realized how destructive whites had been to the aboriginal population, whether because of selling alcohol or mere land greed. She kept the company of Indians; they worked for her; they helped her in the time of need and vice versa; they taught her folk medicine; and, they confided their legends to her. Allison reveals more than sympathy. She often empathized with their plight as is indicated by such comments as, 'My husband always laughed at Indian yarns but I did not for I thought there must be some foundation'; 'Penextitza (a local chief) was a perfect gentleman ... that man was considered uncivilized by our civilized people'; and, 'I knew them ... while they were still people ... a passing people ... The White man has much to be ashamed of in his treatment of the rightful owners of the land.' Such feelings, as Ormsby points out, made Allison decide to record their lives, manners, and customs. In this era, she was the only person in British Columbia to do so.

A final aspect of Allison's recollections which I found noteworthy, and which I will comment upon here as it is not dealt with in any depth in the introduction, was Allison's transcendence of her class origins to some degree. She was the product of an upper class English household and had been educated in Greek, Latin, and French at a private girls' school. In sharp contrast to the vast majority of 19th century emigrants, Allison and her family travelled first class by ship from England to British Columbia. Also indicative of her privileged beginnings were the family's possessions. They brought with them a little rosewood piano, a silver candelabra, Chinese swords, porcelain figurines, her college books, painted portraits, and a new wardrobe including a riding habit. Indeed, when she began her honeymoon, Allison wore the riding habit and rode sidesaddle into the Hope Mountains. But, by this time, as a newcomer, she had been forced to live in a shack where a blanket served as a door and sheets were used as window blinds. She had also learned to wash clothes, something she had never done before — 'we bent over the bath and rubbed with our hands till they bled and our backs felt broken'.

While Allison and her husband remained middle-class by Canadian standards — hiring workers, owning a considerable tract of property, and mixing with the local elite — she did endure continual hardships and some crises including losing her home and possessions on two separate occasions, once by fire and another time by flood. In the end, most of her property was sold to pay debts, and Allison ended up living quite modestly at the end of her life, especially after the death of her husband. She had never, at any time after coming to the province, sought to reestablish her former genteel existence. She expressed no obvious bitterness. Rather she looked back at her pioneer experiences philosophically and with satisfaction. For example, on reflecting when her cabin burnt to the ground and a local Indian brought provisions and clothes from the neighbours, she comments: 'It was a great experience, and I learned the real value of things by it.' Do the changes in attitude as manifested by Allison tell us something about the creation of a distinctly Canadian identity? This new attitude is a rejection of British upper class society and its aspirations in many respects (although it appears to reflect the paternal sense of social responsibility towards the lower classes evident among the pre-industrial gentry of English society.) It also represents an implicit refusal of the materialistic/individualistic/republican values attributed to American society in this period. Is this combination of attitudes and values peculiarly Canadian? If so, what role did women have in fostering and perpetuating these attitudes. Women were, after all, the main instruments of socialization as mothers and teachers.

In sum, Margaret Ormsby, with her introduction, has brought a significant work to public attention. My own comments are meant less as criticisms than as remarks on the richness of these recollections. This document reaffirms the relevance of such material not only to our understanding of women's history, but to Canadian history in general. ◔

The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History

Gerda Lerner, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp.217, $17.25
Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

It is fitting that Gerda Lerner should introduce this collection of her essays in women's history, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, with 'autobiographical notes.' She has played a unique role in establishing women's history as the thriving field it has become; in delineating its appropriate contours; in searching for a method and a theory appropriate to its practice; in unearthing the sources necessary to its writing; and in insisting not merely upon its autonomy and integrity, but upon its inescapable centrality to any worthy history of humankind. In this respect, Lerner's career encompasses the first phase — what she herself would call the prehistory — of contemporary women's history. Beginning graduate school, as a mature woman — established writer, mother of two grown children — in 1963, the year of *The Feminine Mystique*, Lerner developed as a professional historian apace with the new feminist movement. The essays assembled here reflect the feminist commitment that inspired her quest for professional training, informed the course of her graduate studies, and continues to motivate her writing and teaching.

These 11 essays, written during the past decade, offer a splendid introduction to women's history in the United States. Of the 11, five exemplify Lerner's scholarly contributions: The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson;' 'Black Women in the United States: A Problem in Historiography and Interpretation;' 'Community Work of Black Club Women;' 'Black and White Women in Interaction and Confrontation;' and 'The Political Activities of Antislavery Women.' The remaining six include four on theory and method, two on feminism (contemporary and historical), and one on the changing status and experience of the housewife. The historical and topical/theoretical pieces complement each other beautifully. Lerner writes movingly of the relationship between women's history and feminist practice in her personal experience and maintains that feminist scholars have 'become a community of scholars, vitally interested and involved in each other's work, trying to combat

within ourselves and one another the competitiveness which is structured into our institutional and professional life and to substitute for it a new and as yet untested model of supportive and engaged scholarship.' (vii) Feminist history, in her view, thus 'seeks to break down and combat the artificial hierarchies, the elitism and narrow specialization so characteristic of our profession; it seeks constantly to broaden and deepen the connectedness between thinking and committed social action.' (vii-viii) Her own work provides the best testimonial to that commitment, and, beyond it, to the commitment to reestablish history as a vibrant element of the national culture.

