

BOOK REVIEWS

Gerda Lerna, *Living with History/Making Social Change* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

Living with History/Making Social Change provides an intellectual and personal biography of American historian Gerda Lerner, the author of twelve books in Women's History, and one of the scholars responsible for the re-founding of the field in the 1960s. The twelve essays, six of which have been published before, provide a delightful description of how the personal and the political, the emotional, the professional and the intellectual, were intertwined in the life of this eminent historian who spent her life working with considerable success towards the goal of creating social, political and institutional change for the better. The book is also a social history of the later twentieth century with a thoughtful description and overview of the time when women were not welcome in the academic world of historians, either as professionals or as historical subjects. Ranging over a vast variety of ideas, events, causes and convictions, Gerda Lerner explores the complex collective issues effecting women as a difficult-to-define group inside and outside the academy, all the while articulating (somewhat paradoxically) just how one person made a such a significant impact on the world of history and history education. As she puts it, "My passionate commitment to Women's History was grounded in my life." (30)

And what a life! Gerda Lerner was born in Vienna in 1920. As a young Jewish woman of affluent background and good education coming of age with the rise of Nazi Germany, she read widely and was involved in the anti-fascist response to the changing political times. As a teenager she was briefly imprisoned in a Nazi jail, where she learned "from my cell mates that political action meant working with others. One could not survive alone." (2) Her family escaped from Vienna in the late 1930s, and Lerna later moved to New York, where she experienced sexism, racism and anti-immigrant prejudices as she found work as a domestic, as an office worker, as a salesgirl, and much later, as a medical technician, "always at minimum wage [or below] and without job security." (2) In the 1950s she became a wife and mother, but her political education continued with her work as community organizer on a variety of issues within her poor, mixed-race neighbourhood. Her husband, like many of her friends, was blacklisted for radical behaviour during the McCarthy era, another factor which "shaped my mind and thought prior to my embarking on an academic career." (3)

That academic career began in 1963, when, at the age of forty-three, she entered Columbia University. As she explains, it was the only place where the Chair of the history department was prepared to 'bend the rules' so that she could write her dissertation on her topic of choice: a political biography of the Grimke

sisters. Asked on her application to Columbia why she wanted to study history, she replied “I want Women’s History to be legitimate, to be part of every curriculum on every level, and I want people to be able to take PhDs in the subject and not have to say they are doing something else.” (29) The uphill battles that this goal entailed occupied much of her academic career, first getting off to a good start in graduate school, where she “could not accept the content of the curriculum, the worldview I was being taught.” (29) As she explains when describing her culture-shock on first encountering women in the academic world, “In one of the best graduate schools in the country, I was presented with a history of the past in which women did not seem to exist, except for a few rulers...” (29)

The book is divided into three sections, “Redefining the Profession of History”, “Doing History” and “Living in History.” Each of them charts the different ways in which Lerner blended theory and practice in her work as a historian and social activist, whether in her work with African American women and Women’s History in New York, reforming history curricula in the various universities where she held positions, developing workshops for “deviant-out-groups”, contemplating the challenges and possibilities of ‘holistic history’ or of women in world history, or working with historians to lobby for women academic’s inclusion in national history conferences, in university faculties and in the editorial boards of scholarly journals (all of which took years of more and less bitter struggle). And all the while she was working to promote change in a variety of academic and grass roots communities, she was writing and teaching a history in which women were integral.

I would strongly recommend this as an informative and inspiring read, not only for those interested in Gerda Lerner and Women’s History, but for anyone interested in the myriad ways that historians can play a vital and positive role in the world.

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Ivana Caccia, *Managing the Canadian Mosaic in Wartime* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010).

Over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century, one of the major policy issues that confronted the Canadian state was certainly the issue of citizenship. The most recent manifestation of citizenship policy is the creation of a new Canadian citizenship guide, “Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship”, published in March of 2010. The guide was notable for what it omitted as much as for what information was included for prospective citizens to “know.”

Preparing prospective Canadian citizens now mainly involves a certain