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# Scott P. Stephen, *Masters and Servants: The Hudson's Bay Company and Its North American Workforce, 1668-1786* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 2019)

Scott Berthelette

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This book, Guard compellingly argues, helps to “illuminate how not only historians of the left, but also the left itself, have been largely blind to women’s political activism, especially when they acted, or claimed to act, in ways deemed socially appropriate to their gender.” (14)

There is much to praise about the book, more generally, but I’m most impressed by Guard’s significant efforts to recover the stories of scattered local Housewives branches and even more importantly, life histories of the women at the heart of the Housewives. This clearly involved impressive detective work—uncovering the scattered records of local organizations whose archives were more often than not destroyed—as well as the hugely important work of interviewing key players in the organization. And in doing so, Guard successfully challenges the accusations of the Housewives being a Communist Party of Canada front organization that have been consistently levelled at the organization, both by contemporary critics and by later historians.

It is wonderful that Guard included so many images, including photographs, advertisements and even primary source documents. One of the most impressive things about the Housewives was just how skilled they were at creating memorable campaign images and public theatre; whether it was the Children’s Chocolate Bar Boycott or the their multiple ‘On-to-Ottawa’ delegations brandishing props like rolling pins. It’s refreshing to see so many of these images in print, as they bring the movement to life in a way that’s not possible through text alone.

My critiques of Guard’s book are more quibbles than anything, with the main one being that—contrary to Guard’s contention in Chapter 2—that my own argument about the political impact of wartime price controls in *Food Will Win the War* are actually more similar than *Radical Housewives* might suggest.

Even then, my main feeling reading that particular chapter is that I wish she had published it before my book went to press because it answers so many questions that I wasn’t able to answer with my own research.

As I write this amidst a pandemic that has seen shortages, hoarding, rising prices and rents, the lessons of the Housewives struggle for ordinary consumers seems all the more relevant. Guard astutely places the Housewives in a long lineage of activists fighting for what we now call “food security” and, to that end, there is much that contemporary food activists could learn from their successes and failures during this moment of deep social and political crisis.

Overall, this is more than just the definitive history of the Housewives Consumer Association and mid-20th century consumer activism. It is essential reading for anyone studying the history of the Canadian Left, food politics, feminist activism and 20th century consumer culture.

IAN MOSBY

Ryerson University

**Scott P. Stephen, *Masters and Servants: The Hudson’s Bay Company and Its North American Workforce, 1668-1786* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 2019)**

IN *MASTERS AND SERVANTS*, Scott P. Stephen has probed the voluminous archival holdings of the Hudson’s Bay Company (correspondence, minute books, accounts, and post journals) to unpack the nitty-gritty details of labour relations within the Hudson’s Bay Company during the corporation’s long first century (1668-1786). Stephen’s central argument is that the Hudson’s Bay Company’s labour relations were underwritten by deep-rooted understandings

of master-servant relationships within a household setting and that Company posts should be construed as “household factories.” Indeed, as Stephen demonstrates, the patriarchal household family made up of a master (the patriarch) and a family of kin, apprentices, and servants, was the dominant social construct of early modern Britain and its overseas colonies and trading companies.

As Stephen demonstrates, the HBC’s household factory was diverse. Hudson’s Bay Company servants were not just Londoners and Orcadians, but also *Canadien voyageurs* who had absconded from French posts, Inuit and Chipewyan captives sold to factors by Lowland Cree raiders, and even the “mixed-blood” sons of HBC fathers and Indigenous mothers. The labour requirements of HBC factories were also diverse. The London Committee, governors, and factors demanded servants that could fulfill a variety of roles such as general labourers, mariners, officers, clerks, surgeons, and myriad tradesmen—armourers, bricklayers, carpenters, coopers, gunsmiths sawyers, shipwrights, and tailors—as well as more specialized labour in the form of birchbark canoe-makers and linguistic and cultural interpreters.

Stephen’s study outlines two major periods of the Company’s history. The period from the 1670 charter to the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht was marked by an initial flurry of development along the Hudson Bay littoral followed by massive instability in both recruitment and retention of labour due to wartime conditions and French bayside military excursions. The second period, following the peace of 1713, was marked by much-needed stability and security and saw the Company’s labour needs expanded and diversified as it established slooping (coastal trading) operations, whale fisheries, and several inland trading houses—Henley House

(1743), Flamborough House (1749), and Cumberland House (1774). Stephen’s analysis ends in 1786 when the HBC created the position of chief inland factor, which shifted the managerial centre of gravity and reoriented the balance of power of the coastal household factory.

