

understand what women faced when they migrated to Alberta. We get a sense of the harsh realities they and their families confronted and we understand, too, the incredible adaptability and resourcefulness of women who were so often faced with sickness and death, hunger and fear, loneliness and isolation. This book also provides much new information on women's lives in Alberta. While earlier works have informed us of some of the more public hazards of homesteading, Silverman's book reveals something of the more intimate aspects of women's experiences. The honesty with which some of the women spoke of matters still generally regarded as private and personal suggests that Silverman developed a fine rapport with her informants. In fact, Silverman's empathy for these women

and the obvious pleasure she took in meeting and talking to them is conveyed on nearly every page.

Silverman makes no claim that the women she interviewed provide a representative sample though she does argue that common patterns of experience emerged. In seeking to demonstrate these patterns, however, a tendency to submerge differences appears. The vast majority of the oral testimony comes from white women in rural and farm settings so that, for example, we learn little about aboriginal women. Some evidence from women in the urban centres of Alberta is included as part of the autobiographical narrative but it is not as well integrated as the material from the rural women. A reader is left with the impression that some material was included simply

because it was too interesting to discard.

*The Last Best West* is a fittingly ironic title for this book which tells us much about the struggles and hardships, the accomplishments and joys, the isolation and the friendships of women on Alberta's frontiers. Clearly, for many, if not most, women, life in the "last best west" was not the exciting and fulfilling adventure promised by the propagandists for the C.P.R. and the Department of Immigration. Indeed, after reading women's first-hand accounts of their experiences, one is most struck by their tolerant, though resigned, acceptance of their lives of constant work, worry and fatigue and their view that "Well, you just had to keep going."

### THIS IS MY OWN: LETTERS TO WES & OTHER WRITINGS ON JAPANESE CANADIANS, 1941-1948

Muriel Kitagawa, edited by Roy Miki.  
Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985.

*Mona Oikawa*

I first discovered the writings of Tsukiye Muriel Kitagawa during a visit to the Public Archives of Canada. Within the intimidating walls of the Ottawa monolith, I retreated from the reams of government documents condemning my people, to find comfort in the manuscripts of one woman who protested the roots of that devastating power.

It is with joy, therefore, that I have rediscovered Muriel Kitagawa in *This Is My Own: Letters To Wes & Other Writings On Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948*, edited by Roy Miki. Kitagawa, a Nisei (second generation Canadian) woman, was a writer and activist, who was born in Vancouver in 1912 and died in Toronto in 1974. Her journey from the west coast to central Canada is the story of the forced removal, incarceration, dispossession, deportation and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during World War II.

As the title suggests, the volume is divided into two major sections. The first, "Letters to Wes," is comprised of Kitagawa's correspondence with her brother Wesley Fujiwara in 1942. The letters chronicle the day-to-day events resulting from the Canadian government's decision to forcibly remove all people of Japanese origin from the British Columbia coast.

Kitagawa's words express her outrage at the racially motivated government policy, "And this is democracy! . . . It has just boiled down to race persecution." (p.90)

Her letters also reveal the concerns she had as a mother coping with a difficult pregnancy and the subsequent birth of twins, all while caring for two other daughters and a husband. She describes how they become the targets of "mass hatred" through the actions of both the people and the country she so dearly loved. Her sense of betrayal is evident in witnessing the effects of racism upon her children, "so thoroughly Canadian they would never understand being persecuted by people they regard as one of themselves." (p.74)

The second section, "Other Writings," contains selected poetry and prose, some of which were previously published between 1942 and 1949. It is impossible to describe at length the intricacies of thought in Kitagawa's writings. What are striking to me are her clear, articulate analyses and her powers of argument, both of which prod the reader to question fundamental assumptions about democracy and freedom in light of the wartime experience of Japanese Canadians.

*This Is My Own* heralds the voice of a passionate woman who despite repressive restrictions upon her personal freedom, spoke out on the questions of the war, state power, racism and the position of women. Muriel Kitagawa openly protested racist wartime legislation through letters, articles and public addresses. She used her knowledge of government oppression, not only to fight

on behalf of Japanese Canadians, but also to demonstrate how the struggle for equality is inextricably linked to all peoples' fight against "race and economic greed." (p.203)

This wonderful collection was compiled and edited by Roy Miki, a professor of English at Simon Fraser University. His introduction provides a brief historical background to Kitagawa's life. Archival research and oral history form the basis of the documentation, which includes forty photographs. A strength of the book is that Miki has allowed Kitagawa's words to stand on their own, rendering permanent the gift of this remarkable woman.

The one criticism that I have of the collection is the lack of biographical information on Kitagawa herself. After reading her writings I am left thirsting for answers to questions not addressed in Miki's ten page biography, "The Life." I wonder about her friendships with other women and men. What was her relationship to her community, her political involvements and how, for example, did she come to address the Toronto Council of Women in 1948? More information on Kitagawa would have woven a thread of continuity between the beautiful pieces of poetry and prose.