The historical essays reveal the breadth of Lerner's knowledge of her sources, many of which she was among the first to identify, unearth, and use. The historical research centres around the special problems of class and race in female experience, as well as around the organizational and political activities of women within their respective communities. When it appeared in 1969, 'The Lady and the Mill Girl,' represented the first major attempt to deal with changes in the status of women in the first four decades of the 19th century. It remains an important synthesis. In Lerner's judgment, the years 1800-1840 witnessed an objective deterioration in women's economic opportunities and a relative deterioration in their political opportunities. In these decades, the values and beliefs encoded in the dictum 'Women's place is in the home' moved 'from being descriptive of an existing reality to become an ideology.' (28) Extolling women's special role in the private sphere, the 'cult of true womanhood' attempted to justify women's exclusion from public life. But the hypocrisy of the ideology extended further than the sugar-coating of middle-class women's declining position: It also obfuscated the altogether more strenuous and vulnerable life of the mill girl, herself denied even the dubious security of her better-off sister.

For all Lerner's healthy skepticism about the reliability of such ideological codifications as advice books, sermons, and other prescriptive literature, as guides to the actual experience of women, she argues that skillful and sensitive use of the texts can reveal historical truths — although frequently not those intended. Women's lives may not have corresponded to the prescriptive norms, but the norms may, nonetheless, betray tensions inherent in social change. They may, in other words, deserve historical consideration as symptoms, rather than as reality.

Lerner's more specific investigations of the reality yield complementary information about female existence. Armed with a firm realism and an acute sensitivity to the repetitive dailyness of women's lives, Lerner explores the political activities of antislavery women with a fresh eye. Subsequent scholarship has confirmed and developed her pathbreaking work, but she deserves special credit for insisting upon a fresh understanding of the political contributions of women in conditions in which they lacked a legitimate political identity. She traces their contribution to antislavery work through the petitions to which they contributed and those which they initiated and circulated. And she correctly insists upon the importance of evaluating such activities at their true worth. Thus, she shows that no woman could meet the formal criteria for leadership in antislavery work for the criteria have been formulated as a function of explicitly male roles and opportunities. Yet, by her showing, women played an important and frequently decisive role in financing local efforts, editing periodicals, and writing antislavery literature. Thus, when in 1838, Angelina Grimke became the first woman to address an American legislature, the importance of her act lay not in some personal accomplishment, but in her representing 'an organized network of female antislavery societies. (124) In this respect, Lerner painstakingly traces the incontrovertible, but hitherto obscured, political activities of women.

In a similar fashion, she reconstructs the outlines of black women's massive organizational efforts on behalf of their communities. In particular, her essays on the work of black club women and on the interaction between black and white women fix the sign posts for a complex history. Emphasizing the concerted action of community building undertaken by black women whose people lacked access to the normal network of social services, adequate schooling, and recreational facilities, Lerner shows how voluntary female labour laid the foundations for what would become the bedrock institutions of contemporary society. Contending not merely with the disadvantages of sex, but still more with those of race, her black female subjects emerge as strong, determined women, fully committed to the construction of their community. In these essays, as elsewhere in her work, Lerner gives less weight than she might to the centrality of religious institutions and experience in the lives of these women. In my judgment, her slighting of this communal experience and this language of bonding sacrifices some of the density and complexity of the historical process she seeks to evoke, and blunts her perception of the ways in which these women perceived themselves and their world. But other younger scholars, following her path here, as others are following it elsewhere, are restoring that dimension. And their work would not have been possible — or would have been incomparably more difficult — without her trailblazing.

Lerner's topical and theoretical essays all build upon her historical work, even as they inform its questions and methods. Taken as a group, these essays return incessantly to the need to restore women's history to women and women to the history of humankind. Ever committed to recreating the female perspective, Lerner nonetheless never sacrifices the specificities of class and race to an all-inclusive feminism: For her, the general exists in its particular manifestations. Thus she staunchly underscores the particular travail of lower class women and forthrightly recognizes that for most black women racial oppression shaped their experience as women and, hence, their interest in specifically feminist issues.

For Lerner, female experience cannot be contained in the artificial constraints of male history, especially male political history. Historical fidelity to women's experience demands a new and probing look at periodization: What did the American Revolution, or, for that matter, the Italian Renaissance contribute to women's history? The great advances of male civilization most often had no relevance to women's lives, or a deleterious impact. Conceptualizing women in history presents its own challenge and most assuredly cannot be entrusted to male categories. The traditional sources, reflecting a male perspective and even catalogued according to male problems, will not easily yield information on women. Traditional historical theories, such as

the Whig or Marxist, pay insufficient, if any, attention to women's history. Class is not an adequate category through which to think female experience. In other words, history as we have known it woefully fails to include that half, or, betimes, more-than-half of the human population, the female sex. And, to include the female sex is to challenge every fundamental premise of the male, historical craft.

