THE CHANGING VOICE OF LEFT HISTORY: NEW LEFT JOURNALS AND RADICAL AMERICAN HISTORY

by

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Abstract

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This thesis is an analysis of three scholarly journals of radical history that gave voice to a new revisionist perspective on the American past initially referred to as "New Left" history and later simply as radical history. It was this radical history that provided the first major challenge to the so-called Consensus school that dominated the historical profession during the fifties and sixties.

Young radical historians who burst onto the scene in the late sixties presented a view of the past which emphasized class, and social and economic conflict. They sought to create a "usable past" that would account for the country's many problems and would serve as the basis for reforming American society. In viewing American society through the eyes of the inarticulate, they saw a means to rediscover the inherent radicalism of the American past. During the past three decades this attempt to reinterpret the American past from a radical perspective has undergone significant modification and change as radical history has moved from the fringes of the profession to the mainstream of historical scholarship. As well, from the beginnings of this left history to the present, these scholars have been forced to grapple with the meaning of radical history and the role of the radical historian as activist and scholar.

The primary task of this presentation is to show how three generations of radical historians attempted to answer these questions in light of the shifting concerns that influenced their responses. *Studies on the Left*, *Radical America*, and the *Radical History Review* provided a major outlet for these historians to voice their very different approaches as they searched to find a radical American past. In addition, tracing their history from the sixties to the present provides a valuable way to assess the past and present state of radical history in the United States.

While these historians have succeeded in broadening the scope of American history by adding the voices of those previously excluded, such as women, blacks and the working class, and while their alternative view of that past helped to restore some excitement to the study of an American history that was no longer the preserve of the "Great White Men", they have not provided any definitive answers in their attempts to define themselves as intellectuals and to establish a common view of their role as radical historians. As they try to distinguish themselves from the mainstream of the profession, and continue to debate the meaning of the word radical, they are still bedevilled by the tensions between their activist and scholarly identities.

As their definition of themselves as radicals becomes more pluralistic and as the place of radical history in the profession continues to diminish, what remains of this once highly controversial threat to the orthodox canons of the profession continues to struggle forward into the future seeking ways to develop a role that is, according to their sole remaining organ, the *Radical History Review*, "scholarly and activist, radical and historical, seeking to both understand the world and to change it."

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The Changing Voice of Left History: New Left Journals and Radical American History

In the late 1960s, the emergence of a new radical history was seen by many as one of the most significant trends in the recent development of the historical profession in the United States. For the next decade, controversy over this "New Left" history would dominate virtually all discussions of the discipline, in some cases becoming so heated that confrontations at two annual conventions of the American Historical Association threatened to dissolve into physical violence and actually did involve some minor scuffles.[1] This new revisionist history burst onto the scene in a significant way in 1967. In that year, the annual convention of the Organization of American Historians held a session on New Left history which proved to be very popular. In the same year, the paper presented by Irwin Unger at that session was published in the *American Historical Association Review*[2] contrary to the advice of David Donald who argued that it should not be published because "the historians whose work [Unger] discussed were not of sufficient consequence to merit extended consideration in the pages of our major professional journal."[3] Despite Donald's advice and despite the fact that such "state of the profession" historiographical articles in the *AHR* were quite rare, the editors of this prestigious journal considered the topic to be of sufficient importance to publish the article.

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[1] See accounts by James Gilbert, *The Nation* (Jan. 20, 1969); Ronald Radosh, *The Nation* (Feb. 2,1970); James Weinstein, *Socialist Revolution* (July-Aug., 1970); R.R. Palmer, *American Historical Review,* 76 (Feb. 1971).

[2] "The New Left and American History: Some Recent Trends in United States Historiography," *American Historical Review,* 72 (July 1967): 1237-62.

[3] David Donald, review of *Towards a New Past* edited by Barton J. Bernstein, *American Historical Review*, 74 (Dec. 1968), 531.

The following year saw the publication of a collection of essays, *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History,*[4] written by a group of young historians who willingly accepted the labels of "radical" and "New Left." According to the editor, Barton J. Bernstein, the collection was an attempt to expose to a wider audience a wave of revisionist historiography that had remained tucked away in historical journals or had been restricted to university monographs beyond the public's reach. As Bernstein went on to proclaim, "the resulting essays represent the revisionism in process during the late sixties"; "they represent the new departures of recent years and a break with the older consensus history."[5] As an "anti-text," the book immediately attracted a considerable amount of interest. It was prominently but not always favourably reviewed in non-disciplinary publications such as the *New York Times* and the *New York Review of Books* as well as in the major historical journals.[6] In the *American Historical Review*, it was the subject of review essays by two prominent historians, one of the rare occasions that this journal had bestowed such attention on a single scholarly publication.[7]

In addition to the Bernstein collection, there were other indications that New Left history had moved to the centre of historical attention. A second, less well known but important, anthology of radical history edited by Alfred Young[8] was published in 1968 and a historiographical article on the

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[4] Barton Bernstein, ed., (New York, Random House, 1968).

[5] *Ibid*, p. x.

[6] C. Vann Woodward, *New York Review of Books* (Aug.1,1968); John Garraty, *New York Times Book Review* (May 12, 1968); *Journal of American History*, 55 (Sept. 1968).

[7] Aileen Kraditor and David Donald, *AHR*, 74 (Dec. 1968): 529-33.

[8] Alfred Young, *Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 1968).

importance of New Left history, published in the same year, predicted that these would be only "the first of many New Left anthologies."[9] This prediction proved to be accurate as several new anthologies appeared in the early seventies. As well, New Left historians found their work being published in standard collections of interpretative essays on the American past.[10]

Finally, at the 1969 meeting of the AHA convention, most of the historians who came expecting to meet old friends, to look for jobs or perhaps to listen to an occasional paper spent most of their time in business meetings where a newly formed "Radical Caucus" tried to overthrow the "Establishment" and take over the Association. For the first time in its history there was a contest for the presidency of the organization, and although the "Establishment" candidate won, a third of the votes went to Staughton Lynd, the Radical nominee. Historians bitterly debated Radical resolutions calling for an end to the war in Vietnam and the immediate withdrawal of American troops. These proposals were ultimately rejected by the narrow vote of 647 to 611. But as one of the historians attending the conference recalled, when the exhausted scholars ended the convention, "Radicals were already planning for the 1970 meeting in Boston." This sense of purpose seemed to be very much on the mind of one radical scholar who remarked as he left Washington, "I don't envy Mr. R. Palmer," the "Establishment" candidate and Professor of history at Yale.[11] There could be

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[9] Willard Hogeboom, "The New Left and the Revision of American History," *The History Teacher* (Nov. 1968): 55.

[10] One of these anthologies was produced by Irwin Unger, the historian who was one of the first to condemn these historians. See Irwin Unger, *Beyond Liberalism: The New Left Views American History* (New York, Ginn & Co., 1971); See also, Blanche Wiesen Cook et al, *Past Imperfect, vol I & vol II* (New York, Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1973); Gerald Grob and George Allan Billias, *Interpretations of American History*, 2nd ed. (New York, The Free Press, 1972).

[11] David Donald, *New York Review of Books* (July 19, 1970): 1.

little doubt that it was virtually impossible for anyone concerned with the historical profession to ignore the emergence of "New Left" history.

At the heart of this contentious debate regarding the very nature of the discipline was a group of young left-oriented historians who came to be capitalized, reified, and often tacitly homogenized as "New Left historians." But as Peter Novick has concluded, "This was a largely empty and misleading designation, lumping together individuals of the most diverse orientation, and often, innocently or maliciously, associating them with the most extreme wing of the student movement." And as he goes on to add, although some of these young historians had ties to the political or student "New Left", at least as many "had no connection with the movement or viewed it with a jaundiced eye."[12]

While the new left historiography and the student New Left had some common roots, there were significant differences between the two. Although both groups were influenced by many of the same sources of dissatisfaction and rebelliousness of the sixties– the mindlessness of politics in the Eisenhower years, the first stirrings of opposition to the nuclear arms race, awareness of the problems arising from racism, urbanism and poverty, and an admiration for the commitment to the civil rights movement by blacks in the South– new left historiography had unique grievances and a special sense of urgency. As historians, these young radicals were in agreement with a prominent Establishment historian that "history as currently written is bland, banal or Philistine, that it is often morally obtuse, aesthetically archaic and intellectually insipid."[13] They accused their predecessors,

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[12]Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 418.

[13]Donald, "Radical Historians," p.1.

the "Consensus historians"–as they labelled the middle-aged leaders of the profession–of contributing to the present crisis in American society by fostering a cheerily optimistic view of the American past, minimizing political, social and economic conflict, and failing to explain the current debasement of the quality of American life.

As well, many of these left historians who earned their doctorates in the late 1950s or early 1960s came from a background which involved them in Old Left political activity in the fifties. The degree of involvement varied from youthful "red romper- room" participation in the Communist Party for James Weinstein, Staughton Lynd and Eugene Genovese, to involvement of someone such as Jesse Lemisch with the social-democratic Student League for Industrial Democracy. Others, like Barton Bernstein and Christopher Lasch, can best be described as "left liberals," critical of American liberalism but without anything that could be called a socialist commitment. As Peter Novick has suggested, there were some distinctions to be noted between this first cohort and those radical historians who came along a few years later. "The sensibility of the former group had been shaped in the fifties, and they were, for the most part culturally very "straight" whereas those who came along later...were more likely to display a counter cultural sensibility, and were more likely...to have an activist orientation."[14]

As Barton Bernstein argued in his introduction to *Towards a New Past*, the term New Left as applied to these young historians defied precise definition. Still he suggested, "the term does denote a group of various "left" views–whether they be Marxist, neo-Beardian, radical or left liberal." Thus in this loose sense, "it links some of the more exciting young historians whose work has broken with the earlier consensus, and understood in that way the concept is useful and

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[14] Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 419-20.

meaningful."[15] Even Irwin Unger in his critical assessment of their work admitted that what constituted good credentials for New Left historians was difficult to say. "Members of the New Left do not carry party cards; nor do they always acknowledge their affiliation." And, as he goes on to add, "The young radicals know what they reject, and in fact, their dislikes are often what most satisfactorily defines them. They are not, however, as clear about what they accept." As a consequence, the past they create is "a panorama as complex as the pluralistic history the young radicals would refute."[16]

Despite significant generational and ideological differences among these scholars, which made it difficult to establish a clear understanding of their identity, this new intellectual community developed a critique of, and an alternative to, the way the American past had been constructed. Some used a Marxian framework in their analysis of that society. Beginning with the assumption, "that the root of great qualitative leaps in social development are to be sought in the rise, development and confrontation of social classes," they organized their work around issues of class relations and ideology.[17] Even though their work frequently employed Marxist categories, it was, Novick tells us, "most notable for its "heterodoxy." The concept of corporate liberalism had no precedent in classical texts; studies of the working class movement were largely "culturalist" rather than "economistic"; and the work of Genovese and his associates on the slave South stressed the errors and inadequacies of treatments of these subjects by Marx and Engels. As he goes on to conclude, "In their innovative use of the Marxian legacy, and in their break with some of the more

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[15] Bernstein, *Towards A New Past*, p. x.

[16] Unger, "The New Left," 1249.

[17] Eugene Genovese, *In Red and Black* (New York, Random House, 1968), p. 19.

discreditable aspects of that legacy, the young leftist historians were certainly new."[18]

Many others of these historians did not adopt a Marxian view but they all took these issues of class and ideology seriously. Unlike those in the reigning neo-Conservative tradition, which emphasized consensus, continuity and stability, these historians saw social and economic conflict as the major themes in American history. Disenchanted with consensus scholars "for accepting, and even eulogizing, a society where poverty is tolerated because it is presumed to be transient; where racial discrimination is permissible because it too *will* pass away; where political conflict is muted, since everybody agrees upon every thing . . . ," they presented a radical critique of American society and took a more cynical view of the American past.[19] As radical historians they sought to create "a usable past"–a history that would account for many of the country's social and political problems and would serve as the basis for reforming American society. By making an effort to examine the past through the eyes of the common people – "from the bottom up"– they saw a means to rediscover the inherent radicalism in the nation's past. Unlike their mainstream liberal colleagues who affirmed the basic correctness of American institutions, these radical historians sought alternatives to these institutions and focussed on the sources of social change. As one radical scholar described them, "In general, radical historians have focussed on issues of exploitation, domination and oppression; they have argued that existing patterns of domination are not natural or immutable but have historical origins." And, as he goes on to add, "In seeking these historical origins, they have focussed on ordinary people rather than political elites, on groups rather than individuals, and on human agency

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[18] Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 421-422.

[19] Donald, "Radical Historians," p.1.

rather than on abstract or general processes of change."[20]

As a new generation of radical historians matured in the seventies and eighties, and as new subjects and methods developed in response to intellectual and political changes in the previous decade, radical history underwent many changes. Significant numbers of these young scholars entered one or another subdivision of social history hoping to emulate the work done by E.P. Thompson in British working class history. For others, intellectually and politically shaped by the civil rights, anti-war and feminist movements, the time had come to remedy the neglect of popular history and of the general public by creating a public or people's history that would generate a more critical historical consciousness in the United States. Another significant group, reflecting the changing gender composition of the profession, turned to the study of the history of women or to feminist history.

While it is important to determine who these historians were and what kind of history they wrote, it is equally if not more important to examine their impact on subsequent historical writing. Despite the wide range of radical scholarship, their view of the American past never attained the importance or cohesion of the Progressive or neo-Conservative interpretations. This inability to produce a coherent or cohesive interpretation seems to have been the inevitable consequence of the diversity of backgrounds and interests that characterized these historians. As one critic explained, "that body of scholarship as a whole was something less than the sum of its parts." With no overall synthetic work to embody its new perspective, it was never able to constitute the historical component of that "alternative world view" that many leftists had hoped for. Thus, despite the

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[20] Jonathan M. Wiener, "Radical Historians and the Crisis in American History, 1959-1980," *Journal of American History*, 76 (Sept. 1989): 399.

optimism and confidence of these historians that they were on a steady march to historiographical triumph, radical history ultimately failed to achieve the potential many had expected of it.[21]

While radical history failed to fulfill its full potential, nevertheless it has been a significant factor in the continuing reinterpretation of the American past. Thanks in large part to the work of these historians, American history is no longer solely the story of the rich and powerful, of the white and male. In place of a history viewed largely from the top down through the eyes of the dominant elite "the Great White Men", there is a "history from below" which incorporates the "inarticulate" and "outsiders" into its narrative. As leftist historians have found increasing acceptance within the mainstream of the historical profession and as radical history has acquired greater acceptability and respectability as a legitimate approach to the past, one can no longer readily conclude that "By combining politics with history, the 'radicals' have ceased being historians."[22] Indeed, as the historical profession redefined the field in a way that opened the door to a radical conception of the significant problems in the American past, it would no longer be willing to accept the judgment of one early critic that, "Very often, however, radical history is something that never happened, written by someone who was not there."[23]

During the past three decades the concept of a radical American history has undergone substantial modification and change. From its roots in the late fifties to the present time, radical scholars have continuously grappled with the problem of defining radical history and explaining the

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[21] Novick, *That Noble Dream*, pp. 438-39.

[22] Scott L. Gibson, "Radical Trends in American Historiography," *Michigan Academician*, (Spring, 1973): 463.

[23] *Ibid.*, p 463.

role of the radical historian. This concern is even more relevant at the present time as radical history seems to have largely disappeared from the shifting historiographical landscape to be replaced by such post-modern developments as the "linguistic turn" or the current fascination of historians in the United States and elsewhere with memory and agency.

However, notwithstanding these developments, left historians still exist and still continue to debate the questions, "What is radical?"and "What is radical history?"[24] The answers to these questions are far from definitive and have undergone significant revision as three generations of radical historians have engaged in debate about them over the past thirty years. In order to understand the meaning and consequence of this debate for the writing of American history, this study will attempt to analyse and clarify its progress from its origins in the early sixties to the present time. In doing so, it will focus on the changing mind set of these left historians and will undertake to clarify how this shifting intellectual context was reflected in their notions of radical history as it moved from the margins to the mainstream of American history. The primary material to be employed in this investigation will be the three most influential journals that became the voices of New Left History – *Studies on the Left*, *Radical America* and the *Radical History Review*. Representing respectively three different generations of radical historians, these journals provided a major outlet for these young scholars to express their unique and differing approaches in the search to find a distinctive American past. These journals are collectively, an excellent instrument which can be employed to comprehend the attempt to create a radical American history.

Ever since the establishment of the *American Historical Review* in 1895, scholarly periodicals have played an important role in the development of the historical profession in the

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[24] *Radical History Review*, Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes, (27 September1997).

United States. They have provided a mechanism for communication among scholars working in the discipline and have allowed them to keep informed about current research. As a practical instrument for the regulation of the "scholarly record" these journals help to define what knowledge is considered legitimate. When an article is published in a journal it is given a stamp of legitimacy and, depending on the reach and importance of the journal, the article becomes part of a wider body of shared professional knowledge. In this way these periodicals are among the main "gatekeepers" that determine the access of scholars to this collective record. Anyone seeking to research a question or an argument will search this body of material to find out who has worked on it before, what has been established and what the alternative school of thought might be. As well as scholarly articles, book reviews and other types of bibliographical information enable historians to discover what is being researched and published in their fields. As one study of the development of history journals has concluded, "The professional contribution of the scholarly periodical is twofold; it expands the corpus of knowledge in the field, and it facilitates evaluation of that corpus by its book reviews and by the selection of the articles it publishes." As the author goes on to add, "The possibility of publication is in itself a stimulation to research and writing, to a contribution to the discipline's intellectual base."[25]

As well, as a byproduct of their professional contribution, scholarly journals have acquired an important role in establishing professional status. Peer-reviewed articles in respected journals are a key component of the building of an academic reputation. For an individual historian, publication in a scholarly journal provides evidence for the peer evaluation of colleagues that is an essential

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[25] Margaret F. Stein, *The Origin and Development of Scholarly Periodicals* (Birmingham: The University of Alabama Press, 1986), p. 17.

element in the academic career process. As one editor of such a publication has stated, ". . . peer-reviewed journals are gatekeepers for professional advancement and status . . . . In controlling access to the scholarly record, journals also control access to the profession, or at least to its inner circles and upper ranks."[26]

One of the most interesting aspects of the radicalism of the 1960s was the way in which almost every academic discipline created journals of opinion to voice the spirit of dissent and social change that drove the movement. History was no exception as the discipline witnesses the creation of five journals to represent the "new" historiographical left. As noted above, three of these journals provide the base for this study: *Studies on the Left*, the first and perhaps most influential of these periodicals; *Radical America*, the primary vehicle of the second wave of New Left history and a major link with the student movement; and finally, the first journal devoted exclusively to radical history which is still publishing today, the *Radical History Review*.[27]

The first of these journals, *Studies on the Left*, was begun by graduate students at the University of Wisconsin in 1959. Although the journal was not devoted specifically to history, many of its editors were historians, and, particularly in its earliest days, its pages were dominated by historical articles. It is not surprising that this university was the site of the first voice of the new radical history. Throughout the 1950s, it had been something of a Progressive holdout against the triumphal march of consensus historiography. Its faculty included a number of neo-Beardians, namely

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[26] Brett Fairbairn, "The Present and Future of Historical Journals," *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, 27 (Jan. 1996): 61.

[27] *Marxist Perspectives* and *Socialist Revolution* (now *The Socialist Review*) were the other periodicals. The first was excluded because of its short life span - only ten issues. The second was more interested in contemporary problems and attracted a circle of left academics outside of the historical profession.

Howard Beale, Merrill Jensen and Merle Curtis, who in various ways served as models to the graduate students, many of whom were New York Jews of leftist background. Spurred on by "the founding father" of the new radical history, William A. Williams, who had come to Madison in 1957, these young scholars first tried to work out their dual role as historians and radicals in successive issues of *Studies* so that its pages are an important record of their first attempts at self-definition.

These young historians helped to launch a revisionism that profoundly altered the historical profession in the United States through their "radicalism of disclosure." A major component of this interpretation was the "corporate liberalism" thesis that ultimately suggested that the central theme of American history was the global expansion of American capitalism. But there was a deeper tension within the journal and among radical historians.[28] The conflict was between those who saw their primary identity as "activists" and those who defined themselves primarily as "scholars." According to Peter Novick, the "activist" group of left historians in the universities, whose leading figures were Staughton Lynd, Howard Zinn and Jesse Lemisch, was on the whole younger, included many graduate students, and was more counter-cultural; the second group included more members with a Communist background, was somewhat better established and included Eugene Genovese, Christopher Lasch and James Weinstein among its leading spokesmen.[29] The differences between the two groups became increasingly important in the course of the 1960s as civil rights and anti-war organizing dominated the protest movement. In particular, the tension between these two factions became a major focus for the editors of *Studies* after it moved to New York in 1963. At first the editors saw their role as radical historians as being essentially intellectual. As objective scholars their goal was to analyse and appraise

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[28] "The Ultra-Right and Cold War Liberalism," *Studies on the Left,* III (1, 1962): 3-8.

[29] Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 428.

the whole of American culture. In pursuing this objective, the emphasis was to be exclusively on understanding America and its institutions; the job of actually changing America should be left to others. Although their history would eventually aid the movement, their role was to write it disinterestedly and objectively.

It was not long before this view was challenged by the "activist" camp which saw little distinction between intellectual activity and practical organizing. In their view, the emphasis was no longer to be on analysing and understanding America and its institutions but rather on participatory democracy in which individuals "think and work as radicals" and in which "everyone is a leader."[30] On the eve of the "American October", analytical scholarship was beside the point; one needed to stop thinking and act. Ultimately the battles between these two factions led to the death of *Studies* in 1967.

This debate among the editors of *Studies* was repeated among radical historians throughout the 1960s and led to disruptions at a gathering of the Socialist Scholars Conference as well as the famous 1969 convention of the American Historical Association. After all these squabbles the question that still remained unanswered was, "What does radical scholarship look like?" For those historians who took the non-activist position, it was History which, although often controversial, adhered to the traditional canons of the profession. Activists on the other hand, became more and more marginal to the profession and some, like Staughton Lynd, finally concluded that the study of history had little to contribute to the movement and left the profession completely .

Just as *Studies* was fading from the scene, a second journal that would speak to the subject of radical history was born at the University of Wisconsin. *Radical America* began as a historically oriented periodical with ties to the Students for a Democratic Society, the major organization of young

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[30] "Up From Irrelevance," *Studies on the Left*, V (Winter, 1965): 6.

American new leftists. It was largely the creation of a young history graduate student, Paul Buhle, who brought the journal with him when he came to Madison in 1967. "Not only in Madison but nationally," as Buhle recalled, "we inherited a radical graduate student enthusiasm that *Studies* had helped build."[31] Despite the ties between the journals in location and constituency, they took different political and intellectual paths. The product of a generation that grew up in the midst of rebellion, with a different perspective on the past, *Radical America* represented the next generation of scholarship, "the impulse to relocate the hidden sources of resistance, the social sources of radicalism in factory conditions and community life."[32] For these young historians, the appearance of actual radicalism on an impressive scale in the late sixties intensified a feeling that too much emphasis had been placed by the "Williams Generation" of graduate students on the powers of the rulers to manipulate at will. "Instead," as Roy Rosenzweig suggests, "*Radical America* stressed the importance of a strand of indigenous American radicalism." It enthusiastically took up the slogan "history from the bottom up," popularized E.P. Thompson's idea of class and advocated a Marxism that drew heavily on the work of the West Indian scholar and activist, C.L.R. James."[33]

In 1971, Buhle moved the journal to Boston and in this new environment it started to shift away from a central focus on historical questions to issues of labour, community organizing and a feminism which argued for a revolutionary women's movement built around working class women. With Buhle's departure from the editorial collective in 1973, all that remained was another "little

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[31] Paul Buhle, ed., *History and the New Left* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990), p. 221.

[32] "Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (3, 1982): 3.

[33] Roy Rosenzweig, "Radical History Review and American Radical Historians," *Gesichtswerkstatt* (Aug. 1988): 6.

political magazine" very different from the periodical that began publishing in 1968. Although its impact on the profession was less powerful than *Studies on the Left*, it represented another major attempt to come to grips with the issue of radical history and at the very least Buhle suggests, "*Radical America* succeeded in imparting the importance of working-class, black and women's history in providing clues to the unique character of American social struggles."[34]

When the third journal, the *Radical History Review*, began publishing in 1975 it quickly established itself as the primary publication for radical historians in the United States. *RHR* shared many personal, intellectual and political links with *Radical America*. Initially, it continued to see E.P. Thompson as a major role model and embraced his attempts to develop a distinctive Marxist historiography that allowed for contingency, focussed on "lived experience" and the "agency" of those at "the bottom of society." But despite this and other similarities including counter-cultural styles in dress, drug use, hair and music – the jeans and long hair of the male editors of both journals sharply differentiated them from their "straighter" predecessors at *Studies on the Left*– *RHR* was really a "post-New Left publication." The views of its editorial collective were shaped during the later New Left period which saw the end of American involvement in Vietnam and the subsequent collapse of the anti-war movement. As Roy Rosenzweig recalled, "If the editors of *RA* as well as one group among the *Studies* editors had often shifted to being activists rather than scholars, the editors of *RHR* were often making the opposite transition."[35] But just as more and more young historians decided to carry out an activist agenda through teaching and scholarship, it became increasingly difficult to do so. Disheartened by the collapse of the mass social movements, meagre employment opportunities and

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[34] Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p. 5.

[35] Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review*," p. 7.

a resurgent right which had radical historians under attack and on the defensive, they found it necessary to "develop new conceptions of our place in and outside the academy and how we connect with each other."[36] Despite this identity crisis and a significant financial crisis which reached a point at which the journal almost went out of business in 1984, the community of radical scholars continued to grow and diversify its focus. As it struggled to define the meaning of radical history it acquired an increasing interest in history outside the university. As a result, *RHR* was one of the first journals to take an active interest in how history was being presented in non-academic settings. From the start, the journal reported on and assessed what has sometimes been called, "people's history"– the efforts to encourage a progressive, accessible and frequently oppositional historical vision in a variety of community and organizational contexts. This reflected an interest in how history could be used in politically empowering ways through community or labour-based history projects, exhibits and documentaries. A second public history focus saw the journal critically analyse the myths and distortions offered as history in the form of "scholarly monographs, high school textbooks, television docudramas, corporate-funded museums, Hollywood extravaganzas or Bicentennial sugar packets."[37] Both of these forms of public history arose from *RHR*'s commitment to develop and disseminate a critical historical consciousness as a key role of radical history.

Nevertheless, the principal focus of the journal has been scholarly and intellectual. Throughout its history, issues of the journal have been filled with historical scholarship in a variety of forms including interviews, debates and forums, book reviews and scholarly articles. Although as Roy Rosenzweig has observed, "In the range of concerns reflected in these pieces, the *RHR* has both

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[36] *Radical History Review*, 28-30 (1984): 6.

[37] "Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 25 (1981): 4.

led and followed the direction of historical and political writing." Above all, "it has approached that history from an "engaged, critical, political stance."[38] With an increasingly international and global perspective, the journal now engages a wide variety of historical fields– women and gender, gay and lesbian, race and ethnicity, working-class and labour, culture and politics – in many regions of the world. As it continues to analyse these topics from an oppositional perspective it has remained faithful to its original mandate to develop alternative interpretations of the American past that allow left historians to explore the "intersections between the radical and the historical."[39]

As it approaches its twenty-fifth anniversary, *RHR* is in many ways a very different journal from the modest publication of its early years when it was typed, laid out and stapled together by members of the collective. Now published by Cambridge University Press, it has the appearance and respectability of other professional history journals. The editorial collective responsible for the journal is no longer dominated by male Americanists connected to New York, specifically Columbia University. Female members now make up a majority of the collective and there have been aggressive efforts to recruit non-white historians and historians of the non-Western world. As well, in recent years, the collective has become younger and more diverse as a number of graduate students and scholars from outside the academic world have been added.

Although this periodical is now a well-established presence in the historical community, it continues to reassess its position as a journal of radical history. In particular, as a consequence of the increasing acceptance of leftist historians into the mainstream of the profession, much of what has been published in the journal could just as easily have appeared in the most respected historical

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[38] Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review*," p. 14.

[39] "New Directions for MARHO," *Radical History Review*, 2 (3, 1975): 1.

periodicals. "Among conservative American historians," Rosenzweig tells us, "a joke has recently circulated suggesting that the *Radical History Review* has undertaken a 'leveraged buyout' of the *Journal of American History*."[40] As that journal has acquired features that had previously characterized *RHR*, the editorial collective has been forced to reconsider its mission as a journal of radical history. In renewing a debate that occupied the early newsletters of MARHO (Mid Atlantic Radical Historians Organization)[41] in the early seventies, these contemporary left historians still find it necessary to debate the question: What is radical history?; and, What is the role of a radical historian?

By tracing the history of these three radical journals, it is possible to delineate the contours of this debate from its beginnings in the 1960s to the present time. Through an examination of the writings of three different generations of radical historians we are able to better understand their attempts to define themselves as intellectuals and to establish a common view of their role as radical historians while they fought for acceptance and respectability in the historical profession. The three journals they created were established to give expression to a particular view of the American past, one that was not readily accepted by much of the historical profession for some time. By providing a forum for this new revisionist scholarship, these journals have broadened the meaning of that past by opening new perspectives on its radical roots. Even though these periodicals have not always adhered to the traditional format of scholarly journals of History, they still have succeeded in

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[40] *Ibid.*, p.1.

[41] Originally the formal organization involved in the creation of *RHR*. It no longer exists as a functioning organization although its name is still associated with the *Radical Historians Newsletter*. The newsletter is a bi-annual publication of articles and books of interest to radical historians.

revealing a sense of purpose and task that was different, and even on occasion unique.

Above all, a study of *Studies on the Left, Radical America* and the *Radical History Review* provides an opportunity to assess the past and present of this radical history in order to better understand its changing "voice" as it worked its influence on the interpretation of the American past.

PART ONE

A NEW RADICAL HISTORY– *STUDIES ON THE LEFT*

1

Madison Beginnings

The sudden appearance of a new community of radical historians in the 1960s was an unexpected and unprecedented turn of events. Before the sixties, the history profession, unlike some fields in social science, had never included a substantial group of radical scholars. While some prominent scholars who came of age in the thirties and forties, including Richard Hofstadter, Louis Hartz, Merle Curti and Daniel Boorstin, had been influenced by Marxism, American Marxism had not provided its historical practitioners with an illuminating or even a stable critique of American society. While the classic Marxist texts had provided an overall model of society and of historical change such as modes of production and class struggle, there was little in the way of concrete examples of their application. There had been some important Marxist historical studies of European history, particularly in the area of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, but there had been very little, if any, significant work on the United States. Rather, as Paul Buhle has suggested, "Marxist historical thought in America has suffered from ill-developed and overly-formulistic thinking, an almost complete inability to see beyond institutional history to the social history of ordinary Americans, and indifference to the philosophical and cultural insights traditionally part of the European intellectual heritage."[1] As well, burdened with a strong foreign content – most able Marxist

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[1] Paul Buhle, "American Marxist Historiography,1900-1940," Radical *America,* 8-9 (November 1970): 5.

writers were largely foreign-born or foreign-educated and hampered by the weakness of the organized Left in general– American Marxist historiography had little chance of developing generations of younger scholars to make creative contributions to the study of American history. Marxists, at their best, pioneered in areas traditionally neglected by the academically-acceptable historians, and occasionally attempted an overall interpretation of the American experience. Marxist history, Buhle concluded, "was little more than a slight, radical elaboration of historiographical trends or an ideological fixture of self-justification."[2]

Essentially, this history failed to construct a clear overall perspective and consequently had little or no impact on the historical profession. In addition, Peter Novick has suggested that there were some important aspects of the Marxist historiographical legacy which were not only of little use, but more detrimentally "served as an antimodel for the new generation." In particular, in the United States, historians associated with the Communist Party were sometimes dogmatic and sectarian, but more often than not their work, "had hardly any Marxist theoretical content at all, and shaded off into celebratory accounts of struggle and resistance – 'the people' versus 'the interests.' "[3] For example, one prominent radical historian noted that Marxist interpretations of the American Revolution written in the 1940s provided a choice between the sterile economic determinism of Louis Hacker and books that treated the Sons of Liberty as the vanguard leading the masses to revolution or the early novels of Howard Fast romanticizing Thomas Paine or George Washington. As he goes on to add, "The Old Left historians, save for breaking open the worlds of Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass, were a kind of tail on the Beardian Progressive kite; they offered

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[2] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[3]Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 421-422.

me no models for doing history."[4]

The Progressive school, which generally dominated the field of American historical scholarship from 1910 to the end of World War II, was much more open to radical work. With its sympathies for radicals and democratic movements and its attention to economic causes, the direction of this school lay not with the preservation of the status quo but with change. Committed to the idea of progress, they saw themselves as contributing to a better and more humane world for the future. As Progressive historians their role was to show that, though economics had mostly determined people's experience in the past, it should not so continue in the future. As a result, they promoted figures from the American past such as Roger Williams and Williams Jennings Bryan who had fought entrenched orthodoxies, and, "who – for a time at least – had cast forth a vision of what America might be if only regressive interests wouldn't get in the way."[5] In their hands American history became a picture of conflict between polarities of American life: aristocracy versus democracy; economic "haves" versus "have-nots"; politically privileged groups versus those underprivileged; and, between geographical sections, such as East versus West. Striving to lay bare the real interests stifling the American vision, they sought experiences in the past which most revealed this conflict of interests. By locating the barriers to America's promise, the people could go on to overcome them and take full hold of their destiny. In short, the divisions were between those committed to a static conservatism and those dedicated to democratic and egalitarian ideals.

