I did not grow up wanting to be a historian. As a well-socialized child of the 1950s, my early fantasies centred more on the frilliest wedding dress possible. Luckily for me, I abandoned the ‘say yes to the dress’ dream for a life in history. After an undergraduate career in which I managed to avoid Canadian history almost completely and focused instead on African subjects, I worked, travelled to Africa, and came back thinking about the radical possibilities of history on the home front. From the time I returned to school, first part-time at Glendon College, then to do graduate work at McMaster University, I had a dual devotion to labour and women’s history, though there were inevitably tensions and challenges in that pairing. Yet as I was a relatively new feminist at that time, women’s history often felt like ‘home,’ and I have never lost the sense of discovery, excitement, involvement, and pleasure that reading women’s history entails. Trying to pass a fraction of that excitement along to students has taken up almost thirty years of my life, and I have thoroughly enjoyed the ‘wow’ factor in students’ responses to previously unimagined views of the past, whether it was Sylvia Van Kirk’s wonderful reinterpretation of women in the fur trade, Constance Backhouse’s disturbing account of the Ku Klux Klan and intermarriage, or Rusty Bitterman’s tale of Isabella MacDonald, a stick-wielding rural woman defending her family and property against Prince Edward Island landlords.¹

This collection grew out of a desire to reflect critically on the evolution of women’s history over the past thirty-some years. My original intent was to pen a historiographic text, but other research passions always intervened. Another feminist historian suggested using my own writing as a basis around which to discuss women’s history in Canada, and Athabasca
University Press responded to her suggestion with enthusiasm. This is not, however, an autobiographical text detailing my personal experiences as a historian. Nor do I claim that the essays gathered here are a perfect reflection of the evolution of Canadian women’s history, since the interpretive paths of gender historians have sometimes approximated each other but have at other times diverged. I chose a number of pieces that explore some of the changing concerns and debates in women’s history, though ultimately they illustrate how I wrestled with concepts, theories, and the peculiarities of Canadian gender history. One advantage of taking a retrospective view of writing about women’s history is that it helps to contextualize our own writing, reminding us how significantly women’s and gender histories were shaped by the social milieu, political background, and theoretical debates of the time. I do not pretend to hide my own research interests (how could I?), which have centred on themes such as class, work, legal regulation, and colonialism, or my theoretical predilections for a feminist historical materialism, if influenced also by some of the ‘post’ writing. While my ideas have shifted over time, productively challenged especially by critical race theory and anticolonial writing, I also believe that not everything new is automatically better. Some ‘old’ ideas and positions may be, and should be, defended.

It is not my aim to offer a detailed ‘from then to now’ description of the writing of women’s history in this introduction, though a few very general observations do come to mind. First, Canadian women’s history has always existed at the crossroads of, and in dialogue with, international writing, particularly that emanating from the United States, Britain, and France (the last more so in Quebec). As colonialism has taken on greater significance in women’s history, scholarship on empire, and comparative research on British white settler societies have also become more important. Second, writing on women and gender has been intimately connected to, and stimulated by, movements for social change, most notably, (but not only) the women’s movement. Whether it was challenges to the gendered division of labour, patriarchal legal structures, or the regulation of women’s bodies, feminist critiques of existing power structures have had an inestimable impact on women’s history. In turn, feminist efforts to construct our own ‘herstory’ offered insights into, and also lent weight to, specific political struggles. As racism increasingly became a
political issue for the women’s movement, for instance, new questions about ‘race’ and whiteness emerged in women’s history, though political concerns always take some time to register in published scholarship.

Third, it also goes without saying that our project has been intertwined with that of women’s studies and with feminist theorizing. Women’s studies has both sustained and been sustained by women’s history and has created a vibrant space for interdisciplinary dialogue. Feminist theory may appear less important in historical writing than in other disciplines in which theory is the sole topic of conversation, but this is in part because historians often interweave theory with their historical narrative. We might even argue that historical knowledge is vital to the development of feminist theory, though this imperative would not be universally embraced.

Fourth, the subject area of women’s history, while marginalized in its infancy, increasingly gained acceptance and moved closer to the centre of the historical profession: this was registered in many ways, including the awarding of prizes, articles in journals, the hiring of professors, and our participation in professional organizations. Gender has been integrated into some general history texts and courses, and far more departments now have at least one gender specialist. The danger, of course, may be a perception that one is just enough. Finally, Canadian women’s history does have its own peculiarities, shaped by distinct patterns of economic and social development, by Canada’s own version of colonialism, and by in- and out-migration, not to mention historians’ past preoccupation with the nation-state and nationalisms. The receptiveness of Canadian women’s history to international scholarship and theoretical currents has been by and large very positive and productive. One problem, however, is that Anglo-American historiography is so dominant, even hegemonic, and almost always so unaware of Canadian scholarship that we have to be careful to question the conclusions and historiographical certainties enshrined in this writing, as there may well be Canadian exceptions to these ‘rules.’ Raising these would-be distinctions in international audiences can make one sound like an irritating Canadian nationalist demanding attention, but there is no way around this problem of scholarly marginalization.²

In the following discussion, I have assumed, as Judith Bennett has suggested, that we can use the term ‘women’s history’ with the understanding
that it encompasses gender history, for the longer ‘women’s and gender history,’ or WGH, is a larger mouthful (or an awkward acronym). Some historians have seen these projects as distinct, and where that is the case, I try to note their standpoint on this issue. A few still see a pecking order of sophistication, with women’s history superseded by gender history. My own view is that hierarchies in this regard are not particularly useful. More historians would probably now concede, I hope, an overlap and interplay between these two approaches, in which other distinctions — theory, theme, method, evidence — are at least as important as the woman/gender distinction. Perhaps of greater value than setting up this hierarchy of methodological sophistication is a different, more general question: does our writing effectively uncover and understand power relations in the past, and, if so, how and why does it do this? In this regard, both gender and women’s history can be considered ‘feminist’ history (or not), depending on their commitment to feminist politics and perspectives. This might mean approaching a past without sexist or racist preconceptions, understanding the ‘why’ of women’s agency, analyzing women’s inequality where it existed, or probing the multiple power relations that have created and sustained social inequalities.

Historians like Cecilia Morgan and Beverly Boutilier have explored the history of Canadian women’s history, offering intriguing examples of women — often amateurs shut out of the corridors of academe — who valued, rescued, and recounted Canadian women’s history, long before our time. Many were animated by their own political and cultural beliefs, including feminism for some, or more often a particular vision of progress, ‘Canadianness,’ nationalism, or imperialism. Taking a different view, Aboriginal historians like Ethel Brant Monture were keenly aware of the ways in which the dominant Canadian histories had discounted and marginalized Indigenous peoples, and folklorists like Edith Fowke attempted to rescue the disappearing history of the ‘common people’ by preserving their stories and songs.4

While recognizing the importance of these pre-1960s historians, we usually associate the rise of women’s history with the late 1960s and the 1970s, and the explosion of curiosity, creativeness, and political energy that shaped the emergence of this new women’s history is undeniable. Inspired by the ferment of the ‘long sixties’ political movements of
feminism, the New Left, and civil rights organizing, and shaped by new currents in social history that validated a focus on ordinary people rather than high politics, women’s history burst onto the academic scene with considerable optimism and political vitality. In Canada, it announced its presence with books like Women at Work: Ontario, 1880–1930, with new journals like Atlantis, and with the founding of the Canadian Committee on Women’s History (CCWH) in 1975. The foundation story of the CCWH, already told effectively by Veronica Strong-Boag, was intricately tied up with overt challenges to the barriers women faced in a profession that was not only male-dominated but also shaped by class and ethnocentric biases. However, we were not entirely alone: our attempts to question what was of scholarly significance, as well as existing professional power structures, were shared by other insurgent groups, including labour historians. Both challenged a hierarchy in which workers and women appeared to be nonentities on the historical stage, and both redirected attention to groups, themes, and power relations previously ignored in historical writing: the patriarchal relations of family life, the class relations of the workplace, or the intermingling of the two. As our historical gaze shifted to the streets, the home, and the workplace, older nationalist versions of history, so closely tied to the narrative of nation-state building, came under critical scrutiny, though Quebec social and women’s history moved in parallel and different directions, shaped by a distinct cultural history and a concern with Quebec’s own national subordination.

This “moment of discovery” was very much a project of the women’s movement, for feminists recognized that women needed an understanding of the past in order to reshape our present and imagine a better future. Popular women’s publications were hungry for any tidbit of women’s history. In Kinesis, a feminist newspaper produced in Vancouver, for example, a feature article on women’s history in 1976 insisted that revising our understanding of history was essential to the feminist project. History books reflected the ideas of those in power, thus “excluding women, the non-white and the poor.” A history of “working women, Native peoples, and the poor,” the author argued, would reveal a completely different story, including their struggles for “equality and justice.” This popular article relied on the limited research to date, including material on the vote, social reform, and British Columbia women elected to office from
all political parties, but it was also deeply critical of the conservative agenda of early suffragists, detailed actions of working-class women, and was critical of “racism” against Aboriginal peoples. Its politics, in other words, were more radical than the historical writing it was able to cite, an interesting comment on this time period. Some of the earliest popular texts that inspired us were far-reaching, venturesome overviews that spoke to an unbounded sense of political discovery and commitment: Sheila Rowbotham’s examination of “300 years of women’s oppression and the fight against it” is but one example. I taught my first women’s history course in the summer session at UPEI in 1979, using material on women in the United States, Europe, and Canada, galloping over centuries and topics — a rather audacious reach that I would not attempt so blithely now.