This is not the occasion to rehearse the full extent of my theoretical differences with Lerner. They are considerable, despite my sharing her commitment to a history faithful to female experience and to integrating that history into the centre of historical process. I cannot subscribe to the notion that a worthy history of humankind demands our jettisoning the purportedly artificial categories or structure of political history — not unless we wish to write the history of the peoples without the history of their organized and consciously articulated collective life, without the history of power, injustice, and the occasional triumph of, if not the good, the better. Nor can I countenance banishing that civilization which may never have adequately reflected female concerns but which articulated the conscious or unconscious sense of social and cultural order with which they had to come to terms. Lerner has taught us something about the nature of power in her delineation of the political roles of the antislavery women, in her picture of the implicitly political community organizations of black club women. Those activities which she has recovered and rightfully celebrates would lose their historical meaning divorced from the prevailing political relations and social representations from which women were excluded.

As a sex, women live with men, shape their behaviour in conjunction with men, forge their consciousness in relation to men. The conjunction and relation can be those of allies or of adversaries, most commonly both. But they cannot be viewed in isolation. Despite Lerner's respect for Juliet Mitchell, Joan Kelly, and other Marxist-feminists, she forcefully rejects class as an appropriate theoretical construct for the history of women. There is an irony here, for she has pioneered in insisting upon the special experience of lower-class women and black women and she has been the first to acknowledge class oppression and racism as divisive with respect to a feminist, or even a female front. Yet class, as a theoretical construct, evokes her hostility. Women, she maintains, confronted individual men across the social spectrum. And, at precisely this point, her analysis falters. For men, as members of social classes and ethnic groups, have had collective needs which have shaped their specific attitudes and behaviour towards the women of their social group and others. To be sure, class alone will not explain the oppression of women nor suffice to construct an adequate history of women. But it provides a much more important starting point than Lerner is prepared to acknowledge.

Women have always lived as members of social systems. Their multiple contributions to those systems, like the injustices they have suffered from them, defy facile categorization. But their historical presence — and the conspiracy of male silence about that presence — must be thought systemically. The history of women must ultimately be restored to our collective memory of historical process, but must not be used to undermine the sense of history as process. The hard truths, as they emerge, may be hard indeed. It appears likely that male domination of women, even in enlightened, modern, capitalist society, relied much more heavily on violence or its threat than either men or women would like to know. And that knowledge may tell us a good deal about the true relationship between social classes in our purportedly consensual society.

But these questions are for another time. Eventually, the history of women must be seen in the context of political, social, economic, and cultural structures which have largely been dominated by and served the interests of men. Only in such a context can we hope to eschew the history of female oppression on the one hand or the history of separatist female myth on the other. Oppression and separatism there have been, but they, like resistance to and complicity with the prevailing social and political relations can only be grasped as part of the whole. And understanding that whole requires the use of theoretical categories like class, requires respecting political process, and requires contributing to such notions the full sense of the social, economic, and cultural texture that can only be apprehended through full cognizance of the historical participation of women.

The history of women that we need, and that Lerner's work has done so much to inspire, is currently being written. The field has grown exponentially in the decade these essays span. In the explosion of newer forms of social history drawing upon quantitive, ethnographic, and other methods, it has become fashionable to dismiss the history of single, exemplary women as the history of 'worthies.' But, paradoxically, the more sophisticated we become in our conceptualization of women as social participants, the better we understand the social relations of production and reproduction as they depend upon and influence each other, the more we can learn from the study of individuals. Our more refined grasp of social process as a whole permits us to situate and, therefore, to study and learn from the special, the politically and culturally significant, individual. In such a perspective, Lerner herself can be seen as a worthy: a historian to be sure, the most active and politically astute of the opening phase of the new women's history, but also a specially talented writer — recently author of *A Death Of One's Own* — an inspiring and demanding teacher, a model as well as a companion to younger female scholars, a forceful presence in her chosen profession. One day the object of historical study herself. ◎

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Des Femmes au studio d'animation française a l'Office national du film

Mireille Kermoyan

Il y a à l'Office national du film un lieu qui semble, à première vue, privilégié puisqu'on y trouve plusieurs femmes occupant des postes de réalisatrices. Il s'agit du studio d'animation française. Cependant, une analyse approfondie nous amènerait sûrement à constater que ce secteur est à l'image du reste de l'ONF et de la société en général quant à l'égalité des chances pour les femmes au travail.

C'est donc au sein de ce studio que j'ai rencontré Francine Desbiens, productrice et réalisatrice, dans un bureau qu'elle partage actuellement avec le cinéaste tchèque de renommée mondiale, Bretislav Pojar.

D'après Francine Desbiens, ce dernier