Stephen does a particularly good job at drawing comparisons of labour relations to early modern Britain and other long-distance British trading companies, like the East Indian Company (EIC), Royal African Company (RAC), and the Levant Company, to show how the master-servant relationship and the household system reflected larger trends in British imperialism. Unfortunately, Stephen does not provide a sense of whether there was something uniquely British about the household factory, and does not venture into French, Dutch, Spanish Atlantic Worlds to juxtapose the HBC’s model of household governance against non-British trading companies, such as the French *Compagnie du Nord*, which operated in Hudson Bay alongside the HBC for decades. The lack of transnational or trans-imperial comparison opens the question as to how French or *Canadien* Company servants, like Jean-Baptiste D’Laryea and Louis Primeau (whose careers are outlined by Stephen), saw themselves fitting into the structures of the household system with its reciprocal obligations, deferential and paternalistic behaviours, and social and moral covenants. To Stephen’s credit, however, he does a much better job at teasing out social relations between the Homeguard Cree and the HBC, demonstrating how the Cree often imposed their own conceptions of kinship through marriage alliances in order to create reciprocal social connections on unwitting HBC factors and servants, which produced tensions within the household factory that mandated that servants remained celibate.

While the “household factory” produced a remarkably secure and stable political-economic entity that connected the Hudson Bay watershed fur trade economy to the larger British Atlantic World, Stephen also points to where the household factory stressed and strained, particularly under the pressures of illicit private trade and relationships with Indigenous women, both of which challenged the model of household governance at the Bay.

In sum, this is an important publication that will be of interest to labour historians, as well as scholars of the North American fur trade and early modern Britain.

SCOTT BERTHELETTE  
Queen's University

**Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London and New York: Verso 2020)**

“1966 WAS A GRIM year for social justice, but it had one bright spot,” writes Mike Davis in the conclusion to a chapter addressing the whitewashing of police repression in his recent co-authored book on Los Angeles in the 1960s. “At a testimonial dinner in July and in front of hundreds of guests, Chief Parker keeled over dead.” (242) That was as close to police reform as LA was going to get fifty some years ago.

Police Chief Parker was the Warden of the Ghettos, an unreconstructed ‘law and order’ reactionary who winked at those under his command sporting Barry Goldwater badges and distributing John Birch Society literature. He referred to suppressing the Watts Rebellion in 1965 as similar to “fighting the Viet Cong.” (220) It was Parker’s mission to keep LA’s disparate dissident demographic constituencies somewhat in line. Like Malcolm

X, but with so much more in the way of weaponry and license at his disposal, Parker was a believer in “by any means necessary.”

As their Chief amassed “intelligence” (known in the racist lingo of Parker’s inner circle as the “scalp collection”) on subversives and mobsters, civic officials and political opponents, his storm-troopers perfected the chokehold and the no-knock/no-warrant, sledgehammer-driven home invasion. Parker’s death occasioned no mourning among those he had long terrorized.

Histories of the 1960s are never far removed from the kind of surveillance and police brutality associated with Parker, but LA in the decade is undoubtedly a case study in the use of violence and deadly force in the service of an apartheid-like racial order. The conservative carnage revealed in *Set the Night on Fire* is but the tip of an iceberg, yet it melts the heart. Black lives didn’t matter much in LA in these years, especially if they were known to castigate authority and demand “black power.” Police attacks on African Americans punctuate the histories of social movements that Davis and Jon Weiner outline in these pages, although black LA was merely first among many constituencies given a taste of Parker’s equal opportunity repression. A particularly vicious and deadly program of profiling begins with the 1962 murder of Ronald Stokes (hands in the air, pleading, “Don’t shoot any more”) and the serious wounding—including permanent paralysis—of seven other Black Muslims, as a temple was ransacked by cops. (70) Of the 34 killed during the Watts explosion of August 1965, all but two were black, and well over 1,000 suffered injuries.

It was the Black Panther Party that really irked law enforcement (from Parker’s LAPD to J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI), getting under its pale blue skin with armed defence