There is no doubt that some of the earliest attempts to delve into women’s history ‘added’ women into the existing historical concerns, whether it was the story of white settlement, industrialization, or movements for social reform and equal citizenship. Fewer applied their feminist insights directly to a retelling of the ‘old’ dominant stories of the Canadian nation, though an exception might be Barbara Roberts’s refreshing re-examination of national hero Sir John A. Macdonald through the prism of his historically maligned wives in “They Drove Him to Drink.” And yes, some pieces written in the 1970s and 1980s looked at the suffrage and feminist movements, in part because they represented one early, significant campaign for equal rights — admittedly, campaigns that involved only some women and excluded others. I never wrote about suffrage, but I have tried to imagine the context that encouraged these studies, since they are sometimes cited as evidence of the limitations and narrowness of early women’s history. In contemporary politics, this was a period when campaigns for some basic rights for women, from maternity leave to marital property rights, were ongoing and in the courts. Feminists, newly aware of forms of contemporary oppression that had never before been ‘named,’ were understandably interested in explanations for oppression, but, as Andrée Lévesque argues for the case of Quebec, there were also attempts to understand how, where, and why women made their own history (even within the cloistered sphere of the male-dominated church). She adds that feminist historians were caught in a difficult
situation: they might be accused of creating a history of “victimologie,” yet if one stressed women’s agency, they were ‘idealizing’ their subjects! Even historians who likely would not have called themselves liberal feminists sometimes started with the stories of more visible political women who had led public lives, left accessible archives, or whose struggles seemed, on the surface at least, to resemble more contemporary feminist concerns, such as campaigns for legal reform or reproductive control. Still, not everyone wrote about suffragists: to claim, as late as 1996, that Canadian historians “have given lavish attention to the winning of female suffrage between 1916 and 1919 as the critical watershed in the construction of modern feminism” oversimplifies, and thus fails to do justice to, the range of historical writing that did emerge in women’s history. While the early efforts to insert women back into history by looking at their contributions to society were part of the overall impetus for women’s history, feminist writing, argues Andrée Lévesque, was more complicated than this. In Quebec, she notes, one of the first key statements on women’s history, by Micheline Dumont, moved decisively away from traditional French-Canadian biographical celebrations of women settlers and saints, focusing on the economic and social conditions of women. Moreover, women’s ‘contribution’ to history, Lévesque suggests, was not necessarily interpreted in the vein of public, political history but took in previously neglected areas such as the history of motherhood, contraception, and so on. I am not sure that proportionally more biographical (or ‘great woman’) monographs were actually written in the very initial stage of women’s history than more recently. When I first began writing, I saw biography as a more elitist and traditional genre, as I’m sure others did too. An interest in biography, however, has been resurrected by some authors as a very effective method of probing prominent, influential women’s ideas about power, ‘race,’ and colonialism. Biographies of the prominent can provide insights into the imposition of, and challenges to, dominant ideas about race and class. However, they do inevitably leave us more focused on these notable figures rather than on the female subjects they were categorizing and describing, who appear to us only from a distance.

To label early writing on women’s history as ‘adding women and stirring’ (a rather negative domestic analogy) thus captures only part of the
project of discovery and diminishes how important (and thus radical) even adding women and stirring was in the eyes of many establishment historians. In the 1970s, women’s history was typecast in some graduate studies programs as marginal at best, trendy at worst, and there were almost no women professors teaching in this area. Those of us who survived in unsympathetic environs often found sympathetic male supervisors (as I did), but a refrain I heard from faculty and students was that women’s history was too political, biased, and partial, “an excuse for our prejudices” as someone put it. How could we not study men’s gender roles as well, we were asked, and those who asked were not usually early advocates of gender history; rather, they often assumed the ‘minimal’ importance of women’s history! Women were a smaller proportion of the graduate cohort than now, and though we treasured those few, beleaguered, kind women faculty who offered us support, we could also see that they were the targets of masculine marginalization: those who stuck their necks out on issues like sexual harassment might be mocked or sidelined.

Adding and stirring also misses the sense of unbounded and exciting potential at a time when almost no women’s history was written; moreover, the intent to add women to history, in its most basic form, persisted well into the 1990s and beyond, producing invaluable accounts of women within certain time periods, as well as in the professions, politics, unions, and so on. Nor was the intent of early writing to reconstruct a world of women, severed from society and the larger social formation. One of the initial Canadian statements on the subject urged that women’s history be integrated into social history to create an entirely new history of society. Influential writers like Joan Kelly (whose work inspired me) declared that we needed a more holistic history that took in a “double vision” of productive and reproductive relations, while Gerda Lerner called for a “new vantage point” and new questions for traditional history, rather than simply ‘filling in the blanks.’ We need a new “history of humanity,” she too declared, a slogan similar to one popular in the women’s movement at the time: “Women’s liberation is human liberation.” This dual commitment did not seem at all contradictory: as I began to explore women’s history, I was won over by feminist writers like Linda Gordon and Sheila Rowbotham, who produced impassioned and pointed feminist indictments of male domination, while simultaneously conveying a critique
of class and capitalist relations, and I found that political journals committed to social justice politics, like *Radical America* and *Socialist Review*, provided the medium for these messages as much as academic journals.

It is hard to say exactly when a moment of discovery became a moment of expansion and complication. Perhaps they proceeded together. Rather than always tracing our steps in linear terms of improvement, I think it is useful to draw on Susan Friedman’s description of the “dialogic” tension continually operating within women’s history between efforts, on the one hand, to “reclaim” and restore women’s history and, on the other, an ensuing “anxiety” about the “possibility that our feminist reproductions of history may risk repeating patterns of thought that distorted or excluded women from the master narratives to begin with.”20 As a result, our enthusiasms about recovery have to be continually checked by critical self-reflection. Women’s history does make “compensational and oppositional truth claims”21 (and decidedly political ones) that counter existing hegemonic views of history, but feminist critiques of the production of androcentric (hardly ‘value-free’) knowledge have also made us wary of speaking for others and of generalized truth claims. This ongoing tension between “positivism and subjectivism,” between truth-telling and critique, Friedman suggests, is a productive one, although she concludes that the current inordinate influence of poststructuralism risks pushing the balance too far towards “relativism, a fetishization of indeterminacy,” political paralysis, and a stereotyping of the “naïve” project of recovery.22 Perhaps we are always walking a tightrope between recovery and reflection, negotiating a “continuum between objectivity and relativism.”23

Women’s historians could claim that we were simply retrieving a new narrative, a new version of history from a feminist point of view, but it was clear that there was not *one* feminist history, just as there were many methodological and thematic pathways into women’s history. Certainly, historians increasingly pursued many divergent areas of research, from Wendy Mitchinson’s pioneering work on operations on insane women to Bettina Bradbury’s quantitative analyses of Montreal censuses and her discoveries of “pigs, cows and boarders” in working-class households.24 Some areas of study, such as lesbian history, were initially more fully developed outside of Canada but, over a period of twenty years, moved from virtual obscurity to greater prominence within Canada.
something of a whig perspective of progress, Gail Brandt suggested in a
historiographic piece that, by 1990, the earlier “monolithic and static in-
terpretations” of women were superseded by an increasing “variety and
richness” in our writing, not only because the range of topics proliferated
(that seems undeniable) but because ideas like the social construction
of skill were developed more fully, traditional periodization was ques-
tioned, and concepts like ‘separate spheres’ interrogated. Still, compi-
ication, in the form of analyzing differences between women, had been
a theme running through feminist writing from the 1970s on, whether
it was with respect to the imperialist bourgeois project of importing fe-
male domestic servants into Canada to help propagate the Anglo-Saxon
race, working-class women resisting their ‘improvement’ by middle-class
reformers, divisions within the suffrage movement between labour and
bourgeois women, or the distinctive experience of groups of European
immigrant women. There were, of course, lacuna in our exploration
of difference, particularly with reference to race and sexual orientation.
While US writing focused more on race and class, with some feminist
historians exploring the separate, unequal, but interconnected worlds
of white and African-American women, Canadian writing focused more
on class to the exclusion of race — again reflecting the women’s move-
ment well into the 1980s.

Inevitably, we were influenced by ideas defined as new and signifi-
cant in Anglo-American writing at the time. An interest in the notion
of distinct women’s cultures — so evident in the United States in the
late 1970s and 1980s in work by Carol Smith-Rosenberg and others — was
indicated also in Canadian writing that employed a life-cycle analysis
or that focused on women’s diaries, recollections, and social networks,
and this writing was frequently linked to the specificities of region,
place, or women’s rural work. Nonetheless, writing on ‘women’s cul-
ture,’ often shaped by both cultural and liberal feminism, was arguably
less prominent in Canada, though we too wrestled critically with the
concept of ‘separate spheres.’ Regional differences in our writing were
probably inevitable. More pieces on industrialization emerged in central
Canada; women writing about the prairies were concerned with the di-
vision of labour in farm families; and women studying Newfoundland
probed the changing nature of the family economy of fishing. Quebec
was a culture unto itself and developed particular strengths related to its own social history, including explorations of both religious and lay women professionals nurtured in a Catholic milieu and among discussions of French-Canadian nationalism and the woman question. Although women’s history in its early incarnations “was an important aspect of the awakening of regional history,” it is not clear, as Suzanne Morton says of Atlantic Canada, to what extent women’s history really “transformed” how regional themes are examined — even if it has added immeasurably to that history. 30 Western-based feminist collections, often transborder ones, are still very common, perhaps indicating a stronger sense that prairie and coastal history has been altered in the wake of feminist critiques, as well as a regional feeling that women’s history is still defined too much by central Canadian themes and examples. 31