Believers in inevitable progress, these historians assumed that America was moving toward

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[4]Alfred Young, " An Outsider and the Progress of a Career in History," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 52, (July 1995): 503.

[5]Gene Wise, *American Historical Explanations* (Homewood, Illinois, The Dorsey Press, 1973), p. 84.

an ideal social order, growing not only in affluence but also in freedom, opportunity, and happiness as well. Consequently, Progressive historians focussed on experiences which either held out or blocked that promise – experiences such as the making of the federal Constitution which Beard argued was the product of a small group of propertied individuals who were intent upon establishing a strong central government capable of protecting their interests against the encroachments of the masses, and Parrington's study of the struggle between the liberal Jeffersonian tradition and the conservative Hamiltonian one, representing a privileged and aristocratic minority seeking to maintain its dominant position. Thus, the primary source of progress was the unending conflict between the forces of liberalism and those of conservatism. As one of the leading figures of this school suggested, "At last, perhaps, the long-disputed sin against the Holy Ghost has been found; it may be the refusal to cooperate with the vital principle of betterment. History would seem, in short, to condemn the principle of conservatism as a hopeless and wicked anachronism."[6] According to its Progressive practitioners, history was not an abstract discipline whose truths could only be contemplated, but to the contrary, historians had important activist roles to play in the construction of a better world. By explaining the historical roots of contemporary problems, historians could establish the knowledge and understanding necessary to make changes which would bring further progress. Above all, as an example of the attempt to understand the past not as a mosaic of separate episodes on which narrow monographs might be written, but rather as an intelligible whole with something to speak to the present, Progressive history provided a stronger underpinning for future radical historians than the rather stilted writings of American Marxist historians.

The most striking aspect of American historical writing in the 1950s was the rapid

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[6]Quoted in Wise, *ibid.*

disappearance of the conflict view of the American past. In its place "consensus" became the key word as postwar attempts to produce a new interpretive framework for American history focussed attention on what had united Americans rather than on what had divided them. Celebrating the absence of radical challenges to the status quo, these neo-conservative scholars viewed American society as stable and homogeneous. The "cult of American Consensus," as one scholar called it, made the nation's past appear tame and placid; it was no longer a history marked by extreme group conflicts or rigid class distinctions. [7] The heroes in America's past became less heroic because there were no clashes over ideology since all Americans shared the same middle-class Lockean values. Conversely, the old villains – Hamilton, Rockefeller and Carnegie – became less evil, and were portrayed as constructive figures who contributed much to their country. And as one historian has noted, "The underdogs in American history – the reformers, radicals, and working class – were presented as being less idealistic and more egocentric as neo conservative scholars sought to demonstrate that the ideology of these elements in society was no less narrow and self-centred than that of other elements."[8]

In the earliest general statement of the consensus position, Richard Hofstadter wrote in 1948 of his growing conviction that there was " the need for a reinterpretation of our political traditions which emphasizes the common climate of American opinion. The existence of such a climate of opinion has been much obscured by the tendency to place conflict in the foreground of history . . . . The fierceness of the political struggles has often been misleading; for the range of vision ... has

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[7]John Higham, "The Cult of the "American Consensus": Homogenizing our History," *Commentary,* 27 (February, 1959): 93-100.

[8]Gerald N. Grob and George A. Billias, *Interpretations of American History*, 5th edition (New York, The Free Press, 1987), p. 16.

always been bounded by the horizons of property and enterprise ....The sanctity of private property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the natural evolution of self-interest and self-assertion, within broad legal limits, into a beneficent social order have been the staple tenets of the central faith in American political ideologies . . . ."[9]

Hofstadter's attempt to identify and explain the core ideology of Americans was carried further by Louis Hartz , who in the *Liberal Tradition in America* produced the most elaborately constructed argument for accepting an American ideological consensus. America had come into being after the age of feudalism, he claimed and this fact had profoundly affected its development. Lacking a feudal past, the country did not have to contend with the established feudal structure that characterized the Old Regime in Europe. Hence America was "born free" and did not require a radical social revolution to become a liberal society – it already was one. What emerged in America , according to Hartz, was a unique society characterized by agreement on a single ideology – the liberal tradition. The absence of a feudal heritage enabled the liberal-bourgeois ideas embodied in the political principles derived from John Locke to flourish almost unchallenged. " The ironic flaw in American Liberalism," wrote Hartz, "lies in the fact that we have never had a conservative tradition."[10]

Daniel Boorstin, another major consensus theorist, offered another argument that portrayed American history in terms of continuity and agreement. Boorstin, like Hartz, stressed the uniqueness of American society, but he attributed this to other causes. Rather than agreeing on an ideology,

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[9]Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York, Vintage Books, 1948), p. vii-viii.

[10]Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1955), p.57.

Americans instead were united by their rejection of the very notion of ideology. "We do not need American philosophers," Boorstin explained, "because we already have an American philosophy, implicit in the American Way of Life.... Why should we make a five-year plan for ourselves when God seems to have had a thousand-year plan ready-made for us?"[11] In two books written in the 1950s, Boorstin denied the significance of European influences and ideas on American life. From the very beginning, Americans had abandoned European political institutions, European blueprints for utopian societies, and European concepts of class distinctions. Because of their frontier experience, Americans concerned themselves with the concrete situations and the practical problems experienced by their frontier communities, and thus developed little ability for theorizing or any deep interest in theories as such. The "genius of American politics" lay in its emphasis on pragmatic matters and its very deep distrust of theories that had led to radical political changes and deep divisions within European societies. Over the course of time this non-theoretical approach developed into a distinctive American lifestyle which was characterized by a naive practicality that enabled Americans to unite in a stable way of life and to become a homogeneous society made up of undifferentiated men sharing the same values.[12]

While the idea of consensus as a framework for analysis was not intrinsically or necessarily conservative according to Peter Novick, who has suggested that Hofstadter's initial statement of the consensus idea in *The American Political Tradition* had something of a Marxist cast, as did, somewhat more ambiguously, Hartz's *Liberal Tradition in America*, the result was a shift in

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[11]Quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 333.

[12]Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press,1953) and *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, Random House, 1958). Two additional volumes further expanded these views: *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York,1965) and *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York, !973).

historians' focus from the conflict of classes to a consensual culture. This neo-conservative trend, which was marked by a new respect for tradition and a de-emphasis on class conflict, brought many changes in American historiography which revised the Progressive point of view in virtually every period of American history, from a revival of a sympathetic approach to the Puritans to an inclination to play down the more radical aspects of the Progressive and New Deal periods. As well as a tendency to view American society as satisfied, unified, and stable throughout most of its history, there seemed to be an implicit fear of extremism, "a yearning to prove that national unity had almost always existed, and a longing for the security and way of life America presumably had enjoyed before becoming a superpower and leader of the free world."[13]

At the same time as the assumptions and conclusions of the "cult of consensus"came to dominate the writing of American history in the 1950s, the entire American left was in a state of acute disarray and intellectual bankruptcy. Not only was the membership of the left parties a fraction of what it had been at the end of the Second World War, but the ideological sharpness that had characterized left-wing theorizing in the 1930s had long since disappeared. As the wartime left-liberal coalition disintegrated under the pressures of Cold War hysteria, liberals frequently exceeded the right wing in their attacks on Communists and other critics of postwar policies, leaving the left with no means of defence, other than an appeal to the very liberals who were attacking it, to uphold traditional civil liberties. The Cold War at home succeeded in creating, "a cowed and passive population" which provided fertile ground for demagogues such as Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and Representative Richard M. Nixon " who simply built upon the existing premises of Cold War

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[13]Grob and Billias, *Interpretations*, p. 18.

liberalism and the oppressive climate it had already created."[14] By 1955, the Communist Party, still the most important segment of the left, became increasingly aware that it had no direction, no vision of a socialist America and no long-range strategy aimed at social transformation. An elaborate vocabulary of Marxist-Leninist terms persisted, but they served only a, " basically-ritualistic function, helping to block the development of fresh thought within the party without providing the tools for a creative analysis of American society."[15]

While the left was losing its political soul, left academics were also facing the onslaughts of McCarthyism for their alleged anti-American activities. In his discussion of several of these cases, Jonathan Wiener suggests that few targets of McCarthyism were attacked because their scholarship was radical. Rather, "Virtually all were charged with association with the Communist party; most such associations had taken place in the past ...and many of those attacked had long ceased their connection with the organized Left."[16] Nevertheless, the attack on radicals and radical ideas proved to be effective in intimidating academics, and the consequences for the profession were profound. In Wiener's words, "A chill spread across the intellectual landscape: avoiding controversy became prudent; criticism of American institutions or practices could endanger one's job. Faculty members played it safe, avoiding topics in their teaching and research that might arouse the red hunters."[17] As well, even the institutions of the profession took

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[14]James Weinstein and David W. Eakins, eds., *For a New America* (New York, Vintage Books, 1970), p. 4.

[15]James O'Brien, "New Left Historians of the 1960s," *Radical America,* 4 (November 1970): 82.

[16]Jonathan M. Wiener, "Radical Historians and the Crisis in American History, 1959-1980," *The Journal of American History*, 76 (September 1989): 404.

[17]*Ibid.*, p.404.

part in the hysteria. During the fifties, according to Wiener, the official history journals, the *American Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History*, placed the work of a small number of radical and Marxist historians outside the bounds of historical scholarship as they generally ignored the writings of independent radical historians such as William A. Williams. Equally disturbing was the decision to award the Bancroft Prize to a poorly written minor work on the grounds that it showed, "The inapplicability of the Marxist theory of the class struggle." [18]

In dramatic contrast to the climate of opinion during the fifties which seemed to leave little opportunity for a radical critique of the American past, the decade of the 1960s brought striking changes of direction in the writing of American history. During this time, the prevailing mood among the American people shifted dramatically because of a series of shattering events on the domestic scene, such as the civil rights and antiwar movements, which overturned many of the major assumptions that had prevailed in the 1950s. Gone were the complacency, national self-confidence, optimism, and moral composure that seemed to have characterized that decade. Stirred by these upheavals, a new generation of younger scholars responded by proposing a new radical history. The work they created would not present new facts but would identify a different set of questions requiring study, as well as suggesting different ideas of what constituted valid solutions. In doing so, they challenged not only the mainstream of the profession but also the scholarship produced by historians with ties to the Old Left. As graduate students who were part of the Old Left milieu of the 1950s, they were aloof from the American celebrationism of the Truman and Eisenhower years and were able to retain a critical perspective during their years of graduate training in history. Equally important they shared a realization of the shortcomings of the Old Left. This growing consciousness

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[18] *Ibid.*, p.404

was well advanced by 1956 when the left suffered a severe blow with Khrushchev's acknowledgement of the crimes of Stalin, which together with the Soviet army invasion of socialist Hungary, shattered the American Communists' intellectual world. As a result, one source suggested, "Young radical intellectuals had no received tradition which they owed fealty, and in fact they were forced to rely largely on their own resources in arriving at a political and intellectual position. Even those among the young radical historians who had actually been members of Old Left parties broke with them, in nearly every case, by the end of the decade of the1950s."[19]

This new community of radical scholars and the journal they created, *Studies on the Left*, came into being in this situation. It was not surprising that the University of Wisconsin at Madison was the site of the first, and in many ways, the most influential voice for the new radical history. Throughout the 1950s it had been something of a Progressive holdout against the more conservative historical trends. As Warren Susman observed in 1955, "there are three parts of the god – head here at Wisconsin – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost – Beard, Parrington, and Turner. We have gotten to the point where we can admit some failings in Turner – but Beard looms as an even larger task."[20] Two Wisconsin products, Merrill Jensen and Jackson Turner Main, were the principal defenders of the Progressive view of the Constitution. John D. Hicks, who had spent his most active years at Wisconsin, defended the Populists against Hofstadter's criticisms, and John Higham, another Wisconsin Ph.D, "repeatedly, albeit ambivalently, criticized the excesses of the consensus school."[21] As well, the three senior faculty members, Jensen, Merle Curti, and Howard Beale, were dedicated to the defence of the Beardian tradition and stood at the centre of the resistance to Cold War politics

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[19]O'Brien, " New Left Historians," p. 82

[20] Quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 346.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 345-346.

and scholarship. These historians served as models for the graduate students, a significant number of whom were New York Jews of leftist background and for whom Wisconsin served an "Americanizing" function. As Herbert Gutman, who came to Madison in 1950 after completing his M.A. at Columbia recalled, "Howard Beale, Merrill Jensen and especially Merle Curti . . . offered me and others a critical American history, an analytical history that was deeply empirical. It was not strongly theoretical, not cosmopolitan. It worshipped Beard and Turner but was not deterministic. All three of my guides were relatively new to Wisconsin, and they revived the Progressive tradition in their own way."[22] Finally, this mix of formidable intellectual powers and often unpopular ideas was filled out by the likes of Fred Harvey Harrington, the only major diplomatic historian who continued to teach from a "Beardian" perspective in the fifties, and the political historian, William Hesseltine. Along with these historians, there was one historically-minded sociologist who also counted heavily. Hans Gerth, a refugee from Nazi Germany, introduced, "a cosmopolitan learning and a depth of feeling for twentieth-century tragedy congruent to the historian's message." As Buhle goes on to conclude, "The mixture of an old-fashioned pursuit of the truth against the marshalling of the history profession by prestigious Cold Warriors, and newfound iconoclastic discoveries about America's unproud traditions, made for a heady brew. Those who quaffed it would never look at history and its uses through the same eyes again."[23]

Even more significant was the presence of William A. Williams who came to Madison in 1957. Over half of these new radical historians did their graduate work at Wisconsin, where in nearly all cases they came under Williams' influence. His emphasis on the economic aspects of American

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[22]Herbert G. Gutman, " Learning About History," in Paul Buhle, ed., *History and the New Left: Madison, Wisconsin, 1950-1970* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 48.

[23]Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p. 22.

expansionism, combined with a restless probing for the motives of American statesmen, made a strong impression on the minds of his students. As one historian has argued, " . . . his graduate seminar provided the intellectual arena in which New Left history in the United States first developed."[24]

Williams' influence was particularly felt by the group of graduate students who founded *Studies on the Left* in 1959. For these young scholars, which included historians Martin Sklar, James Weinstein, David Eakins, and Steven Scheinberg, "it was Williams himself who created the intellectual excitement, stirred them to serious study and convinced them of the possibility of a conceptual breakthrough that could have implications for the world beyond the universities."[25]

Although Williams gave the journal his enthusiastic support and warmly recalled his association with these young intellectuals as one of his most fulfilling moments, he did not play a direct role in *Studies*, and apparently chose very consciously to remain in the background. He had his own work to do and he also wanted to give the new generation its own opportunity to make mistakes and learn. Also, as he wrote to Warren Susman, the editors of the journal had too much of the "left-over nuttiness of the 1930s image in their bones" and so they came with a built-in proclivity to believe that they had to shock in order to be radical. Still, he felt he had "calmed them down" on some issues and believed that his presence had a special effect upon the journal's leading figures. Sklar was a particular favourite, and James Weinstein recalled meeting with Williams over coffee to talk about the direction of the journal. As Buhle concludes, much of their later work, "came out of a collective dialogue in which Williams traded ideas and, more than anyone else, reformulated

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[24]Wiener, "Radical Historians," p. 406.

[25] Quoted in Paul Buhle and Edward Rice-Maximin, *William Appleton Williams: The Tragedy of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 118.

them for an increasingly large intellectual following."[26] As one of the editors proclaimed in 1959, "Prof. Williams believes that the journal we are projecting could develop into something significant as an intellectual movement within academic circles, perhaps attaining in the United States a status similar to the *Left Review* in Britain."[27]

In addition to an interest in Williams' attempts to re-conceptualize American history, many of these graduate students had come from an Old Left milieu and had been members of the Communist Party or its youth organization, the Labour Youth League. Many were members of the Wisconsin Socialist Club while others had only recently become radicals or Marxists in the course of their studies. But as David Eakins suggested, "All shared two things: an awareness of the severe failure of the old left, and a commitment to participate in the development of a body of theory to stimulate the creation of a new revolutionary movement in the United States." And as he goes on to conclude, "Underlying the work of the editors was a loosely shared consciousness of the need to develop socialist thought comprehending American reality." [28] It was their belief that, "other students, in and out of universities, must also be thinking seriously about a radical or socialist approach to American problems, and that a forum in which student socialists can communicate their thought and research would fulfill a vital function." [29]

As products of the disenchantment with the old left and as forerunners and participants in the new, these young radicals, in the landmark introduction to the first issue, attempted to define the purpose of socialist intellectuals in the contemporary American political climate – in which the

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

[27]Gardner to Herbert Gutman, 4 February 1959, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 3-13.

[28]Weinstein and Eakins, *For a New America*, p. 6 .

[29]Undated introductory letter, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 11-1.

atmosphere of repression and conformity left little room for legitimate radical scholarship. From their perspective historical "objectivity" had been reduced to the, " weight of authority, the viewpoint of those who are in a position to enforce standards, the value judgments of the not so metaphorical market-place of ideas." In the same way, "scholarly dispassion" was seen as "a way of justifying acceptance (either active or passive) of the status quo." Thus, when a historian is digging up facts to support traditional and accepted interpretations with no interest in the "significance of these facts for larger theoretical questions . . . he may understandably remain unimpassioned." To these editors, this did not mean that he was any less biassed; it may have simply meant that he cared less than his neighbour. "On the other hand," they argued, "when a scholar arrives at radical or unconventional interpretations he may very well become excited by what he is doing. For the act of contradiction involves emotions more tumultuous than those aroused by the state of acceptance." As a result, "scholarly dispassion" is nothing more than the "true medium of the scholar satisfied with (or browbeaten by) things as they are . . . ."

As future academics and radicals they saw their work being hampered by "the intrusion of prevailing standards of scholarship, which set up a screen between ourselves and our product, an automatic censoring device which trims and deflates and confines our work, under the pretext of what is supposed to be 'objective scholarship,' until we no longer know it as our own."Arguing against the mood of the prevailing "intellectual racket" the editors called for a rebirth of the radical scholar, "the thinker who is committed to the investigation of the origins, purposes and limitations of institutions and concepts;" one who advocates "the application of reason to the reconstruction of society"; and, one who looks upon "traditional formulations, theories, structures, even 'facts' with a habitually critical attitude stemming from his distaste for things as they are, and from his distrust of the analyses of those who are committed to the maintenance of the status quo."

The benefits of such radical scholarship would result from the fact that these historians, given their opposition to established and conventional conceptions, would have little concern for their safety or preservation enabling them therefore to carry inquiry along paths where the so-called "objective" conservative or liberal scholars would fear to tread. "The radicalism of our time," they wrote, quoting of all people, Woodrow Wilson " . . . does not consist in the things that are proposed but in the things that are disclosed."[30]

But producing such radical scholarship was not that simple. While there were some scholars who pursued their intellectual labour with "a combination of scholarly integrity and commitment to the humanization of society," too many others were prevented from doing so "by the paralysing effect of forcefully maintained academic standards." The result was that many isolated scholars found it extremely difficult to exercise their radicalism in individual opposition to the weight of the authorities who controlled their professional futures. These restrictions suggested a dual responsibility to the editors: first, to create a radical intellectual community for these isolated individuals; and secondly, to provide the opportunity for that community to produce work that would "demonstrate to the academic world the unique contribution which the radically committed thinker, by the very nature of his emotional and intellectual partisanship, is able to make." As the editors concluded, "We hope that the radicalism of what is disclosed, as it increases and matures, may provide knowledge and theory for the future growth of a radicalism of what is proposed."[31] According to Paul Buhle, this editorial expressed the "quintessential Madison faith in hidden truths to be revealed by the independent scholar"and could have easily been written out of a Williams seminar. As he goes on to suggest, "The

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[30] "The Radicalism of Disclosure," *Studies on the Left*, 1 (Fall, 1959): 2-4.

[31] *Ibid.*, p., 4.

tone was especially consonant with Williams' own self- distancing from the Old Left."[32]

Although the realization of "a radicalism of what is proposed" was still a long way off in 1959, over the next eight years the journal published some of the best young American historians, sociologists, economists, literary critics and a host of graduate students who helped launch a revisionism that profoundly altered the historical profession in the United States. As Jon Wiener has suggested, "The journal's most important contribution was a theoretically self-conscious reinterpretation of American history, supported by an impressive series of research monographs."[33] But more importantly, it was in the pages of *Studies* that these young radicals tried to work out their dual role as historians and as radicals, and as a result it is a valuable record of their first attempts at self- definition. In the beginning, however, the editors were concerned with immediate political and economic developments and with the analyses and criticisms of American society that would be in keeping with their stated objective of providing, "an opportunity for students who are socially concerned to express their ideas and the results of their researches." By offering such students a chance to publish they hoped, "to encourage theoretical discussion and radical or specifically socialist analysis in the academic disciplines" including, " . . . analyses of subjects historical and contemporary; considerations of traditional methods and theories in the social and natural sciences, literature and the arts; and book reviews."[34]

The first issue of the journal was published in December, 1959 and, as well as the editorial statement discussed above, contained an article by Hans Gerth on the theoretical inadequacies of the

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[32]Buhle and Rice-Maximin, *William Appleton Williams*, p. 117.

[33]Wiener, "Radical Historians," p. 408 .

[34]Carl Weiner to Philip Foner, 14 August 1959, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 3-5.

then present day American sociology and two articles by members of the editorial board. The first, by David Eakins, was a discussion of the question of the objectivity of Marxist scholarship in the United States; the second, by Lloyd Gardner, an analysis of American foreign policy in the 1930s. The issue also included an article by Paul Breslow on the "Middle Class Beatniks," a "Documents" section and several book reviews. The journal was well received by reviewers, and the initial printing of 3,000 copies was soon sold out. In particular, Herbert Aptheker in his review in *Political Affairs* suggested that, "The articles and reviews are first-rate contributions , but the most important thing about the journal is its appearance, and the editorial statement, 'The Radicalism of Disclosure.'" As he went on to conclude, " With such manifestoes issuing from American youth . . . there is every reason to turn to our work . . . with renewed enthusiasm and confidence." [35] In a second review, the political scientist Andrew Hacker suggested that the editors, trained at the University of Wisconsin where the "radical tradition runs deep," were a group of young scholars who were "serious about their radicalism" and he predicted that they would likely have an "important influence" over American scholarship in the years ahead.[36]

The response of the editors was to suggest that the journal would emerge as the vital centre of significant scholarship that was part of a renaissance of left intellectual efforts within the universities, ranging from, "the reassertion of Jeffersonian libertarianism to the renewed application of Marxism to analyses in the various academic disciplines."[37] To accomplish this goal, providing they were able to overcome the ever-present problem of finances, the board suggested a tentative list

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[35]Herbert Aptheker, *Political Affairs* (January, 1960): 65.

[36]Andrew Hacker, "The Rebelling Young Scholars," *Commentary* 30 (November,1960): 407.

[37]Sklar to Herbert Aptheker, 19 January 1960, *Studies on the Left Papers*,1-4.

of themes or articles they hoped to see published in forthcoming issues. Included in this conditional schedule were topics such as: current myths of American scholarship; the application of the concept of alienation to American society; the role of socialist parties in American politics; the concept of "socialist man"; class structure in American society and the broad subject of the political and economic structure of American capitalism. This was not a journal that was going to speak to or for the struggling masses, the working classes or the poor. As Hacker concluded, *Studies* writers sought not the "abolition of private property or the establishing of human equality by political means"so much as a "rational social order" through better education and knowledge.[38] In all of these projects the emphasis was on understanding America and its institutions, and they would write disinterestedly and objectively as intellectuals.

While the first volume would include articles on the Socialist Party, the Political Economy of the Modern United States, Liberalism, and Modern Marxism, a major focus of analysis was the growing ferment in the black community. In the second editorial statement, the editors pointed to the growth of the integration struggle in the South as a significant manifestation of the development of self-consciousness and community among "Negroes."[39] What seemed to be happening in the South was not merely a drive for social justice but also a quest to recover "community." The movement was not merely fighting bigotry and injustice, but also doing battle with the"atomization of society, the break up of primary groups, the canned culture." "This is social change," the editors stated, "growing out of, but reaching beyond the movement for civil rights; it is a movement of many diverse people

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[38] Hacker, "Rebelling Scholars," 408, 412.

[39]Even though the term "Negro" was in disrepute among black Nationalists and was in the process of being replaced by "Afro-American" it was still used in *Studies* in 1960 because it was more convenient and more generally recognized. Previously, the term, "Afro-American" had been condemned by Black intellectuals for smacking of "black nationalism".

for an end to alienation, for community."[40] As well as attempting to assess the revolutionary developments in the Southern civil rights movement, the editors probed more deeply into the emerging ideological tendencies in the black movement. This analysis focussed on two articles in the second volume of the journal. The first, by Harold Cruse, chided American Marxists for failing to work out a meaningful approach to revolutionary nationalism which had special significance for the American Negro. As he argued, "the Negro is the American problem of underdevelopment," and, "it is not at all remarkable then, that the semi-colonial status of the Negro has given rise to nationalist movements."[41] The second article was an interview with the North Carolina militant, Robert F. Williams, who challenged the policy of non-resistance set down by the national leadership of the NAACP. As the editors noted in the introduction to volume 2, number 2, "the struggle for "integration" has not been the only program of positive action instituted by Negroes." Equally important, " the rapid growth of Negro separatist groups and national organizations, rejection of non-violence and passive resistance, and the espousal of socialism by militant Negroes" have appeared as distinct reactions to the Negroes second class citizenship. As they concluded, "These contrasting trends... raise a question as to whether the Negroes' achievement of human rights is possible through "integration" into existing American society or whether basic changes in social and economic relations must be effected before there can be equal and harmonious relations between the races."[42] In volume1, number 3 the editors turned to an analysis of the Cuban Revolution, a subject that was to play a key role in the development of the journal. Three editors had visited Cuba during the summer

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[40]"Editorial," *Studies on the Left*, 1 (Winter, 1960): 1-3.

[41]Harold W. Cruse, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American," *Studies on the Left*, 2 (Summer, 1962): 12-25.

[42]"A Statement by the Editors," *Studies on the Left*, 2 (Summer, 1962): 3-5.

of 1960 and returned to write about it as a new crisis in Cold War ideology. One of these editors, Lee Baxandall, had his photograph of the First Declaration of Havana used as the cover for the second issue of the journal and translated Che Guevara's essay on the development of the revolutionary war for issue three which also included an article "Ideology and Revolution" by Jean-Paul Sartre.

In their editorial, they called on radicals to take the lead in exposing the "sham battle" between "freedom" and "Communism," arguing that the State Department, by attacking what was then clearly a non-Communist revolution, forced Cuba to join the Russian side of the Cold War. The world view proclaimed by the American government, which went unchallenged by the intellectual community, that all revolutionary movements were part of a world-wide communist conspiracy, made it "impossible to understand, much less deal with the changes that have taken place and are taking place throughout the underdeveloped countries." The Cuban Revolution, "brings this point close to home" and, as the editors concluded, "unless the United States can be freed from its own ideological creation, the American people may find themselves isolated from the world by the devil theory of communism and popular revolution."[43]

Indeed, there were grounds for further concern in 1961, following the Bay of Pigs fiasco . As the editorial statement in volume 2, number 1 of the journal observed, " the Cuban adventure does not merely constitute a repetition of old United States patterns; it is a major step to the right." The result, they argued, was to raise the intensity of the cold war atmosphere so that it reached the point where "President Kennedy has asked the press to impose self-censorship . . . as it would in time of war" and, "we have made the alleged fear of Russian military bases in the Caribbean the theoretical basis of our policy." More importantly, a State Department white paper branded the revolution

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[43]"From the Editors," *Studies on the Left*, 1 (Winter, 1960): 1-6.

"communist" and announced that communism cannot be tolerated in "our" hemisphere. "If we were not Americans, or, perhaps, if we did not live in a world threatened by atomic disaster," they concluded, "this sort of thinking might be amusing; for us it is frightening." What was even more discouraging was that as these patterns emerged, the response of the liberals and intellectuals was, "either silence or a branding of those who easily penetrated the Kennedy facade as followers of a Communist party line." If Cuba was a test of the nation's inner strength and ability to develop with the times, "it should not be the object of our fear, or the butt of our bullying." While some students and intellectuals have begun to protest this development, dissent is not enough, there is " a pressing need for the development of an effective organization on the left."[44]

In addition to these concerns, the journal's most important contribution to the "radicalism of disclosure" was the "corporate liberalism" thesis first presented in the editorial, "The Ultra-Right and the Cold War" written in 1962 in response to the concern expressed on the left in the late 1950s and early 1960s "about the danger of a rapid growth of various far-right groups."[45] According to the editors, radicals and left-liberals alike saw reactionaries as the major threat to the existing liberal society and called "for joint action with the liberal establishment in opposition to the menace from the right." But, as the editors went on to suggest, the heavy fire aimed at the ultra-right by the American left was misdirected because these attacks defined the right wing as "a menace to an extant liberal society, rather than as a concomitant of the increasingly authoritarian liberal mechanism for responsibly waging the cold war." Power was held by the large corporations and they had no reason to turn to the right for support. The reason for this was the political sophistication of American

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[44]"America's Dirty War," *Studies on the Left*, 2 (1, 1961): 1-4 .

[45]Weinstein and Eakins, *For a New America*, p. 15.

corporate leadership which was acting in its own long-range class interest by developing a liberal ideology. For the past thirty years, the corporate elite had been aware that its success in "maintaining its hegemony at home, as well as its ability to extend it abroad, has been dependent upon the inclusion of labor and the middle classes in a consensus based upon real and apparent concessions to these groups." From the editors' point of view, the main impact of the ultra-right " had been to complicate matters for the direction of the cold war consensus." For them, "the implementation of the rightest program, or even the attempt to implement it, would threaten the renewal of open class conflict, exacerbate racial conflict, and intensify other 'inter-group' problems." Although the ultras had nothing to offer and were at times irrational, that did not mean that they were totally harmless. According to the editors, they did present a danger because of their argument that defeat in the cold war was a strong possibility if desperate measures were not taken. By pressing for a more militant prosecution of the struggle and increasing the likelihood of war, they believed they could attain victory against "godless communism."

