenomenon in child abuse.⁶³

The reaction to the hundreds of women who failed to find some redress for sexual assaults in Ontario between 1880-1929 and who were finally forced to leave “the courtroom empty-handed, their stories disbelieved, their intimate lives subject to the hostile gaze of the all male cast of police, jury, judge and court reporters.”⁶⁴ has characterized much of our collective response to abuse. As a modern survivor of childhood incest has reflected:

The demand is: keep quiet about what you know. The threat is: if you don’t, we can declare you all sorts of things — bitter, lying, crazy, man hating — so that no matter how loud you speak, no-one will listen. Only those parts of my memory that support the myth of the Healthy Happy Social Family are given space in this society.⁶⁵

61. Quoted in Sharlene Frank, *Family Violence in Aboriginal Communities. A First Nations Report* (Victoria, 1992).

62. On false memory syndrome, see Jody M. Davies, *Treating the Adult Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (Basic Books 1994). See also Robyn Hall, “Fighting the Backlash: False Memory Syndrome,” *Kinesis* (May-1994): 1. On the resistance to Freud’s identification of “seduction” or sexual assault on young children, see the controversial J.M. Masson, *The Assault on Truth. Freud’s Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York, 1985).

63. On the commonplace assumption, even by the well-intentioned, that the problem of the abuse of children is “growing” and in some way unprecedented, see, for example, Joseph P. Hornick, Barbara Burrows, Debra Perry and Floyd Bolitho, “Review and Monitoring of Child Sexual Abuse Cases in Selected Sites in Alberta,” *Studies on the Sexual Abuse of Children in Canada*, Working Document, Research and Development Directorate, Department of Justice, Canada (July 1992): 1.

64. Dubinsky, *Improper Advances. Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario. 1880-1929* (Chicago, 1993), 3.

65. Heidi Eigenkind, “Bearing Witness. A Question of the Politics of Memory,” *Canadian*

In face of so many incentives not to disclose, it has not been difficult, as one victim put it, to know that "Telling the truth is dangerous."⁶⁶

Fortunately, today's anti-racist, feminist, and children's rights movements are creating audiences, and potential assistance for those who have long found no hearings. Historians are needed to help tell these stories. By situating violence in historical perspective, our contributions will help change that fundamental landscape reported in terrifying detail in the 1993 report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women. Nostalgic desires to return to the "good old days" when a narrow, and narrow-minded, history prevailed, will not help us out of present predicament as a community. If we wish to be relevant and attended to, historians must confront the fact of our own privilege and turn our attention to neglected realities. It is at the very least presumptuous, and inevitably short-sighted, to believe that our profession can offer advice on Canada's on-going "national question" without first of all addressing the meaning of the oppressive relations which have produced, with much else that we have ignored, our ugly inheritance of child abuse, and violence in general.

In conclusion, the field of history has an essential contribution to make in solving the major dilemmas of our times. Most of the private and public violence which haunts our globe can be traced back to widespread confusions and prejudices about gender, race, and class. As the would-be custodian of our collective memory, history as a discipline has much to say to our time about these issues and others. We will not make that contribution if we are intimidated or antagonistic or, like the bulgy bear, confused by the prospect of change, in our membership and in our mandate. When historians expand their vision, through an acknowledgement of privilege and the creation of a pluralistic community of scholars, we will be a good deal closer to coming to terms with meaning of the "deep diversity" that characterizes Canadian life. This surely is the first step to constructing ways of living together, whatever their exact constitutional form, that no longer require some voices to be disadvantaged while other are allowed to monopolize decision making about what constitutes truth, citizenship and identity. Unless we are prepared to take on this challenge, then we will indeed become fundamentally irrelevant to the construction of a meaningful memory for all Canadians.

Women Studies (Fall 1991): 23.

66. Trysh Ashby-Rolls, *Triumph. A Journey of Healing from Incest* (Toronto and Montreal, 1991), xvii