One could argue that an increasingly self-critical moment emerged by the mid-1980s and into the 1990s (a rather long span of time, I admit) as feminist historians interrogated their own early assumptions, almost immediately asking what was missing, even from the newly emerging story of women’s history. An answer came from historians exploring themes such as immigration, sexuality and the law, criminalized women, or those in marginal political parties, to name only a few areas. 32 Influenced in part by the demographic and political changes in Canada ushered in by the end of an ostensibly ‘white-only’ immigration policy in the late 1960s, and especially pushed by critiques penned by women of colour, women’s history did increasingly attempt to confront issues of ethnicity, race, and racism, as well as the colonial project of dispossession and subordination that defined our nation-state and shaped the lives of Indigenous women so profoundly. The latter, of course, had not been completely absent: we should not discount the pioneering work done by scholars like Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer Brown in fur trade studies. 33

New political priorities did mean that the way we posed our questions had to be rethought: rather than examining women factory workers, we had to look more closely at domestic work and the informal economy; rather than looking for women’s political activism in feminist groups and political parties, we had to explore women’s organizing on the basis of their ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural identities; rather than associating ‘race’ solely with women of colour, we had to address white identity
as well. Although poststructuralist writing on difference and identities may have shaped this new concern with ethnic and racial differences, it was also a profoundly political response to critiques circulating within the women’s movement at the time. Feminist historians — and I include myself — may have imperfectly integrated a race analysis into our writing of women’s history, but there has been a shift over time in our sensibilities in this regard. I think it inaccurate to suggest that there is an immovable group of feminist historians who see a ‘race’ analysis as “abandoning gender.” Rather, many historians are struggling to understand the specificity of women’s lives within the categories of analysis that are most salient to their research context, with race being one of those. In the early twentieth century, for instance, Newfoundland outport women’s lives were profoundly shaped not only by gender but by merchant and industrial capitalism, regional poverty, and religious and cultural identity.

We can also make some very broad generalizations about feminist and critical theory: earlier works in the 1970s and into the 1980s were influenced by varieties of ‘modernist’ feminist theories, including those trying to understand ‘patriarchy’ or, like the pioneering Women at Work: Ontario, 1880–1930, by Marxism and Marxist-feminist writing. Some historians put more emphasis on gender oppression, seeing this as a means of “changing the past and the present,” while others drew on E.P. Thompson’s ‘Marxist-humanist’ vision of history and feminist-socialist debates about the relationships between capitalism and patriarchy. My socialization was shaped particularly by the latter two currents: Thompson’s emphasis on class formation as both a material and cultural phenomenon, on experience as a dialectical process, and on the importance of human agency seemed to offer a vision of the past that opened up rather than closed down the possibilities of a feminist and socialist analysis. Still, there was never an entirely either/or distinction between class and gender: even those stressing gender as a ‘primary category’ in their writing, for instance, were not completely inattentive to class, at least in Canada.

Interdisciplinary exchange also played a role in shaping emerging theoretical approaches. Feminist political economists, many of whom were sympathetic to structural and materialist approaches, produced historical studies on women, work, and the welfare state, and their work was not insignificant to the emerging feminist oeuvre. I suspect that
women’s history was less influenced by literary theory here than it was in the United States — though certainly there was some interchange between the two fields. Poststructuralist theory — the ‘linguistic turn’ — and a parallel thematic interest in culture, representation, and identity were clearly increasingly influential by the 1990s onwards, though other theoretical proclivities, including feminist materialism, did not completely wither away. The influence of queer theory, postcolonialism, and some poststructuralist writing on language was also evident by the mid-1990s. On the international scene, some historians went so far as to suggest that gender history had literally been brought into being by poststructuralist theory. While this claim did not dominate Canadian writing, it was a distortion of the historiography that understandably irritated socialist feminists.

There was perhaps less debate about the theoretical benefits of ‘post’ theorizing in Canadian women’s history than there was in Anglo-American social history more generally. This can hardly be chalked up to younger historians’ “timid” fears of one Marxist historian, a rather facile claim (and an insulting one to the historians who were using theory) put forward by Mariana Valverde. It is more likely that the insights of ‘post’ theory were simply taken for granted as Canadian historians followed an international trajectory in which materialism and Marxism were on the decline. They looked outside our borders for the key texts shaping this debate, and, following some Anglo-American social historians, some suggested that a more a pluralist ‘accommodation’ between materialism and poststructuralism was the answer. The latter accommodationist or integrationist enterprise (summed up most recently by Geoff Eley and Keith Nield’s claim that “we do not have to choose”) persists in some writing. However, I am not alone in seeing some of these attempts to find a ‘third way’ as problematic, not only because they can become a new form of liberal pluralism, but also because many authors ultimately do choose which theory to validate and which to undermine or reject, even if subtly so, and it was more likely to be historical materialism that was portrayed as lacking or ‘myopic.’

In her 1991 historiographic piece, “A Postmodern Patchwork,” Gail Brandt suggests that women’s historians in Canada were drawn to poststructuralist notions of “diversity and mutability,” as well as its dislike of
“generalization and discrete categories of analysis.” Yet generalization and categories of analysis were not banished from historical writing in the wake of poststructuralism, and few Canadian feminist historians truly embraced forms of radical deconstructionism advocated by writers like Hayden White. Poststructuralism certainly had an influence, perhaps a discreet, subterranean one that persists today, and many women’s historians paid an almost ritual homage to Joan Scott’s writing on language and gender. However, this does not mean they embraced poststructuralism in a thoroughgoing manner, and this was perhaps especially true in Quebec.

Still, for those of us who are sympathetic to historical materialism, class seemed increasingly to become a silent partner in women’s history, and, symbolically, labour historians’ texts were judged by their attention to gender, while feminist histories were not held to account for class in the same way. In international circles of Anglo-American writing, the theoretical shift away from a social history shaped by Marxism was well documented, though the same trends were not necessarily found in non-Western ‘third world’ contexts. Not only was social history not supplanted by cultural history in Latin America, argues Barbara Weinstein, but Anglo-American assertions that the integration of gender into social history signals the highest pinnacle of scholarly “theoretical sophistication” creates a hierarchy in which Latin Americanists appear to be “lagging” behind, surely an insulting equation. Her warning connects to the arguments of some Indigenous women in North America who lay claim to different historical priorities than non-Aboriginal women; for them, categories of imperialism or race, rather than gender, may yield more significant master narratives.

In feminist theory more generally in North America, class did not disappear; indeed, it was often invoked as a marker of difference, but it was described more in terms of identity than with reference, as it had been earlier, to the productive and reproductive relations undergirding capitalism. In the wake of a “new individualism” evident in politics and theory by the 1990s, argues Beverly Skeggs, class was seen as redundant or as a “relic from modernism which had no applicability to the ability to travel through differences, unencumbered by structure and inequality.” “Class,” publishers informed her dismissively, no longer “sells.”

Introduction
movement away from class was even the case for those using intersectional理论 (as I did too), perhaps suggesting that I/we should have been more cognizant of some of the problems with intersectionality. We looked to intersectionality as a means of avoiding an ‘add-on’ analysis of compounding inequalities, focusing instead on the interconnected, seemingly indivisible aspects of social life. It also promised an analysis still interested in listening to multiply marginalized “outsider” voices. However, at one end of the spectrum of intersectionality writing, all categories of analysis were simply deconstructed, and attention was focused on the multiplicity of differences within individual identity. Some of the intersectionality writing paid relatively little attention to class, and indeed, key ontological differences between kinds of inequality — race, class, gender, and so on — were occluded. The “methodological murkiness” of intersectionality, a failure to address the “structural level” of oppression, and the tendency to “skirt questions of origins” thus remain problems with intersectionality writing. The different ways in which intersectionality has been used by feminists are increasingly under critique and reconsideration, offering the possibility that insights about the interconnectedness of social life may be retained without neglecting the importance of structural inequalities. Interestingly, in the last two years, some prominent US-based feminists have suggested a reconsideration of class analysis and Marxism, in light of their recognition that global capitalism was able to accommodate and reconfigure key demands of ‘second wave’ feminism. One might argue that the ‘fit’ between feminism and capitalism was encouraged far more by postmodern and liberal feminism than socialist feminism since the latter group did not completely abandon the much-maligned metanarratives of Marxism or their critique of structural inequalities. Nonetheless, even if this insight about accommodation is not entirely new, a renewed look at it may take feminist theory in productive new pathways.

The National Question and Feminist History

One example of how Canadian women’s history both intersected with international scholarship and followed its own distinct path is to be found in debates concerning the ‘nation.’ Although Anglo-American and French
feminist historians have certainly written about the ways in which gendered power relations and discourses have shaped definitions of the nation. Canadian women’s historians have arguably wrestled with a more fragmented notion of the nation. Within our nation-state, there has long been more than one group constructed as a nation, and this has inevitably complicated gender history. Early on, both French- and English-speaking feminists defined themselves as part of a specific nation, and there are other groups of women who would still define themselves as located within a cultural nation shaped by ethnicity and history. There are also feminists within Canada who see their own liberation not simply in gendered terms but in national and anticolonial terms as well. For those writing women’s history, in other words, the ‘nation’ had not only been problematic because it was originally equated with a masculine story of political evolution, thereby marginalizing aspects of women’s history deemed less central to this ‘public’ realm, but also because the notion of a homogeneous nation has been so contentious for many groups. This is particularly true for Québécois and Aboriginals but also for those on the economically regional outskirts of the nation. It is for this reason that one commentator has suggested that an understanding of fragmentation and critiques of essentialism were already known to Canadian feminists before postmodern critics popularized them.