But the corporate capitalists achieved their domination by means of ideology, not force. By seizing the initiative in calling for reform, they turned popular protest movements toward strengthening liberalism with the result that popular movements seldom challenged capitalism on socialist grounds. For example, the New Deal provided an excellent instance of the conservative achievement of liberal reform and it had included the leadership of the labour movement, which won real concessions. In the minds of the editors, the ideological stream of contemporary right-wing politics in the United States flowed from the headwaters of corporate, cold war liberalism so that the mistake of the left in recent years had been to "concentrate on the elimination of an admittedly foul brew, instead of applying itself to the destruction of the still." If the left was to play a meaningful role

in American life it must "cut itself free from the stifling framework of liberal rhetoric and recognize that at heart the leaders of the United States are committed to the warfare state as the last defence of the large-scale corporate system." To counteract twentieth century liberalism, which was consciously developed to strengthen the capitalist system, the left must "develop an ideology with man and his social needs at the center, in fact rather than merely in rhetoric, and to do so on the basis of American society as it actually functions."[46]

This thesis was supported by articles from John Rollins and Ronald Radosh in the same issue. For Rollins, the Spanish American War and the acquisition of the Philippines, although minor episodes in the continuing evolution and expansion of American capitalism, resulted in liberal capitalist intellectuals and reformers exposing themselves to the radical charge, " that imperialism is inherent in capitalist development, whether reformed or not."[47] In his article, Radosh traced the origins of American labour's entrance onto the stage of world diplomacy in 1917. From these humble beginnings the "labor-statesman has become an accepted part of our way of life"so that "cooperation between organized labor and the federal government in foreign policy matters has become an aspect of American politics questioned only by radicals and right-wingers." This was not always the case. In the nineteenth century and in the pre-World War 1 days of the twentieth, organized labour opposed American foreign policy more often than it supported it. It was not until after the War that labour's support in foreign policy matters was actively sought by the government and concessions were offered in exchange. And as he went on to add, "the virtually universal acceptance of Cold War diplomacy

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[46]"The Ultra-Right and Cold War Liberalism," *Studies on the Left*, 3 (1, 1962): 3-8.

[47]John W. Rollins, "The Anti-Imperialists and Twentieth Century American Policy," *Studies on the Left*, 3 (1, 1962): 9-23.

in American political life has been made possible by the active support at home and abroad of the American labor movement."[48] Radosh, an associate editor of *Studies* who later renounced his radical roots, expanded this point of view in a second article, "The Corporate Ideology of American Labor Leaders From Gompers to Hillman", in a later issue of the journal and in two subsequent monographs.[49] In addition, the "father" of the "corporate liberalism" thesis, William A. Williams, found the time to contribute a review of a book by consensus diplomatic historian, Ernest R. May, as well as a longer essay regarding American intervention in Russia, both of which were published in volume 3 of the journal.[50]

This interpretation that the central theme of American history was the global expansion of American capitalism and that the entire legacy of popular movements had to be understood within a context that recognized that virtually all popular and protest movements had been incorporated within the expanding capitalist system was supported by an impressive array of monographs. The first and in many ways the most significant of these was Gabriel Kolko's *The Triumph of Conservatism*. In this book, he challenged the traditional interpretation of Progressivism which previous historians had described as a democratic movement for popular control of the new giant corporations, arguing instead that many Progressive "reforms" had been initiated by corporate capitalists who enlisted state power to rationalize an economy where uncontrolled competition created unstable and unpredictable

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[48]Ronald Radosh, "American Labor and the Root Commission to Russia," *ibid.*, p. 34-47.

[49]Ronald Radosh, *Studies on the Left*, 6 (November-December 1966):66-88 ; Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, Vintage Books, 1969); Ronald Radosh and Murray N. Rothbard, eds., *A New History of Leviathan* (New York, E. P. Dutton, 1972).

[50]William A. Williams, "The Acquitting Judge," *Studies on the Left*, 3 (2, 1963): 94-99; and "American Intervention in Russia, 1917-1920," *Studies on the Left*, 3 (4, 1963):24-48.

conditions .[51] The view that the ideal of a liberal corporate social order was formulated and developed under the aegis and supervision of those who enjoyed ideological and political hegemony in the United States – the more sophisticated leaders of America's largest corporations and financial institutions – made fifties politics more intelligible for many. It explained the incorporation of the working class challenge and the easy destruction of radical movements by McCarthyism, and when the liberal Kennedy and Johnson administrations committed the country to an "imperialist" war in Vietnam, "advocates of the corporate liberalism thesis could claim decisive empirical confirmation."[52]

In addition to beginning to construct a coherent view of American society, the Wisconsin years also witnessed the first attempts of these young editors to work out their role as intellectuals and radicals. Although critical of American intellectuals as a whole, who, they wrote, "failed to accept the role of critic and investigator of social institutions and of the changing relationships within our society, as well as those of our society to the rest of the world," they were even harsher with their criticism of radical intellectuals. At the very time that a world in upheaval demanded that intellectuals confront the problems of man in society, intellectuals in the United States had, with few exceptions, " marched off in the opposite direction" and radical intellectuals had "failed almost entirely to pierce the myths and dogmas which permeate and even smother the realities of life in the United States." "Where thoughtful discussion and rigorous analysis have been called for," they wrote, "various groups in what remains of the organized left have responded with concerted attempts to force history and ideas into

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[51]Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History 1900-1916* (Glencoe, University of Illinois Press, 1963); see also, his later book, *Railroads and Regulation* (Princeton, 1965) and James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State: 1900-1918* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1968).

[52]Wiener, "Radical Historians," p. 409.

a preconceived mold." Because of their feeling of frustration about the usefulness of such intellectual work, the editors believed that there was a pressing need for the development of that, "body of analysis and social theory so necessary to the emergence of a new and meaningful radical movement in this country," which "was and is one of our fundamental purposes." But their interest in the renewal of American radicalism did not mean that they were concerned only, or even primarily, with what are "commonly thought of as political questions." The distinction between intellectuals and activists was essential. If it was lost, intellectuals might confuse the commitments to general ideals and critiques with their commitments to specific political factions. When this happens, they concluded, intellectuals lose their effectiveness as intellectuals, which had been the fate of the old left in the thirties and forties and they were determined to avoid repeating it.

Hence, their first task was to define themselves as intellectuals, and not as practical activists. In doing so, they immediately drew a line between themselves and the larger New Left movement. Although many considered the journal a theoretical organ for this movement their answer was that, " we can only be considered New Leftists in the sense that we are striving to free ourselves from the dogmas and myths which have paralysed the old left, and to put behind us the history of fratricidal warfare on the left." "The point", they concluded, "is not whether or not we ourselves will transform society, but whether *Studies on the Left* can contribute to the development of a body of analysis and social theory which will be of aid to those who will."[53]

Thus, in the early sixties, these young scholars were well on their way to establishing a common view of their role as radical historians. In many ways this view fit well with the professional self image they were inheriting from their non-radical historian elders. Although their history would

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[53]"A Statement of the Editors," *Studies on the Left*, 2 (Summer, 1962): 3-5.

eventually aid the movement, for now they would write it disinterestedly and objectively. In the end, it seemed that by simply uncovering the truth they would aid the cause. This was a self-definition that allowed them to see themselves as both committed radicals and practitioners of the historical craft. They could finish graduate school and move to writing "professionally acceptable" monographs and books. The only difference was that as academics they were "most concerned with the effective and meaningful use of our discipline in order that we may learn what should and can be done to help change our society into one in which the fullest development of each human being will be possible."[54]

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[54] *Ibid.*, p.4.

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New York – New Perspectives and a New Approach

In1962, after three years at Wisconsin, the founding editors of *Studies* found themselves "caught up in the inevitable process of leaving the cozy academic community of Madison and migrating to other universities in different parts of the country in pursuit of advanced degrees and their first jobs as accredited academicians." This resulted in fewer resident editors being there to handle the increasing demands of a quarterly publishing schedule, so when three of the five remaining resident editors (Lee Baxandall, Martin Sklar, and James Weinstein) moved to New York in early 1963, they took *Studies on the Left* with them. This move was based, they suggested, on the assumption that radicalism was not limited to any one core of people in any one city or university town. In their words, "Although we are departing from this community which has served us so well in the founding of a journal committed to the radicalism of disclosure, we are confident of our ability to retain the spirit that was first nurtured here." [1]

Although it had published a few articles of sociology, literary criticism and philosophy while in Madison, the journal had been primarily devoted to problems of American history and American imperialism. As one of the founding editors recalled, "*Studies* seemed at first broader, more cultural, than it would later become," but he added, " we didn't know how to take it further in the cultural

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[1]"A Note From the Editors," *Studies on the Left*, 3 (2, 1963): 3-4.

area." In the end, he suggests that Jim Weinstein, "more or less took over the leadership of the magazine after three or four issues" and aimed it in other directions.[2] Most of the early editors agree that the most important figures involved with the journal in Madison were James Weinstein, Marty Sklar and Eleanor Hakim. Weinstein, who was eight to ten years older than the other editors, arrived from New York just after the second issue had been published and joined the resident board at that time. He was engaged in revising the history of American socialism and communism which involved not only research into the Progressive period but also forced him to rethink the 1930s and 1950s, and because of this interest he was a major force behind the historical orientation of the journal. Sklar was a working man who carried brick hods and was revered for his theorization of corporate liberalism and its roots in the Wilson administration. Hakim, on the other hand, was a cultural type whose North Lake Street apartment was the cramped but welcoming centre of *Studies* socializing. According to Weinstein, "Marty and Eleanor Hakim were the key people on the journal while it remained in Madison. Marty was the historical-political guru, Ellie was cultural editor."[3]

Above all, the editors, associates, and many of the contributors were close friends, and an informal atmosphere prevailed within the organization. However, personal conflicts were not entirely absent, and ideological differences sometimes provoked serious dissension and apparently several editors and associates resigned, at one time or another, due to misunderstandings derived, in part, from the closeness of the staff. One example of such a conflict was the resignation from the board of Eleanor Hakim in early 1963. The dispute revolved around the move to New York and her conflict

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[2]Saul Landau, "From the Labor Youth League to the Cuban Revolution," in Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p.111.

[3]James Weinstein, "Studies on the Left," in Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p.116.

with the three editors who moved there with the journal in 1963. In the words of one of these editors, "We were faced with a dilemma: whether to pursue what we believed to be the journal's best interests , or to pursue what Eleanor believed to be those best interests, whatever her reasons."[4] According to the other two editors, the controversy arose over her own psychological crisis in leaving Madison and "because she wanted to be managing editor and we would not (could not) appoint her to the job."[5] Whatever the reason for her resignation, Hakim was quite bitter and the controversy generated considerable discussion among present and former editors, much of which was sympathetic to her position. As Chapperon wrote in his reply to Weinstein, "In short, if *Studies* cannot keep a person like Ellie as a leading worker in the front office, it is time for the editors to make a more serious assessment of what they are worth . . . because Ellie had, and still has, a great personal stake in making a major contribution to the journal, and therefore her resignation cannot be taken as being trivial."[6]

The dispute over the status of Ellie Hakim was a relatively minor issue facing the editors in their new home. Of much greater consequence was the changed political climate, especially among students, that had evolved in the three years since the journal had begun publishing. Events in the South in 1960, especially the next stage of the black struggle, the lunch counter sit-ins which were a break with civil rights demonstrations and with cold war culture, ignited a young generation of blacks to become activists, and more importantly, stimulated some southern and many northern whites to participate in something they began calling "the movement." Greensboro had demonstrated that they

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[4]Baxandall to Madison Board Members, 4 April 1963, *Studies on the Left Papers,* 1-13.

[5]Weinstein to Matt Chapperon,26 March 1963, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 2-3

[6]Chapperon to *Studies* Board, 1 April 1963, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 2-3.

could challenge Jim Crow, and their actions were shown every evening on the television news. The next year seven black and six white volunteers boarded two busses in Washington, D.C., and began the next phase of the movement – the Freedom Rides. These events and the activities of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee stimulated many northern white students and acted as a catalyst in the formation of The Students for a Democratic Society in 1960 at the University of Michigan. Its founder, Robert "Al" Haber resuscitated the old Student League for Industrial Democracy, a branch of the old left League for Industrial Democracy. After negotiation with L.I.D. officials the name was changed to SDS and he began to enlist articulate and concerned students such as Tom Hayden, the editor of the campus paper, in his attempt to create a forceful student organization. Over the next two years, the organization initiated a considerable amount of physical and intellectual action visiting campuses to recruit new members and speaking out for civil rights and individual liberties. Hayden, for example, moved south and worked with SNCC, participating in voter registration drives and putting his body on the line. The next year the group articulated its political positions and social values in a manifesto that became known as the *Port Huron Statement*. This document called on young people to transform American politics through the creation of new forms of decentralized democracy that would supplement existing representative institutions and draw people directly into political decision making. This "participatory democracy" was a radical vision that broke with both the dominant assumptions of American political theory and received left-wing dogma. As one historian recently suggested, it was "the first commentary from a new generation of white students, and it was significant because it outlined a new left ideology."[7]

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[7]Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 64.

While it is difficult to measure the impact of the *Statement* on the 1960s, it did have a profound effect on SDS organizers. During the next few years, their energy would mobilize others to join SDS and join with them on their journey to change American society. This journey took them in three directions in the next year – some went to college campuses, others to northern slums, and many more back to the South. The efforts were related, for as one activist noted, "Creating a movement meant building a community in which people could trust each other and love each other enough to be able to carry on a collective fight."[8]

All of this was of great interest to the *Studies* group, which saw in the development of SDS the first possibilities for a new kind of socialist politics. In New York, the remaining editors quickly added new editors who shared an interest in the developing movement and who would also broaden the areas of competence of the board. Within several months two literary critics and an economist joined the board to be followed shortly by another historian, Eugene Genovese, a young labour leader named James O'Connor and somewhat later by SDS leader Tom Hayden and civil rights and peace activist Staughton Lynd. In the eyes of two former editors of the journal, the effect of the board's new diversity was a "partial shift in editorial focus, from historical, economic, and sociological analysis to more direct reporting and analysis of the student and peace movements, particularly of the community organizing activities of SDS and other groups." In wanting to develop a closer relationship between the theoretical work of the journal and the practical work of the movement, the editors felt they would be able to aid the "student movement in developing a comprehensive revolutionary perspective, and at the same time provide a constituency and a more immediate relevance for the theoretical work (still

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

not highly developed) of the journal." [9]

As one of the last editorials written in Madison predicted, "A movement cannot develop without its own ideology, and there is no radical ideology even potentially available to those workers, farmers, and disaffected middle class persons whose experience might turn them to the left." What was needed was not "a prolongation of the sterile debates and recriminations in all their multiform variations," but rather, "the development of a theoretical perspective that makes sense as an alternative to those whose interests, morality or sensibilities are done violence by the liberal cold war state." Instead, they concluded, "The left must consciously develop an ideology with man and his social needs at the center, in fact rather than merely in rhetoric, and to do so on the basis of a study of American society as it actually functions." To the editors it did not matter how difficult a task this might seem because, "for those who are serious in their social commitment there is no alternative."[10]

In addition to anticipating the future political direction of much of the student movement, this editorial also provided the basis for agreement between the original editors and those who joined the board in New York. At the same time, according to Weinstein and Eakins, it was also to have significant future consequences because as well as projecting the need to create, or synthesize, a new system of political ideas, "it also contained the seeds of difference that would develop into one split in the board and finally to the decision to cease publication."[11]

For the present, there was a strong sense of unity among many movement activists and the journal's editorial board which centred on the need to consider a new socialist perspective which

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[9]Weinstein and Eakins, *For a New America,* p. 14.

[10]"The Ultra-Right and Cold War Liberalism," *Studies on the Left*, 3 (1, 1962): 7-8.

[11]Weinstein and Eakins, *For a New America*, p. 19.

Studies addressed in its first New York issue. In the key essay of this issue, Staughton Lynd argued that a "cultural prohibition keeps us from seeing that socialism is the natural inheritor of the currents of dissent which have lately accumulated in America." By socialism he meant "comprehensive planning, involving maximum popular participation, based on the public ownership of all major industries." However public ownership and planning were only "the technical side of socialism" and as he added, "the deeper purpose of American socialism has always been the completion of the American Revolution." In order to achieve this, "the people must take into their own hands the control of industry if they are to retain control of government." Traditionally, the essential charge against the capitalist was not what he did to the working man but "what he did to American democracy." In addition, despite the massive indoctrination of the past twenty years, which tried to show that socialism and democracy were incompatible, the insistence that capitalism offered a more hospitable environment for democracy had begun to lose conviction. As well as recognizing the housekeeping necessity of planning, and besides seeing socialism as the fulfilment of democracy, Lynd also suggested a third essential ingredient for a revived American socialism. This he said was, "the clear and unequivocal assertion that there is an interest of humanity distinct from all national interests." He concluded his article by stating "that the new American socialism must begin by affirming that an American life is worth no more than any other life," that the "American Revolution is an idea, not a place," and that "some other people or peoples may be destined to nurture to maturity the seedling planted here in '76."[12]

Although several of the editors found Lynd's vision of socialism to be inadequate in its abstraction and ahistorical analysis, his article was the first by a leading activist to insist on a socialist

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[12]Staughton Lynd, "Socialism, the Forbidden Word," *Studies on the Left*, 3 (Fall, 1963): 14-20.

perspective for the new student movements, and as such, it fit nicely with the original intention to participate in the development of a new socialist movement in the United States. In this regard the article "marked a significant step in the evolution of *Studies* politics."[13]

The issue of socialist theory, however, was put aside for a short time as the editors, reflecting their new diversity, announced their intention to publish a series of special issues in volume 4. Three of these, a literature issue, a Latin American issue, and a special issue on Civil Rights and the Northern Ghetto actually appeared in this volume – a fourth issue on the Welfare State was never published. As well as devoting their time to planning these issues, the editorial board, which had hired a full-time editorial and business manager as a part of its expanding horizons, was faced with the problem of increasing its subscription base. In order to meet expenses, the editors were aiming to convert a third of their readers to subscribers or to find 1,500 new subscribers. With 3,000 subscribers and average book store sale of 1,500 copies, *Studies* would be virtually self-sustaining. In their words, "As it is, we are in serious financial difficulties" and unlike in the past when, "most of this deficit was taken care of by foundation grants, these are now finished and we are at your mercy."[14]

The most significant issue in volume 4 was the one largely devoted to the civil rights movement. In the editorial statement of this issue one finds the first direct statement suggesting a socialist perspective for the developing black movements. Following a discussion of the two "Negro" movements in the United States, the one in the Northern ghettoes with echoes in some of the larger Southern cities, the other in the South, an "all-class civil rights movement whose objectives and, to a large extent tactics have been formulated by middle class leaders," they argued that the liberal faith that

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[13]Weinstein and Eakins, *For a New America*, p. 20.

[14]"From the Editors," *Studies on the Left*, 4 (Winter, 1963): 3-4.

"peaceful democratic processes and pressure group politics could solve the problems of black oppression" was no longer valid. Black radicals in particular, furious with the failure of this approach, attacked liberalism and liberals in general. As they forcefully argued, "The real needs of black workers can only be met by a movement against corporate power." While many white radicals insisted that socialism was the only solution to the problem of black inferiority, the difficulty was that it meant "virtually nothing to the man in the street." For the editors, the long evaded task of these radicals was to, "provide a politically realizable program for organizing American life around a socially owned, democratically planned economy; a program that will be drawn in terms of the immediate experiences of the American working class in particular, and of the nation more generally."As they went on to conclude, "Failing this, radicals will continue to occupy the never-never land they have maintained for the last forty years or so, where dualism in their political thought has been but the ideological expression of their actual predicament: namely, of their absorption by liberalism while in the very act of "appealing to the masses" and of sectarian isolation while "rendering an appeal to conscience." For them, mankind had produced no principles that differed from those of "imperialist capitalists," no principles that meet the immediate demands of the working class other than socialism. Thus they declared, "Shall we not say the word and translate it into the American language and experience?" "Since the material basis and the historical necessity of this task already exist," they concluded, "Only the will of radicals to make the effort is lacking."[15]

Among the many other difficulties both ideological and historical involved in this task, the will of the editorial board to make the effort was also lacking as some of the editors advocated a very different path for the journal to follow. In light of the activism on the Left, in addition to working with

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[15]"Civil Rights and the Northern Ghetto," *Studies on the Left*, 4 (Summer 1964): 3-15.

theory and analysis, the journal, they claimed, needed to become more involved in the movement itself. To facilitate this, the journal's format was revised to include reports from the movement in a new section introduced in volume 5 entitled, "With the Movements." According to one of the editors, these reports and analyses of the various movement groups and activities were to be the responsibility of a full time reporter-editor "who will travel and examine first hand." However, it would appear that this appointment never took place and although the reports in this section were largely from people not involved in the work, they still gave, "an interesting picture of the consciousness of those involved" even if they provided little analysis. Even with these limitations, Weinstein concluded, "*Studies* has won considerable interest among students and their organizations. Both the Students for a Democratic Society and the Northern Student Movement are eager to have the magazine distributed widely to their memberships, and both are interested in having us expand into a bi-monthly publication."[16] Although this new focus of *Studies* lasted for just one volume (January,1965 to January, 1966), from the beginning it was the source of considerable friction which ultimately had disastrous consequences for the journal. Specifically, the new editors, particularly those who were deeply involved activists – Tom Hayden, Norm Fruchter and later Staughton Lynd – were to carry the standard for a definition of radical scholarship directly opposed to the one previously worked out in Wisconsin. The result was that the board quickly divided into two antagonistic camps. The "activists", seeing little distinction between intellectual activity and practical organizing, were immediately challenged by a "scholarly" camp which believed it was the intellectual's responsibility to construct a firm theoretical and analytical foundation upon which later activists could build a movement. For them, the new movements and the many individual radicals were approaching a point where they would need, "a

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[16]Weinstein to Daniel J. Bernstein, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 1-7.

radical center through which they can integrate with other activity, provide mutual support, train new cadre, and work out a vision of a better society and a strategy of transformation."[17]

The response to the call for this "radical center" which would create a broad body of radical analysis to demonstrate the need for an over-all transformation of American society was answered by the "activist" wing in the next issue. In a statement which seems to have been mostly the work of Tom Hayden although also signed by Norm Fruchter and Alan Cheuse, these editors argued that the non-activist editors were guilty of advocating an elitist and manipulative concept of the left. Instead of assuming that a viable radicalism was present, an assumption which led to the idea that a "radical center" was needed, they suggested a need to focus on the obstacles to a radical movement as the first priority. For them, the real task at hand "was beginning a real democratic revolution," in which, "the most oppressed aspire to govern and decide, begin to practice their aspiration, and finally carry it to fulfilment by transforming decision-making everywhere." From this perspective, a "radical center" was an overly administrative concept, " a false way of making the insubstantial substantial." Only by adopting the Movement emphasis on "letting the people decide," on decentralized decision-making, and on refusing alliances with top leaders could radicals create, "a personal and group identity that can survive both the temptations and crippling effects of this society." Only when the movement recovers power from the elite can "a new kind of man" emerge to change American society. Instead of a radical elite attempting to create a body of radical theory before such "new men" could speak for themselves, radical analysis and theory should grow from a grassroots movement in which individuals "think and work as radicals" and in which "everybody is a leader." Thus these activist editors concluded, "Not

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[17]"After the Election," *Studies on the Left*, 5 (Winter, 1965): 21.

until then will a center reflect anything radical and deep in American society."[18]

According to one young scholar, this activist position grew from a perspective which would later permeate activist history and which challenged the non-activists' commitment to disinterested and objective scholarship separate from activity. For the activists he explained, "America's problem was basically personal and psychological." Americans, the activists believed, were not so much victims of oppression as of repression. Thus, the radical organizer was seen largely as a therapist. "Modern society," the activists claimed "was the culprit," and it was the radical's task to help them regain their wills to create the situation in which a new identity and a new movement could emerge.[19]

The reply of their opponents, included in the same issue (James Weinstein was the author, and it was signed by Stanley Aronowitz, Lee Baxandall, Eugene Genovese, and Helen Kramer), asserted that their attempt to find an effective way to "confront this society and change it" was not to solve the problem with "new organizational formulas" but to begin the search for effective strategies that would work toward creating a coalition of radical constituencies that would be capable of becoming an effective political force on the left. What was needed to accomplish this goal, according to this camp, was discussion, analysis, and examination of all the new experiments in community organization with a view, "to finding common programs, a common attitude toward existing American social organization, a common vision of the new society, and a long range strategy for putting together a coalition that might have some political relevance." The answer was not to be found by, "limiting ourselves to the problems of organizing or working within communities of Northern poor and Southern

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[18]"Up from Irrelevance," *Studies on the Left*, 5 (Spring,1965): S3-7.

[19]Richard Evans, *In Quest of a Usable Past: Young Leftist Historians in the 1960's*, PhD. Dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1979, p. 40-41.

rural Negroes, even if that work is now the most advanced and has the greatest potential for rapid development." Instead of "mindless activism" radicals have the responsibility, "to explore the possibilities for the development of mass radical consciousness and to attempt its organization among several other groups in society." For this group there was a clear division between themselves as intellectuals and scholars and the rank and file and organizers in the movement. Intellectuals would first build an ideological centre to develop the radical theory that the activists would later use to help them organize in the streets.[20]

Behind this disagreement lay fundamental differences regarding the role of the intellectual. For the "scholarly" camp, intellectual work was essential and therefore a legitimate full time occupation. One could not be committed to producing scholarly work and be expected to organize at the same time. Activists, on the other hand saw, intellectual work as an "incidental adjunct to the more basic work in the streets." In Evans' view, "They believed that only intellect informed by the direct experiences of the people in struggle was likely to be of much use because "ivory tower intellectuals" were allowing themselves to be coopted by the establishment and "deserved to be held in contempt by those struggling along with the people."[21]

This debate among the *Studies* editors would be a precursor of many battles that would be fought by radical historians in general during the latter half of the sixties, culminating in the December 1969 meeting of the American Historical Association. A specific example of the extent to which radical scholars were becoming divided on this issue was seen at the first meeting of The Socialist Scholars Conference held at Columbia University in the fall of 1965. In a paper "The Future of

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[20]"Reply," *Studies on the Left* (Spring, 1965): 7-12.

[21]Evans, *In Quest of a Usable Past*, p. 42.

Socialism" Staughton Lynd suggested, in a general way, "the possibilities for the maturation of a revolutionary crisis in the United States as an increasingly predatory foreign policy generated resistance at home." While several of the panel members disagreed with Lynd's analysis, it was Eugene Genovese who sharply dissented from his estimate of an unfolding crisis and who argued that "socialist scholars ought to concentrate on intellectual work as a part of a struggle that might take a century to mature." This conflict was underscored during the open discussion when representatives of various factions tried to take the microphone to press the "specific formulations of their particular groups." Only the efforts of Ann Lane, the chairman of the panel, prevented a disaster by thwarting the attempts of these "radicals" to "transform the panel into a circus."[22] In the following year the conference attracted over 2000 participants who found a deepening conflict between the organizing committee and younger radicals seeking "a politically engaged scholarship." It was at this conference that Genovese gave a paper on slavery that opened with the statement, "American radicals have long been imprisoned by the pernicious notion that the masses are necessarily both good and revolutionary, and the even more pernicious notion that if they are not they should be."Although he was criticizing Herbert Aptheker's *American Negro Slave Revolts*, "soon he and others would direct the same criticism at the works of radicals studying 'history from the bottom up'."[23]

By the end of 1965, most of the editors seemed to be in agreement with the comments made by Evan Stark in his short commentary, "Theory on the Left," which appeared in the last issue of volume 5. According to this observer, there was considerable disappointment with the recent tendency of *Studies* to align itself with "the movement" and its tendency to subordinate the need for a creative

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[22]"Socialist Scholars Conference," *Studies on the Left*, 5 (Fall,1965): 3-7.

[23]Weiner, "Radical Historians," p. 420.

theory of collective action to "mundane comments" from members of the new "rub your nose in the grime" school of middle-class engagement. As he went on to point out, "If *Studies* is to remain radical, it must remain critical of the movement as well as of tangential protests." In his plea for *Studies* to turn its pages once again to scholarship, he insisted that the left needed a body of theory shaped for collective action by intellectuals. "When *Studies* abdicates its role as a journal of radical thought as well as an occasional commentator on radical action . . . it unwittingly defends the complete destruction of intellectual sensibility in America which is already in full swing."[24]

Although the majority of the board agreed that community organizing was not the path to a new revolutionary America, it had not seen the last of this topic as the clashes over the direction and function of the journal would continue into the next volume in 1966. Indeed, the controversy was the focus of the lead article in the first issue of that volume, written by a future editor, Ronald Aronson. In this article, Aronson spoke of "the strange debate" taking place on the "new Left" where neither side listens to the other, where positions are rarely explored and where, "epithets and set-phrases (' manipulative', 'utopian', 'old-Left line', ' psychological hang-ups') replace discussion." For him, the dispute was largely a historical one: a theory, Marxism, without a movement and a movement without a theory. As he argued, "unlike Marxian theory, participatory democracy has no analysis of society to explain *why* poverty, disenfranchisement, and concentration of power in elites occur."At the same time, the community groups had developed in response to the same prosperity that had made Marxian theory irrelevant for their potential movement. With this gulf between the movement and its Marxist critics, it is small wonder then, that "dismissal often takes the place of debate."After attempting to see the issues from a different perspective, and, analysing the movement's critics and the attitudes and

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[24]Evan Stark, "Theory on the Left," *Studies on the Left,* 5 (Fall, 1965): 80-83.

activities of the organizers, he suggested that the fundamental problems of the movement seemed to be "historically determined rather than the fault of the organizers' personal shortcomings." Without a theoretical understanding of the system, the movement could oppose and threaten, but it would never take power and develop an alternative. A radical opposition must understand the system's weakness in order to be as effective as is historically possible. As he concluded, "If activists are to break beyond slogans to a more basic analysis and a more effective politics . . . they will require the assistance of those who can explain the source of the system's fragility, as well as its weakest points." "Many of us will continue to reject and oppose the system" but, "we shall be doing it more for personal and moral reasons than because of objective possibilities of success."[25]

Certainly, the article did not resolve the conflict and may have even taken the discussion a step backward. Although it was important as a restatement of things as they were in 1965, it said little that had not been said repeatedly in the previous year and as Weinstein and Eakins suggested, "because it granted so much to those on both sides of the questions, it did not stimulate further serious discussion." More importantly, it took for granted what was at issue, both in terms of student organizing and in "assuming that what passed as Marxist theory in the organized left in the United States was, in fact, all that was possible."[26]

The final statement regarding community organizing initiatives was published in the next issue of *Studies*. As the last serious attempt to raise the problems of this approach to the level of theory, the two authors observed that "none of the present left radicalism has developed into political radicalism

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[25]Ronald Aronson, "The Movement and its Critics," *Studies on the Left*, 6 (January-February, 1966): 3-19.

[26]Weinstein and Eakins, *For a New America*, p. 26.

(a radical movement or party with a coherent strategy aimed at taking power), just as none of the left debates about alternative strategies have developed any theoretical understanding which takes us closer to change." After an analysis of a student-initiated community organizing project with which they both worked and a discussion of community organizing in general, they did not hold out much hope that these activities could provide the foundation for a national radical movement. In this situation, the importance of the movement lies in its "attempt first to create, then enlarge, a space in which the possible alternatives can be developed, and the possible challenge to the status quo kept alive." In this way, these community organizations become "rallying points." Thus, they concluded, "the movement's attempts to create buttresses against the absorbing society, its constant challenge of existing institutions, its experimentation with possibilities for opposition, give it its importance."[27]

The resignation of the three activist members of the editorial board in the spring of 1966 was the definitive evidence of the changing perspectives of the journal.[28] It appears to have been obvious by this time that the board had not been functioning very well. In late 1965, James Weinstein was complaining that there had been " real trouble with Tom [Hayden] and that "Gene [Genovese] wants to force his resignation." Added to that dilemma was Staughton Lynd's failure to come to meetings which, "we all feel is just as well," and plans were being made to drop him from the board by the next meeting if he still was failing to attend meetings.[29] At the time of the resignations, Lynd responded to the board's acceptance of his proposal to join the associates' list by stating that it was absolutely clear

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[27]Norm Fruchter and Robert Kramer, "An Approach to Community Organizing Projects," *Studies on the Left*, 6 (March-April,1966): 61.

