

Book Notes / Références Bibliographiques

Volume 47, 2001

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt47bn01>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

(2001). Book Notes / Références Bibliographiques. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 47, 273–276.

BOOK NOTES / RÉFÉRENCES BIBLIOGRAPHIQUES

Richard L. Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff, *Have Women and Minorities Reached the Top? Diversity in the Power Elite* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1998)

THE AMERICAN "power elite" in business and politics has slowly become more diversified away from an exclusive membership of white, Anglo-Saxon males. Jews are now overrepresented in the elite relative to their share of the population. Visible minorities and women remain dramatically under-represented, though their presence increased in the late 20th century. Zweigenhaft and Domhoff examine both the barriers to full integration of all races, genders, and sexual orientations into what some of us still refer to as the "ruling class," and the characteristics of the *parvenus* within that class. There is not much that is new here, but the authors do compile a fair bit of information on the minority and women members of the elite. In general, the authors find that these new members of the elite adopt completely the perspectives and behaviours of the traditional elite. In this sense, the character of the ruling class *vis-a-vis* the rest of the population is unchanged by the entry into its ranks in small but growing numbers of African-Americans, Latinos, and women. Changes at the top affect but little the struggles that members of other classes must undertake to win social justice.

Derek Leslie et al., *An Investigation of Racial Disadvantage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1998)

IF A FEW MEMBERS of visible minorities are making it into the ruling class and adopting the patterns of behaviour of existing elites, the evidence of race in the class system is everywhere evident. This book quantifies the extent to which visible minorities in Britain are disadvantaged in terms of finding employment, earning decent incomes, and getting enough education to be competitive in the labour force. The Thatcherite 1980s, it demonstrates, were hardest on visible minorities, who bore the biggest brunt of increasing unemployment and declining working-class incomes. But Leslie and his co-researchers see some hope in increasing availability of higher education for non-whites in Britain and some signs of a decline in the income gap between whites and non-whites. Like many books filled with economic formulae and tables of data, this book is a touch short of both analysis and example. But the carefully-constructed tables, and the detailed explanations of how they were compiled, will be useful to anti-racist researchers.

Brian Titley, *The Frontier World of Edgar Dewdney* (Vancouver: UBC Press 1999)

DEWDNEY AVENUE is Main Street in Regina. But, according to Titley, the politician for whom the street is named was a self-aggrandizing, profit-seeking, racist Tory politician of the late 19th century. That made him fairly typical of the successful politicians of the John A. Macdonald era in western Canada. Dewdney is best known for his role as Indian commissioner and lieutenant-governor of the Northwest Territories at the time of the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. While he warned Ottawa of impending revolt in the region, Dewdney happily followed federal policies of dispossession of Natives and forcing them onto reserves. Titley has little positive to say about Dewdney, though he writes without rancour of Dewdney's efforts to use his time in office to enrich himself. So, for example, while lieutenant governor, this worthy servant of the people speculated on land in Regina and other places. Then he placed his official residence and several government buildings on or near that land so as to make a big profit from land sales. He was building his bank account as much as he was building a new nation. Needless to say, his treatment of Natives was vile. One more "nation-builder" unmasked!

Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press 1999)

WHAT CAN BE WORSE for a group of oppressed workers than facing the united opposition of the ruling class of one country? The answer according to this book is the united opposition of the ruling class of two countries. Historic and contemporary opposition by growers in the American Southwest to efforts by exploited farm workers, generally from Mexico, to unionize and win decent wages and work-

ing conditions is well known. The American state and the governments of individual states have unsurprisingly acted as the agents of the growers in helping to repress these efforts at worker organization. Less well known, and quite tragic, is the involvement of the Mexican state, through its consulates in the farming states where Chicanos work, in snuffing out worker protest. Concerned with keeping the growers happy so that they will absorb populations the Mexican ruling class can find no employment for, the Mexican government has also regarded control of its workers when they enter the belly of the beast as an exercise in public relations with the American government. Unwilling to confront the economic subordination of Mexico to the US and indeed drawing benefits from this subordination to the disadvantage of Mexicans generally, the Mexican leaders have easily allowed themselves to become the enemies of their workers abroad every bit as much as at home. The book focuses on strikes in California in the 1930s, but then traces the issue of Mexican farmworkers in the US and the involvement of the Mexican government in their struggles, up to the 1990s.

Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998)

THIS IS AN ENTERTAINING set of essays on leisure in Victorian Britain, ranging from music halls and bars to model athletic sports in public schools. Along the way, comic papers, musical comedy, and the early response to the gramophone are considered in a book that seeks to identify class and gender biases in British leisure and practice in the 19th century. Bailey's chief interest is discourse, and he begins the book with a lively discussion of how his own life circumstances have shaped the way he looks at and talks about history. A particularly interesting chapter

deals with the role of the barmaid in sexual talk and music during the Victorian period. There were strict rules against men touching barmaids, but their very presence in the male environment of the bar had quite an impact on the public imagination. Separating out the sexualized portrayals of barmaids in barroom gossip, musical comedy, and the press, from the experience of the women themselves is no easy task. Bailey does not really try but he makes clear the importance of the "parasexuality" represented by popular portrayals of the barmaids in a society of considerable sexual repression.

Ching Kwan Lee, *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1998)

THIS IS A FASCINATING ACCOUNT of women workers in private industry in both Hong Kong in the sunset days of British colonialism, and in Guangdong province of the People's Republic. Unsurprisingly, there are two different labour regimes in the Hong Kong and Guangdong factories, though the two electronics factories are commonly owned. But surprisingly the presence of a Communist government in the latter explains none of the difference. In both colonial Hong Kong and Communist-run Guangdong, capitalists must be free to pursue profit-making without state interference. Gender, rather than the state, has created two different labour regimes. In Hong Kong, the management, having assembled a large labour force of married middle-aged mothers, practices a degree of benevolent paternalism in order to hold on to its labour force despite paying miserable wages. It recognizes the women's need to attend to their children, and incorporates this into a schedule for the women that leaves them virtually no time in their lives when they are not either attending to their kids or earning profits for their

bosses. In Guangdong, this company, able to assemble a large workforce of single young women escaping the dreary life of the countryside, runs an even more despotic ship, with the women's lives at the mercy of their bosses, male relatives, and local bureaucrats.

Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1999)

CRANE TRACES CHANGING clothing styles by class and gender throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States, Britain, and France. Largely concerned with clothing's symbolic power to express the images, which different individuals and groups wish to project, she tends to treat clothing choice purely in terms of individual and group preference. She documents the percentage of income that various classes devoted to clothing purchases, compares the wardrobes of different social classes at different periods, and traces two centuries of both long-lasting changes in clothing as well as a myriad of fads. This book is weakened, however, by its tendency to divorce evolving social mores from structures of political and economic power. Clothing here is almost always treated in terms of decisions made from below. Uniforms imposed by employers, laws prohibiting women from exercising much choice in choosing their clothing, the limitations resulting from mass manufacture, strategies of companies to maximize both sales and profits, and particularly the role of advertising all play a minor role in Crane's account. Fashion, of course, has social agendas, but fashion does not belong to "society" alone but also to the holders of power and the symbolic manipulators who create illusions of choice in order to increase market share.

Sam Migliore and A. Evo Dipierro, eds., *Italian Lives: Cape Breton Memories* (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press 1999)

MANY ETHNIC BIOGRAPHICAL and autobiographical collections focus on the individuals from the group who "made it," their achievements, and their bromides on how to be successful. This book has a bit of that, but it also has the testimonies of many workers, housewives, and small business owners, and a lot of humanity. Mixing biographical accounts and memoirs with interviews, the contributors to this collection provide a rich history of Italians in Cape Breton from the 1870s to the present day. From the reminiscences of old-timers about the mining and steel industries at the turn of the 20th century to an environmentalist's complaints about the continuing destructive impact on Cape Breton Islanders' health, this book pays close attention to what working in industrial Cape Breton has meant for immigrant workers. There is some attempt to include women's experiences as paid workers as well, particularly in the fisheries. But this book is more than a compendium of occupations and work experiences of Italian immigrants to Cape Breton. There is much here about rum-running in the inter-war period, wine-making, sports, and Italian cooking. A set of recipes lets you know that this is not meant to be an academic account of a group's experiences.

Glenda Riley, *Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1999)

THIS BOOK has a modest premise: In the American conservation movement of the early 20th century, as in so much else, women played a large role that subsequent scholarship, produced by males, has largely ignored. Riley does more than add the names and achievements of a group of important women environmentalists to the picture of the movement as a whole; she demonstrates that women environmentalists in the western United States tried to 'feminize' the western wilderness. She challenges the notion that women fear the outdoors. She notes that they climbed mountains, skied, and rafted. They also experimented with crops and breeds of stock. They championed Native and environmental causes in social movements and political campaigns. Unfortunately, in her attempts to be comprehensive, Riley fails to analyse much about what these women environmentalists actually thought about the overall impact of capitalism and industrial development in their region. Almost any woman whose activities took her outdoors for much of the day is categorized as an environmentalist here. Neither the commonalities nor differences among these environmentalists are dealt with in the book.