It may seem peculiar to explore the concept of the nation when the current emphasis is on creating transnational histories that escape or ‘rise above’ the limited categories of past analyses: too often, claims a group of new scholars who are somewhat dismissive of their predecessors, we continue to “fall back on the comfortable fiction of the nation.” While this historiographical assertion needs some interrogation, the value of thinking transnationally about women’s history, as many historians have already rehearsed, is obvious: it allows us to research and write comparatively; trace the movement of populations, cultures, and ideas across national boundaries; analyze the common and distinct social forces that shaped women’s lives and gender relations; and highlight divergent patterns of colonialism, class, and ‘race’ politics shaping feminist thought and practice, to name a few areas. Historians of empire have made particularly good use of transnational work, though some of this is essentially comparative history with a new name. Still, the legal
regimes, environmental resources, and political cultures of the nation-state were important influences on women’s lives, as were their loyalty to, and critiques of, national identity. So we must ask why and how these influences affected their histories and history writing. Moreover, even though Canadian historians have offered critiques of national and/or nationalist metanarratives, they have often circled back, interpretively, to the nation as their focus or as a means of framing the parameters of their study. I see no reason to privilege transnational history as far superior to those histories bounded by the nation, since good transnational histories must ultimately be built on accounts of the relationships, entanglements, and conflicts between the local, regional, national, and global. One could even argue that Canadian history is itself transnational given the multiple nations within its boundaries (an idea some American colleagues looked on rather askance when I tried it out on them).

From the early 1970s and into the 1980s, feminist historians often had an ambiguous if not contradictory relationship to the concept of a Canadian nation and to nationalism. Feminists wanted women included in the nation’s history in order to fill gaps and silences and, ultimately, to transform that history itself. Like feminist historians in many countries, they opposed a traditional nationalist history of wars and high politics, often promoted by leading malestream historians as the pre-eminent and most significant metanarrative to be studied. Standing at the core of both teaching and research in the post-World War II period, this national history had often focused on the nation as either a progressive, optimistic story of Canada’s liberal political evolution or as a more pessimistic, conservative story in which Canada went from British colony to nation to American colony. In Quebec, the nation was highly contested, but in different ways, with English Canada rather than the United States the focus of anticolonial critique. National identity was also theorized as a product of our distinct relation to the environment, the North, and the emergence of a ‘peaceable kingdom.’ However, this comforting image of the ‘peaceable kingdom’ ignored public and private histories of violence and dissention, occluded gender, and as one critic has suggested, implicitly valorized the superiority of the white Euro-Canadian founding nations.

When feminist historians first argued that we needed to redefine the meaning of the political and interrogate a national history that excluded

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workers, women, and Aboriginals, we were not, however, completely ques-
tioning the very basis of nation itself as a category of historical analysis.\textsuperscript{65} One reason was probably that English-Canadian feminists like myself, who came of political age in the 1970s, had lived through intense po-
itical discussions, across ideological and party lines, about our colonial relationship with the United States; remnants of this concern with the cultural and economic domination of the Canadian nation likely lin-
gered on. Second, nationalism was a key organizing principle of activist and academic politics for Quebec feminists who were deeply involved in their own nation-building project in the years after the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. The impressive synthesis of women’s history first published by Le Collectif Clio in 1982 was an attempt to bring to light the distinct history of the Québécois. Rather than rejecting a nation-based identity, the authors sought to recast Quebec’s history, questioning its traditional categories and periodization, by integrating women and a feminist per-
spective into the narrative.\textsuperscript{66} At the same time, the ongoing political con-
cern with recognizing Quebec as a nation likely left Quebec feminists in a difficult situation: their case for historical redress could be seen as less important than the overall need for national redress from a confining fed-
eralism. Feminist historians were not necessarily hostile to nationalism, but they could be critical of it, as Micheline Dumont was in her analysis of the sexist language and assumptions in some nationalist literature.\textsuperscript{67}

These two national solitudes of feminism have been an ongoing ele-
ment of Canadian women’s history.\textsuperscript{68} Quebec feminist historians have rightly questioned why relations with their English-speaking colleagues are so often ‘one way,’ with the English language dominating, while Que-
bec women’s history written in French remains largely unexamined by anglophones. Although English and French-Canadian women’s history have shared many concerns, differences — in how we periodize history (especially with respect to feminist activity), in the dominant method-
ologies used, and in the themes explored — still exist. A form of ‘implicit separatism’ has come to operate, as Denyse Baillargeon has suggested.\textsuperscript{69} This may be in part because of an increasing focus on transnational rather than national histories, but it is also because Quebec no longer commands the same political attention in English Canada that it once did. Opportu-
nities for comparative work or, better, examinations of our “entangled”

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histories, as Magda Farhni argues, have not been developed. When the CCWH was first founded, it was cognizant of the need to address the two solitudes, and we found some commonality in co-operative professional efforts. The problem remains, however, and is not helped by the fact that many of us imagine that, intellectually and culturally, Quebec has already gone its own separate way. Even if the solution, as one Quebec feminist colleague tells me, is to sustain our ‘internationalist’ ties with each other, we cannot do so in linguistic solitudes.

Another shift in the view of nation emerged from those writing Aboriginal history, whose work challenged that long-established cornerstone of Canadian history, the idea of two founding nations. Instead, Aboriginal historians spoke of the First Nations and the white settler newcomers. Feminists influenced by postcolonialism also began to critically dissect the nation as an imaginary that was synonymous with gendered, racist, and ethnocentric discourses and practices. In this historical work, women were not added to the nation as much as the nation itself was held up for scrutiny, including its racialized and gendered dimensions (though class, notably, is not so visible). If in the 1970s feminist historians sought to make women historical subjects and actors within the nation, by the turn of the century scholarship increasingly examined the symbolic meanings of the nation, using a gender and race critique. Race was deeply woven into the nation-building project, it was argued, including in terms of exclusion/inclusion, as immigration policy de facto kept Canada an overwhelmingly white country until the later twentieth century. This question was extended to the constructions of nation within a global context: Sherene Razack has asked how the Canadian state created an image of a protective, gentler peacekeeping military nation while remaining violently complicit in racism and imperialism. Research on ethnicity has also indicated the complicated creation of women’s national loyalties. The Ukrainian communist women of the 1920s that I wrote about (who were left out of the dominant definitions of an Anglo, ‘white’ Canadian ‘nation’ at the time) related to multiple nations: their cultural nation of origin, their current national home, and the nation of their political ideals, the Soviet Union.

Despite the impact of feminist and other criticisms of traditional national history, it has proven hard to escape the nation. This holds true even
if our aim is to critique it, and even if it is important that we continue to question and “trouble” the nation, particularly the ways in which it is defined by inclusions and exclusions.\textsuperscript{75} And given that the local state is often first in our line of political sight when we fight for rights and resources for women, our interest in understanding the mechanics of the nation-state is not entirely misplaced. Moreover, contra postmodern calls to ‘deconstruct the nation,’ metanarratives that focus primarily on the nation remain a central part of Canadian history making, even if they are presented under the rubric of new theoretical or political forms such as ‘the liberal order’ or ‘cultural communications.’\textsuperscript{76} It may be preferable, then, to recognize their influence, engaging with them critically and productively.

Daiva Stasiulis offers one feminist suggestion as to how we might reinterpret the ‘nation’ without focusing solely on identity and sacrificing all systemic analyses, including structural investigations of race and class. Examining the stark reality of competing feminist nationalisms in Canada — English, French, First Nations — she argues that we should put aside an accommodationist liberal pluralism and instead analyze the relational “positionality” of these nationalisms, with attention to the relative economic and social positions of these groups.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{Interrogating Historiographical Certainties}

As historians, we may look, rather instinctually, for a chronological narrative of historiography, for change over time, assuming that insight builds on insight, leading us to a ‘better’ history. As Chris Dummitt noted, certain origin stories and narratives of onward-and-upward progress often take hold in our writing.\textsuperscript{78} This moves us precariously close to a whig interpretation of women’s history, something we need to continually question. I too have invoked a ‘progressive narrative’ when I described labour history moving from a narrow focus on male artisans to a more expansive focus that also took in women, family, and community. Perhaps, however, we can make some distinctions between recognizing certain advances in our writing (as well as possible setbacks) and claiming an ever onward-and-upward improvement over what came before, a problematic whig view that critics have located even within some poststructuralist writing seemingly dedicated to decentring existing narratives of progress.\textsuperscript{79}
Another problem with a historiographical narrative of progress is that contention and different points of view may be suppressed. As I reviewed many books for this introduction, I was struck by the number of exceptions to some of the widely accepted narratives of feminist historiography in Canada. And contra my colleague Chris Dummitt, I do not see Canadian women’s history as a homogenous feminist project of attempts to advance political “inclusiveness,” with few lines of distinction between authors. Indeed, this very claim, along with the sentiment repeatedly articulated in the same book that debates of the older generation were simply “polarizing and polemical,” whereas the arguments advanced by the book’s ‘new scholar’ contributors are expansive and innovative, should also be held up for scrutiny as a problematic whig claim. It may be true that one of the code words for inclusiveness, ‘difference,’ has become fetishized, overused, and quite compatible with liberal pluralism. We should perhaps also heed the warning of political theorists like Himani Bannerji who argue that liberal pluralism can slide into an acceptance of neoliberalism because, in its avoidance of master narratives, it “precludes the use of larger concepts of social organization, such as class, capitalism, imperialism, even patriarchy.” That statement in itself suggests differences between those feminist scholars who still see the need for such metanarratives and for structural explanations and those who are far more suspicious of such approaches.