[28]The three board members who resigned were Norm Fruchter, Tom Hayden, and Staughton Lynd. Although Lynd was to remain as an associate editor, his name disappeared from the masthead with the third issue of Volume 6.

[29]Weinstein to Michael Lebowitz, 4 November 1965, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 6-2.

that it was his desire to continue "a dialogue with the *Studies* board." The reason for this, he added, "was because the 'objective fact' is that the two positions overlap considerably, that the dialogue within the board reflects a dialogue within the movement as a whole, and that, in my opinion, none of us has succeeded in articulating the relation between theory and practice in that era when mankind begins to move out of the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom." Despite this gesture, he withdrew his services totally because of his loyalty to Tom Hayden. When the board refused to reconsider Hayden's resignation, Lynd replied, "I cannot accept a situation in which Tom is cast into outer darkness and I remain."[30]

With the departure of these three activists from the board and the addition of two new board members who were more sympathetic to the non-activist position, the editors now agreed on the need for the movement to turn to the task of developing a socialist politics. As Sklar and Weinstein suggested in their article in the second issue of volume 6, "The essential work now involves developing in outline, and to a degree programmatically, a view of the new post-industrial society posited by present-day capitalism, and to begin building a new movement around this view." The first step in achieving this objective was for new leftists to examine the content of their radicalism and "determine if they are committed to a transformation of American capitalism into that higher form of society envisaged by Marx." If they committed to such a goal all their activities should be consciously determined "by an intention to build a revolutionary movement and then a party that has the perspective of gaining power in the United States."[31]

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[30]Lynd to Ronald Radosh and James Weinstein, 28 March 1966, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 6-8.

[31]Martin J. Sklar and James Weinstein, "Socialism and the New Left," *Studies on the Left*, 6 (March-April, 1966): 69-70.

Weinstein would go on to describe the role of socialist intellectuals in this process in a second article in the same volume. Reinforcing his earlier commitment, he believed that socialism was still relevant in the United States as the only alternative for those committed to the transformation of American life. In creating a vision of a society free from bureaucratic control and capable of permitting everyone to develop their potentialities and live a satisfying life, it was "the special responsibility of the socialist intellectual" to conceptualize the nature of that society and the prospects for making it a reality. As well as exposing the inhuman character of American society as it is now organized, "socialists should begin constructing a vision of a new society organized to satisfy real needs and to allow for a 'participatory democracy' outside the framework of the non-dominate corporate-liberal state." In order to create this new structure, it would no longer be possible for these intellectuals to separate their intellectual and academic work from their "politics." Instead of seeing politics simply as activity on the one hand or retreating to a socialist ivory tower on the other, they should apply their intellect to "the examination of those historical, economic, political, and sociological problems that are relevant to the building of a new socialist movement in the United States and to the ultimate transformation of American society." Without this vision, the new activists "will continue to experience frustration, or will be absorbed by the more sophisticated molders of the liberal consensus." The real issue facing socialists at the present time he concluded, "was whether the new left, unlike the dominant left of the 1930s, will be able to develop its own revolutionary vision of a reorganized America – or whether, like the left of the 1930s, it will substitute tactics for ideas."[32]

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[32]James Weinstein, "Socialist Intellectuals," *Studies on the Left*, 6 (September-October, 1966): 3-8.

In order to further this goal of building a new socialist party, *Studies* announced plans for a conference on independent politics to be held in New York City on December 27, 1966. In their promotional letter to fellow left-wingers, the editors indicated that they realized that at this point in time a socialist party would be little more than "another isolated sect" but they were still convinced that, "the time has come for a conscious effort to gear both our theoretical and practical work to this goal." Apparently they had experienced some difficulty in obtaining articles which bore directly on the problems that needed to be solved if a new socialist party was to be built. This difficulty, they believed, was due to the fact that the growing number of "radicals and socialists" who agreed in whole or in part with their perspective were unable to establish lines of communication which would, "permit us to exchange views, formulate theoretical tasks and carry through the work that must be done." The conference would be a start towards "overcoming the isolation in which so many of us are compelled to work . . . ."[33] The conference was organized around a discussion of various forms of independent politics that had emerged in the period after 1965, and included sessions on black power, the peace movement, and socialist-oriented committees for independent political action. According to the managing editor of the journal, the purpose of the conference was to explore the questions involved in these new trends, to come to some tentative estimate of their direction and potentialities, and "to define the theoretical problems relevant to development of "new politics" into socialist politics."[34]

This call for an enlarged participation in *Studies* attracted at least one former Madison associate who seemed to hold definite ideas on how the journal might develop its new focus more fully. As he suggested, "The critique of the 'old Left'; the character of *Studies* analysis of American

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[33]"Conference Announcement," *Studies on the Left Papers* (not dated), 11-1.

[34]Lewis to Unknown, 9 December 1966, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 11-1.

civilization; and Aronson's imperative of transcending Marxism strike me as three important areas (related) which, once developed, can become a legitimate basis for growth." Even more important was the need to examine "the base" of the new socialist politics. As he concluded, "Is there a program which can unite both middle class and working class sectors in a movement against technological capitalism? Or are we somehow developing a theory and an approach to revolution which implies (consciously or not) that the agent of revolution is the student and intellectual and middle class?"[35]

His concerns were particularly relevant as events related to the escalation of the Vietnam War after 1965 and the growing strength of the new black power movement forced radicals to think more seriously about questions of power and to see imperialism as a world-wide system whose vital centre was the United States. In particular, the growth of a new kind of peace movement, one that relied on mass participation and direct confrontation rather than on the accumulation of "respectable" support, led naturally to a new interest in class adjustments and structures, and "to the search for a more comprehensive view of the nature of American corporate capitalism." Although this pushed the movement into a new awareness of its own potential as a revolutionary force, it was also to have a negative impact on *Studies* and its analysis of American society. As two former editors of the journal observed, this new awareness, "did not change the community organizers' habit of thought that their immediate activity, was, in itself, the means to revolutionary change in the United States. If anything, the tendency to think of the movement as a substitute for a revolutionary party was momentarily strengthened."[36] At the same time as many radicals began to see the peace movement as the foundation for a larger revolutionary movement, there were others who predicted that there was very little chance

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[35]Breines to *Studies* Board, 14 December 1966, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 11-1.

[36]Weinstein and Eakins, *For a New America*, p. 30.

of this happening. As one editor of the journal argued in 1966, "one of the weaknesses of the American peace movement as presently constituted is that it lacks a clearly defined theory of imperialism." Without such a theory, the peace movement would never break out of its isolation and build a political base in the United States. Protest was not enough. What was needed was an analysis both of the origins of the current conflict and of the nature of American foreign policy in general. As he concluded, "In the final analysis, then, the struggle for peace and against imperialism cannot succeed if it continues to be waged on a single issue basis. Precisely because American imperialism is so deeply rooted in the whole military-industrial complex, it must be fought on the level of domestic as well as international policy."[37]

Despite this criticism, many radicals insisted on acting as if the peace movement should be a substitute for an independent socialist party. Apparently this feeling was shared by some members of the board and so the underlying conflict about the journal's direction remained as it had been before the split in early 1966. Despite agreement on the need to establish a new socialist movement, and despite agreement about the importance of the new anti-war movement, the controversy over scholarship and activism would not go away. While one group looked to the movement for the spontaneous development of a new socialist politics and saw the movement evolving into "an organization with a will to power and with an increasingly coherent ideology and strategy to make that will effective," the other believed that, "only a self-consciously socialist party could achieve the theoretical and programmatic coherence required for the sustained development of theory and strategy essential to the steady and privileged growth of a revolutionary movement." At some time, they were

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[37]Robert Wolfe, "American Imperialism and the Peace Movement," *Studies on the Left* ,6 (May-June, 1966): 28-43.

convinced, "a group of people who saw the need for such a political formation would have to take willful action."[38]

To this group, who favoured immediate action toward creating a new party, willful action meant that the editors should call for the formation of a preliminary organization made up mostly of intellectuals to begin the work of developing a vision of a new society and an initial organizing strategy, and that *Studies* should become the organ of that new grouping. This position was argued very emphatically in two papers presented at the Socialist Scholars Conference in late 1966 and reprinted in the first issue of volume 7 of *Studies.*[39] Both of these authors agreed that at least part of the new left was tending to the conclusion that before radicals could move from protest to politics, they must pass through a period of intensive theoretical and educational preparation. Even the SDS, often regarded as the very model of "mindless activism" had begun to see the light by establishing the Radical Education Project which testified to a new interest in theory and research as well as a new emphasis on the specific needs of the student community. Once again it seemed obvious to these scholars that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice. "Given the present state of the American left," Wolfe lamented, "the need for radical intellectuals to act like intellectuals is all too plainly manifest." Equally manifest was the need for a radical political practice which would permit radical intellectuals to formulate their theoretical goals in relation to actual tasks and actual struggles. In the absence of such a practice it would be difficult to avoid falling back upon "a static and monolithic model of American society, a model which may then serve as a justification for continued

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[38]Weinstein and Eakins, *For a New America*, p. 32.

[39]Robert Wolfe, "Beyond Protest," and James Weinstein, "Notes on the Need for a Socialist Party," *Studies on the Left* 7 (January-February 1967): 3-21; 50-61.

inaction."[40] But most important of all was the need to evolve a long range social vision to which immediate struggles could be related and through which an ongoing program of political education and political action could be sustained. For them the only vision was socialism, which needed to be spelled out in clear and meaningful terms and which also needed to be embodied in "a political movement that practices the social values it preaches."[41]

This point was reinforced by Weinstein who agreed that if there was to be such a movement there must first be a group of people committed to social transformation, capable of developing this vision of a better society, and able to work out a strategy for its attainment. The agent for this kind of change according to Weinstein, "is a conscious group of individuals committed to transforming society in a specific direction or manner and organized to do so."[42] Their task at the beginning of this process was to bring together those people who already think of themselves in some way as socialists into a coherent and self-conscious grouping, so "that the work of developing a vision of a new society and an initial organizing strategy can be done consistently." It is interesting to note that in identifying those "people" who would be likely to share this view, he included mostly young students and intellectuals as well as older unaffiliated socialists but omitted the poor and the white working class. Both of these groups would only become part of the socialist constituency, "after we have a visible, relevant, substantial party with which they can identify from the beginning of their association with us." Before this could happen, Weinstein concluded, "we must begin to be able to say not simply that socialism

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[40]*Ibid.*, p.11.

[41]*Ibid.*, p.21.

[42]Weinstein, "Notes on a Socialist Party," p. 57.

is the answer, but to define what socialism could mean in the United States."[43]

However, the other group of editors, while also desiring to see the movement turn to socialism, believed that to take the initiative to establish this new socialist party would isolate the journal from the movement. Instead, they insisted that *Studies* should return to its former role of reporting on and analysing movement activity with the aim of influencing its direction, and refused to cooperate with the Weinstein-Wolfe faction.This time the board was split almost exactly in half and neither side could carry on alone. And so *Studies on the Left* ceased publishing in the summer of 1967. Ironically, the last issue published, volume 7, number 2, was a special issue on "The Crisis of the European Left."

In a final letter to the friends of *Studies*, the editors pointed out that while a growing debt (about $5,000) forced the decision upon them, it was not the main consideration for stopping publication of the journal. To put it simply, the board, in their words, "has been generally dissatisfied with the character of the journal and fundamentally divided over the direction in which it should go." For some, the way to organize a party was "to organize a party." They did not see the value of debating questions of immediate tactics, such as draft resistance and electoral campaigns. Nor did they feel a commitment to analysing movement insights such as participatory democracy and "counter-community" with the hope of raising discussion of "such fragmentary and scattered ideas to a serious theoretical level." A journal that would attempt to become the critical self-awareness of the movement, trying to move with it towards adequate styles of politics, life and work, was not the kind of publication that radicals such as Genovese, Weinstein and Wolfe were prepared to support. In their minds, such a journal would also require an entirely new format and they were not prepared to make any further concessions. Having stated the need to form a socialist party many times in recent volumes of *Studies*,

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[43]*Ibid.*, p.61.

this group believed that, "the time has come to act on its own advice or retire gracefully."[44]

Despite its relatively short life span of less than seven years, *Studies* was, in many ways, the most important vehicle for the new historiographical left. This was true in spite of the fact that its circulation never exceeded five thousand copies per issue.[45] From its humble beginnings as a radical student journal in Wisconsin, where it was established to provide an arena in which radical and socialist students could publish their researches and debate radical approaches to American problems, it became one of the major battlegrounds where two warring camps of left historians fought their skirmishes over the questions of what it meant to be a radical historian and what the role of radical history should be. In the early years in Wisconsin, these young historians had evolved a comfortable self-definition of what the new radical history would entail and in many ways this view fit closely with the professional self-image they were inheriting from their non-radical historian elders.They were firmly committed to a history that would be written disinterestedly and objectively and which would, by simply uncovering the truth, be of greatest value in aiding any radical movement. Their work was motivated by what seemed to be an attempt to prove that left radicals could be good scholars and that the scholarship they produced was as academically valid as that found in the accepted professional journals. In their analysis of American history and politics in the light of current realities and in their desire to update and develop left theory, they would place radical scholarship at the service of radical politics. Finally, as Eleanor Hakim recalled, there was a commitment to, "a radical socio-cultural and historical analysis and clarification in and of themselves, in contradistinction to traditional radical

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[44]Editors to the Friends of *Studies*, 9 August 1967, *Studies on the Left Papers*, 6-4.

[45]The total paid subscription at the height of its influence was 4,425 copies. Mail subscriptions, for those radicals who could afford the $5.00 subscription fee, only amounted to 1,625 copies; See *Studies on the Left*, 6 (January-February, 1966): 106.

politics."[46] Although she went on to lament the journal's shift from intellectual radicalism to "a pragmatic radicalism for which intellectual analysis became something of an expedient," a shift in focus that projected itself more to a politically radical readership and less to a community of intellectual radical peers, she was prepared to concede that *Studies* did make a significant contribution to revisionist scholarship in "both left-wing and academic circles," especially with regard to updating the view of the United States as a corporate society.[47]

As many of the memoirs in Buhle's collection on Madison radicalism suggest, even if the journal failed to create an ideal community of radical scholars it did succeed in creating a "public presence for the new history." For one former Madisonian it represented a continuation of what the best of Progressivism had been and became a "muck-raking journal on a higher level." But it was also more than that. Inspired by the British New Left, it was more European with its real interest in social relations than most American intellectual work. Still, as Warren Susman also observed about *Studies*, "Although it took positions on many things, it was not a call to picket the corner grocery store."[48]

With its move to New York, the journal took on another face as a result of a critical challenge to the idea that a radical historian could be both a committed radical and a practitioner of the historical craft.This challenge came from a growing sense among young radicals that the problems of America involved more than politics and economics. For many of these young activists, the problems were also spiritual and psychological, which meant that radical history would need to be written in radically

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[46]Eleanor Hakim, "The Tragedy of Hans Gerth," in Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p. 258.

[47]*Ibid.*, p.258

[48]Warren Susman, "The Smoking Room School of History," in Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p.45.

different ways. As the editorial board was expanded to include radicals who were deeply involved activists, the new editors were to carry the standard for a definition of radical scholarship which was the complete antithesis of the one previously worked out in Madison. They believed that intellectual work was largely an adjunct to the basic work in the streets. To these activists, "ivory tower intellectuals" had been coopted by the system and deserved to be held in contempt by those struggling along with the people. The creation of a special class of intellectuals to produce theory and analysis was unnecessary as theory would emerge spontaneously from the experience of the people as they engaged in the everyday task of gaining their liberation. Given the spiritual nature of America's problems, one needed to stop thinking and act. Objective scholarship, though possible, was largely irrelevant to the problems as activists saw them. While Novick tells us that it would be an exaggeration to speak of the polarization of left historians into two distinct and mutually hostile camps, the journal's pages bear testimony to the controversy between the demands of citizenship and scholarship.[49] This debate between the "involved scholarship"of activists, created by and immediately useful to revolutionary participants, and the "distanced scholarship"of intellectuals, which maintained high intellectual and critical standards while being committed to radical goals was never resolved and ultimately killed the journal. After all these squabbles the questions that still remained unanswered were: What should radical history look like? and, What is the role of a radical historian? Was radical history to be made in the stacks or in the streets?

Despite its inability to overcome this dilemma, *Studies* did make important contributions to the study of American history. First and foremost, it helped to revive radical scholarship in the United States and so for many radical scholars it served as an "oasis" in "the intellectually parched early

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[49]Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 428.

1960s."[50] One cannot ignore the example of radical scholarship the journal provided during the seven years it published, when New Left historians fought for recognition in the profession as legitimate contributors to an understanding of the American past. As well as creating a new understanding of the American political economy by developing the analytical concept of corporate liberalism as the dominant political ideology in the United States throughout the twentieth century, the journal also contributed to the consciousness and ideological development of the student New Left. Although not directly a part of the New Left, it quickly recognized the potential in the various New Left activities and tried to provide for the new movement an understanding of what had brought the Old Left to grief as well as a theoretical basis for a new socialist politics. As Jim Weinstein recalled, "we knew many movement people read the journal, and we were very much at home with SDS and such groups as the Northern Student Movement." "This was true" he added, "even though we insisted on the need to understand our place in the history of the Left, while Tom Hayden and most other SDS leaders believed they had no connection to the Old Left."[51] Many other leaders in the movement were connected with *Studies* in one way or another, as writers, editorial associates or editors. Still Weinstein confessed, "It's hard to say who read *Studies* . . . or what its influence was but "we hoped that *Studies* would have an effect on the general orientation of Left intellectuals and it may have had some impact."[52]

Nevertheless, it did make a significant contribution to revisionist scholarship in both left-wing and traditional academic circles. As well as attracting a respectful interest from a section of "liberal" academia, even respected mainstream historians such as C. Vann Woodward began to appear

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[50]James B. Gilbert, "Studies on the Left," in Mary Jo Buhle et al., *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p.759.

[51]James Weinstein, "Studies on the Left," in Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p.116-117.

[52]*Ibid.*, p.117.

in its pages, welcoming the journal as "a sign that graduate students are still alive and kicking in spite of all the professors can do to anaesthetize them."[53] At the very least Buhle adds, "*Studies* made radicalism, or at least cerebral radicalism, respectable, allowing many students to discuss and publish in their areas of interest without fear of sanction." The real tragedy of its premature death was the fact that, as in so many previous cases where radical left-wing intellectuals attempted to provide a new vision for American society, their attempt ultimately failed. While these intellectuals claimed to have learned from past mistakes, they were still unable to overcome sectarian arguments that plagued the left in America and drove their predecessors to failure.[54]

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[53]Paul Buhle and Edward Rice-Maximin, *William Appleman Williams: The Tragedy of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.119.

[54]*Ibid.*, p.119.

PART TWO

A NEW GENERATION – *RADICAL AMERICA*

3

Wisconsin Roots

Just as its editors were preparing the obituaries for *Studies on the Left*, a second journal that would speak to the subject of radical history was born at the University of Wisconsin. This new journal, *Radical America*, grew out of the experiences of Paul Buhle, its founder and original editor. Unlike many of his *Studies* predecessors, Buhle had grown up in the Big Ten university town of Champaign-Urbana where he lived at home during his undergraduate days until he married at nineteen, and where he drifted through "an apolitical campus life with the help of a bohemian subculture."[1] His political awareness dawned in 1960 with the civil rights movement when walking the picket line in local demonstrations was the most "exciting thing" that had happened in his life to that point. Within a year, he had observed the beating of a political dissident in Madrid by Franco's special police and had been exposed to the San Francisco counterculture for eight months while attending San Francisco State. On his return to Champaign he found himself to be the only open socialist on a campus of thirty thousand. By now, widening opposition to the Vietnam War brought him into the local SDS chapter and he found himself chairing the first big public forum and marching at the head of two hundred demonstrators. Shortly after, a friendly history professor helped him stay ahead of the draft board by sending him to the University of Connecticut in Storrs to pursue

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[1]Paul Buhle, "Radical America and Me," *History and the New Left*, p. 218.

his Master's degree.

While attending Connecticut, his radicalism was fostered by a summer working in New York where he was able to spend "an evening every week arguing with teacher James Weinstein at the Free University of New York." Back in Storrs, he had become involved with the local SDS chapter which had made some waves but failed "to overcome the political apathy of a weekend commuter campus."[2] However, SDS was making headway nationally and in 1966 – 1967 Buhle became involved in the American History and Political Thought program, a subdivision of the Radical Education Project (REP) which had been launched as the educational arm of the Students for a Democratic Society in the fall of 1966. This American Radical History program, organized and coordinated by Buhle, was largely conducted by mail and consisted primarily of a periodic newsletter containing bibliographies, short articles, and correspondence on the history of American radicalism which Buhle produced from approximately October, 1966 to February,1967, with a circulation of no more than one hundred copies, mostly to SDS members and chapters. The first issue of *Radical America* was simply a more ambitious version of this newsletter. Both were for individuals who were trying to find historical precedents for the radical student movement of the 1960s.

According to Buhle, the original purpose of this new experiment in making history relevant to radicals was quite clear. As he proclaimed, "In creating a crude, little magazine about American radical history, *Radical America*, I hoped that SDS members would read and learn about the mistakes of the past (especially those made by Socialists and Communists) and not repeat them." As he went on to conclude, "In some sense, for which neither the Old Left nor the Port Huron Statement

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[2]*Ibid.*, p. 218.

prepared me, history *had* to be used to gain a sense of the way things were moving, and the role that a variety of radicals might play."[3]

While the lack of financing limited the publication of Volume 1, Number 1 to five hundred copies, of which no more than four hundred were circulated, the appearance of this first issue generated sufficient interest to encourage the further development of the magazine. As one supportive SDSer from Ohio State wrote, "Let me emphasize that radical education grounded in history and with the idea of developing theory is sorely needed in Columbus."[4] By this time Madison called, and encouraged by friendly professors who supported his study of American radicalism and who pointed him in the direction of Madison, Buhle believed it was time for "a pilgrimage to the spiritual home of radical history."[5] As he later confessed, even with his Masters in history, his experience with two SDS chapters, and a fledging magazine in his back pocket, "I had never, for more than a few political moments, broken the isolation of the village atheist American radical."[6] Madison would certainly change that.

When he arrived at Madison in the fall of 1967 to begin his graduate studies in History he found a campus that had been swept by militant action against American involvement in the Vietnam War and where radical history graduate students seemed to be at or near the leadership of insurgent institutions all around the campus, including an active chapter of SDS. By the time Buhle reached

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[3]Paul Buhle, "Introduction to the *Radical America* Collection," 1971, *Radical America Papers*, 1-1.

[4]Jim Buckley to Paul Buhle, 24 January 1967, *Radical America Papers*, 1- 4.

[5]Buhle, "Radical America and Me," in *History and the New Left*, p. 219.

[6]*Ibid.*, p.217.

his new home, he had already made the acquaintance of two other individuals who would play a prominent role in continuing to publish the journal in Madison. One of these, Jim O'Brien, a fellow graduate student and intellectual activist, was already busily engaged in Madison REP work and would become a key collaborator throughout the history of the journal. The second was Henry Haslach, "sometime printer, Teaching Assistant Association pioneer, mathematician and Industrial Workers of the World aficionado,"[7] whose living room was the office of the Madison SDS chapter. As Buhle recalled, "*Radical America* had a working group waiting for me."[8] Starting with its second issue and for the next four years the journal was mainly edited and produced by Buhle and his two associates O'Brien and Haslach, without the luxury of enough seed money for commercial typesetting and printing. As Jim O'Brien recalled, "For its first year, *RA* was a modest compendium of short articles on the radical heritage and on 1960s organizing efforts. It was printed, one 8 ½ x 11 sheet at a time, on the tiny printing press our SDS chapter bought with the proceeds from Barbara Garson's play *MacBird*. The binding process often involved hitting a stapler with a shoe."[9] Over the next two years the journal appeared as an "SDS Journal of American Radicalism" primarily dedicated to the discussion of the radical tradition and its implications for political action, and affiliated with the national organization in spirit although not connected to it in any formal sense.

In providing this national forum for independent radical ideas, the journal was partially filling the vacuum left by the death of *Studies on the Left*. Not only did *Radical America* inherit a

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[7]*Ibid.*, p. 219.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 219.

[9]Jim O'Brien, "Celebrating the Radical Past with Some Irony: Stories in Search of a Story Line," *Radical Historians Newsletter*, 78 (June1998): 2.

radical graduate enthusiasm for history that *Studies* helped build, but as well the contrast between the two journals helped to define the status and orientation of *RA*. As Buhle recalled, "By the mid 1960s, a dissenting strain of radicals had popularized a view of corporate elites dominating the state, directing anticommunist foreign policy, and drowning real democracy in empty ritual. *Radical America* reflected the next generation of scholarship, the impulse to relocate the hidden histories of resistance, the social sources of radicalism in factory conditions and community life."[10] While the *Studies* group generally had seen itself as the nucleus of a theoretically-minded cadre for a new left that grew all too slowly and with "an unwonted antipathy for theory," *Radical America* grew up in the midst of rebellions which may have lacked, "an intellectual perspective but decidedly developed their own leadership and their visionary goals." While some *Studies* editors denounced "mindless activism," this was not the stance of *Radical America*. According to Buhle, "Most of us thought that our first responsibility was not to explain socialism to them but to understand their capacity to take charge of demonstrations, of their dorm life, and of various problems attendant on any student strike. Through interaction, we could provide the information and insights they badly needed in order to carry their aspirations through to a successful conclusion."[11] As the first Madison issue of the journal boldly proclaimed, "Most of all, we believe in shattering forever the walls between the 'activist' and 'intellectual' members of the New Left."[12]

In addition to these fundamental differences of purpose and intellectual orientation, and despite the fact that the journal was edited and published by graduate students in Madison, its

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[10]"Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (3, 1982): 3.

[11]Buhle, "Radical America and Me," p. 221.

[12]"Introduction," *Radical America*, 1 (2, 1968): 1.

relationship to the university contrasted significantly with *Studies on the Left.* By 1968, William A. Williams had left Wisconsin and consequently his influence was largely reduced to his writings rather than felt through any sustained personal contact. Before leaving, however, he was instrumental in helping launch *Radical America* on a wider scale by recommending a small grant from the Rabinowitz Foundation in 1968.[13] More significantly, the editors' relationship to the History Department as a whole was very different from the *Studies* editors, who had been at the university before the student movement had developed to the point of challenging the university's structure and function. As the editors noted in their introduction to the special issue on radical historiography, ". . . though as individuals we have had cordial and intellectually- rewarding relationships with various history faculty members at Wisconsin, our main relationship with the faculty has been an antagonistic one."[14] Despite the attempts of graduate teaching assistants to convince the faculty to share its power over curricular decisions within the History Department, the faculty's predominant stance was one of resistance to democratization. As the editors went on to conclude, "It may be significant that no two of us have the same faculty adviser: it is primarily through political involvement rather than through our work as graduate students that we have come to know each other."[15] Given this context, they would develop very different views from their predecessors in Madison regarding the historical profession and the role of radical history.

In addition, Buhle has suggested that differences between the two Madison journals could also be attributed to generational change on the Left. *RA* was the product of a generation that found

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[13]*Ibid.*, p.221.

[14]"Introduction," *Radical America*, 4 (8-9,1970): 1.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 2.

itself in the midst of rebellion unencumbered by the baggage of the radical past. If the *Studies* group had experienced a "very intense disillusionment from the proletarian shibboleths of the Old Left, most *Radical America* editors had never met a Communist until they came to Madison." As Buhle goes on to observe, "A New York ambience dominated *Studies*; the inner circles of *Radical America* had a preponderance of small-town Protestants whose inherited radicalism (if any) lay generations back."[16] For him, *Studies* had a more academic focus because its founders had fewer illusions about what was possible (a matter of when it was founded) and because, "*RA* was really launched as an informal outlet of a project within SDS, directed at SDS chapters (which usually meant the grad students and upper undergrads, or folks who worked or hung out at bookstores.)"[17] The result was a journal that was meant to be intellectual but not especially academic .

The first issue, produced while Buhle was still in Connecticut, which one commentator critically described as more closely resembling "an undergraduate literary magazine than a scholarly journal,"[18] was the first step in "an experimental forum for the exchange of ideas" between students and scholars in the field of radical history. Although this first issue was only to be a "rough draft" of some of the things these radicals hoped to accomplish, it did seek to speak not only "for and to the younger leftists of SDS, but also to those whose experiences are part of the radical history we are now trying to understand." As the forum for a national study group, it was intended to overcome the flaws of local study groups, which often involved a certain cliquishness or a tendency to

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[16]Buhle, "Radical America and Me," p. 222.

[17]Paul Buhle, e-mail to the author, 9 November, 1997.

[18] John C. Mc Millian, "Love Letters to the Future: REP, Radical America and New Left History," unpublished article in the author's possession, p.25.

indoctrination sessions all too common to the Old Left. In the minds of these young radicals, a national study group would alleviate these problems by providing a "community of scholars" on the subject for all participants as well as opening channels of communication for a "national dialog on all problems."[19]

While the first editorial statement was not entirely clear on the journal's purpose, it did suggest that its structure would have a format similar to any other history journal committed to an ideological position. As well as articles on radical history in an "Approaching the Problem" section there would also be a place for activists to present "lessons as well as facts" on "Contemporary History." The remainder of the magazine would be devoted to presenting annotated bibliographies and reprints of historical and practical interest to the movement. These "departments" did not follow the journal to Wisconsin, where its format would undergo a series of changes that reflected the changing focus of the journal. In Madison, with the second issue, *RA* began operating on a more or less bi-monthly basis with a much more attractive appearance and improved scholarly content.

In the first phase of its development in Wisconsin it was most successful in analysing recent developments in movement history, beginning in the last issue of volume 1 with Mark Naison's study of "The Rent Strikes in New York."[20] volume 2 would continue this trend with articles devoted to the attempts to organize coal miners in Hazard Kentucky; the growth of the SDS Economic Research and Action Project; the evolution of the *Guardian* from Old to New Left; an obituary for *Studies on the Left* written by one of its former editors, Jim Weinstein, as well as articles

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[19]Paul Buhle, "Our Role," *Radical America*, 1 (1, 1967), unpaginated .

[20]Mark Naison, *Radical America*, 1 (3, 1967): 7-50.

by Staughton Lynd on "The Radicals Use of History,"[21] and George Rawick on "The Historical Roots of Black Liberation."[22] This emphasis on movement history was also the focus of one of the first attempts by Jim O'Brien, in a series of three articles in Volume 2, to trace the history of the New Left, from its early years to 1968. Originally conceived as strictly a bibliographical essay, O'Brien soon realized that in order to make it useful to "anyone but scholars (with the time and the library facilities to chase down the sometimes esoteric materials listed here), I would have to write it as a narration, with bibliographical notes."[23] In this narrative O'Brien described a social movement, composed mainly of students, "which had threatened the equilibrium of American society." In his analysis, the New Left had undergone a number of changes since 1965 both in its conception of society and in its strategic thinking. However, none of these changes should be surprising for they were all variations on a theme, "the recognition that American liberalism was not enough, that the good society was one in which people shaped their own institutions to meet their own needs."[24] This approach reflected his vision for a "Radical America" which he had articulated in the first issue of the journal. As he argued, " In the present revival of interest among radicals in understanding their heritage, there is a chance to make important breakthroughs in our knowledge of how we got where we are. But we must ask different questions from those that the earlier historians asked: we must

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[21]Staughton Lynd, *Radical America*, 2 (3, 1968): 58-63.

[22]George Rawick, *Radical America*, 2 (4, 1968):1-13.

[23]The series originally appeared in three installments in the May-June, September-October, and November- December 1968 issues of *Radical America* and was later reprinted as a pamphlet by the New England Free Press.