Unfortunately, as Miki points out, Kitagawa was unable to complete this autobiographical task herself. One may speculate that the reasons which prevented her from fulfilling her dream of writing the history of Japanese Canadians during World War II are in some way related to her position as a woman and as a member of a denigrated racial group, at a

time when both identities were suppressed by sexist and racist ideologies. But Miki does not explore these ideas in this work.

Muriel Kitagawa's legacy, as Miki underlines, can serve as an example of the need to resolve the current debate on redress for Japanese Canadian survivors of World War II. Kitagawa foreshadowed the urgency of this issue when in 1947 she wrote, "Reparation for our property

losses will. . . heal a little of the damage done to us. . . a determined effort of all decent Canadians will wipe out the stain of our psychological hurts." (p. 249) The publication of *This Is My Own* contributes to this process of healing. For people of Japanese origin in Canada who lived through the cruelty imposed upon them during World War II by the Canadian government, as well as for the generations which have followed, this book is repre-

sentative of a struggle to claim a history which is defined by us and "our own." Hopefully, *This Is My Own* will be read by "all decent Canadians" to whom Muriel Kitagawa entrusted the challenge to create a world of peace and equality for all. In this way, her work may stand as a reminder of how knowledge of the past may inform the ways in which we conceptualize the future.

## THE NEGLECTED MAJORITY: VOLUME 2

Edited by Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985.

*Linda Kealey*

McClelland and Stewart have provided a sequel to *The Neglected Majority*, Volume 1 (1977). This second volume brings together previously printed articles which have appeared since the publication of Volume 1. Comparison is inevitable and readers will find in this volume not only a handy teaching tool, but also a barometer of change in the field of women's history. As the editors optimistically note in their introduction, Canadian women's history has begun to make inroads into the discipline. Unfortunately, far too little concrete evidence of this has yet appeared in text books. On the positive side, Volume 2 demonstrates significant strides within women's history – a broadening of subjects, a more imaginative use of sources and more awareness of the need for regional case studies.

The collection addresses areas and themes of importance for understanding women's past and present experiences – the women's movement, women's work and family life, ideology, culture and education, as well as health and sexuality. The authors utilize both "traditional" historical sources and newer techniques, such as oral history.

The women's movement and its relationship to other organizations and ideologies provide the focus for Marta Danylewycz's article on nuns and feminists in Montreal. This piece explores how nuns and lay women developed an important supportive relationship which aided feminist campaigns in Quebec. Danylewycz and Margaret Conrad also explore education, ideology and culture in their articles. The attempts to establish

institutions of higher learning in Quebec detailed by Danylewycz emphasises the constraints imposed by the Catholic Church. Conrad's piece of women's diaries also stresses the importance of religion for women in the Maritimes, albeit most of her diarists were protestants. Conrad's essay addresses the broader question of women's culture as revealed in women's private writings; moreover it reveals the wide range of information diaries provide on most of the themes addressed by this volume.

Several of the essays, as well as the introduction, pinpoint the importance of demographic factors and life cycle considerations for women. Imbalanced sex ratios, age at first marriage, fertility and mortality patterns, and migration had profound effects on the way women lived their lives. Access to birth control and abortion, still a controversial issue, is discussed by Angus McLaren in his article which covers the period 1870 to 1920. The observable decline in marital fertility in these years provoked a debate which drew together many threads of social commentary on women. The "new woman" with her potential employment, new values (sometimes including feminism) and her attraction to urban areas threatened to undermine expected roles centering around marriage and child-bearing. McLaren's essay indicates how far women would contest their rights to control over fertility and provides a needed corrective to the notion that women were the passive victims of the medical profession and the state.

Women's work both inside and outside the home is analyzed in Jan Noel's piece on women in New France, in Gail Cuthbert Brandt's discussion of women cotton workers in Quebec, in Marjorie Cohen's exploration of Ontario women in dairying and in Marilyn Barber's examination of domestic service. These same articles address the relationship between paid work and women's position in the

family, a key dynamic which has to be considered in the context of the life cycle of both the individual and the family.

In comparison with Volume 1, it is gratifying that more of the essays in Volume 2 pay attention to the history of working class women and socialist women. In the early stages of Canadian women's history, middle class women's experiences tended to dominate. The essays by Barber, Brandt and Cohen serve to remind us of the vast territories still in need of research. Susan Walsh's article on two CCF women in British Columbia raises the question of the tensions between socialism and feminism, a subject of contemporary feminist analysis.

Volume 2 is a welcome addition to the corpus of Canadian women's history; not only does it provide a valuable teaching tool, but it also reflects where Canadian women's history is both strongest and weakest. Clearly the strengths lie in certain regions and time periods. More work has been done on central Canada and more recently, B.C. and the Maritimes; the weaknesses remain apparent but diminishing in the Prairies, and in parts of Atlantic Canada (Newfoundland and PEI). Canadian women's historians have tended to focus on the period 1870-1920, with some significant strides toward the twentieth century. What is missing from our reconstruction of the past, however, is the historical experience of native, black and ethnic women. Integrating that history into mainstream Canadian women's history awaits a future volume.