If feminist historians are to locate and analyze those differences, we may need to continually rethink the narratives and historiographical certainties that become reified and are thus taken for granted in the profession. Understandably, when feminists think they have opened a new door of interpretation that had previously been hidden or shut, they may embrace that newfound insight, or sense of mission, rather enthusiastically. Casting an ongoing critical glance on our claims making is thus essential. For example, by the late 1990s, after ‘race’ had become a more central preoccupation for Canadian feminists, one scholar warned that by trying to overcome too singular a focus on gender (what she calls “gender essentialism”), feminist writing slipped into “race essentialism.” In so doing, writing assumed an automatic hierarchy of racial oppression, warned against any and all appropriation, homogenized women of colour (as well as white women), and dealt in guilt at the expense of
analysis, thus obscuring a more complex analysis of power. Similarly, a feminist theorist has suggested that our fears of making generalizations across differences and of being labelled an ‘essentialist’ (a designation no self-respecting feminist wants) have resulted in our methodologies becoming far less diverse, more “essentialist,” and more limited. Another social scientist has questioned the “airbrushing of history” involved in the whig notion that, over the past thirty years, feminist theory went from being simply white to diverse.

Although these questions have not emerged in the same way in Canadian history as they have in the field of feminist studies, they usefully challenge taken-for-granted narratives of feminist theoretical progress. Questions like these would help us interrogate our definitions, methods of categorization, and a priori assumptions. It may be worth asking, in this vein, if historians are using categories like colonialism and race with an eye to historical context and specificity, rather than imposing current definitions on the past. Is it not acceptable, for instance, to use the word ‘colonial’ when referring to Quebec-Canada relations in the past, even though we now associate the word primarily with white-Native relations? I have been criticized for doing so, including by students, yet words and categories that seem dissonant now may characterize past relations quite well — and vice versa.

One example of a productive rethinking of historiographical issues is Janice Fiamengo’s nuanced discussion of early suffragists’ understanding of ‘race,’ in which the author avoids a dichotomous reading of her subjects’ ideas that either indict their racism or sidesteps the question of race. However, another piece by the same author indicates precisely the problem with historiographical certainties that become entrenched and are widely reproduced. In this article on Nellie McClung — reprinted in Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History, a very influential collection read by scores of students — Fiamengo positions her research within an accepted version of historiography that sees Canadian women’s history evolving progressively into a more complex analysis of gender history. To support this narrative, Fiamengo cites a much-quoted introduction to Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History. This Gender Conflicts introduction was itself particularly important, I would argue, since it seemed to represent a new group of historians different from those who had put
out the very first feminist collections like *The Neglected Majority* or *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, and also exploring some exciting new thematic areas of social history. It may have appeared that women’s history was moving in new directions, symbolized by the title’s emphasis on gender, not women, and indeed this was the claim of the book’s authors, often made by counterpoising the ‘new’ gender history, with all its complexity, to older, “unfruitful models” and writing associated with women’s history.

According to Fiamengo, women’s history was first exemplified by a “celebratory” phase. Veronica Strong-Boag’s early writing, for instance, “championed” Nellie McClung’s contribution to feminism. This one-dimensional approach was challenged to some extent in the later 1980s by Carol Bacchi’s critical take on the suffragists’ class, ethnic, and eugenic biases. But the key interpretive shift, it is implied, comes in 1992 with *Gender Conflicts*, since this book represents an embrace of complexity and difference, a challenge to the previous celebratory approach, and a more thoroughgoing call for attention to race. “Gone is the assumption of commonality in women’s experiences,” repeats Fiamengo; gone is the singular emphasis on the “contributions of women” in past writing. Fiamengo admits her interpretation is “schematic,” but there is nonetheless an assumption of a movement from a more naive, celebratory form of women’s history to a more complex one. Concentrating on one or two key texts, as Fiamengo does, can be a useful method of interrogating historiography, but it has dangers: how do we decide what constitutes a key text? Should we not explore a broader range of historical writing? Does this method literally make these texts iconic?

On the basis of that same introduction, other pieces on women’s and gender history make similar assumptions about a positive shift in the historiography: these claims are picked up on as ‘fact’ in an international publication as well. What is interesting is that this introduction, co-authored by all the contributors to the book, actually opens with a more generous interpretation of previous writing. Although it claims that the field of Canadian women’s history has been characterized by a liberal “preoccupation with white middle-class women,” there is some acknowledgement that other topics have been examined, including the lives of working-class women. Yet it is the ensuing whig-like assertions that seem to captivate readers, and that have been repeated so often.
The authors contrast their book to earlier scholarship that was limited, among other things, by its concentration on “articulate, white middle-class women” (categories seemingly always elided) and by its tendency to create “romanticized heroines,” whether they were “middle-class reformers” or “working-class victims.” 93 Earlier social history writing was also restricted by its reliance on generalizations about the “tired” dichotomy of “top-down domination and bottom-up resistance,” 94 whereas their collection showed that some women with little power could “exercise a measure of control over their own and others’ lives.” 95 In contrast to previous scholars, these authors claimed to avoid “creating heroines of any type,” particularly those women who were “morally pure.” 96 But were not some earlier authors also trying to understand this dance of power, control, and human agency involved in women’s history?

Leaving aside the question of whether the contributors’ individual essays reflect their collective self-description, we need to ask if their portrait of past writing is accurate. After all, who exactly wrote about these one-dimensional and morally pure heroines? There were almost no citations offered for all these bold historiographical claims. 97 Yet earlier scholarship suggests a more complicated picture, particularly with regard to class. Wayne Roberts’s work on working-class women contradicts the Gender Conflicts characterization, and his writing was not merely an anomaly. Nor were women merely “described,” rather than “analyzed,” by previous historians (the former more simplistic, the latter denoting a more complex stance). 98 Articles dealing with upper-class women’s efforts to create an imperialist Canada through British working-class women’s immigration, class-based efforts to reform working-class women, political efforts to mobilize working-class women against bourgeois women, or white settlers who marginalized Native and Métis women: all suggest that conflict was not totally ignored. Our interpretations of historiography, like history, will always differ, but there are some cautionary principles we might agree on: the need to understand the political, social, and intellectual currents shaping historians’ scholarship, to look at a broad range of writing, to actually cite texts to support our argument, and to be wary of too easily impugning historians with accusations of one-dimensional ideas or political motivations. The latter three are of particular concern in this case.
Fiamengo’s critical comments on the limits of so-called contribution history, aligned with this particular historiographical narrative, also raise questions about how we define ‘contribution’ history and where the line is drawn between celebratory or uncritical histories and sympathetic or empathetic ones. Does taking a sympathetic view of working-class women who are on strike, or who are struggling to keep the family economy intact, amount to celebratory history? How does this differ from the sensitive and empathetic portrayals Karen Dubinsky offers of female victims of violence who protested their treatment in court? Should we always disguise our sympathy for women who found a myriad of ways, formal and informal, to avoid, protest, or dispute their oppression?

One can thus cite enough exceptions to the historiographical narrative extracted from the Gender Conflicts introduction to suggest that a straw feminist historian is being set up and a whig narrative sustained. Because few published pieces took direct issue with this interpretation it could become ‘common sense’ in the field. Indeed, there are other examples of similar claims making. In one article, a group of feminists posited that gender history offered a superior perspective to women’s history since it went “beyond descriptions of ‘women’s experience’” and looked at the “whole social formation,” not “just women”: as a result, the “unitary category” of woman was productively questioned, not simply assumed. In a similar vein, Mariana Valverde suggested that women’s history represented a “first stage” in feminist writing that was characterized by the naive, “positivist” assumption that one could simply “collect quantities of facts about ‘women’s experiences.’” In contrast, poststructuralist writing by authors like Denise Riley offered a more sophisticated, open, “tension filled methodological approach” far from the proven “dogmatism” that characterized both “grand theory and empiricism.” Yet one could argue that historical materialism, a maligned ‘grand theory,’ also examined tensions and contradictions and, at its best, encouraged an “open” reflective assessment of truth claims.

One can dispute the historiographical assertions made by some authors but still commend the thematics and subject matter they are addressing. Situated as it was in the early 1990s, the Gender Conflicts introduction also represented two broad shifts in the field: a growing concern with questions of ‘race,’ and an increasing interest in poststructuralism.
The latter trend was visible in other monographs as well, though their use of theory was not of one piece. Carolyn Strange’s positioning of her study of the ‘girl problem’ in Toronto as a project less concerned with locating women’s ‘experience’ than with the discourses shaping their ‘regulation’ drew consciously on Foucault, while Cecilia Morgan’s study of Upper Canada used discourse theory to dissect the meanings of masculinity and femininity in the colonial period.104

This shift towards poststructuralism was also visible in a second key historiographical statement also often taken as definitive, that of Joy Parr’s “Gender History and Historical Practice,” which won the Hilda Neatby prize for the best article in women’s history. This piece (published in 1995) is also a good reflection of debates and ideas circulating by the mid-1990s: first, it argues for gender as an improvement on women’s history; second, it indicates the increasing interest in masculinity; and, third, it offers a poststructuralist critique of previous notions of experience in women’s history. Gender history, Parr suggests, emerged very much because of theoretical innovations of poststructuralism. Moreover, the latter’s emphasis on contingency, “temporariness, impermanence” is in fact the “greatest contribution” gender history has made, as well as the source of opposition to it.105 It is gender history’s emphasis on impermanence and ‘not knowing,’ Parr argues, that threatens an older “generation” of historians, who were “cleaved” to the humanist “roots of history,” including nineteenth-century notions of truth.106 “The writing of history has moved on,” she declares, asserting an implicitly whig view of progress.