[24]James O'Brien, *A History of the New Left, 1960-1968* (Boston, New England Free Press, no date), p. 1.

study our radical forbears in the light of the social system with which they struggled." Because, he concluded, "For all their heroism, it is the fortress, not the attackers, that is most important."[25]

By the summer of 1968 the journal was projecting a run of at least 3000 copies for its July-August issue on "Black Liberation," a watershed issue that first introduced young American radicals to the work of the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R.James. At the same time, one of its newly appointed associate editors, Mark Naison, wrote to Buhle to congratulate him on the "growing professionalism" of the journal and noted that it was selling briskly in New York's left-wing bookstores. As he went on to suggest, "I think that the delicate balance between good historiography and relevant theory may be possible to keep."[26] However, as the student movement heated up in the summer of 1968, Buhle's focus began to change and that meant that the editorial emphasis of the journal would also change, as he was, in effect, according to O'Brien, "the sole editor, regardless of who else may have been listed."[27]

This new emphasis was heralded with the appearance of Buhle's article, "New Perspectives on American Radicalism" in volume 2, number 4 in the summer of 1968 which Buhle began by asserting that, "Only the naive or the willfully blind can believe that the Left has not failed in America." For him, the most glaring defect of American radicalism had been, " its failure in analytical terms; the almost total inability of radicals to grasp rudimentary problems of revolutionary development." What seems to have happened is that American leftists had never been able to free themselves from the petrified version of Marxism developed during the Second International, so that

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[25]Jim O'Brien, "A Radical America?" *Radical America*, 1 (1, 1968): 5.

[26]Mark Naison to Paul Buhle, Summer, 1968. *Radical America Papers*, 2-18.

[27]James O'Brien, "Celebrating the Radical Past," p. 2.

they failed to advance further analytically until the 1960s. Most of all, the failure of the various "Old Lefts" in the 1890s, 1910s and 1930s was, "a failure to grasp the American reality and reformulate an analysis to transform it." Above all, their old mechanistic notions of Marxism could not explain, "the growing sense of emptiness among the well-clothed and well-fed Americans, the deeply cultural crisis that swept across America." Instead of ascribing people's actions to their economic motives, the left now had the potential to, "analyse the ways in which people's lives had been changed under modern capitalism and ultimately rework the half-truths of American mythology into a new Marxist synthesis." Only by developing a new cultural critique of American society would leftists be able to rid themselves of the old radical notion that American society possessed a healthy, democratic culture "which only the militarists and corporation presidents temporarily polluted." As he went on to conclude, "The worst of the New Left's heritage is the Old Left's failure to break decisively with that culture, to willingly throw aside old illusions about traditions and groups and begin to propose alternatives."[28]

The article elicited a favourable response from Warren Susman, a left historian who would help shape future American cultural studies, who indicated that he liked the piece and thought that Buhle was, "on to an approach of some fruitfulness." In particular, he went on to propose that Buhle was " right about the failure to understand the milieu of American Marxists" and went on to suggest a number of directions in which Buhle might further his investigations.[29]

Most importantly, this essay signalled what has been described as the second phase of *RA*'s

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[28]Paul Buhle, "New Perspectives on American Radicalism," *Radical America*, 2 (4, 1968): 46-58.

[29]Warren Susman to Paul Buhle, 12 October 1968, *Radical America Papers*, 3-12.

development that would see it reject what it considered to be the Old Left's narrow focus on the economic determinants of behaviour and replace it with a new cultural critique of society that would provide a more valid understanding of bourgeois hegemony. This new emphasis became evident immediately in volume 2, number 6, with the appointment of three new "Cultural Editors," Dan Georgakas, Henry Haslach and Dave Wagner. While Haslach had been part of the editorial staff from the beginning, Georgakas, a Greek-American activist and editor from Detroit, and Wagner, whom Buhle described as his "own poetry mentor and future collaborator"[30] were new to the scene. Together they brought a dazzling array of underground and counter cultural poets and writers such as d.a. levy to the pages of *RA*. This focus continued into the next issue with the publication of two articles on cultural theory analysing the scope and significance of the work of Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse as radical theorists,[31] to be followed by the most popular single issue in the journal's history, "*Radical America* Comix," edited by the underground cartoonist Gilbert Shelton. According to Buhle, "Never before or after did *Radical America* hit a press run of 15,000 copies – and sell out the issue."[32]

This cultural focus continued to be an important part of the journal's activity over the next two years with issues devoted to youth culture, Surrealism, and the translation and lavish illustration of French Situationist work by Guy Debord. The youth culture issue, produced by the Buffalo collective, was devoted to the theoretical problem of determining the character and meaning of the

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[30]Paul Buhle, "Radical America and Me," p. 225.

[31]David Gross, "Towards a Radical Theory of Culture," and Jeremy Shapiro, "Notes on a Radical Theory of Culture," *Radical America*, 2 (6, 1968):1- 23.

[32]Paul Buhle, "Radical America and Me," p. 223.

youth culture in the hope that "it will supply a starting point for a genuine radical interpretation of what is presently happening throughout the country and specifically in the Universities."[33] While, as Buhle was to suggest some fifteen years later, "the links between radical scholarship and youth culture may seem, fifteen years past, especially dubious,"[34] the collective believed that it was a central issue for the movement in terms of any political program that would be developed.

The readers of *Radical America* were also introduced to surrealism, as one of the successors to a long tradition of European avante-gardes. The first surrealist group had been formed in Chicago in the sixties largely through the efforts of poets Franklin and Penelope Rosemont. Spanning the gap between homegrown American radicalism and the avante-grade tradition, they expanded their activities in many directions including producing the special issue on the subject for *Radical America.* They were also to produce several *Radical America* pamphlets in a "Surrealist Research and Development" monograph series with the pregnant insight that "American radicalism and popular culture had been full of objectively surrealist manifestations, from Krazy Kat and Bugs Bunny comics to the blues of Peetie Wheatstraw and Memphis Minnie, to the work of obscure autodidact painters and sculptors."[35] According to Buhle, the Rosemonts had a special contribution to make, "by verifying our own historic-cultural experiences," and as he went on to add, "With Rosemont's help, we turned to recuperate childhood joys and, despite Rosemont's pessimism on this

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[33]Buffalo Collective, "What is Youth Culture?" *Radical America*, 3 (6, 1969): 1.

[34]Paul Buhle, "Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (3, 1982): 3.

[35]David Roediger, "Surrealism," in Mari Jo Buhle et al, *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Urbana, Ill. University of Illinois Press, 1992), p.763.

point, to find analogies in the campus culture's dreams and ideals."[36]

In looking back at this cultural contribution in later years, Buhle explained that the journal's editors, "saw around us (and took part in) the brief flourishing of a new local journalism, the underground press, combative in its style and often compelling in its political message for the young" and, "when the mood had been fresh, the publication of a *Radical America* issue consisting entirely of underground comics, or of a supplemental series of poetry booklets utterly nondidactic in character, evoked no great surprise. We were all part of the same Movement."[37]

This cultural approach also had its historical side with a special issue on "The Working Class and Culture" which former Madisonian and C.L.R. James devotee George Rawick helped to edit. In addition to Rawick's article on "Working Class Self-Activity" and Dick Howard's paper on "French New Working Class Theories," the issue was highlighted by two historiographical articles that introduced the New Left to new perspectives on the American working class. As the first of these articles suggested, the New Left had "tended to ignore the American working class" or else had thought of it "with ignorance, suspicion, and fear." Instead of taking for granted that workers, "had been too fully 'bought off' and shared too strongly in the dominant anti-communist and racist ideology to ever become a force in the movement for socialism," the time had come to continue the process of destroying the myths held by the Movement about the working class. Also, it was hoped that the bibliography would encourage the "much-needed study on the areas of working class life and

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[36]Paul Buhle, "Radical America and Me," p. 226.

[37]Paul Buhle, "Introduction," *Radical America,* 16 (3, 1982): 4.

experience which have been either totally ignored or distorted and confused."[38] For a practical example of the kinds of revisionist working class history this might produce, the second essay on "Working Class Historiography," by Paul Faler, provided an analysis of three historians, two of whom would provide models for such a new approach. According to Faler, Edward Thompson and Herbert Gutman had broken away from the "narrow economic framework of their predecessors and have studied the experience of working within the larger context of social history. In doing so, they have vastly enlarged our knowledge of the magnitude of industrialization; its impact on the social structure, values, and traditions of a previous way of life; and the responses it evokes from workingmen." He went on to suggest that the work of Stephan Thernstrom also deserved mention because of his use of sources that social historians had largely ignored. Although he acknowledged that no American scholar had attempted a study of the magnitude of *The Making of the English Working Class*, he suggested that Gutman's work was a promising beginning in that his focus was not working men organized in trade unions but rather "the communities in which they lived and worked in relationships with other groups." As he concluded, "For a fuller understanding of the response of the working class, as well as other classes, an approach to history that has the cultural and social breadth one finds in the works of Thompson and Gutman is a necessity."[39] As the best selling number of what was referred to as the "Eclectic-Marxist-Journal" period[40] of the journal (November-December 1968 through September, 1969) when *RA* elaborated the elements of what could be called a neo-Marxist theory, this issue was enthusiastically welcomed by many of the

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[38]John Evanshon et al., "Literature on the American Working Class," *Radical America*, 3 (2, 1969): 33.

[39]Paul Faler, "Working Class Historiography," *Radical America*, 3 (2, 1969):56-68.

[40]*Radical America Newsletter*, 1 (Dec. 1969): 5.

journal's supporters including Mark Naison who described the issue as, "outa-sight, a great beginning point for a new subscription drive and what not. I thought Faler's article was extremely well done, and the way the bibliography came out."[41]

The issue on the working class was followed by one centred on "Culture and the Intellectuals" which continued the theme of elaborating elements of neo-Marxist theory. Produced by the Rochester SDS collective, this edition was highlighted by a 40,000 word essay by Martin Sklar, a former editor of *Studies on the Left* on economic disaccumulation and the proletarianization of intellectuals.[42] The culmination of this "phase" was the September 1969 issue which was highlighted by a special symposium on the French philosopher and Marxist, Louis Althusser. Following an introductory article by Andrew Levine which attempted in a sympathetic fashion to indicate the scope and character of Althusser's contribution to Marxism, comments critical of Altusser's structural approach (the focus of considerable debate among British Marxist historians[43]) were presented by a number of regular contributors to *RA* including Martin Glaberman, Paul Piccone, Dale Tomich and Greg Calvert.

Beginning with volume 3, number 6, the journal embarked on what it referred to as the "Special Numbers" period which carried it through to the end of 1970. For the editors, these special issues came as, "a decisive break from the last-minute-franticness that had characterized ALL the

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[41]Naison to Paul Buhle, Summer 1968, *Radical America Papers*, 2-18.

[42]Martin Sklar, "On the Proletarian Revolution and the End of Political Economic Society," *Radical America*, 3 (3, 1969): 1-42.

[43]The strongest critic of Althusser's position was E. P. Thompson. See his *Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978). Althusser's influence was strongest in the 1970s in the Centre for Contemporary Studies at the University of Birmingham and in the journal *New Left Review* whose book division was the major English-language publisher of his work.

issues before. The best way to solve it was to farm issues out . . . of course that has had its cost too."[44] In addition to the cultural issues mentioned above, there were special editions devoted to Women's Liberation, papers from the Socialist Scholars Conference held in 1969, a C.L.R. James anthology, a Lenin-Hegel philosophical number with a special section on the continuing debate on youth culture, and finally, an issue devoted entirely to radical historiography. While the James anthology, drawing on the work of the Trinidadian Marxist, was important as a framework for understanding Black Nationalism and the student revolts of the 1960s, it was also important to *RA* because of the seriousness with which James examined the ostensibly low brow cultural productions of the masses. As Jim O'Brien observed, "James, whose Marxism was laced with an extraordinary appreciation of popular culture, became especially important for Paul's thinking."[45]

Just as significant was the issue on Women's Liberation, one of the earliest collections dealing with this topic. In this wide ranging collection which included articles as varied as discussions on the American family and arguments for company kindergartens, Mari Jo Buhle's article "Women and the Socialist Party,1901-1914" was the only one with a specific historical focus aside from a bibliographical summary of the movement from "Feminism to Liberation" compiled by the editor, Edith Hishino Altbach. As she stated in the introduction to the issue, "Needless to say, this issue does not presume to be the definitive statement on women's liberation. Nor does it represent one particular ideological position." Indeed, she stated emphatically, "one of the strongest points women's liberation has made is to view critically any attempt to 'lay down the line' to us from any source." "This," she explained, was because, "no academic discipline, no intellectual framework

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[44]*Radical History Newsletter*, 1 (December 1969): 5.

[45]James O'Brien, "Celebrating the Radical Past," p.3.

and no organizational blueprint has produced up to now either the complete theory or the praxis where women are concerned." As she so accurately predicted, "The hardest work lies ahead."[46]

According to Jim O'Brien it was this second phase of the journal's young life starting in mid-1968 when Buhle sought to shake up the more thoughtful among the student movement with a "dizzying succession of single-theme issues," that constituted "*RA*'s glory years." As he went on to suggest, "Paul let his imagination thrive on the creative possibilities that seemed to be thrown up by the political and cultural ferment of the late 1960s. He drew on clusters of people in Chicago, Detroit, New York, Buffalo, and Rochester, and elsewhere for these special issues. What they all had in common was their excitement. The new insurgencies seemed to be riding a wave of unknown dimensions and strength." At this point then, he concludes, "*RA*'s mission was to suggest new (or sometimes old but neglected) ways of thinking of possibilities facing New Left radicals."[47]

There was no question that the journal had changed from its early stages as a "Radical-History-for-its-own-sake"magazine. It had moved to typesetting and professional layout and was no longer collated, folded and stapled, whenever Buhle and his "workers" arrived at a favourite meeting place and, fortified with a few beers, hoped to "to get the covers on right by the time we had tippled our way through a few hours."[48] It had held its first editorial conference in June of 1969 with nineteen participants, many of whom came from a variety of places other than Madison. In December of that same year, it published its first newsletter, a more or less monthly bulletin, "to bring together the now considerable number of people who are 'around' *Radical America*." As the introduction went on to state, "Through the bulletin we hope to keep everyone informed about *RA*'s progress and stimulate

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[46]Edith Hoshino Altbach, "Apologia," *Radical America*, 4 (2, 1970): 1.

[47]Paul O'Brien, "Celebrating the Radical Past," p. 3.

[48]Paul Buhle, "Madison and Me," p. 228.

interaction between everyone so as to draw upon the resources around us which we have not been able to utilize effectively or systematically in the past."[49]

Although the newsletter voiced the usual concerns about financing which plagued all of these scholarly journals, it appeared that there were sufficient funds to carry the journal forward into the next year. Several editorial matters were also raised, including the possibility of editors and associates reading articles before they were published. This had not been an issue in the past since there were far too few possibilities for good articles, but as a sign of the growing importance of the journal they now had "literally dozens, many more than we can use to fill the issues." As well, they now were in a position to consider whether they should continue "farming out" issues to gain "a new-felt consistency" and even more interesting "whether we should try to have nearly all articles written by grad students (thus helping the writers to grow, in addition to simply putting out a mag), or whether we should get older people to write regularly also."[50] This apparently was the position favoured by Buhle and the Newsletter editor, Dale Tomich. Some encouragement for this idea may have come from William A. Williams in his response to a letter from Buhle suggesting a review of his new book. In his reply to Buhle he wrote, "I think your idea of having graduate students do the evaluation you speak of is *much* the best idea. The others (professional historians) have such chances one way and another, whereas students do not have the serious opportunities." He went on to add, "Furthermore, one of the best aspects of the journal, in my view, is that it has moved with the thought

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[49]"Introduction," *Radical America Newsletter*, 1 (Dec. 1969): 1. The newsletter was only produced sporadically and never became a regular publication but was just an occasional mailing to associate editors and friends of the magazine. See Jim O'Brien to Eleanor McKay,12 August 1973, *Radical America Papers*, 3-4.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 8.

of the people."[51]

Aside from the editor's sarcastic comment that, "The main thing that strikes me is: how little work we accomplish with so many people available,"the future of the journal seemed assured even to the point of planning additional pamphlets, books (growing out of journal issues) and anthologies on a variety of topics including one on Marxist theoreticians, an anthology of writings on "too little understood Marxists, to be edited by the staff."[52]

Despite this optimistic report, *RA* had not been free of criticism, even from those most closely associated with it. The editors of the issue produced by the Rochester collective, Stuart and Liz Ewen, were quite emphatic about Buhle's interference in their project when they wrote, "You cannot expect us to feel any kind of involvement in the issue we are editing if you constantly feel it necessary to judge and prejudge what we are doing, to go off on tangents about what you *think* we are doing and to generally become hysterical about the nature of this issue." For them the matter was quite clear, "When we undertook to edit an issue – it was our choice that decided its structure and its content and you'll just have to be satisfied with that or else there will be no issue." Even more damning were their comments about a comparison of *RA* with the *New Left Review* ". . . if *Radical America* even approached the quality of *New Left Review* your hysteria might be somewhat legitimate. But since, with some exception, the magazine has shown poor quality and no connection to anything resembling either theory, practice or connection to a movement your comments are

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[51]William A. Williams to Paul Buhle, 5 November 1969, *Radical America Papers*, 4-2. The review of the book, *The Roots of Modern American Empire*, appeared as Michael Meerpol, "W.A. Williams'Historiography" in *Radical America* 4 (6, 1970):29-49. Also included was a comment by James O'Brien p. 50-53.

[52]*Radical America Newsletter*, 1 (December 1969): 4, 9.

completely out of place."[53] Apparently they were able to work out their disagreements and publish their issue in the next month.

A more ominous note was sounded by Mark Naison in a letter he wrote to Buhle in the fall of 1969. According to Naison, "the magazine is beginning to lose its audience in New York. People don't talk about it, don't call me up to ask about new or old issues, don't buy it at the same pace." But as he pointed out, this loss may have had nothing to do with the journal as such. Instead, he suggested, "It may be that the last three months have been so traumatic that it removed people's desire to read, particularly when what they have been reading has prepared them so little to cope with the current situation."[54]

The situation that Naison referred to was the fragmentation and collapse of the New Left student movement that resulted in considerable disillusionment and confusion for American radicals. 1968 had been a year of tremendous hope for the left, followed by a series of defeats and disasters culminating in the riots in the streets of Chicago and the election of Richard Nixon. In 1969 and 1970 the New Left broke into factions, with one group maintaining the old Marxist- Leninist view about organizing a vanguard party to lead the working class and another faction holding to its support for black nationalism and youth rebellion. When the massive protests against the American invasion of Cambodia failed to force a withdrawal of American troops, the anti-war protest could no longer power the movement and by the end of 1970 the New Left student rebellion had collapsed. One of the main casualties was SDS. Two months after the student riots at Columbia, it held its national convention and "the radical bravado of some of its members killed what remained of the

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[53]Stuart and Liz Ewen to Paul Buhle, April 1969, *Radical America Papers,* 1-16.

[54]Mark Naison to Paul Buhle, 13 October 1969, *Radical America Papers,* 2-18.

organization." When an acrimonious split developed between a faction of national officers called Weathermen and a disciplined group from the neo-Maoist Progressive Labor Party, the organization "splintered into factions, babbled into civil war as many of its members became engrossed in bragging about who was the most revolutionary."[55]

Although the journal was unconnected to the SDS factionalism and its ultimate demise, this development was of some importance to the editors of *RA*. As Buhle recalled, "the disastrous internal split of 1969 made the magazine's very subtitle, "An SDS Journal of American Radicalism" doubly anomalous. SDS as we had known it ceased to exist." One significant result was that, "the slogan-ridden Marxism-Leninism of the competitors for the organization's legacy all but relegated the rediscovery of an American radicalism to the classroom and the scholar's study."[56] In addition to changing the subtitle of the journal, *RA* found itself caught in a vacuum as it came to grips with the changed circumstances. According to Buhle it was a time when "One yearned for a few years of consolidation, reflection, development of new concepts to relate the volatility of students, blacks, Chicanos, or others to the problems of organization and leadership." "But," as he went on to add, "yearning did no good. Our race had been run." Subscription renewals fell "precipitously" in the final months of 1969; printing arrangements in Madison disintegrated; and, a trial issue, farmed out to a Buffalo group of youth culture enthusiasts, "barely came back in one piece. Things had fallen apart."[57]

The degree to which things had disintegrated brought renewed reminders of the old "activist versus scholar" debate that had plagued the last years of *Studies on the Left*. According to Mark

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[55]Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*, p. 202.

[56] "Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (3, 1982): 4.

[57]Paul Buhle, " Radical America and Me," p. 230.

Naison, *RA* no longer spoke to activists but went "completely by them, not over their heads, but by them." The reason why this had happened, he went on to suggest, was directly related to Buhle's role with the journal. As he put it, "You are in danger of defining yourself as an Intellectual with a capital 'I' and relating to the movement as some kind of brilliant curiosity who talks about all these weird guys like Hegel and Stalin and Louis Fraina, and really tells us very little about what we're supposed to know." The end result, Naison goes on to suggest, is that this would bring Buhle toward the position of historians like Genovese who rejected activism as poisonous and who defined the task of the movement as "scholarship." " Such a position," he concluded, "legitimizes the worst kind of personal opportunism – absorption into that warm and secure international, though increasingly non-Jewish, community of intellectuals, who are really suppressed aristocrats, and despise and fear the people."[58]

The resignation of Paul Breines as an associate editor early in 1970 reflected another side to this disillusionment. As he saw the situation, *RA* was not a journal of a developing radical theory but, "an 'operation' whose raison d'etre is operational: the journal exists, therefore it should continue." But this was not enough for Breines who had some ideas and who was in search of, "kindred spirits, perhaps ultimately for a collective of some kind rooted in a shared perspective." Unfortunately, he no longer found this in *RA*. As he told Buhle, "I like you but from what I know – not second, but first hand – do not feel the kind of solidarity politically and philosophically that I believe necessary at this juncture."[59]

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[58]Mark Naison to Paul Buhle, Fall 1969, *Radical America Papers,* 2-18. It should be noted that many of Naison's letters lacked precise dates with the result that Buhle later wrote over the top of them an estimated date.

[59]Paul Brienes to Paul Buhle, 2 February 1970, *Radical America Papers*, 1-8.

Prior to his resignation, Brienes had attended a meeting of some Boston associates of *RA* in January of 1970 to discuss the status of the magazine at that crucial juncture. While the group acknowledged the lack of a specific direction in the last year or so, at least one of the participants was prepared to suggest that that may have been a good thing, in that, "given the present motley staff, the dispersion of the staff all over the U.S. and Europe, and the divided present condition of the movement, it is perhaps good that the magazine does not have a tight line or standardized permanent format." Although critical of the decentralized character of the journal which led to problems, specifically the lack of editorial participation of those not close to Madison, the group was less critical of Buhle's leadership which they described as a "strange combination of openness and dictatorship." This they suggested was a major factor in the survival of the magazine as he was open to "all sorts of attempts at a creative Marxism and experiments both aesthetic and political . . . his leadership has kept the magazine open in that way even if it goes off on tangents because of it." The minutes of the meeting go on for eight closely typed pages as the participants ranged widely over a whole host of issues relevant to the future of *RA* including editorial policy and the role of the intellectual in the social movement. They concluded with a list of ten positive proposals, which included the need to develop a minimum editorial statement of aims as well as suggestions not to overdo the surrealist thing, not to reprint articles by big names such as Marcuse and to do some kind of marketing survey to boost sales. The most consequential suggestion was that *RA* consider the foundation of an anonymous several-man editorial board, "which could feel freer personally to make stylistic corrections and to cut down on pedantry."[60]

Despite these setbacks Buhle was still determined to send "love letters to the future" or as

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[60]Minutes of Boston Associates of *Radical America* Meeting, 3 January 1970, *Radical America Papers*, 4-10.

he described it, "to create monuments to analysis and sensibility at a time when both seemed to have dissipated entirely."[61] While its succession of creative special issues continued throughout 1970, significant changes were being made. The most important of these was structural, with the establishment of an editorial collective somewhat different in intent and structure from the Boston suggestion, that gradually took joint responsibility for editorial decisions starting in the winter of 1970-71. According to James O'Brien this was a major turning point in the journal's development. As he suggested, the creation of this editorial board in Madison in 1970 was important because the magazine became "less freewheeling with the creation of collective responsibility."[62] A second consequence was that it meant a return to the journal's Madison roots. Although Buhle had been active for a time in the local SDS chapter, *Radical America* had been published for a national audience and therefore had few contacts with the university and the local community. Now, as the magazine pulled inward to its roots, the editorial collective embarked on a "last, grand, Madisonian gesture." As one of its associate editors Dick Howard had suggested a short time earlier, "One other thing concerning *RA*'s content: LET'S GET BACK TO U.S.HISTORY!!!!"[63] Pulling together a small group of determined Wisconsin graduate history students, the editorial board produced a special issue on "Radical Historiography" which was intended to, "summarize where radical history had travelled in the United States and what new directions it had recently taken." As Buhle explained, "From Charles Beard, the shadow over Madisonian history, to the *Studies on the Left* historians now emerging in the mainstream, to our own insurgent generation, we stood as an unrecognized

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[61]Paul Buhle, "Radical America and Me," p. 230.

[62]James O'Brien, e-mail to the author, 2 August 1998.

[63]Dick Howard to Paul Buhle, 29 October 1969, *Radical America Papers*, 2-3.

generation in American society."[64]

This special issue, organized mainly by Jim O'Brien, was the collective project of a group that overlapped (though not entirely) with the editorial board. Including articles analysing American Marxist historiography, the role of W.E.B. DuBois, neo-Beardian history, New Left historians and a symposium on teaching history, it represented another significant turning point in the journal's development. Aside from the one or two notable exceptions previously discussed, history, as such, was not an important theme in the early years of *RA* even though as O'Brien pointed out, "probably all the issues offered different ways of looking at history as well as the present."[65] For a short time, at least, this changed, and history became more important in the journal's focus. Equally significant was the attempt of these radical graduate students to develop in the introductory editorial statement a coherent definition of their view of radical history. In this sense they were very conscious of continuing the work of the previous generation of *Studies* graduate students who had departed from Madison in 1963. For them, the issue represented "an attempt on our part to synthesize our political views and experiences with our political research."

Unlike their *Studies* predecessors, their experience as a whole with the History Department faculty was largely an antagonistic one due to their attempts to include teaching assistants in the decision making processes of the department. As a result, their attitude to the historical profession was "one of ambivalence." Although, as individuals, they had had cordial and intellectually rewarding relationships with various History faculty members, and while they could endorse the profession's rigorous standards of evidence, which were better than "those which normally prevail

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[64]Paul Buhle, " Radical America and Me," p. 230.

[65]James O'Brien, e-mail to the author, 2 August 1998.

in political controversy," and which produce data that "is generally reliable," they were more concerned with stating its darker side.

> On the negative side, the profession seems to us a bad combination of a gentleman's clubhouse and a bureaucracy...not simply because there are scarcely any women but also because of its upper-class tone that is carried over from the days when history was written principally by wealthy men of leisure. Even today faculty members at the most prestigious universities....enjoy an income level and social status ....and a work set-up that sets them well apart from their own students. It is ... a bureaucracy in which younger men progress by producing tangible evidence of their merit. In this constant struggle to advance, the history profession itself becomes the source of all values for those who depend on its approbation for their employment. It is an unhealthy situation.[66]

Indeed there seemed to be little value in a profession that frowned on the political activism of radical historians, when at the same time "the slanting of history in textbooks is accepted as standard practice, necessary to get the texts accepted."[67]

More importantly, their statement argued for "methodology as the key to radical history." However, they were no longer prepared to support wholeheartedly "what has been called the bottom-up approach to history" which had been debated in the second issue of the journal when Joan and Donald Scott launched an attack on Jesse Lemisch's call for a "democratic history." In 1967, Lemisch, a radical historian then teaching at the University of Chicago, produced the first piece of literature for the recently established SDS Radical Education Project, an academic essay entitled "Towards a Democratic History." In keeping with the aims of the REP, which was devoted to the cause of democratic radicalism, Lemisch's essay attacked the traditional view of social scientists that America, "is and has been a land of equality and mobility, a land of consensus – liberal consensus." According to this traditional perspective, those who have dissented from this consensus have been

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[66]"Introduction," *Radical America,* 4 (8-9, 1970): 2.

[67]*Ibid.*, p. 2.

few in number and those few have been described as unrealistic, "their rationality open to serious question." According to Lemisch, "there has never been much wisdom in rocking the American boat." In challenging this elitist history, he suggested that some recent studies had in fact shown that it was possible to recreate a very different interpretation of the American past if one were to forego a "history written with a bias favorable to an elite on the basis of an insufficiently critical consideration of elite sources." Instead he argued that a bias which says, "that history can happen from the bottom up, that the people often act for good reasons, expressing genuine grievances, helps us to better understand both past and present." As he went on to conclude, "History, the democrat believes, can happen from the bottom up and the democrat as historian will write it from the bottom up."[68]

The attack by the Scotts argued that Lemisch's position was not looking at America in a different or distinctive way; it was "merely looking from the opposite direction." In their view it was not a very valuable alternative: "For the right's myth of people as a great beast, Lemisch substitutes the Left's myth of the people as glorious revolutionaries. Both myths obscure and dehumanize history." In their minds his paper was "profoundly unhistorical, myopic, and blind to reality." The bottom line was that a "radicalism which refuses to perceive men for what they are, which cannot understand how relationships among men operate and change, is doomed from the start."[69]

Lemisch responded in a lengthy essay in the same issue. Arguing that the Scotts had misinterpreted his thesis, he refused to back down, stating that "I claim that my working assumptions

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[68]Jesse Lemisch, "Towards a Democratic History," February, 1966, A Radical Education Project Occasional Paper. Apparently this essay was the occasion where Lemisch coined the phrase history "from the bottom up," a term still used by historians today.

[69]Joan W. and Donald M. Scott, " Toward History: a Reply to Jesse Lemisch," *Radical America,* 1 (2, 1967): 37- 42.

and categories are, when correctly understood, liberating." Unlike the Scotts, who failed to provide a viable method, history "from the bottom up" was a method that would allow radical historians to "explore the all-important connections between the ideology of the inarticulate and their activity", which in his view was the key problem facing radical historians. For Lemisch, a genuine history of the inarticulate – history "from the bottom up" was essential for any understanding of the interaction of people on top and at the bottom of society and for understanding the relationship between the ideology of the inarticulate and their actions. For this radical historian it was clear that, "until we undertake and achieve a detailed history from the bottom up, our historiography will be uncertain and our understanding of radicalism partial." [70]

While admitting that there was much utility to the bottom-up approach to history, the editors echoed the Scotts by suggesting that this approach had distinct limitations if it was not linked with an "overview of the way the lower classes have related to the rest of society." For them, Marxism was now the most useful starting point for radical history. Although they acknowledged the weaknesses of American Marxist history and also that there were no magical formulas that would make the job of writing history an easy one, Marxism was most useful because it seemed capable of "absorbing the greatest variety of insights without getting hopelessly mired in complexity." While concurring with a number of aspects of Marxism that they found especially useful in their attempts "to fit specific historical phenomena into a coherent overview," these young radicals argued that the crucial aspect of Marxian methodology was its concept of social classes. Informed by the concept of class advanced by E.P. Thompson whose influential book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, showed left historians that culture could not simply be reduced to "superstructure," they were

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[70]Jesse Lemisch, "New Left Elitism: a Rejoinder," *ibid.*, 44-45.

prepared to reject the notion of older Marxist historians that social classes were predetermined categories and substitute in its place the view that they should more correctly be seen as "the products of historical development." Although class was a particularly troublesome problem and needed to be treated carefully, it still seemed to them "the most useful touchstone for understanding a society's development."

Although they admitted to a great uncertainty about their role as radical historians, they were optimistic about the fact that there was confusion within the American left because it would allow them the freedom to "derive our *questions* from the experience of the radical movement without being pressured to reach particular answers."[71]

As the last issue in volume 4, the "Radical Historiography" number would mark the end of the first important era of *Radical America*'s development. In the three short years of its existence, it had gone through two significant phases, as it traced the roots of American radicalism and then switched to a cultural critique of American society, not only publishing historical works but also promoting cultural alternatives to mainstream Americanism.[72] Now it was about to enter a third phase, which brought to a close the period of Paul Buhle's greatest creative influence, when he was, in O'Brien's view, "the hub of a kind of a wheel– encouraging a variety of imaginative people and groups to use *RA* to publish special issues."[73] The period of "freewheeling and eccentric publishing" was over and the direction of the magazine would now be decided by an editorial board in Madison. From its beginnings as a "crude, little magazine" about American history, the journal had become

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[71]" Introduction", *Radical America,* 4 (8-9, 1970): 3.