“Highlighting the partialness of our understanding of the past,” Parr claims, is seen as “dangerous” by these older critics, though she cites only two Canadian pieces reflecting this stick-in-the-mud generation: Michael Bliss’s much-criticized and discussed piece on fragmentation and an unpublished paper by Jim Miller. Without Miller’s unpublished piece that was cited, it is difficult to assess this claim, but I do not think the published version falls under the category of being “ferocious and hostile” to gender history.107 On the contrary, he praises many of the innovations and advances of women’s history. However, he does argue there are certain dangers inherent in new methods and theories of the 1990s, not only because of poststructuralist rejections of the idea of truth but also because historians may, he fears, sacrifice what they see as the truth to
political considerations or invest too much in a feminist emphasis on the personal and experiential. I do not agree with all of Miller’s points: using the usually antifeminist term ‘political correctness’ was a mistake, and assuming that women’s history was deeply invested in the experiential was actually a misreading of the times, since that is precisely what Joan Scott was critiquing. But some of the questions Miller raises about an abandonment of all notions of truth and about the perceived problems of researching across Native and newcomer cultures are thoughtful and timely. Indeed, given his research on residential schools, it is not surprising that Miller might be concerned with the undermining of truth claims, which are often the path to redress. A defender of traditional humanism he may be, but he is hardly a reactionary ‘von Rankean,’ opposed to historiographical innovations, including gender history.108

Those critical of a poststructuralist emphasis on impermanence, fluidity, and ‘not knowing’ are not all in one older, passé generation, nor do they necessarily reject the need for diversity or the insight that society and history, not biology, lie behind the construction of gender and race, as Parr suggests in her article. To be critical of poststructuralism is not the same as being critical of gender history or feminism. Poststructuralists see positions as “multidimensional and specific” rather than “universal and totalizing,” Parr claims, again making those she criticizes appear to be inflexible absolutists.109 Others have argued that an emphasis on seeing history as ‘unfinished,’ on questioning “interpretive assumptions” and the “strategies used in constructing texts,” are not specific to poststructuralism and have long been tenets of historical practice.110 Even though Parr concedes this might be so, she adds that poststructuralism is a needed antidote “after three decades of the social sciences” leading historians to seek out “immobilized structures” and ignore “local colour.”111 This is not a characterization that to my mind reflects Canadian social history in the mid-1990s, which had long welcomed local studies and which was increasingly sceptical of mechanical ‘structural’ interpretations.

Parr’s influential article also undoubtedly reinforced the view that a focus on women was limited because, as she put it, the very questions asked about ‘woman’ “presupposed” the answers given, “isolating woman from the social relationships that created her.”112 In her discussion of masculinity, however, Parr discusses similar problems of assuming a ‘unitary’
masculinity. One could argue that extracting any one group from its social context or presupposing answers based on the questions asked are potential perils for histories of men or women, masculinity or femininity, depending on how the history is done. They are not intrinsic to a more “limited” women’s history.

Parr also rightly points out that writing in the 1970s and 1980s often aimed to reclaim women’s experience, and, in accordance with Joan Scott’s 1991 influential article, Parr sees this earlier approach as flawed by a lack of understanding that experience itself is not foundational: rather, “experiences were claims, not irrefutable foundations,” for “meaning precedes experience.” Earlier feminists did often claim to be recovering women’s experiences, and some of these works undoubtedly assumed women’s words could be read as an ‘authentic’ rendering of their lives. However, not all feminist historians naively relayed women’s words as simple ‘truth,’ or failed to ask the question Parr sees as crucial: “What made some parts of experience notable and others unmarked?”

To swim against what is persistently presented as the tide of historiographic progress and innovation can be daunting: to argue against the apparently definitive insights of poststructuralism could put one in the camp of the absolutists, the naive humanists, and maybe even the economistic, determinist Marxists (perhaps the worst label of all). To admit to really liking or agreeing with books like Against Postmodernism, The Retreat from Class, or Descent into Discourse (as I did) might classify you in the latter unfashionable category. Whatever the beneficial insights of feminist poststructuralist writing (and there were significant ones), there were significant disadvantages as well, including for those women who had been marginalized even within women’s history, as their ‘authentic’ voices of experience could be undermined — a point Karen Flynn makes very well in the context of African-Canadian women’s history. There may indeed be some areas where the insights of modernist and postmodernist thought have been mutually beneficial and productive, even — or perhaps especially — when they existed in tension, as, for example in feminist writing on sexuality and regulation that drew selectively on Foucault but also engaged with him critically. The same might be true for writing on gender and colonialism that drew in part on postcolonial theories. However, in the latter case, even third world scholars
sympathetic to postcolonial scholarship are critical of the depoliticizing tendencies evident in some highly culturalist postcolonial theory that has strayed completely from the earliest (anti-imperialist) meaning of the term.\textsuperscript{117} I believe we need to heed their words.\textsuperscript{118}

The theoretical sentiment in Joy Parr’s article clearly struck a chord at the time, and it is a cogent reminder that, by the mid-1990s, the concept of experience had become problematic for many feminist historians, associated as it was with erroneous, even dangerously ‘essentializing’ foundational concepts.\textsuperscript{119} And this critique did have a tangible effect, shifting historians’ approaches to their subjects, creating a wariness of depicting women’s experiences with any certainty, of being able to get inside their minds and feelings — especially when one was crossing barriers of race. It is precisely for this reason that representation became more central to feminist history writing. For feminist historians like myself whose socialization had been in Thompsonian social history, the poststructuralist critique could not but unsettle a core concept of ‘lived experience’ that encompassed both social relations and human interpretations of those relations. Debates about experience were hardly new; indeed, earlier structuralist critiques of Thompson had also argued (not unlike some poststructuralists) that he endowed the notion of human experience with too much ‘authenticity.’\textsuperscript{120} Despite the confident assertions of some social historians that Thompson’s rendition of experience had been “disposed of” by Joan Scott and others,\textsuperscript{121} it has not been without its defenders. By the late 1990s, feminists and materialists of various stripes were publishing critiques of Scott reaffirming the importance of “retrieving experience,”\textsuperscript{122} although many such works came from feminist and cultural studies theorists rather than historians. For precisely this reason, I revisited these debates in one of the final articles in this book.

Even accounting for some reticence vis-à-vis this debate, American women’s historians seemed more ready to discuss interpretive and ideological differences than their Canadian counterparts. As Andrée Lévesque noted with regret, “one cannot help but notice the paucity of theoretical debates by historians, including Canadians, which so enliven the practice and development of women’s history.”\textsuperscript{123} Why is this?
Debatophobia

When I began working on this book, Alvin Finkel commented that some critical discussion of feminist historiography would be a welcome addition to Canadian scholarship: after all, he quipped, Canadian women’s history seems to suffer from ‘debatophobia.’ His comment forced me to reflect critically on whether this was really true, and if so, why? And were the consequences of agreement really that bad? After all, many feminists have seen building consensus as a positive and community-enhancing enterprise.

As 1970s’ feminists discovered, however, consensus can simply paper over or even suppress differences in ideas, feeling, and power. Debate, in contrast, is more open, and while it may not lead to resolution, it does clarify what our differences are and why we feel one interpretation is better that the other — and is interpretation not at the core of how and why we do history? Think of the debates within feminist studies over the years. The Nancy Fraser–Judith Butler debate about the politics of recognition and redistribution was sometimes sharp, and certainly critical, but it was also enlightening and stimulating. If nothing was resolved, positions were developed, ideas expanded, and feminist theory was certainly enriched — whichever side you oscillated towards. The exchanges between Linda Gordon and Theda Skocpal about social policy, or between Linda Gordon and Joan Scott about violence and women’s experience, similarly highlighted different approaches to history, politics, and feminism — and one can cite many other examples of incisive feminist critiques and theoretical differences.

Such drama is not the stuff of Canadian women’s history, and it is not simply that we are a more polite nation, prone to be accommodating even when someone steps on our toes. Is it possible that we actually all agree? I think there may be a measure of truth to this characterization. The early CCWH was built on attempts to draw together feminists from a variety of occupations, politics, and regional areas. Since many of those who initially became interested in women’s history were already sympathetic to some brand of feminism we were drawn together by a common sense of political purpose. No matter what our age or background, many of us have dealt with instances of sexism, marginalization, fear,
or derision relating to our gender at some point in our lives. A feeling of being ‘embattled’ was probably especially prevalent in the early ten to fifteen years of the CCWH, when women’s history was more decidedly on the margins, when women were struggling to get courses on women accepted, and when there were fewer women in history departments, let alone universities. This feeling of being in the same boat — and a lifeboat at that — likely engendered a sense we should stick together, and there certainly were instances of women supporting other women in the profession. Unlike our counterparts in the United States, where there are hundreds of feminist historians working in universities, we are also a much smaller group, with more personal connections.

Perhaps we also had some political role models: Canada’s national women’s organization, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), worked for many years as an uneasy political coalition of women drawn from different political stripes, constituting a form of feminist politics that Jill Vickers and others define as particularly Canadian.126 There seem to be far fewer high-profile right-wing commentators and antifeminists in Canada à la Camille Paglia or Katie Roiphe, peddling their wares in our country (which is not to deny that some organizations like REAL [Realistic, Equal, Active, for Life] Women of Canada are pernicious promoters of antifeminism), and an enduring social democratic tradition has often become the home of many feminists attracted to its gentle critique of capitalism, its long-standing voice on women’s issues, and its investment in democratic processes of change. Still, not everyone stumps for the NDP, and the assumption that we are all ‘progressive’ feminists of this variety, or even that this tradition is the one and only way forward, leaves out some feminists and assumes an ideological consensus that may well paper over differences. Social democracy, as history suggests, can be quite sectarian in its sense of moral superiority.

This problem of a seemingly agreeable progressive left-centre perspective being taken as the superior norm is not confined to women’s history; this pluralistic vision, lauding attention to race, gender, ethnicity, colonialism, sexual orientation, and disability has also been celebrated as the primary achievement of social history.127 But pluralism can also be a form of liberalism or can become a confining creed of consensus whose dominance is assumed, not questioned.128 The solution to a cozy sameness,
one commentator has lightly suggested, is to have more “conservatives” writing Canadian history, since leftists supposedly split hairs rather than debate real differences. I think not.

A more generalized example of this aversion to debate was symbolized by the decision of the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) years ago not to have commentators at sessions as they might be too “critical” (precisely the word used). Yet commentators can tie papers together, raise questions we had not thought of, and yes, create a critical, engaged, intellectual community. I have not heard a harsh critical commentary since 1985 at the CHA, and I don’t think the turn towards consensus has made the conference academically superior. Moreover, shutting down open debate simply takes it into a more closed, private realm. If we refrain from making a critical comment during a session or in a book review but then go and complain about someone’s paper (and perhaps them, too) behind their back, this is not creating a scholarly community. It is recreating the atmosphere of ‘junior high school’ (as one historian put it to me), an experience some of us would rather forget. To be sure, at one time we had to guard against antifeminist and pejorative comments about women’s history, but they are far less commonplace now, and feminists must be ready to face the same questions about how we use evidence, argument, and theory that define all of us as historians. We also need to distinguish between antifeminism and critique. To disparage women’s history and feminism in general is one thing, but to criticize a particular text for not using evidence carefully, or taking a quote out of context, or drawing the wrong conclusions is a valid and useful academic exercise.

It is true that disciplines differentially and differently foster debate as part of their ethos. Canadian political economy would seem at first glance to engage in more debate, whether one is addressing race and essentialism, the national question, or the need to discuss gender. Within the historical profession, writing in British social history has never escaped sharp debate, and the much larger, more diverse and variegated American profession, including women’s and labour history, also seems less reluctant to disagree. Consensus is thus not endemic to Canadian research or history more generally; indeed, other areas of the discipline have witnessed more disagreement. When women’s history burst upon the scene in the 1970s, its sometime ally was labour history, which was
characterized by more ideologically charged debates, in part because an established cohort with social democratic loyalties opposed an upstart group of Marxists whose politics, priorities, and international perspectives challenged theirs. 132

Our views are likely shaped also by our own academic and political socialization. I suspect that being exposed to the ‘far left’ political milieu of the late 1970s encouraged me to see political agendas as worth fighting over. I may not have always liked the way these debates unfolded, including in gendered terms, but I did not see them as simply worthless. Even today, there are some political milieux in which discussion is suppressed, and other situations in which people are more actively engaged and become used to hearing quite impassioned disapproval of others’ ideas. Perhaps this was one reason I wrote a polemic meant to stimulate debate and stake out a position about gender and women’s history, but it was not very satisfying, with discussants sometimes talking at cross-purposes. I was protesting the hierarchy being established between a superior gender history and a ‘limited’ women’s history, while other commentators were criticizing what they saw as my rejection of ‘diversification’ of the field through the expanding categories associated with gender history. 133 Possibly some clarifications emerged that were useful, but in a small country that shuns argument, any debate can stall prematurely or become unproductively personalized.

Debates within feminism can be uncomfortable since we do not want to shut down all contacts, collaborations, and future invitations to discussion, and, for some women, this becomes equated with career issues. Why talk back or disagree, some may respond, when academic life — from publishing to jobs — hinges on maintaining good personal networks? Although I find this a depressing response, I recognize why the fear is there. Moreover, critique can seem a daunting prospect for all of us. Who wants to be criticized in print when our lives are so entangled with our writing, and when we invest so much of ourselves in our work? Who wants to be told that they had it ‘wrong’? No one enjoys this, myself included. After all, a book is not just a job done: it’s a labour of love. Interpretation and argument matter a great deal to us; they are not akin to fixing spelling mistakes in a memo, something we can leave at the office when we go home. We may also want to avoid conflict in order not to lose the sense
of common purpose and female support networks that have sustained us as feminist scholars. Last, but not least, it would be naive to think that reprisals for criticism never occur in academic life.

In terms of generation and experience, some of us may have to accept that certain criticisms come with age (unfortunately we are not simply seen as ‘wise women’) as a newer group of historians, reared in a different political milieu, will identify things we neglected, or separate themselves from approaches they see as outdated — the inevitable “old fogey” quandary, as Veronica Strong-Boag put it — though I suspect criticism will still be doled out to us disproportionately. No one enjoys being portrayed as a feminist dinosaur, a characterization I’ve seen directed against some fellow women’s studies professors by students in our regular ‘criticize the program’ meetings. And no one enjoys being socially constructed, after even one academic debate, as “contentious,” a “problem,” and so on, with those adjectives seemingly glued to one’s academic persona for life.

The solution to debatophobia, however, does not seem to me to be accommodation to a false consensus, which, as feminists found in political organizing, may actually result in one group claiming the high moral ground. Nor is it to resort to behind-the-scenes discussion (sometimes becoming gossip), which has a disproportionate impact in a small country. In academic life, there are many ways to establish a canon that excludes or diminishes without resorting to open criticism: by telling one’s graduate students not to bother reading certain authors (or just leaving them off reading lists), by ‘power citing’ (using footnotes to exclude), and by typcasting a person’s work according to their supposed politics or personality. These are all bad alternatives to a debate about what we actually write. They do not represent the type of engagement with ideas that we truly value; they do not reflect the intellectual excitement we feel as we puzzle through changing concepts; and they do not represent the reality that history is about interpretive and ideological difference. We can acknowledge the general contributions an author has made to the field, we can analyze the context in which they wrote, and we can make every effort not to misquote their words, but within those boundaries, critique is valid and necessary and, used effectively, it may help our collective project of developing an even richer, more complex, and exciting version of women’s history.
Sharp debate may have seemed disloyal at a time when women’s history was just finding its feet, but we are no longer standing on the margins, at least not simply because of our gender. True, we don’t want to become too complacent, since there are sometimes backlashes and pockets of antifeminism to contend with, but we can still recognize the considerable shifts that have transpired in the practice of history. We must also concede that that having women integrated into the profession is not the same as social equality; those women marginalized by class, race, or sexual orientation, those who have no access to universities and no hope of other education, remind us that we are a relatively privileged group. Within the small circles of higher education, however, the field of gender and women’s history has prospered, diversified, and expanded and can now boast a rich and varied history of its own. This should be cause for a celebration (not suppression) of our intellectual and ideological differences, which in turn can only tell new generations of historians that there is more work to be done, more arguments to question, more problems to solve. It is possible that our praxis will change over time, as we recognize how influential our ideas have become within the profession. Over the past thirty years, the impact of feminist organizing, thinking, and writing on scholarship has been significant; women are no longer ‘nonentities’ on the historical stage, and gender relations are seen as an important social category to integrate into our understanding of history. Innovative research that addresses new questions we never even thought about before, and that also revisits old problems we never solved, is appearing all the time. The more such work is published, the more debates about women’s history see the light of day, the richer our praxis is, the richer our legacy for the next generation of feminist historians.

Notes

I'm sure Ann Stoler thought we were picky, overly sensitive if not crazy Canadians when Bryan Palmer and I criticized her use of a Canadian book title to lead off an article with virtually no Canadian content in it, although it was about ‘North America.’ It is true, however, that other American books use ‘North America’ as a synonym for the United States and they do not understand why we get exercised about this. Bryan Palmer and Joan Sangster, “Letter to the Editor,” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 3 (2002): 1185–86.


On the ccwh, see Veronica Strong-Boag, *Work to Be Done: The Canadian Committee on Women’s History/Le Comité canadien de l’histoire des femmes* (Montreal: The Canadian Committee on Women’s History/Le Comité canadien de l’histoire des femmes, 1995).


Johanna den Hertog, “What Did They Fight For, How Did They Organize?” *Kinesis* (Sept. 1976): 13–17. Book reviews in *Kinesis* also reveal how little had been written even by the late 1970s, as they often reviewed British books on topics like the suffragettes, or more popular Canadian titles.


For example, the Irene Murdoch case concerning women’s right to marital property, or the legal fight for paid maternity leaves.


15 Ibid., 273.

16 There were some early biographies that could not just be dismissed as celebratory or un-analytical. See, for instance, Patricia T. Rooke and Rodolph L. Schnell, No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987). For a couple of examples of this recent use of biography, see Patricia Roome, “From One Whose Home Is Among the Indians: Henrietta Muir Edwards and Aboriginal Peoples,” in Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West Through Women’s History, ed. Sarah Carter et al. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 47–78; Jennifer Henderson, Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). Biography has also been used more recently, either as a means of describing a remarkable woman’s life in the context of her times or as a means of exploring the commemoration of certain women. On the former, see Faith Johnston, A Great Restlessness: The Life and Politics of Dorise Nielsen (Winnipeg: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), and on the latter, Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan, Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

17 It is also hard to define ‘adding women’ to history. Some more recent post-1995 books might seem to fit this bill too, yet they may well be excellent examples of the expansion of knowledge. For example, one could add or integrate women into the story of the political left through a biography, such as Johnston, A Great Restlessness, correct the history of Upper Canada by adding women in, as in Jane Errington, Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790–1840 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), or add women to the history of a region in order to reconceive its history, as in Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West Through Women’s History, ed. Sarah Carter et al. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005).