[72]The index for Volumes 1-4 lists over 50 articles devoted to Radical History and Historiography. These historical essays and its cultural contributions dominate the first years of the journal.

[73]James O'Brien, e-mail to the author, 2 August 1998.

a national magazine with a regular circulation of 3,000 copies widely read by a variety of 60s radicals. Having survived several crises, including the collapse of SDS, the left student movement and the ever present problem of finances, the journal pulled inward and returned to its roots in Madison, to radical history. As the editorial board announced in volume 5, number 1, 1971, "We're making some changes . . . ."[74] The shakedown process was coming to an end and *RA* was about to enter a new phase of development that would bring it a new direction and a new home.

As the journal reached this critical turning point in its development, Buhle could look back with a great deal of satisfaction on what had been accomplished. Although he would quickly be disillusioned about the possibility of radicals reading and learning about the mistakes of the past and not repeating them, he continued to believe that history had to be used to gain a sense of the way things were moving and the role that a variety of radicals might play. Given the poverty of radical American history, he believed that it was left, "to our generation both to write the real history of the past, the way people lived and believed and faced their obstacles and to keep going politically as if we understood enough to grasp exactly what we were and should be doing."[75] Despite its shortcomings, including charges of his dictatorial control and antipathy to activism, the journal in this first stage did adjust to changing circumstances to look at past history as something "more live, more vital, of more immediate importance in personal and political life than could be suggested in *Labor History* or other academic journals."[76] By unearthing historical methods and subjects that had otherwise been ignored or marginalised by mainstream professional historians, the journal produced

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[74]"Radical America Looks at Itself," *Radical America,* 5 (1,1971): unnumbered back cover.

[75] Paul Buhle, " Introduction," *Radical America Papers*, 1-1.

[76]John C. McMillian, "Love Letters to the Future," p. 25.

the "good history" that was among "the most useful and even interesting things, for any revolutionary." Not only did *RA* produce this "good history" which Buhle believed, "was, or has much to do with, social history," it had also demonstrated that a real "radical America" could be found in the resistance of workers and in the dissent of the masses. According to Buhle, as he pondered the future of the journal in 1972, what *RA* had done was unprecedented for the American left. This, he said, was because, "we have 'given birth to ourselves' theoretically, as Marxists of a new kind. We have provided not only in working class history, but also in other areas, e.g. women's history, an indispensable groundwork for the theory that must be developed." And as he concluded, "Through the literature produced, moreover, we have been the first magazine in the recent past to bring together non-self serving, useful materials on the working class, a documentation of class self-activity, and avante-garde materials of a serious kind."[77]

Perhaps the most notable accomplishment of all was that this journal was still alive and able to contemplate a new home and a new direction. Given its constant state of financial crisis, the constant debate over readership, strategic agenda and content, and the difficulty of publishing any kind of radical journal, it was truly amazing that *RA* survived while hundreds of other left-oriented publications either failed or became totally irrelevant. More than anything its survival was the consequence of the vision and tenacity of one man – Paul Buhle.

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[77]Paul Buhle, "Results of the Drift – a Discussion Document," *Radical America Papers*, 4-8.

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A New Direction and a New Home

With the publication of the first issue of volume 5, the newly formed Madison editorial board, which included Buhle and longtime associate Jim O'Brien as well as six other members, embarked on the task of finding a new direction for *RA*. According to the first issue in this volume, the entire operation of the journal had been reorganized and the editors were in the process of establishing and elaborating its technical and editorial functions. As well as cutting back to a bi-monthly schedule to facilitate greater care for content and format, they also announced that *RA* would cease to publish monothematic, or special issues and instead would produce, "a coherent political review including semi-regular features on a variety of subjects."[1] As the New Left went into crisis and collapse, the belief that *RA* would speak through a series of monographs, nearly all methodological in nature, to the long-range task of laying the foundations for a new movement "that would finally come into existence when the confusion and discouragement of the current one faded," had "proved inadequate."And so, they added, "There was neither the internal coherence nor the external demand from former and current Movement people who read *RA* to justify the continuation

[1]"We're Making Some Changes . . . ," *Radical America,* 5 (1, 1971): Back Cover.

of a monograph series."[2] The journal would need a clearer and narrower direction to reflect the fact that campus activity would no longer occupy a central political focus. At a time when a segment of the left student movement turned most emphatically, in O'Brien's words, to "a Marxist-like belief in the agency of the working class" and when many ex-activists were beginning "to establish themselves in workplace and community organizing, *RA* would be transformed initially into a journal concerned with the American working class.[3] According to James Green, one of the journal's new editors, this New Left "turn" to the working class resulted in part from renewed labour militancy generated by the pro-business policies of the Nixon administration and by the recession that followed as the United States withdrew from Vietnam and decreased war-related production. Buoyed by the militancy of West Virginia coal miners and black auto workers in Detroit, a younger generation of factory workers "rebelled against speed-up and authoritarianism" in Lordstown, Ohio. As well, rank-and-file union members had begun to oppose conservative union leaders. This was most dramatically demonstrated in 1970 with the national postal workers' wildcat strike and the formation of the Miners for Democracy in Appalachia. It was a time that seemed to suggest exciting possibilities for radical change, "especially among younger workers affected by the anti-war movement and the 1960s counterculture."[4] In the past, the student movement had been too far removed from ordinary men and women, but now, given this new awareness, it seemed that in one way or another, "blue-collar America had to be an essential part of our future constituency."As Buhle

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[2]"Editors' Introduction," *Radical America,* 5 (6, 1971): 1-2.

[3]James O'Brien, "Celebrating the Radical Past," p. 3.

[4]James Green, ed., *Worker's Struggles Past and Present: A Radical America Reader* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1983), p. 6.

recalled this moment, "We followed with great interest the efforts by non-Leninist groups to engage in local struggles, publish independent agitational papers, and establish new fusions of rebellious culture and factory reality." But as he was, correctly to conclude, "We were not suited to become an agitational journal ourselves, any more than we aspired to the kind of Marxist theoretics which remained in one way or another a European import." Instead he went on to state emphatically, "We had one simpler, and for us, more obvious task: History."[5]

Thus, the editors announced that a new phase of development had begun and that beginning with volume 5, the main focus for study and analysis would be, "the American working class, particularly its female and black components, its historical development, and its future prospects." [6] As it turned out, this would also include the activity of the European working class especially when it could shed light on possible future developments in America. Although other areas of concern including Mass Culture, the nature of American radicalism, developments in Marxist philosophy, and the "conceptions of party and praxis in Twentieth Century Marxism" would be considered, it was the American working class that would be at the core of the journal's identity for the remainder of its time in Madison.[7]

One thing that did not change was the appeal to readers for financial aid for the immediate future. Here too, the disintegration of New Left remnants left its impact and "jeopardized the scale of *RA*'s operation, always circumscribed by lack of funds." Thus in order to free the new editors from financial worry and to allow them the time and energy to devote to editorial concerns, it was

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[5]Paul Buhle, "Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (3, 1982): 4-5.

[6]"We're Making Some Changes," *Radical America*, 5 (1, 1971): Back Cover.

[7]*Ibid.*, Back Cover

necessary to add to the funds acquired from subscriptions and bulk sales. In this appeal, however, new editors carefully pointed out to their readers that they were not asking for "an amount extending into five figures (as with other radical newspapers and journals), but for stabilizing funds. . . ." As they concluded, "Since we have no paid staff all funds received by *Radical America* go directly into production and distribution costs."[8]

Beginning with volume 5, number 1 and continuing through1971, the Madison editorial group succeeded in establishing a strong foundation for this new phase in the journal's development. In particular, this period demonstrated a strong historical bent and produced some of the journal's most important contributions to the female and black components of its working class analysis. volume 5, number 2 devoted to "Black Labor" was highlighted by Harold Baron's forty page essay in which he examined the economic basis of racism from colonial times to the present . According to Baron, one had to place major emphasis on capitalist development, particularly on the demand for black labour, in order to get at "the heart of the oppression of black people in modern America." "Historically," in his argument, " the great press for black labor as the work force for plantation slavery simultaneously supplied the momentum for the formation of institutional racism and set the framework for the creation of the black community in the United States." After analysing the colonial foundations, he went on to centre on three major periods in the development and control of black labour; a transition era with two phases, 1860 to World War One with a second phase from 1917 to the Second World War; and the current situation. In his analysis of the contemporary situation, he concluded that, "The racist structures cannot be abolished without an earthquake in the heartland. Indeed, for that sophisticated gentleman, the American capitalist, the demand for black

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[8]*Ibid.*, Back Cover.

labor has become a veritable devil in the flesh."[9] A shorter but equally important essay by Robert Starobin also addressed the problem of white racism in the American experience; in particular, the fact that recent historical research was now beginning to view the oppression of blacks as, "a key to the meaning of the American experience." After examining some of the recent research, he observed one overriding weakness of most of this work, the tendency for these researchers "to treat white society as an undifferentiated monolith and to neglect the importance of class factors in shaping white responses to blacks." "Still," he suggested, "the contours of the centrality of racism and of the black experience have been delineated by the new scholarship."[10]

This concentration on the black community continued in the next issue of the journal in an essay by Mark Naison, who had continued as an editorial associate despite his earlier criticisms of Buhle and *Radical America.* In the lead essay for this issue, Naison argued for the development of a fresh theoretical approach to the efforts to create an alliance between black and white movements. As he proclaimed, "The history of the Left's involvement in the black community . . . is in large part a tragedy, and its dimensions must be honestly faced." Specifically, the barriers dividing black and white in America have been so great and complex that, "they overwhelmed all efforts to define an effective response in Marxist terms." Following his summary of the tensions between American radicalism and black aspirations, where even the best-intended struggles engaged in by white radicals for black rights tended to resolve themselves through doctrinaire formulas "which served insufficiently when white Leftists faced other priorities," he still believed that Marxism could be

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[9]Harold M. Baran, "The Demand for Black Labor: Historical Notes on the Political Economy of Racism," *Radical America*, 5 (2, 1971): 1-40.

[10]Robert S. Starobin, "Racism and the American Experience," *ibid.*, p. 93-109.

useful, but that would only be the case if radicals recognized that it did not provide a "firm and scientific solutions to racial tensions in revolution . . . ." While in his mind, an ignorance of history was particularly destructive in this failure, there was no easy way out for the Left. The barriers between black and white were real and efforts by white radicals to project firm "political lines" on the black struggle would be of little value. Instead, "the complexity of this issue must be dealt with and our efforts at theorizing infused with a new flexibility, new humility, and increased understanding of the connections between the cultural and economic dimensions of the revolutionary process."[11] While not directly related to the problem of black labour, the focus on black liberation and racism in American society would speak directly to the political implications for American radicalism and the writing of radical history.

In addition to its emphasis on the working class, the journal's last year in Madison was important for its pioneering contribution to women's history which continued to develop the ideas first presented in the "Women's Liberation" issue edited by one of the editorial board, Edith Hoshino Altbach, in 1970. This work, the editors suggested in their introduction to volume 5, number 4, was an exploratory study of women's history which was the result of *RA*'s commitment to the Marxist proposition, "that the gap between consciousness and action is crossed in history and enabled by an understanding of it" so that the essay "Women in American Society" was conceived as a response to the conceptual problems "confronted by all who seek to comprehend the historically- rooted sources of today's oppression."[12] The article, written by three women historians, argued that "women

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[11]Mark Naison, "Marxism and Black Radicalism in America: Notes on a Long (and continuing) Journey," *Radical America*, 5 (3, 1971): 3- 25.

[12]"Editors' Introduction," *Radical America*, 5 (4, 1971): 1.

with renewed caste-consciousness are returning to historical questions in a search for their collective identity and for an analysis of their condition." Facing the task of defining women's history in relation to the emergence of women as a collective force, they believed it was essential to define what their past really was. Only through such a historical critique could "they begin to transcend the imposition of contemporary institutions and values on our lives." Without it, their view of daily life would remain at the level of individual reaction to what seemed intolerable and their analyses would tend to document their feelings of subjection rather "than the underlying historical conditions of the subjection of women." To assume that women's lives were without time and without change ignored the role that the subjection of women had played in world development. For them, historians' chronic blindness to that fact prevented them from probing the "fullest meaning of history." If they could succeed in defining the "specificity of their oppression" then, they suggested, "we will have moved closer to realizing the dynamics of all historical development – a necessary prerequisite for changing it."[13]

In addition to describing the limited scope of work that fell into the category of women's history when they were writing their article, they also presented a lengthy historical analysis of the changes in the lives of women from colonial times to the present, concluding that, "because women have been divided from one another on class lines, because the Twentieth Century definition of sexuality has discouraged the concept of collective sisterhood, and because in the years since the early part of the century, women, like men, have been educated to act and think in a framework of individualism, feminism has been in decline throughout most of the century." The new

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[13]Mari Jo Buhle, Ann Gordon and Nancy E. Schrom, "Women in Society: A Historical Contribution," *Radical America*, 5 (4, 1971): 3-6.

feminism which has arisen out of a larger social and political movement is "attempting not only to understand and change the facts of middle class women's condition, but also to understand and surmount effects of class division and social fragmentation."[14]

It should be noted that this monographic essay was in Paul Buhle's estimation the single most important article that the journal had published and was steadily reprinted as a pamphlet for a half-dozen years or so. Of greater significance was that the article identified a major focus for *RA* in the 1970s, "a feminism informed by history."[15]

Although *RA* succeeded in establishing a new direction in emphasizing the role of the working class in American society, this new perspective was not without its critics. In his proposal outlining suggestions for the investigation of working class life, Mark Naison continued to argue that, "in spite of its flexibility and honesty, the magazine has failed to develop an effective analysis or critique of American society" and, "while editorial policy has scrupulously (and correctly) discouraged 'vulgar marxism' and factional rhetoric, it has tolerated obscurity, 'scholarly detachment' and a complete lack of interest in tactical and strategic questions." While there were good reasons to maintain its non-partisan approach, times had changed and people were more likely to listen to radicals but only if they "a. Avoid rhetorical bullshit b.Write clearly about things happening in the real world and c. See 'theory' as something which will give people a grasp of events in the society which conventional ideologies fail to take into account." In the case of the working class who, he agreed, would play a pivotal role in the transformation of American society, the major problem was the "mechanistic perceptions of how these people live." Too often they had been

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[14]*Ibid.*, p.52.

[15]Paul Buhle, "Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (3, 1982): 5.

stereotyped as "oppressed," "racist," and "authoritarian" and they would become revolutionary only when they could be made to realize "who their enemy is."According to Naison these images provided only the barest outline of working class life and could be enormously misleading. Instead, he argued, a study of the working class involved more than the social at the "point of production" but also had to come to terms with, "the social institutions that mold working class *community life* and the various ways that working people have their human needs met *within* the framework of a repressive society."After suggesting a number of different areas of community life that merited serious investigation, including the Church, sports and the social life of working women, he concluded by claiming that, "the basic thrust of such studies would be to reveal how working people live, how they try to make the best of their limited options, how they seek to find dignity and self respect within the American capitalist framework," because, "as radicals we should know this society more intimately and sensitively than anyone else; too often we have known it least."[16]

This concern was echoed by Staughton Lynd, the former *Studies* editor and a contributor to *RA* in its working class phase. In a letter to the editors he stated that "the developing association with *RA* has meant a great deal to me," and that there was some fear in his mind that if he were to speak out and raise a political or ideological concern it might cause him to be "written off or disowned by friends" if he were to speak out. Still, he felt it was necessary to raise an issue regarding *RA*'s workplace frame of reference. It was his "personal, passionate belief" that the movement would fail unless it became involved in both the workplace and the community. In his words, to choose between the two seemed like, "those old debates in which we felt obliged to choose between national and local work, direct action or electoral activity, without perceiving that even if a particular person or

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[16]Mark Naison to Paul Buhle, Spring,1971, *Radical America Papers*, 2-18.

collective must, for a time, make such a choice, the movement as a whole must embrace both." Because *RA* had only viewed workplace organization from a distance, and was romanticizing a reality which it had not experienced daily itself, it could be doing considerable harm by sanctioning a narrow and one-sided approach to working-class organizing, "which will not prove effective in the long run and will 'burn out' many brave young people who are trying to live up to an inadequate model of what it means to be a revolutionary."As he concluded, "my contention is that the working class is in fact revolutionary or has the potential to become so in situations where what is fought for is a total way of life, and that a movement that limits itself to workplace struggles will have great difficulty growing into such a hegemonic effort."[17] The old battle between scholarship and activism would simply not go away and would continue to haunt the attempts to describe a radical American past.

In addition to this debate regarding the focus of its working class analysis, the journal was considering another important change in its operations, a move from Madison to the east coast. In referring to the possibility of such a move, Dick Howard, a longtime associate editor of the magazine, while agreeing that in many ways Cambridge would be a good place to be, suggested to Buhle that there were many risks involved in such a move. In his mind, because of the "political heat" in the Boston area it would be difficult to be neutral and learn from everyone, with the result that to work there, "it will be necessary to snub people and you will be labelled, like it or not, just or not." However, as he went on to add, "The mag is, and has always been, yours. If you feel you can take the risk; take it. If it folds, that's the breaks; there will always be other things." One thing he did insist on was that the magazine produced in this new locale be one which would know itself, "its strengths and weaknesses, its goals and aims; that it not have a false consciousness and not be either an activist

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[17]Lynd to the Editors, 29 January 1971, *Radical America Papers*, 2-8.

nor an intellectual cop-out; and further – and this is my biggest gripe always about *RA* – that it be readable."[18] This was very sound advice that would be ignored on many occasions in the future.

When the move to the Boston area took place at the end of 1971, Buhle described it as the "only alternative" available as "there were not enough people to keep it going" in Madison. Just as the *Studies* group had found themselves caught up in the inevitable process of leaving the academic community of Madison in pursuit of advanced studies elsewhere, so too was "everybody leaving" *RA*.[19] Howard, for example, was now employed at Southern Illinois University and Buhle's wife Mari Jo would be doing research in the Cambridge area. As well, the ebb in political activity in Madison and the "general need for the greater personal and financial resources that Madison could not provide a Marxist journal prompted a decision to move."[20] Not wanting to leave entirely the academic connection, the only question was where to go. Unlike *Studies*, *RA* would find its new home in Boston rather than in faction-ridden New York, which presented a far less attractive political and intellectual venue for the journal to continue its working class perspective. The last issue printed in Madison, volume 5, number 5, presented two sets of documents on working class struggles; a long series of documents originating from a series of Italian strikes and riots that had taken place over a two year period from 1969 to1971; and, a model American steel contract drawn up by the Writer's Workshop in Gary, Indiana based on demands raised by rank and file caucuses within local unions. Both sets of documents and the accompanying commentaries by Dan Georgakas and Staughton Lynd attempted to make clear, "the complex problems of working class struggles under conditions of

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[18]Howard to Paul Buhle, 16 January 1971, *Radical America Papers*, 2-3.

[19]Paul Buhle Interview with the author, 27 September, 1997.

[20]Paul Buhle, "Introduction," *Radical America Papers*, 1-1.

advanced industrial capitalism." While the editors concluded in their introduction to this issue that the move to Boston would not mean an "abandonment of our explorations into the American past," and that they would retain their "emphasis on the experience and development of the American working class," they did suggest that, "Boston would bring us into contact with new people and will allow a greater attention to developing Marxist theory capable of comprehending the contemporary American situation."[21]

The first issue published in Boston, volume 5, number 6, was the responsibility of Buhle and Jim O'Brien, the only two members of the Madison editorial group who moved east with the journal, and was completed before the new Boston editorial group was fully functioning. In announcing the move, the two editors explained that while *RA* had anticipated the New Left's turn to working class politics, it did not welcome the return to the conventional Marxist-Leninist formulas for party building. For them, the existence of an independent radical journal implied the "inadequacy of existing Marxist thought and/or practice." The time had come for *RA* to seek the next logical step in its development, "the combining of the full implications of a methodological critique of its latest phase, introducing explicitly and in avowed political terms what Marxism must become."[22]

To meet this challenge, Paul Buhle bravely offered "39 Propositions" about Marxism in the United States as a discussion document, and as an "abstract measurement of some of the distance *Radical America* has travelled in speaking to the most pressing problems of the Left." As he wrote in the introduction, "Perhaps no other Marxist journal in the history of the American Left has been so undefined at its outset, and has so completely reflected in its growth and elaboration the

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[21]" Introduction," *Radical America*, 5 (5, 1971): 1-2.

[22]"Editors Introduction," *Radical America*, 5 (6, 1971): 2.

development of its editors and writers." Most importantly, he argued, because of the crumbling of the New Left there was a, "vacuum of theoretical discussion at a time when radical possibilities within the society are greater than at any time in a generation . . . ." In this period of transition, both for the left and for the journal, it was necessary to adapt to new conditions as the editors had begun, "to see that the Movement as it was understood has been dialectically transcended and overcome; and, that the next stage, whatever it brings, will mark a transformation of us all."[23]

In rejecting the stale Marxist thinking of past generations, Buhle presented his own analysis of the failure of Marxist thought in the United States which had contemplated life through its economic lenses and "lacked a critique of culture as the substance of social life, the mediation of understanding and response from classes toward the outside world." While the struggles of unorganized workers in the period after the First World War had represented the first "Moment" of American Marxism, the New Left represented the second great opportunity for class struggle against the emptiness of contemporary life. But even the New Left experienced only "a conscious glimpse" of Marxism in its ultimate quest for personal self-liberation. Still, through the militancy of its followers it established, "a new stage of mass intervention against Imperialist military action abroad; and through the insistent connection of personal and social liberation, it brought a new consciousness of totality – however distorted in practice – into the revolutionary process."[24] Thus he suggested that Marxism in the United States had only begun to draw "its first breath as a thoroughgoing system of thought" and that a "vast groundwork in the comprehension of method and the application to classes

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[23]Paul Buhle, "Marxism in the U.S.: 39 Propositions," *Radical America*, 5 (6, 1971): 62-63.

[24]*Ibid.*, p.79.

remains to be laid." As he went on to conclude, "Against the Marxists of the past we insist that new forms of self-organization, undreamed of by them, will follow, that humanity can recover its self in History, and that the process is underway without their help, or it has already been lost."[25]

The Marxism that Buhle and his associates espoused drew heavily on the writings of C.L.R. James, whom *Radical America* first began publishing in 1968 and whose work was featured in a special edition in 1970.[26] Born in Trinidad in 1901, James became a leading Caribbean intellectual through his writings, which ranged from fiction to cricket reporting. During the 1930s he moved to England where he became heavily involved in Marxist politics. He participated in the Independent Labour Party and joined the Trotskyist movement, and later took part in the formation of the pan-African nationalist movement. In 1938 James came to the United States on a lecture tour and stayed for the next fifteen years until he was deported from the country in 1953. (He was later permitted to return.) After coming to the United States, he joined the small Trotskyist movement and devoted himself to learning about the problems of blacks and working class Americans. By the outbreak of World War Two, the Marxist movement in general and the Trotskyist movement in particular were in shambles, and Trotskyism had proved totally inadequate in explaining what was happening in the world. In this period of crisis, James and the small group he established in Detroit, which functioned as an opposition tendency within the Trotskyist movement, embarked on "the task of reconstituting a viable Marxism adequate to the needs of the times." Beginning with a return to fundamentals, to Marxist economics and the study of *Capital,* and to the Marxian dialectic and the study of Hegel and Lenin, James produced a remarkable collection of philosophical and political writings. These

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[25]*Ibid.*, p.88.

[26]*Radical America*, 4 (4, 1970).

writings, which insisted on the unity of theory and practice, served as an example and encouragement to radicals because of his efforts to "render Marxism an all-sided theory and practice."[27] In James' work, a new generation of radicals found a "radical humanism" in which emancipation was not the result of the actions of some privileged leadership but the result of "self-activity" by the masses propelled by their own initiatives. As cricket historian, James analysed the way the masses had taken over a gentlemanly game and made it their own. In his major historical work, *Black Jacobins,* he employed the notion of self-activity to show how African slaves used their own cultural traditions and the ideas of the French Revolution to create an autonomous national liberation movement that overthrew the master class and founded the black republic of Haiti.[28] To the editors of *Radical America,* this Caribbean intellectual, historian, journalist and political revolutionary offered, "a working model of subtle cultural history and its generally unperceived significance."[29] For a situation in which Left theory appeared to be stale and one-dimensional, James' writings were a breath of fresh air, provided a more imaginative approach to history and politics, and gave the journal an alternative to the conventional Marxist-Leninist formulas for party building.

Beginning with volume 6 in1972, the Boston group, including Buhle and Jim O'Brien from the Wisconsin editorial collective, assumed responsibility for the journal. Although the editorial collective contained many new faces, it did include a significant number of historians, including Linda Gordon, Jim Green, Margery Davies and sociologist Allen Hunter who also was very

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[27]Martin Glaberman, "Introduction," *Radical America*, 4 (4, 1970): 1-2. See also Paul Buhle, *C.L.R. James: The Artist as Revolutionary* (New York: Verso, 1988).

[28]C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

[29]Buhle, "Radical America and Me," p. 227.

interested in history, thus guaranteeing that the journal would continue to have a strong historical orientation. In particular, a major focus of this orientation would be a continued emphasis on the experiences of the American working class. In the next few years, according to one observer, *Radical America* would publish an impressive array of, "historical studies of labor radicalism among steelworkers, saleswomen, pullman porters, and the unemployed; studies of conflicts within American labor along gender, race, and class lines; studies of the constant tensions between trade-union organizations and self-directed labor militancy."[30] In his reader, a collection of the best of these articles published in the journal during the fifteen years from 1967 to1982, Green organized these writings under three major headings which corresponded to some of the main political and historical concerns of the activists and historians who had written for the magazine. These issues included the struggle for control at the point of production, the problem of organizing the unorganized, and the relationship between organized workers and union leaders.[31] In addressing the theme of power and authority in the capitalist workplace, a number of articles examined the nature of capitalist control and explored the workers' own culture of resistance, suggesting that a constant battle for control had been waged in the American workplace. In many of these articles the "informally organized work group" was seen as the centre of resistance and creative activity on the part of the workers. From "counter-planning on the shop floor" to "the clerking sisterhood" the informal work group was

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[30]Jonathan M. Wiener, "Radical Historians,"p. 425.

[31]James Green, ed., *Workers' Struggles Past and Present: A Radical America Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

clearly the locus of this attempt to understand the workers' search for power.[32] One of the best examples of this approach was the article by Susan Porter Benson which appeared in volume 12. In her article on the work culture of women department store clerks she studied management strategies to develop "skilled selling" and showed how workers exerted their own kind of control even though they were not formally unionized. While the managers were unable to control skilled selling behaviour, the saleswomen themselves were developing a strong work culture and "durable informal work groups." The existence of a vibrant "clerking sisterhood" was a strong indication that workers created a life for themselves on the job.[33]

A second major theme of this working class perspective was the attempt to understand why labour unions have never been able to organize more than a quarter of the wage-earning population. In particular, to what extent did organized labour bear some responsibility for failing or refusing to organize the unorganized? Building on the earlier work of George Rawick, several articles by Roslyn L. Feldberg, Roy Rosenzweig, Staughton Lynd and activist intellectual Manning Marable supported the idea that effective union organizing has to flow from "the spontaneous local activity generated by workers themselves. If outside organizers impose their strategies and political views, rank and file workers become alienated." If unions hoped to increase their membership in the future, Green argued, "they must address the social issues raised in these articles as well as the traditional economic issues," and in addition, "they must also recognize that autonomous workers' movements . . .can

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[32]Bill Watson, " Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor," *Radical America*, 5 (3, 1971): 77-85; L. Valmeras, "The Work Community,"*Radical America*, 5 (4, 1971): 77-96; M. Guttman, "The Informal Work Group,"*Radical America*, 6 (3, 1972):78-86.

[33]Susan Porter Benson, " 'The Clerking Sisterhood': Rationalization and the Work Culture of Saleswomen," *Radical America,* 12 (2, 1978): 41-56.

contribute enormous energy and purpose to organized labor."[34]

A third major theme identified by Green was the relationship between organized workers and union leaders in particular: namely rank and file militancy from below. In exploring various kinds of militant activity from wildcat strikes during World War II to demands for health and safety in the work place, several authors suggested that the more radical demands seem to have been brought to the surface by the rank and file which resulted in strained relationships with union leadership. For the most part this militancy was seen as a threat, with the result that union politics remained largely unresponsive to rank and file demands. As Stan Weir noted in his lengthy analysis of class forces in the 1970s, "it has been so many years since radicals have been a presence within the unions that it is difficult for them to learn and articulate clearly the ideological basis for the historically demanded re-alliance between themselves and the ranks.The once fresh and progressive young workers who rose from the ranks to the top positions in many of the unions have long since succumbed to bureaucratic conservatism."[35] Disillusioned with their unions, rank and file militants no longer focussed on obtaining power within the formal union governmental structure. As Weir suggests, they had learned that that was not the means to the end they sought. "Instead they often bypass that power fight and seek a direct and radical expression of their powers or their democratic rights in the total collective bargaining process." This, he added, was particularly significant for the left which would remain isolated from these spontaneous and potentially radical outbursts of working class militancy unless it developed a new theory and practice based on the reality of workers' daily lives. "Anything less" he concluded, "will be ultimately reformist . . . leading at last to a sense of

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[34]Green, *Workers' Struggles*, p.139.

[35]Stan Weir, "Class Forces in the 1970s," *Radical America*, 6 (3, 1972): 38.

futility."[36]

Labour historian David Montgomery, who first called on the New Left to make an assessment of working class struggles in 1970, was less critical of unions as a negative factor in workers lives. From his perspective, the union, even in some of its worst forms, had "provided a shield behind which workers of no more than average aggressiveness have found both emancipation from the bonds of subservience to the bourgeois order and a link between themselves and their more forceful shopmates." In addition, he claimed that there was clear evidence to suggest that for most workers union recognition, "was a means not an end in itself, and that recognition of their unions tended to unleash shop-floor struggles in the first instance rather than contain them." It was not just union structures, leaders, and demands that had been successfully incorporated into American capitalism time and time again but "so have workers' parties (reformist and revolutionary alike), co-operatives, and worker councils here and in Europe." For Montgomery, spontaneity and organization were dialectically inseparable, not a one-way line from militancy to bureaucracy. As he concluded, "The struggle for workers' control advances only as it moves from the spontaneous to the deliberate, as workers consciously and jointly decide what they want and how they want to get it."[37]

Montgomery's essay reflected a significant shift in the journal's discussion about workers' struggles. Initially, working class self-activity and spontaneity, and the need for autonomous struggle had been the main subjects of the journal's inquiry. In the 1970s, these subjects became "problems for debate and reconsideration." In a 1972 essay on working class militancy in the Depression, Green

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[36] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[37] David Montgomery, " Spontaneity and Organization: Some Comments," *Radical America*, 7 (6, 1973): 70-80.

argued that in 1940 American workers looked back on a decade of victories, "of a scale and quality monumental in the international history of the working class." These victories, he claimed, resulted from "the power of rank-and-file workers" who forced the "more powerful segments of the ruling class – industrial manufacturers – to recognize the working class as more than simply 'labor power.'" If there was a lesson in the labour history of the 1930s it was that, "the left must be flexible enough to respond to the specific needs of local militants and to raise political demands that are relevant to those needs."[38] In 1975 in a similar article on labour militancy in the1940s, the emphasis was no longer on the radical potential of self-organized workers' movements but rather on the "ways in which unions and the government joined employers to restrict rank-and-file militancy and to expel the organized from the labor movement." It was a time when labour found itself on the defensive both politically and economically as workers were forced to battle "giant corporations, an anti-labor government, and sometimes their own union leaders to hang onto their hard-won gains, which had, according to the wishful thinking of academic sociologists, made them 'middle class.'"[39]

The increasingly discouraging events of the 1970s, including the worldwide economic slump and high inflation and unemployment in the United States, saw many *RA* writers turn to "the Old Left's study of the objective conditions that inhibited or defeated class-conscious movements and to the Early New Left's emphasis on the co-optive effects of state intervention and regulation."[40] Others, such as Margery Davies in her study of the clerical workforce, focussed on how capitalists

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[38] James Green, " Working Class Militancy in the Depression," *Radical America*, 6 (6, 1972): 1-35.