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 24–25.


Suzanne Morton, “Gender, Place and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History,” *Atlantis* 25, no. 2 (2000): 123. It seems undeniable that in Canadian history more generally a concern with region is less evident today than it was thirty years ago. In some cases, this has been replaced by a concern with ‘space and place,’ a term that can be used anywhere in Canada.


“There are still Canadian women historians who, despite plenty of evidence to the contrary, say that more attention to gender will undermine a politically edged women’s history. And that attention to race will mean abandoning women. . . . But only a few have publicly mocked efforts to build bridges across theoretical and generational differences” (210). No citation is given for these claims, which I think are not a fair reflection of the actual writing.


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Two examples of political economists doing history are Gillian Creese, “The Politics of Dependence: Women, Work and Unemployment in the Vancouver Labour Movement before World War II,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 13 (1988): 121–42; Alicia Muszynski, *Cheap Wage Labour: Race and Gender in the Fisheries of British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996). Although there were some important literary-influenced studies, such as those by Carole Gerson, this genre seemed less influential than political economy, though it may well be increasing with books like Henderson, *Settler Feminism*. This increased significance could have something to do with an interest in poststructuralist literary theory.

For a brief summary of the areas affected, including notions of what is knowable, the self, metanarratives, structural explanations, etc., see Mary Maynard, “Beyond the Big Three: The Development of Feminist Theory in the 1990s,” *Women’s History Review* 4, no. 3 (1995): 259–81.

For example, Geoff Eley and Keith Nield in *The Future of Class in History: What’s Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2007) claim that Joan Scott’s work “may have done more than any other single intervention to help bring the importance of feminist ideas from the barely tolerated sidelines of women’s history into the central territories of the discipline and profession of history” (118). This is rather hyperbolic and ignores many other feminist historians with different politics whose work was important. For the argument that earlier connections between the New Left, Marxism, and women’s history have been downplayed, see Sheila Rowbotham, “New Entry Points from USA Women’s Labour History,” in *Working Out Gender: Perspectives from Labour History*, ed. Margaret Walsh (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 12. For a critique of the conflation of women’s history and poststructuralism, see Barbara Epstein, “Why Poststructuralism Is a Dead End for Women,” *Socialist Review* 5 (1995): 83–119.

Mariana Valverde, “Some Remarks on the Rise and Fall of Discourse Analysis,” *Social History/Histoire sociale* 33, no. 65 (May 2000): 64. The fact that this kind of unverifiable (and in my view wrong) historiographical statement has gone virtually unchallenged is a reflection of the problem of ‘debatophobia’ discussed below.


Eley and Nield, *The Future of Class*, 17. This is a sophisticated treatment of the theoretical debates, but ultimately the authors do favour poststructuralism over what they revealingly call the “myopia of materialism” (77).
For some who are critical, see responses by Frederick Cooper and Judith Stein, “Farewell to the Working Class?” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 57 (Spring 2000): 1–30.

Eley and Nield, *The Future of Class*, 77, refer to the “myopia of materialism.”

Brandt, “Postmodern Patchwork,” 467.

Brandt, “Postmodern Patchwork.” Magda Fahrni suggests this is even more pronounced in Quebec, where other methods, such as quantitative work, have maintained more prominence. Fahrni, “Reflections on the Place of Quebec in Historical Writing in Canada,” in *Contesting Clio’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, ed. Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009).

See my discussion of book reviews in “Feminism and the Making” (146). This is only one example of this trend, however.

Moreover, even if gender is a focus for debate, it is possible that questions featured in Anglo-American debates may not be the same ones that ‘take’ in Latin America. Dutch feminist historian Mineke Bosch has similarly questioned the ways in which feminist historical debates are presumed to be ‘international’ in character. See Mineke Bosch, “Internationalism and Theory in Women’s History,” *Gender and History* 3, no. 2 (1991): 137.


See, for example, the special issue of *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006), and Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, “Ain’t I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 5, no. 3 (May 2004): 75–86.

Hester Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women’s Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009); Nancy Fraser, “Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History,” *New Left Review* 56 (March–April
2009): 97–117. It seems facile to say this, but it does appear that the political and economic context, including the recent meltdown of global capitalism, may have helped to shift feminist thinking, even for some who previously offered the same critiques of ‘metanarratives’ that they are now reconsidering.

58 Obviously, other nation-states are not completely monolithic entities, and the international literature on nationhood has had an important influence on Canadian scholarship. As Fahrni points out, French literature on commemoration has had an influence in Quebec. See “Reflections,” 7.


60 Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson, “Introduction: Debating the Future of Canadian History: Preliminary Answers to Uncommon Questions,” in Contesting Clio’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History, ed. Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009), xvii. They are referring to an article in the collection by Adele Perry. Even the endorsement on the book jacket from senior scholar Gerald Friesen notes wryly that this group gives ‘short shrift’ to their predecessors.

61 Again, one problem is that certain nations and points of view still dominate transnational histories: intellectual life is not immune to geopolitical power relations. Some borderland historians, for instance, question if these comparative projects will actually shake off the dominance of the English-speaking, Anglo-American academic world, and historians of the ‘third world’ rightly question whether transnational histories will unsettle the hegemonies of north-south, colonizer-colonized, ‘the West and the rest,’ and the prevailing structures of intellectual and cultural power. See Christopher Ebert Schmidt-Nowara, “Response to Borders and Borderlands,” American Historical Review 104, no. 4 (Oct. 1999): 1226–28; Frederick Cooper, “Conflict and Contention: Rethinking Colonial African History,” American Historical Review 99, no. 5 (1994): 1517.


70 Fahrni, “Reflections,” 17.

71 Jill Vickers, “Feminisms and Nationalisms in English Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35, no. 3 (2000): 128–43. I suspect the problem is also generational, for feminists politically active in the 1970s were more invested in the ‘Quebec question.’ When I pointed out to a younger scholar that Quebec was considered an issue of ‘colonialism’ in the 1970s, I was told that I needed to reflect on why I had “repressed” the real ‘race’ question of the time, i.e., whiteness.


Friedman, “Making History,” 35.

Dummitt, “After Inclusiveness.”

Dummitt and Dawson, “Introduction,” x.


It may appear that by calling for the continual reassessment of our interpretations and how they are constructed and justified, I am embracing a poststructuralist endorsement of ‘indeterminacy.’ I don’t think so: one can continually interrogate all seemingly accepted truths while still holding to certain notions of advancement. This openness to constant reassessment, in fact, has been part of a historical materialist tradition. See E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978). Nor I am suggesting that any explanation goes: there are better explanations, substantiated by evidence, that are a closer reconstruction of the past. See Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: Norton, 1994).


Janice Fiamengo, “A Legacy of Ambivalence: Responses to Nellie McClung,” in Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History, 4th ed., ed. Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleason, and Adele Perry (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2002), 152–53. Where a piece of writing appears also matters a great deal. If it is in a reader used by hundreds of students over a number of years, this makes a difference.


Ibid., 153–54. For example, she cites Wayne Roberts’s writing as a possible exception to this emphasis on celebration.


Ibid., xviii.

Ibid., xvii.

Ibid., xvii–xviii.


One exception was Bryan D. Palmer, “Historiographic Hassles: Class and Gender, Evidence and Interpretation,” Social History/Histoire sociale 33, no. 65 (May 2000): 105–44.

Lykke de la Cour, Cecilia Morgan, Mariana Valverde, “Gender Regulation and State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Canada,” in Allan Greer and Ian
102 Mariana Valverde, “Post-Structuralist Historians: Are We Those Names?” Labour/Le Travail 25 (Spring 1990): 229, 236. It is important to note that she sees Riley more positively than she does Joan Scott, whose work she treats more critically, including Scott’s failure to discuss problems with discourse analysis.


104 These are two notable examples, but not the only ones. Carolyn Strange, Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Cecilia Morgan, Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791–1850 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).


106 Ibid.

107 Michael Bliss, “Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, the Sundering of Canada,” Journal of Canadian Studies 26, no. 4 (1991–92): 5–17; J.R. Miller, “I Can Only Tell What I Know: Shifting Notions of Historical Understanding in the 1990s,” in Reflections on Native-Newcomer Relations (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 61–81. Because so much has been written on Bliss, I am concentrating here on the second piece, for which I have only the published version. I requested the unpublished one, but Jim Miller no longer has a copy. Note that while Parr uses words like “ferocious and hostile” to characterize critics generally, but not Miller and Bliss specifically, these are the only two historians cited.

108 Note that, in the published version at least, Miller does not quote von Ranke as his guide, but rather as an influence on historians. In Parr’s piece, it is phrased this way: “He takes as his guide Leopold von Ranke” (358).


111 Parr, “Gender History,” 373.
112 Ibid., 362.


114 Ibid.


119 In the words of one author, not only essentializing but ‘tribalizing’: Craig Ireland, “The Appeal to Experience and Its Consequences: Variations on a Persistent Thompsonian Theme,” Cultural Critique 52 (Autumn 2002): 86–107.

120 Experience was a key focus of debates between Thompson and others, ranging from Louis Althusser to Stuart Hall. For a discussion of these, see E.P. Thompson, “The Politics of Theory,” in People’s History and Socialist Theory, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 396–408.

121 Eley and Nield, The Future of Class.


See Linda Gordon’s review of *Gender and the Politics of History* and Joan Scott’s review of *Heroes of Their Own Lives* and their responses in *Signs* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1990): 848–60.


Jhappan, “Post-Modern Race and Gender Essentialism.”


Strong-Boag, *Work to Be Done*. 

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