[39]James Green, "Fighting on Two Fronts: Working-Class Militancy in the 1940s," *Radical America*, 9 (4-5, 1975): 42.

[40]Green, *Worker's Struggles*, p.12.

used scientific management and technology to de-skill workers and fragment workgroups.[41] Unlike its earlier articles that showed how black and white workers fought together to achieve gains in the workplace, the journal began to concentrate more on the divisive role of racism and sexism in working-class struggles. In an editorial statement in 1974, the journal suggested that racism had in fact become the main obstacle to working class unity. Because of its location in Boston, Green suggested that *RA* was strongly affected by the violent school-busing crisis of the mid-seventies so that the struggle "against racism seemed far more vital than any effort to manufacture unity among black and white workers."[42] Even the journal's attempts to broaden the scope of its analysis of the working class struggle and explain its international character saw a significant change in direction. While earlier issues lauded the spontaneous efforts of rank and file workers in the 1971 Quebec general strike praising their language of "national liberation, class struggle, and socialism," and later celebrated "worker's autonomy" as the goal of revolutionary socialism in Italy, a later issue on the crisis of capitalism took a very different approach.[43] Now the key concern was the state of the British working class and whether or not its internal divisions between unionized and non-unionized workers and between white and non-white workers would seriously hinder its ability to "withstand the next offensive of capital whether the attack would come by way of Labour's 'social contract' or by the way of the more direct attack of the other parties."[44]

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[41]Margery Davies, "Women's Place is at the Typewriter: the Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force," *Radical America*, 8 (4, 1974): 1-29.

[42]Green, *Worker's Struggles*, p. 14.

[43]See special issues on Quebec, *Radical America*, 6 (5, 1972) and the revolutionary left in Italy, *Radical America*, 7 (2, 1973).

[44]"Introduction," *Radical America*, 8 (5, 1974): 7.

Following the special on Labour in the 1940s, which Jim O'Brien described as the last of the unique historical special issues, the study of the working class moved into the background.[45] Both the journal's new feminist perspective and the changed political situation would no longer support an analysis that saw workers as economic and political beings rather than as human beings in the fullest sense. This new set of circumstances was effectively summarized by David Montgomery in one of the last articles that *RA* would print on the subject of workers' control. Although the struggle was still taking place, he suggested that there were important differences between the struggles of the late 70s and the previous decade. Of some significance was that control struggles were no longer limited to job control among a small group of skilled individuals. "Today's struggles," Montgomery argued, "begin with the scientifically managed factory," and this meant "that battles against plant closings, or against take-back bargaining, must embrace much, or even all, of the plant's workforce."[46] Anticipating the future movement to downsizing, Montgomery correctly identified that the struggles around plant closings revolved around the financial control of the enterprise and that workers would have to exert some control over investment decisions. If they did not, and their plants were closed and moved to low wage areas, all of their other struggles would have been fought in vain. In this setting, the ongoing struggles by workers and by communities for control over their own destinies, "becomes a battle to change the rules of the economic game itself."[47]

Although there was some criticism of the journal and these historians for their failure to

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[45]James O'Brien, e-mail to the author, 2 August 1998.

[46]James Montgomery, "The Past and Future of Workers' Control," *Radical America*, 13 (6, 1979): 22.

[47]*Ibid.*, p.22.

extend their analysis "beyond the capitalist workplace to the home, the family, the community and other social settings," this was not simply the result of a lack of sources or a lack of imagination. There were also significant political and conceptual reasons and these appear to have been closely tied to a growing feminist influence both within the editorial collective as well as from the outside, which would ultimately force the editors to reexamine their approach.[48] Still, the very least that can be said of the journal's working class writings is that these *RA* historians, in their concentration on the struggles of ordinary workers, "extended their inquiry beyond the traditional economic and political concerns to include social and cultural questions." In doing so they never "confused the history of unions and political parties with the larger story of working class struggle" and they recognized that this struggle involved issues of "dignity, freedom, and control" as well as wages and working conditions.[49] In the words of one historian *Radical America* helped show that American working class history was "far richer, more turbulent, and far more complex than anyone would have imagined from its treatment at the hands of earlier historians including those on the left."[50]

As well as its emphasis on labour radicalism, *RA* established a strong feminist perspective in Boston, building on the earlier special issue on women's liberation in1970 and the path breaking article in the last Madison issue which had combined feminism with class analysis. Shortly after its move, the journal published another special issue which attempted to develop more fully a synthesis between Marxism and feminism, a merger that would prove to be very elusive. At this point there

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[48]Paul Buhle, Interview with the author, 27 September 1997.

[49]Green, *Worker's Struggles*, p. 1.

[50]Casey Blake, "Where Are the Young Left Historians?" *Radical History Review* (28-30, 1984): 117.

were many problems facing the women's liberation movement, not the least of which was the sharp discontinuity between this movement and the "liberal feminism of NOW and *Ms* magazine." According to the editor of this issue the major problem was that although, "the great resources that the liberal feminist leaders have at their disposal have helped bring the issue of women to the consciousness of the masses, it has not been raised in a socialist context."[51] This was extremely important for there were many women who believed that a socialist society was necessary to end their exploitation. But before this could happen much theoretical work needed to be done about the situation of women. The development of a socialist feminist analysis of society was just beginning and this task was complicated by the realization that a basic class analysis of American society was largely nonexistent, particularly for women. Even more distressing was that Marxism itself had not provided a "good definition of what class is for women" and that for too long "women had been assumed to carry the class position of their fathers and then husbands." Despite these difficulties, one basic assumption had to be acknowledged, that there "cannot be a revolutionary woman's movement unless it is built around working-class women." At the very least, the authors added, "We are beginning to know that class is a complex, not a simple category; that class describes one's relation to the means of production, as well as shared cultural experiences throughout life, from childhood to old age," and that the experience of the working class as a class takes place "not just in the shop but also at home, in bed, in ballparks and movie theatres." For the time being, feminists were forced to publish materials from the British women's liberation where, as a much more class conscious country than the U. S., its women's movement "defines itself as socialist and has sought to reach working-class women as its main priority."As Ann Gordon concluded, "if there are possibilities for

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[51] Ann Gordon, "Introduction," *Radical America*, 7 (4-5, 1973): 2.

increased working-class militancy in the next decade, it is crucial that a socialist feminist analysis be developed, argued for publicly, and put into practice."[52]

Ironically, this issue also marked the departure of Paul Buhle from the editorial board. A brief announcement on the back cover indicated that he had moved away from Boston and the editorial staff but that he would continue to work on the magazine from New York. It appears however that his leaving was the result of a certain amount of frustration with the direction of the journal. As he wrote shortly before his departure, "I came East with high hopes, straight into the most depressing scene I could imagine, with the feeling of personal collapse all around. We managed to survive, but without much focus except the familiar blue-collar factory materials which – we all knew – were in themselves inadequate."[53] Despite his attempts to provide a new direction, he confessed that "it was easier in a lot of ways to run a magazine without consulting anyone about anything." Even a reshuffling of the editorial board did not seem to help. Although he had good things to say about some of the board, "at least one of the women [probably Ann Gordon] is the most remarkable I have ever known in political life; and we have in Jim Green one of the most brilliant young social historians in the country" and praised as well as a number of others who "represent the best impulses in the serious dedicated but non-demagogic 'organizers' of New Left days," he still felt somewhat uncomfortable about others. In the spring of 1973, he wrote to Ann Gordon complaining that the last shift in the board prompted, "a hashing out of women/men issues which paralysed everything else for a month, and brought the bitterest disagreements about any single article we've ever had yet."

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[52] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[53] Paul Buhle to Harry Magdorf and Paul Sweezy, 12 March 1973, *Radical America Papers*, 1-13.

Real differences emerged about the nature of articles, for example, whether a personal narrative without any class inclination should be published. Although the article was not printed, the board found itself forming factions "about the importance of the 'personal' in itself, and by implication something about Marxism," a dispute from which, "nobody emerged totally unscathed." Once again, he went on to add, "what matters most is our correct position, and the observation of the *lives* of people becomes a secondary matter again."[54]

In addition to his concerns about the politics of an editorial board there was also the question of personal relations. "Things" had gotten both worse and better in that department but at least he suggested, "As in the political vacuum, I have learned a world of things about the problems of an editorial board and what we had earlier failed to do in so many respects."As he went on to confess, "I have a strong sense of having bloodied my hands on a brick wall, when quite a while ago I might have begun looking for some stairs over the top. This year I have gotten some slight sense of the minimum necessary things I would have to know to break out of the limitations of the situation and that is . . . more than I ever imagined, more by far than any group of people our age and with our background could have gathered together for any theoretical or historical 'breakthrough.' "[55] His regime at the journal was over and he felt relieved to be older, less tense and clearer about his work knowing that he no longer had to think constantly about deadlines and finances. Although he had a great deal to occupy his time, including completing his dissertation, he also admitted that, "I can't completely suppress myself from planning another and different sort of journal, on the expectation

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[54] Buhle to Ann Gordon, 22 April 1973, *Radical America Papers*, 1-18.

[55] Buhle to Gordon, 22 April 1973, *Radical America Papers* , 1-18.

that *RA* will become more and more popular, timely and less theoretical."[56]

Perhaps he had simply accepted the judgment of his former Madison associate Dick Howard who, in a letter to Buhle early in 1973, wrote that, "The fact of it, it seems to me, is that *RA* has *not* advanced." While he was prepared to agree that the journal still provided several useful services such as, "exciting grad. etc. students to what we need to do as historians, showing people that there is another history than the official one, printing weird things, doing certain kinds of documentaries that are not normally found because they either go into books or are scattered, and being a certain non-dogmatic place to publish/read things," it had not done what really needed to be done. What it had failed to do was to be critical and provide, "not just more facts, a friendly place, and a sort-of alternative, but actually take the lead politically and intellectually." Part of the problem he went on to point out was "knowing for whom the mag was produced ... Organizers? Academics? Ex-new-leftists now without a base? Grad students in history? University Mirco-films?" As he concluded, "The first thing that must be done is that that audience be defined, and that writing take place in its context."[57] Of course this was a decision that seemed easy enough to make in theory, but given the practical realities of creating the journal it was a difficulty that *RA* never succeeded in resolving successfully.

Although Buhle's departure represented at least a "symbolic discontinuity" with the journal's past, it would appear that his withdrawal did not immediately result in a significant reduction in the historical orientation of the magazine. It continued to publish articles of consequence to radical historians as an independent Marxist journal published by a collective of twelve socialists

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[56] Buhle to Magdohf and Sweezy,12 March 1973, *Radical America Papers*, 1-13.

[57] Dick Gordon to Paul Buhle, 3 February 1973, *Radical America Papers*, 2 - 3.

including Jim O'Brien, the last link to its Madison past. For the next two years it managed to present a wide variety of articles analysing the history and current condition of the working class in America and Europe with special emphasis on the changing role of women in the workplace, combined with essays that continued to develop the journal's feminist perspective such as Sara Evans' article on the "Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement."[58] But as Buhle had predicted these Volumes also saw the introduction of a trend to analysis of more timely, popular issues such as the Vietnam War (volume 8, numbers 1-2, 3) and the busing crisis in Boston (volume 8, number 6 and volume 9, number 3.)

As the journal began its tenth year of publication, its circulation continued to hover around the 3000 mark, which included some 1200 mail subscriptions and almost 1000 left over, unaccounted for, or spoiled copies. This left *RA* in somewhat of a financial predicament as their long time printers Fredy and Lorraine Perlman of the Printing Co-op in Detroit were no longer able to produce the journal. This change brought a substantial increase in costs since printing represented nearly half the total budget. This increased expense, the editors announced, would have to be covered by the first price increase in five years which, they said, would represent the exact minimum needed to meet their new costs. While asking their subscribers to "stick with us" they also announced a modified letters column[59] to encourage comment on journal articles or contemporary political issues. In addition, they promised to attempt to solicit articles of contemporary analysis, and about organizing, in a more zealous fashion than was previously the case.They concluded by stating that *RA* would assume an

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[58] Evans, *Radical America*, 9 (2, 1975): 1-12.

[59]Interestingly, one of their first letters was from Paul Buhle announcing his new position as a director of the Oral History of the Left Program sponsored by the Taminent Library in New York City. See *Radical America*, 10 (2, 1976): 76-77.

even greater importance as "one of the few stable voices of the anti-Stalinist Left which is primarily focussed on building a working- class socialist movement in the U. S., and they hoped, "that people actively engaged in organizing and research will feel a responsibility to share their analyses with others in our journal."[60]

While this focus dominated volumes 10 and 11, it was apparent that a comprehensive re-examination of the journal's approach was underway as the seventies came to a close. This was a reconsideration that was made all the more necessary by a changed political situation. In the late 1960s when America was in the midst of a broad progressive upsurge supported by the civil rights and anti-war movements, and radicals were oriented primarily to political struggles in the Third World and to the fight against racism and imperialism at home, many radicals believed that the Left would "continue to grow stronger year by year, just as it had been doing for the last decade or so." But in the early 1980s it was the feminist movement and not the civil rights or anti-imperialist movements that was the strongest progressive force. And perhaps the most important reality was the realization that, "today it is the Right and not the Left that is on the offensive."Attacking on a terrain that was once the strength of the Left, the brunt of this Right-wing offensive aimed at "quality of life" issues and it was the Right that was "addressing the issues of sexuality, the role of women and the family, the importance of community and opposition to bureaucratic government."[61]

According to Linda Gordon's and Jim Hunter's analysis of this situation, the New Right cultural politics of sex and family was not only a backlash against women's and gay liberation movements, as seen in the opposition to abortion, affirmative action and gay rights but was also a

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[60]"Editors' Comments," *Radical America*, 10 (1, 1976): Back Cover.

[61]"Editors' Introduction," *Radical America*, 12 (1, 1978): 3.

"reassertion of patriarchal forms of family structure and male dominance," and furthermore, "a direct challenge to class conscious politics" for which the Left had no serious or appealing cultural response "largely due to its prevalent economism and an insufficient appreciation of feminism."[62] For these authors, it was now time to stress the major contribution of the women's liberation movement, the recognition that "the personal is political" and therefore "to make sex- and-family, 'personal,' issues important in our work." As they concluded, "We think that the development of a fuller socialist - feminist program on these issues would contribute greatly to a socialist program that would be attractive and realistic for our country," because, they argued, "family and personal instability is a weak spot in capitalism, and socialists can participate in and develop political responses attractive too much of the working class."[63]

Thus, with the Right on the offensive, the journal embarked on a path that would see it reevaluate every concern through a "definitive feminist experience" and for a brief time it chose to describe itself as "an independent socialist and feminist journal."[64] Although it would quickly return in the next volume to describing itself as "an independent Marxist journal," this feminist emphasis would continue to influence the journal's direction into the eighties. In 1982, as the journal entered its fifteenth year of publication, the editors reaffirmed their intent to continue the presentation of activist " politics, history, and culture, informed by a socialist and feminist world view, with even more urgency." Above all, they added, "The struggle continues; vision and program must not be split

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[62] Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter, " Sex, Family and the New Right: Anti-Feminism as a Political Force," *Radical America*, 11 (6, 1978): 9-10.

[63] *Ibid.*, p.25. See also, Gordon and Hunter, "Feminism, Leninism and the U. S.," *Radical America*, 13 (5, 1979): 29-35.

[64] *Radical America*, 12 (5,1978).

apart."[65] Although the editors were prepared to take some responsibility for neglecting the "big picture" or the "overall context in which the popular struggles we write about take place," the 1980 elections had made the triumph of the Right even more chilling so that socialists and feminists were feeling a sense of deep cultural isolation and alienation which necessitated something more than the defensive or adjustive responses of the past. "As an enlightened Barry Goldwater might put it," they suggested, "extremism in the defence of democratic socialism is no vice."[66]

What happened, however, was that the journal devoted less and less space to historical analysis and practice and devoted more and more attention to current cultural and political issues. In what seems to have been their final attempt at historical analysis, the editors produced two special issues in which they published a series of reviews of recent work in American social history and attempted to assess the contribution this "radical history" had brought to traditional history. The result of this effort was somewhat discouraging, as once again these radicals "came face to face with the fragmentation within and between political activism and radical intellectual work." In a period in which activism had moved outside the universities, and in which intellectuals, inspired by the social movements of the last twenty years had increased within them, there appeared to be "a growing lack of contact or connection with each sector's interests or concerns," a gap that reflected the "continuing crises in our movements and in the meaning of radical intellectual work in a period of political and cultural retrenchment." Unlike the 1960s, when radical historical scholarship was defined by its connection to "social movements that set its agenda and its location, in a period in which the purposes and the culture of the universities were themselves the objects of challenge,"

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[65] "Editors Introduction," *Radical America*, 15 (1-2, 1981): 3-4.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

current radical work, in the absence of these conditions, is characterized by "its separation and consolidation into various disciplinary productions – journals and conferences of radical history, radical science, radical economics, radical sociology." From the editors' perspective, the university was no longer a terrain of political struggle and criticism, and for the radicals in the universities, "social existence exerts its awful and hidden weight on the consciousness of history, and on the narrowed perspectives from which it is written."[67] Specifically, they would go on to criticize recent radical history for its failure to incorporate feminist perspectives into its analysis. Working class historians' treatment of culture as an "outside resource, for example, assumes the separation between 'work' and 'family'...rather than seeing it as part of the problem to be examined", and it was also true that, "women are virtually absent from most of these studies, except when they entered the factory or became involved in community struggles related to workplace issues." In its failure to incorporate feminism, the new radical history was accused of actually standing "in a less critical position to the history packaged by mass culture and promulgated by the New Right." As the editors concluded, "In the face of New Right reaction, and the equivocation of some parts of the left in their responses to it, radical historians need to return to the problem of culture and politics," but in a way "which looks critically at both the older traditions and the new solidarities of capitalist relationships."[68]

Despite this admonition to radical historians, *RA* would do little to rectify the situation as future volumes in the 1980s would develop a variety of topics ranging from the threat of a nuclear holocaust, to sexuality and male violence, to gay politics and the aids crisis; all evidence of its "lack of history." By this time it had become just another "little left political magazine" and was a very

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[67] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical America*, 15 (6, 1981): 3-5.

[68] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (1-2, 1982): 5-7.

different product from the one Paul Buhle began publishing in Madison in 1968. Perhaps symptomatic of its declining influence was the fact that its production schedule became more and more erratic, and although still publishing, was running two or three years behind schedule.[69] It is quite likely that Paul Buhle was correct when he observed that the journal "never did come to grips with the ideas of the 1970s."[70]

In the final analysis, there are some Left historians who see *RA* as a "political magazine that included historical articles."[71] Certainly, in the period after 1970-71 when it moved to Boston, the journal became more directly political as it tried to find a way to make up for the collapse of the New Left. In Boston, the need to respond to shifts in the movement and the desire to "present material in popularly written language" saw it redirect much of its emphasis to the American working class. As one observer has noted, "their aim was to search out a new movement constituency, to bring Marxist and populist perspectives to factory line workers and union organizers."[72] But as Buhle later observed, "once it became clear that ... the spread of student radicalism to the factory and blue-collar neighbourhoods offered no panacea for the collapse of the New Left, the gradual confluence of politics and personalties around feminist concerns took place as a matter of course."[73] It was this "feminism informed by history" that became the journal's principal orientation for the remainder of the 1970s. Although the departure of Buhle from the editorial board in 1973 did not reduce its

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[69]For example, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1991) was not published until July, 1995.

[70]Paul Buhle, Interview with the author, 27 September 1997.

[71]Jonathan M. Weiner, "Radical Historians," p. 427.

[72]"Love Letters to the Future," p.30.

[73]Paul Buhle, " Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (3, 1982): 5-6.

historical orientation significantly, the journal had already begun to shift away from a central focus on historical questions to a greater concern with issues of labour, community organizing and feminist analysis of current American society. Still, with his departure and the drifting away of most of the original collaborators over the next few years, its concern with historical insights and scholarship were replaced by a purely political perspective on current issues. From the very first issues, the journal had reflected "a syndicalistic perspective both attuned to the student New Leftness, and also to hopes for self-guided workers' movements." By the 1980s, analysis of the "New Right" utilizing the special insights of activists in the women's movement became a central concern and in the last ten years it became according to Buhle, "more and more a lesbian journal with a working class tint, a perspective it continues to retain."[74]

Although the journal generated a five foot shelf of labour and community studies including contributions by Staughton Lynd, David Montgomery and James Green as well as a number of articles by younger radical historians like Roy Rosenzweig, and also an impressive array of articles from women's historians such as Mari Jo Buhle, Sara Evans, Linda Gordon and Sheila Rowbotham, who significantly influenced the writing of American history in their field, its impact on the profession was less powerful than that of *Studies on the Left*. As Buhle observed a decade or so after the journal's founding, "only three of the eight collaborating graduate students remained within academy walls. Union educators, archivists of feminist collections, historic- minded supporters of Latin American and other causes, oral historians – this was the fate of the de-institutionalized generation."[75] While *RA*'s editors remained on the fringes of university life its constituency was the students who saw it foremost

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[74] Buhle, e-mail to the author, 5 September 1997.

[75] Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p. 231.

as a journal of history and who could agree that "its real precocity lay in unearthing of historical methods and subjects that had otherwise been glossed over or marginalised by mainstream historians." It played a part in the revolution in social history which resulted in a detailed and accurate view of America's lower classes, and in Buhle's mind, "succeeded in imparting the importance of working class, black and women's history in providing clues to the unique character of American social struggles."[76] Although *RA* was not responsible for the rise in New Left history, its studies of "slave resistance, Debsian Socialism, communists in Harlem and the repression of the Wobblies in World War 1 helped to popularize these subjects among young historians, legitimized them in the eyes of the left, and at its best, found ways to make history meaningful to people's lives." From Buhle's perspective, "*RA* may have been a bit too obvious at times for budding theoreticians, a poor spot to publish scholarly treatises, but sought with every breath to remain true to its activist roots."[77]

Throughout its first fifteen years *Radical America* performed an important function as a radical history journal simply because as one young student recalled, "here was a magazine that at least in the areas of history and politics upheld the idea of serious thought and hard brain work." Most importantly, "It stood for intellectual independence and radicalism . . . not prepackaged answers but encouragement to thought." Many people who grew up with *Radical America* remember that as its best achievement. Although it is difficult to measure its specific impact on the writing of radical history and although it certainly did not resolve the conflict between scholarship and activism, it was important as a voice of radical scholarship in the early years of its existence, demonstrating that a real "radical America" could be found among the so-called "inarticulate" in American society. As a

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[76] *Ibid.*, p.5.

[77] Buhle, "Introduction," *Radical America* 16 (3, 1982):6.

journal that was meant to be intellectual but not especially academic, it was an example of how radical history could operate in a world beyond the ivory towers of academia. It is only fitting that the last word on the subject should be Paul Buhle's reflections on the first fifteen years of the journal. As he described its accomplishments, "If our own work for fifteen years meant nothing more than the creation of a radical history-and-culture magazine which returned the romantic kernel to the Marxist tradition – and placed human liberation upon the agenda as the imperative demanded by our scholarship and personal experience – we would have fulfilled our purpose."[78] And, as he later added, "perhaps the best issues were those which contained documents of struggle – leaflets, etc. – which expressed the spirit from beneath." [79]

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[78] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[79] Buhle, e-mail to the author, 5 September 1997.

PART THREE

POST NEW LEFT HISTORY – *RADICAL HISTORY REVIEW*

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A Different Time and Place

Just at that time in the seventies when *Radical America* began to shift away from historical questions to more current political and social issues, plans were underway to establish a new organization of radical historians that ultimately would assume responsibility for sponsoring the first, and only, journal devoted exclusively to radical history – *Radical History Review*. This group, the Mid-Atlantic Radical Historians Organization (MARHO), grew out of a conference held at Fordham University in New York in January, 1973, attended by over 300 people, a majority of whom were teachers at community colleges and state and city universities, largely from metropolitan New York. According to its organizers, "The large and enthusiastic response to the conference clearly demonstrated the need for communication and organization among the growing number of radical historians."[1] Within two months, a coordinating committee of some fifteen members formed at the conference "decided to move toward the "formation of a membership organization" and began to hold monthly meetings to develop ways in which the process of "communication and discussion

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[1]*Newsletter of the Radical Historians Caucus*, 12 (March,1973).This newsletter was published by the Radical Historians Caucus of the American Historical Association which was formed in 1969.

among radical historians could continue in the future."[2] Included in their plans were a membership directory of radical historians, sponsoring additional conferences on a variety of topics such as political trends in the state university system, teaching techniques, the political economy of higher education and most importantly, establishing a newsletter, to be published quarterly, to provide the membership with "discussions of subjects of mutual concern and announcements of activities in the region." In addition, its rather modest functions would also include its serving as a "clearinghouse for people seeking to form study groups, organize collective research projects and initiate political actions as the need arises," as well as containing "reports of meetings and conferences which might be of interest to the membership." To become active members in MARHO, people were asked to contribute the princely sum of $3.00 per year to help defray the costs of the newsletter, the directory and the other projects the organization hoped to initiate.[3]

This newsletter would provide the humble beginnings for the *Radical History Review* which would evolve, within a short period of time, into a collectively edited review that became the major voice of a new generation of historians and radicals who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.As the third (and last) generation of historical magazines to emerge out of the New Left, this new journal quickly established itself as an important historical and theoretical publication. From one historian's perspective, "this was a more raucous and countercultural journal, which evolved from a crudely reproduced bulletin into a major outlet for left scholarship."[4] Created by this new generation of scholars, some of whom as graduate students had been associated with the Lynd caucus of radical

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[2]*MARHO Newsletter*, Vol.1, No.1 (no date, but probably March, 1973): 1. This was a new publication and should not be confused with the *Radical Historians Newsletter*.

[3]*Ibid.* p. 1.

[4]Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 460.

historians, it was as Rosenzweig suggests, "really a post-New Left publication."[5] Unlike *RA* which began in the most active phase of the New Left, the early years of the newsletter and later the journal corresponded with the end of American involvement in Vietnam and the collapse of the anti-war movement. As Rosenzweig goes on to conclude, "If the editors of *RA* as well as one group among the *Studies* editors had often shifted to being activists rather than scholars, the editors of *RHR* were often making the opposite transition." Because there was no longer a mass movement to attach themselves to, "they had decided to embrace – sometimes happily, sometimes uncomfortably – the scholarly life."[6]

There were other differences as well. Not only did *RHR* emerge at a different time from *RA* but also in a different place. *RHR* developed in New York City, specifically at Columbia University, and for most of its early history until the late 1970s its editorial collective "was dominated by current or former Columbia history graduate students."[7] Its institutional home for much of its early existence was the History department at John Jay College where it was administered out of Mike Wallace's office, supported by some financial backing from the Chancellor of CUNY who wanted to keep the journal there.[8] In contrast to the provincial, small-town Protestant roots of *RA*, *RHR* was very much an urban product whose centre of gravity is still located in New York City. Despite its Ivy League roots, one of the early members of the collective has suggested that many of its founders such as Mary Nolan, Mike Merrill, Mark Naison and Robert Padgug were in fact very "un-Ivy League"

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[5]Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and American Radical Historians", p. 7.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 7

[8] Danny Walkowitz, Interview with the author, 10 January 1998.

people who were largely disinterested in professional credentials and "who did not necessarily see themselves as being successful in the profession." Their concern was not what America was doing right, but "what we were doing wrong." [9]

That emphasis was very apparent in MARHO's statement of principles drawn up by the coordinating committee early in1974. For these young radicals the organization would consist of, "a group of scholars and teachers who have avowed their open partisanship as scholars and teachers, in the struggle for human liberation." In fostering a revolutionary consciousness that would lead people to an active commitment to the on-going process of change, they did not see themselves operating as a "left opposition" within the established professional associations but rather as "an independent alternative to them."[10] While there were no illusions about this organization of scholars and teachers becoming the engine of revolution, they were very clear that MARHO was an organization of historians, not social scientists, because history was, "practically the only discipline in which the possibilities of human experience, the creativeness of human action, is still the major object of study; and for which general literacy is the only prerequisite for accessibility." As they concluded, "This distinctiveness is decisive and should be cultivated. Historians are best situated to show that not only is liberation necessary, but also that it is possible."[11]

Despite this emphasis on scholarship, the tension between the idea of the historian as scholar and the historian as activist was never very far from the surface in the early issues of the newsletter.

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[9]Victoria DeGrazia, Interview with the author, 14 December 1997.

[10]*MAHRO Newsletter,* vol.1, no.6 (no date, probably January, 1974): 3.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 4.

As one young contributor noted, "We keep trying to figure out what a radical historian is."[12] As previous attempts to deal with this conflict had demonstrated, the problem of reconciling the role of educator and activist was not an easy task. As one writer suggested, "We define ourselves by the kind of work we do, or rather, our work defines us. We write in glowing terms about the heroic struggles of workers, blacks, or women and suddenly, magically, we are 'radical historians.' But this is not enough." As he went on to argue, radical historians must avoid becoming prisoners of their own rhetoric, relying on "vocabulary rather than serious analysis, on form rather than substance." They should never be content to talk of revolution as a substitute for seriously engaging that subject in their work and lives, because, he insisted, "we cannot afford the luxury of being content with symbolic gesture while avoiding the revolutionary act." Thus, he concluded, "Our responsibility as radical historians is to form a new vision of society, to legitimize our struggle for social change, to assume the true mantle of the radical – the outcast, the breaker of idols, the relentless critic who cannot be tucked safely away in some dusty corner with his books."[13] Such an analysis did not generate a great deal of enthusiasm among this newer generation of radicals however, as one young graduate student observed, "it seemed a 'blast from the past',the worst rhetoric of the 1960's returned." Instead, given the circumstances facing young scholars in the early seventies, he suggested that, "while some individuals will shift from teaching to agitation, as a group their main concern would be to function as historians."[14] As historians, their focus should be directed to more practical

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[12]Jay Facciolo, "How Much Corn Is in the Can?", *MARHO Newsletter*, 2 (2, no date but ca. Spring, 1974): 3.

[13] Marty Sklar, "On Trying To Be a Radical Historian," *MARHO Newsletter*, 2 (1, no date but ca. January 1974): 7- 9.

[14]Facciolo, " How Much Corn Is in the Can," p. 4.

concerns such as how to teach, the questions their research should address, and how to organize to protect jobs as well as fighting for more jobs for historians.

This last concern was a pressing reality for these young radical historians in the early 1970s as the result of the great academic depression – caused partly by an oversupply in the number of new history Ph.D.s who encountered a rapidly shrinking market for college teachers. According to Peter Novick, the job crisis was at its worst in the early seventies as large numbers of students who sought a career in history during the days of the seller's market in the 1960s, "found themselves too far into the pipeline to back out, and trudged ahead even though there was now only twilight at the end of the tunnel."[15] At the 1970 meeting of the American Historical Association there were 2,481 applicants for 188 positions, and competition was so intense that the organization had to use special security measures to keep those seeking jobs from destroying invitations to interviews addressed to their competitors. The situation would remain stagnant throughout the seventies and early eighties when unlike the sixties, when fewer than 10 percent of history Ph.D.s were looking for jobs when they graduated, more than one- third were still looking after earning their degree. Even those who did get jobs found themselves in temporary or part-time positions, a situation not unlike today's market where fewer and fewer tenure track positions exist for new history Ph.D. recipients.[16] Thus, as Rozenzweig suggested, these young radical historians had good reason to be doubly depressed because, "the mass social movements on which they had pinned their hopes had mostly diminished and the universities that were the alternate outlet for their activism had precious few openings for

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[15]Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 574.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 574.

them."[17]

Even for those who where able to find a teaching job there was still a sense that the pursuit of scholarly activities was not enough. "There are those moments – are there not?" asked Mike Wallace, an early and still active member of the journal collective, "when we all feel just a bit beside the point. Wearing our academic hats, writing history, teaching college students, sitting in the cloister, the true struggle outside passing by, those who can, do, those who can't teach etc." But as he quickly went on to add, "it was true that in our more together states we know that the development of a critical history, one capable of penetrating and exposing the massive clot of obfuscations and ideological coverups that account for so much of the conventional wisdom, is a crucial task, an indispensable complement to praxis." Not only that, but as he also was prepared to admit, "we know that teaching students, unbending the pretzels their minds have been twisted into by the propagandists who have been working on them is exciting and important."[18]

Despite, or perhaps because of these obstacles MARHO continued to grow so that by the winter of 1973 plans were being discussed to take the organization to "a new and more active stage" which would result in the formation of a national radical historians' group that would be a focal point for intellectual and political activity among these historians as well as encouraging mass propaganda work around themes such as the approaching Bicentennial. The first step in this process would be the creation of a new radical historian's magazine that would be prepared to deal with a number of subjects that traditional professional journals and other left magazines did not include in their

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[17]Rosenzweig, " *Radical History Review* and American Radical Historians," p. 9.

[18] Mike Wallace, " On Being Taken Seriously," *MARHO Newsletter*, 2 (2,no date but ca. Spring, 1974): 7.

publications. The organizers' initial list of subject areas focussed primarily on the problems radical historians faced as teachers, including discussions of teaching experiences, ways to do radical history, examples of course syllabi, work experiences and on the job struggles, and how to take history outside the classroom and outside the university.[19] Although the proposed national organization of radical historians never materialized, their journal did and in early 1975, two years after the *Newsletter* first appeared, it became the *Radical History Review.* In announcing this name change the editorial group hoped that it would better reflect the contents of their publication as well as their decision to commit themselves consciously to establishing a journal. Although they were not certain what the eventual format of the *Review* would be, they promised "to keep the things that made the *Newsletter* unique: the attempt to find where the radical and historical intersect; a concern with teaching as well as research; and a sense of humor." Because the other "professional" journals were not open to discussions of the significance of the work of left historians, the *Review* would also provide, "a new forum for articles and essays which would not necessarily be constrained within the bounds of bourgeois professionalism."[20] The original four page *Newsletter* whose content consisted largely of announcements had quickly been transformed into a scholarly journal of radical history.

Despite the name change, the format of the Review continued for a time to look very much like the old *Newsletter.* It remained 48 pages in length, and was laid out, typed (on more than one typewriter according to Rosenzweig), mimeographed, and stapled together by various volunteers. It included irreverent graphics and cartoons, mixed with poetry, humour, announcements, letters,

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[19]*MARHO Newsletter*, 1 (6, no date but probably ca.Winter, 1973-1974): 1. See also *MARHO Newsletter,* 2 (1, no date but ca. January,1974). The introduction to this number contains a revised list of topics to be discussed in the projected magazine.

[20]"New Directions for MARHO," *Radical History Review*, 2 (3, 1975): 1.

reflections on teaching, and a large number of book reviews. Produced by a group of ten "co-conspirators" one of whom was a "marxist lobster" the first issue contained no publication date and used the same volume and issue number as the last issue of the *Newsletter.*[21] Despite its rather inauspicious debut, the journal did get better, the typing improved, the issues got longer and new features appeared, including scholarly monographs, course syllabi, the first of a long series of interviews with radical historians and a response to the job crisis entitled, "Alternative Careers (a Continuing Series)" which promised new and exciting careers for dissatisfied historians in such non-existent fields as "cliotherapy."[22]

Indeed, by the fall of 1976, the editorial collective believed that it had reached "a certain point of stability," and so it was now appropriate to try "to assess" why the journal's constituency had emerged and "what this implies about the future of the *Review*." In their judgment the growth of the *Review* reflected, "the emergence of a new generation of Marxist historians in the United States, politically awakened in the 1960s, but reaching maturity as scholars in the last few years." With the collapse of the student movement and the failure of its "strategic vision" many people on the left were in a state of despair, but others however were left with, "a hunger to analyze the development of a society that seemed so unjust yet so resistant to basic change." In the course of re-educating themselves, many people made their first serious study of Marxism, in an effort "to understand the complex interrelationships between institutional and cultural change which dominant liberal and radical paradigms could not explain." In the course of organizing MARHO activities, the editors of the journal became aware of the "extraordinarily large number of people" all over the

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[21] *Ibid.*, Contents page.

[22] *Radical History Review*, 3 (3, Spring, 1976) and 3 (4, Fall, 1976).

country whose historical work was influenced by the Marxist tradition. As a result they concluded that these developments "forced a change in the self image of the editorial board," which now began to feel "that the work we engaged in was *politically* significant – that the effort to develop and legitimize a Marxist intellectual tradition was an important step in laying the groundwork for a mass socialist movement in the United States." The result was a concerted effort to reorganize the magazine so that it would more effectively reflect these new responsibilities. By improving the quality of the editing, the attractiveness of the format, and the regularity of the production schedule, the board aspired to expand into a quarterly which would present "historical writing and political analysis of a consistently high quality."[23]

Whatever the reasons, this community of radical historians continued to grow during these lean years and *RHR* also continued to grow, if somewhat more erratically, along with that community. In fact, according to Roy Rosenzweig, a remarkable number of radical historians, in contrast to *RA*'s experience, seemed to have stuck it out through the job crisis, and despite anti - radical biases within the academy, "may have actually done better in the academic job market than non-radicals."[24] And, as the editors had promised, the physical format of the journal did undergo significant changes that helped to elevate its status as a scholarly history journal. Beginning with volume 4, number 2 - 3 in the summer of 1977 it grew to almost 200 pages in length, and acquired

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[23] "Introductory Statement", *Radical History Review*, 3 (4, Fall, 1976): 2 - 3.

[24] Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and American Radical Historians," p.10. In his mind there were three reasons to explain this situation. The first possibility was that these historians, because of their political convictions, were unwilling to take up alternative careers. Secondly, their radical or Marxist analyses may have resulted in their producing more innovative and coherent scholarship. Thirdly, they may have been convinced of the worth of what they were doing and so stuck with the project. See also Weiner, " Radical Historians and the Crisis in American History".

a professional layout and a "perfect" (cement) binding. By the following year, it had started to typeset its articles and feature original graphics, and had stopped including casually pasted in drawings and cartoons "ripped off" from other publications (by this time Josh Brown had been hired as Office Manager and his creative abilities would have a significant impact on the journal's appearance.) The production of the journal was now the responsibility of a volunteer editorial group headed by Mike Wallace who occupied the position of Editorial Secretary. By the third year of its existence, "*RHR* increasingly looked like other 'professional' history journals, although it remained distinctive in its more extensive use of illustrations and its carefully illustrated and sometimes irreverent covers."[25]

As well as the changes to the physical format of the journal, the editors announced the expansion of the editorial group to "reflect our character as a national organization." This expansion came in the form of an increased number of participants in the New York collective and the creation of two new editorial collectives in Boston and Providence, Rhode Island. The Boston group was organized by Molly Nolan, a former Columbia graduate student and one of the founders of the *Review* who had moved there to take up a position at Harvard. According to Roy Rosenzweig, the Boston members of MARHO, many of whom were history graduate students at Harvard, had been meeting for at least a year before they evolved into the collective in 1977. It was at one of these branch meetings that they apparently discussed the idea of the Boston people putting together an issue of the journal in addition to broaching the idea of establishing collectives in other cities.[26] The Providence collective centred on graduate students at Brown but also included Paul Buhle of *Radical America* fame. Although the editors announced plans to organize editorial boards in Philadelphia and

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[25]*Ibid.*, p.10-11.

[26]Roy Rosenzweig, Interview with the author, 14 January 1998.

Baltimore, these groups never materialized but a New Haven collective replaced the short-lived Providence group when a member of the Boston collective, Jean-Christophe Agnew, moved from that area to take up a position at Yale in 1978.

Subsequent to the formation of these collectives, several issues of the journal were produced following this decentralized format. The Boston collective brought out a double issue in the summer of 1977 that continued its historical evaluation of the Depression, focussing not only on the political struggles it generated but also on the modes of capitalist response it called forth. The Providence group followed with a special issue on "Labor and Community Militance in Rhode Island" that evolved from the Rhode Island Labor History forum, a group involved in local labour education activities. The issue was the result of their attempts to create a public discussion about the roots of labour and community radicalism.[27] Despite MARHO's claims that they had overcome the logistical and technical problems of a decentralized editorial operation it appears that their attempt at participatory democracy was not successful as only one other issue was produced by a regional collective and by the fall of 1981 these groups were no longer being listed in the journal.[28] Not only was the structure unwieldy but the journal's recurring financial crisis made coordination extremely difficult. In 1978, for example, there was a rather desperate appeal to readers for immediate financial help. The expenses involved in the printing and mailing of the *RHR* and *Newsletter* had reached $15,000 whereas subscriptions and sales had generated "a mere $12,000." Only sales of items such as matchbooks and T-shirts and $5,000 in contributions had saved them from "financial collapse."

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[27]*Radical History Review,* 4 (2-3 Spring - Summer, 1977) and *Radical History Review*, 17 (Spring, 1978). Beginning with Number 17 the *Review* would be numbered consecutively rather than by volume and would appear in the Spring, Autumn and Winter of each year.

[28]*Radical History Review,* 19 (Winter 1978-79) was produced by the Boston Collective.

If *RHR* was to survive and expand its activities in the coming year, it was going to require, "a significant infusion of money from our friends and supporters, and soon." As they concluded, "The left needs a radical historians' organization. The Radical Historians Organization needs the left's support now."[29] As an organization of volunteers, without funds for a paid staff or for travel or most office expenses, "it was hard to run an operation in even one city."[30]

Even while the *Review*'s editors struggled with the journal's financial problems, they could point to a number of successes in the short period that during which journal had been in operation. One distinctive feature was, "the effort to locate the newer generation of American radical historians in the context of other older and non-American left historiographic traditions."[31] In their attempts to print material which focussed on the process of writing history and which examined the political and cultural context from which the current generation of Marxist historians emerged, the journal offered special issues on "Culture and Class" and "Marxism and History: The British Contribution." The first of these reproduced Stuart Hall's keynote address from the spring 1977 MARHO Conference where he had challenged the Left to "continue developing an understanding of culture which could serve as a guide to Marxist theory and practice."[32] The second of these special issues surveyed the current state of British Marxist historiography, which the editors suggested might clarify, "how to know what we can and cannot borrow from the experience of socialist historians in Britain." In their attempt to draw the line between "constructive emulation" and "self-deluding

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[29]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

[30]Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and American Radical Historians," p.11.

[31]*Ibid.*, p. 14.

[32] Stuart Hall, " Marxism and Culture," *Radical History Review,* 18 (Fall, 1978): 5-16.

mimicry" of the British Marxist tradition the Boston Collective, who produced this issue, concluded that, "what we may have demonstrated more effectively than anything else is that Marxist history in Britain today is too complex, too vigorous ever to be simply captured and imported into the United States without major distortion and damage." Unlike in Britain, where the interaction between history and politics produced a rich and impressive body of work, in America, " that process is more necessary than ever if a truly socialist history is to emerge."[33]

In addition to these special issues, the journal's most significant contribution to establishing an awareness of a radical historical tradition was the publication of a series of interviews, beginning in 1976, with a number of prominent radical historians who belonged to an older generation of radical intellectuals that had come to maturity in the 1940s and 1950s. Beginning with the neo-Marxist British historian E.P. Thompson, who would later become an editorial associate of *RHR*, the initial purpose of these interviews was to explore the relationship in their work between historical scholarship and political commitment. Certainly Thompson was a logical choice to begin this series of interviews, because as the editors of the issue containing his interview stated, "No historian has had a more profound impact on working class history or Marxist theory than Thompson; his work has helped transform the context in which questions of class and class consciousness are currently discussed by radical scholars." In addition, they felt that it was important to examine the relationship between his political activity and his work as a historian, "particularly his break with the British Communist Party and his role in the formation of the 'New Left' . . . and how his work as a teacher in an adult education program" shaped his most significant historical work, *The Making of the*

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[33] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review,* 19 (Winter 1978-79): 3-5.

English Working Class.[34] Certainly Thompson would become the model for most American leftist social historians in the 1970s and 1980s who seemed to be largely in agreement with his attempts to develop a distinctive Marxist historiography which allowed for contingency, and which focussed on the "lived experience" and the "agency" of those "at the bottom of society." It was a Marxism which stressed the centrality of class and class struggle and his re-conceptualization of class as a happening not as a thing, and it "resonated perfectly with the hopes of a generation of radical scholars that common people could make their own history, and that sympathetic historians could write it using such imaginative tools as reading upper class sources 'upside down,' pursuing oral history of the living, and 'decoding' behavior of the dead."According to Alan Dawley, "When Thompson wrote that class *happens* he sent a quenching shower of spring rain across a parched landscape of arid, static definitions."[35]

During the next two years the journal published interviews with the British Marxist historian E. J. Hobsbawm as well as American Leftists such as Staughton Lynd, David Montgomery, W.A. Williams and Natalie Zemon Davis which aimed at continuing the dialogue between generations of historians on the Left through which they could explore together the connections between radical politics and the practice of history. In the minds of the editors of *Visions of History,* who collected these interviews into book form, these dialogues allowed for "exchange and argument about matters shortchanged in conventional scholarly discourse – about theory and political strategy and the history these men and women have lived as well as the history they teach and write."[36] Encouraged by the

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[34]"Introductory Statement," *Radical History Review*, 3 (4, 1976): 3.

[35]Alan Dawley, "E.P. Thompson and the Peculiarities of the Americans," *Radical History Review*, 19 (Winter, 1978-1979): 39.

[36]Henry Abelove et al.,eds.,*Visions of History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. ix.

candor and thoughtfulness of their early efforts the editors decided to interview more widely and included younger radical historians such as Linda Gordon, Vincent Harding, and John Womack in the published collection. For the editors, these interviews not only attested to the diversity of radical history, they also revealed the basic unity of purpose that all radical historians share. Quoting Marx's earlier observation, they agreed that the point was, "not only to interpret the world but to change it," and so, they concluded, "These men and women have much to teach us about the past and its bearing on the work of liberating the present."[37]

In addition to establishing this connection with an older radical historiographic tradition, the journal was also making an innovative contribution to the discussion of a number of unique subjects such as the history of sexuality, the spatial dimension of history, communism in western capitalist societies and the new "people's history" movement – all of them the subject of special issues of the journal. These subject areas were not likely to be found in traditional scholarly journals of history but as the editor of the issue on "Sexuality and History" pointed out, " In any approach that takes as predetermined and universal the categories of sexuality, real history disappears." Because of the force of recent events and movements, such as the women's movement and the gay movement, questions concerning the nature of sexuality were once again on the Marxist agenda and the resulting comprehension "that sexuality, class, and politics cannot be disengaged from one another must serve as the basis of a materialist view of sexuality in historical perspective as well."[38] While new approaches to methodology and conceptualization useful to historians had begun to make an impact

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[37]*Ibid.*, p. xi.

[38]Robert A. Padgug, "Sexual Matters: On Conceptualizing Sexuality in History," *Radical History Review*, 20 (Spring-Summer, 1979): 5-6.

on the field of sexuality in history, more questions had been raised than had been answered and things were still very much in the process of construction so that much work needed to be done if sexuality was to play an important role in contemporary struggles.

In much the same way, the special issue on spatial analysis of history was an attempt to remedy, "a legacy of neglect, suspicion, compartmentalization and uncertainty about space" so that it would no longer be seen simply as a marginal social category but rather, "as a changing set of lived social relations – a social construction – whose understanding allows us to remap the mental and physical terrain of social struggle, and in particular, to re-examine the relation of production to social reproduction." Influenced by a Marxist perspective, the struggle over space was seen as one more dimension of class relations and class conflict but it was also agreed that this analysis would encompass more than specific moments of class conflict and would involve the attempts to "understand a particular historical transformation within the framework of lived spatial relations" such as the study of Manhattan housing in the early nineteenth century, the emergence of consumerism in the rural United States in the early twentieth century or how the design of department stores affected customers, managers and clerks alike. As the editors concluded, "None of the articles can be said to offer a full elaboration of the synthesis called for here." Instead, "they reflect the imbalance, fragmentation, and tentativeness which characterizes the existing scholarship on space . . . they delineate the outlines of a materialist analysis of space. They open a door."[39]

The most significant of these new approaches, as least as far as the future of the journal was concerned, was an interest in history outside the university in what was now being called "public history." According to the editors this new direction involved a two-pronged initiative. The first of

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[39] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 21 (Fall, 1979): 3-9.

these efforts would be an ongoing attempt, "to report on, learn from, and assess the diverse products of the burgeoning "people's history" movement which had grown dramatically in the form of community and union-based oral history and photo exhibits, radical film and radio programs, and left theatre groups' attempts to create a new "democratic history." The second part of this approach would be to begin "the equally vital task of analysing critically the myths and distortions that are often offered as history, whether in the form of scholarly monographs, high school textbooks, television docudramas, corporate-funded museums, Hollywood extravaganzas, or Bicentennial sugar packets." "On a regular basis," the editors concluded, "we intend to subject the products of 'our history' and 'their history' to sharp critical scrutiny."[40] Spurred on by a strong belief that the New Right was mobilizing intense political pressure to gain control over this kind of history, particularly over non-traditional historical projects that attempted to translate recent scholarly work in social and working class history into forms which were accessible and useful to ordinary Americans, the editors felt compelled to respond. Their answer to this attack was to offer some, "specific lessons for historians engaged in challenging the misrepresentations of mainstream history and developing a people's history which is socialist and democratic."[41] As well as analysing the ruling-class renderings of the past as conveyed through the commercial market, their active involvement in people's history would be tied to community organizations and community struggles through direct participation so that they could, "understand – and connect with – the needs, aspirations, and visions of our 'audience.' " But as these scholars began to develop a historical practice that was non-hierarchical, democratic, and community based, there was also the concern that the content of this history be something more than,

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[40] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 25 (Fall, 1981): 4.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

"a radical populism which simply celebrates past victories and decries past exploitation." As the editors of "Presenting the Past: History and the Public" concluded, "we need to base our historical work on a theoretical and practical understanding of class, racial, and sexual oppression which will enable people to understand why they lost in the past and how they can win in the future. Such understanding, of course, will not simply flow from 'radicals' to 'the people,' but must move in both directions . . . we must develop our audience at the same time that we develop the form and content of our historical work." [42]

This new interest not only reflected the journal's activist political commitments but also the fact that "some of its editors (and many of its readers) were taking the lead in people's history projects around the United States." Specifically, Rosenzweig mentions that for a time MARHO even organized its own "New York Public History Project" that produced, "oppositional walking tours, pamphlets, and slide shows on the history of housing and banking in New York City." [43] At this point in time in the journal's relatively short history, this emphasis on public history would mark the beginning of a new direction in the journal's struggle to define the meaning of "radical historian" and to figure out how to combine the roles of scholar and activist. In its earliest years, *RHR* had seen the classroom as the place to achieve that synthesis.The assault of the Right on the cultural and intellectual front – an area that had been dominated throughout the 1960s and 1970s by an uneasy alliance of liberal and radical intellectuals combined with the growing conservatism of undergraduate students, probably discouraged many radical historians about the possibilities of fostering a radical or oppositional democratic history in the traditional classroom setting. Public history in both of the

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[42]*Ibid.*, p.7-8.

[43]Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and Radical American Historians," p. 13.

previously discussed manifestations would provide a new context to combine the roles of scholar and activist. As one of the first journals to take an active interest in how history was being presented outside the university in non-academic settings, the *Review* would fight the new scholasticism by setting itself against the increasing specialization that separated the profession from a public interested in the past.

Despite its many critical successes the journal experienced an important period of crisis as it approached its tenth year of publication in 1984. As the editors commented in their introduction to the issue celebrating this milestone in the journal's history, "In fact, small independent radical journals have difficulty surviving in the best of times, and these have not been that." Not only were funds more difficult to raise during the recession of the 1980s, but also "meager employment possibilities have historians increasingly disheartened, and a resurgent right wing has radical historians under attack and on the defensive."[44] In particular, the financial plight of the *Review* was a significant concern and had reached a point in 1984 when the journal almost went out of business. As the *Review* grew bigger in size and stature, production and delivery costs rose, and the business of running the journal became more complicated and difficult to manage. Without substantial institutional support, and dependent on volunteers from the collective to keep it alive, the journal could no longer continue to operate on an "ad hoc" basis as it had been doing. While a subsidy from the City University of New York would restore a measure of financial security, the crisis reached much deeper into the operation of the journal as many of the younger members of the collective were concerned about the way the journal was being run. According to one young critic Josh Brown, who, along with Jean-Christophe Agnew was responsible for much of the innovative and distinctive art

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[44] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 28-30 (September 1984): 5.

work of *RHR*, "for some time now, the *Review* has been operating on a grotesque version of the base-superstructure model." By that he meant that the editorial or "content" element of the journal had been placed on a pedestal, while the production work, " – really, in a narrow sense, the form of the *Review* – remains unqualifiedly shitwork:" taking the already "determined material and making it look pretty." As an alternative to this unsatisfactory model he suggested a format in which the graphics would be, "as intrinsic to the articles' presentation as the articles should be intrinsic to the graphics." Although he was prepared to admit that such an "organic product" was an "ideal," he did hope that treating the production work as a melding of form and content in the creation of the *Review* would go a long way to creating a journal "whose appearance is not simply arbitrary, but has an intellectual and theoretical basis." After outlining a process by which a new Production Subcommittee would function in an attempt to create a "totality," one that could not be split into words and pictures, he concluded by arguing that at the very least it would require that the entire editorial collective "be willing to treat the 'production process' of the *Review* with a respect and seriousness – with an intellectual creativity – comparable to the Editorial Subcommittee's concerns."[45] Although Brown's memo was never adopted by the collective, the journal's illustrations and its "carefully illustrated and sometimes irreverent covers" continued to represent a serious attempt to intermingle art and history. While the journal's artwork was never as important a feature as its written materials, it did represent, "a different political and intellectual practice that created new materials for the *Review's* historical and political debates." [46]

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[45]Josh Brown, "Production as 'Practice' Rather than 'Shitwork,'"Undated memo (ca. 1980) in the possession of the author.

[46]Josh Brown, Interview with the author, 11 November 1997.

At the very least, the financial crisis and the labour intensive process of putting out the journal forced the Editorial Collective to reorganize its personal and financial commitments. *RHR* had been born in a period of enormous political energy which saw the Collective assume control over production as well as editorial content, and that meant assuming responsibility for fundraising and publishing as well as editing. Ten years later those responsibilities once considered "empowering" had now proven to be overwhelming. As a result of the practice of individual editors accepting articles for publication, a large backlog of articles had built up, production meetings were overwhelmed by detail, and many members of the group were unhappy because they were primarily interested in publishing and not in raising money. While some suggested that these difficulties were inevitable and reflected the "competing professional aspirations of a maturing generation of radical historians," others disagreed, arguing that the Collective was still a diverse group with a large representation of "second generation left graduate students and recent degree-holders" and few established people in tenured positions so that as one new member of the group declared, "the Collective had to become more damn efficient if the journal was to survive."[47]

Having gained a measure of financial security with the help of John Jay College (CUNY) the decision was made to resume publishing and produce a mammoth triple anniversary issue of over 500 pages, which, in as much as it was a celebratory anniversary issue, led Danny Walkowitz to suggest that it would be a convenient way to clear out the backlog of articles that had already been accepted in advance.[48] In introducing this "anniversary" issue the editors admitted that "the rethinking of our project continues" and that in this spirit they were looking forward as well as backward, as both the

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[47] Daniel Walkowitz, Interview with the author,10 January 1998.

[48] Walkowitz interview, *ibid.*

"form and content of the volume reflect the Journal's moment of transition."[49]

A major focus of that rethinking process involved the realization by the editors that, "no political movement today except for feminism seems to galvanize intellectual energies. Indeed, we are living in an era in which political issues do not seem to be clearly defined." As a consequence, they felt an obligation to "define those issues and our relationship to ongoing social movements – or build new ones." Now that there were at least two generations of radical historians, they went on to conclude that "we must develop new conceptions of our place in and outside the academy and how we connect with each other." Moreover, they saw the need for a new radical agenda where theoretical questions would be reformulated and addressed and not least of all, where "the meaning of radical history must be engaged." The concern about the meaning of radical history was a serious one. From their perspective, much like the *Review* over the decade, the anniversary volume reflected, "the heterogeneous quality of what now goes under the generic label 'radical' history. " Indeed as they went on to observe, this diversity had allowed for a certain creativity, so that in the last several years radical history had reached a kind of maturity which meant that, "in some areas we can now speak of traditions, 'schools' and even specializations." Thus, they argued, radical historians had been able to pursue, "diverse objectives while at the same time have a sense of working within a common political tradition."[50]

There was another side to the argument however and that was the possibility that such diversity indicated that the notion of "radical history" had very little coherence, if any, and had become so fragmented as to be relatively meaningless. Certain areas of study, such as women's and

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[49] " Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 28-30 (September 1984): 5.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

labour history had been reshaped and revitalized by various critical perspectives, which, "for lack of a better term in the United States, we call radical" and "consequently the fields themselves have come to be characterized as radical." In addition, the tendency to equate history with specific fields has also had negative repercussions. As the editors argued, "Too often radicals' focus has been limited to these fields, rather than to the broader historical process.Indeed, some work tends to be forgetful about the larger enterprise, leading to a new kind of scholasticism."[51]

In the journal's rebirth, the editors promised to fight this new scholasticism by making the theory and practice of public history a regular and substantial part of the *Review*. With increasing numbers of historians working outside the academy and given the extent to which the past was being packaged for consumption there, "Public history contributions reflect our desire to intervene, to agitate as it were, in that arena." As in the example of public history, the journal would continue to develop new areas for historical inquiry and, of equal importance, would continue to provide a forum for new work by younger historians, and "a voice for radical perspectives on historiographical debates."[52]

Most importantly, the Collective had survived a very difficult period and from this point on it would maintain a regular and uninterrupted publishing schedule for the next fifteen years. In Volume 31, the first issue of the new regime, the changes that had taken place in the production of the journal were very much in evidence. The Collective had been expanded to include several new faces who would have a particular impact on the journal's future including Priscilla Murolo, Daniel Walkowitz and Jon Wiener. A new managing editor was now in place and Mike Wallace, whose

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[51] *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

office in the History Department of John Jay was the journal's headquarters, had now become the Editorial Coordinator. Several former members of the group such as Susan Porter Benson and Steve Brier were now listed as Consulting Editors and a whole new category of Editorial Associates had been added to the masthead. This very impressive list of associates who, according to Natalie Z. Davis, had very little if anything to do with the publication of the *Review*, was a who's who of British and American left historians, whose names added an aura of credibility. The one thing missing was any reference to its being published by MARHO, which as an organizational entity would soon cease to exist in anything but name only. A final innovation, that was to continue in future issues, was the practice of having two or three Issue Coordinators from the Collective assume responsibility for a specific issue. In the case of volume 31, the two coordinators Patrick Manning and Richard Yeselson apologized for the new, short format, "a svelte 96 pages", suggesting that it represented an experiment on the part of the collective. It was a rather short-lived experiment as by Volume 33, less than a year later, the *Review* had grown in size to more than 150 pages.

In the first ten years of its existence, the journal had a rather checkered career. From its modest beginnings as the four page *Newsletter* of the Mid-Atlantic Radical Historians Organization, the *Review* was quickly transformed into a full-fledged journal of radical history devoted to "a number of subjects that professional journals and left magazines do not emphasize." As this New York community of radical scholars grew in the 1970s, the journal grew along with them, both physically and geographically. As the number of pages grew so too did the number of radical historians involved in its production with the establishment of regional collectives in Boston, New Haven and Providence. A legacy of sixties radicalism, this decentralized structure proved to be unworkable and it was not long before the responsibility for publishing the journal returned to its original base in New York City.

In its early years, the journal had focussed on radical historians as teachers as so many of these young radicals had chosen to carry out an activist agenda through teaching and scholarship. To help these young scholars, the journal published discussions on teaching strategies, articles on the politics of the university and course syllabi. However, with the deteriorating job situation in the late seventies and with the attacks of the conservative right becoming an increasing threat to radical history, the journal lost some of its emphasis on history teaching and acquired an increasing interest in history outside the university in the form of Public History. Most importantly, in these early years, the journal reflected the heterogeneous quality of radical history in the post-new left period in its interpretation of American labour and women's history. In its scholarly articles, debates and symposia, book reviews and interviews with prominent historians, the *Review*, tinged with the "cultural Marxism" of E. P. Thompson, demonstrated the tremendous diversity of subject matter being investigated by young radical historians. Not only did it provide a forum for these new areas of historical inquiry, but it was also a critical voice for radical perspectives on historiographical debates within the profession. In its series of interviews with leading radical historians, one of the journal's most productive ventures, it helped to locate these young radical historians in the older and non-American left tradition and provide a context in the continuing struggle to define the meaning of radical history. As the editorial to the tenth anniversary concluded, "The last decade has seen radical history and the *Review* make a substantial mark on historical understanding and in the profession." But, as they went on to warn their readers, "These gains can be easily eroded . . . the battle is far from over. Strategies and organization need to be re-thought and perfected. We look forward to the next ten years, and urge readers to join in that struggle with us."[53] Having resolved its

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[53] " Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review,* 28-30 (September1984): 12.

most serious crisis the Collective was ready to move ahead, and to continue its efforts " to depict a history that is more than merely a course syllabus, a university press monograph, or a road to tenure." [54]

[54] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 31 (December,1984): 2.

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Regeneration and Renewal

During the next decade, the *Review*, to a large degree, succeeded in accomplishing the objectives set out in its anniversary issue. As well as making the theory and practice of public history a regular and substantial part of the journal, it continued to develop new areas for historical inquiry, provided a forum for new work by younger historians, and by assessing some of the limitations and accomplishments of left history in relation to mainstream history it persisted in its attempts to help define the place and meaning of radical scholarship, offering a strong voice for radical perspectives on current historiographical debates in which, from the editors' perspective, "the academic troglodytes in the Age of Reagan" attempted to discredit the work of left historians from the past two decades.[1]

It was in this period that the journal developed a regular section on Public History where, in contrast to its earlier favourable assessments of "people's history," it began to include critical

[1] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 28 - 30 (September,1984): 12.

commentaries on the presentation of history in the commercial media outside the world of the classroom. In an attempt to better understand the pervasive power and influence of the multitude of historical images and messages in films, television docudramas, paperback novels, newspapers, museums and historic sites, which could transform history into just another disposable and smartly packaged commodity that reflected dominant interests and reinforced popular prejudices, the journal's goal was to explore the role of the mass media and challenge its attempts to create an historical amnesia or a version of the past where the memory of what happened blotted out the reality of what really happened. In analysing this popular media version of the American past, the journal studied the historical fiction of left wing novelist Howard Fast and probed three female writers' fictional accounts of their involvement in the civil rights movement that offered, "provocative commentaries on the meaning of 1960s politics for liberals and leftists marooned in a hostile present."[2] It examined the way in which the American past had been constituted and packaged in diverse contexts such as *American Heritage* magazine, the world of Disney, Colonial Williamsburg, the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian, and on Ellis Island where, at Liberty Weekend in 1986, Ronald Reagan, "hijacked the Statue in order to use its popular appeal and symbolic potency" to refurbish his reading of immigration history as, "the 'up-from-poverty' saga of the model white ethnics." [3]

Several special issues explored subjects that involved analysis of some of the theoretical background to the critical work the editors would produce in public history. The first of these

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[2]Barbara Melosh, "Historical Memory in Fiction: The Civil Rights Movement in Three Novels," *Radical History Review*, 40 (Winter,1988): 76.

[3]Mike Wallace, "Hijacking History: Ronald Reagan and the Statue of Liberty," *Radical History Review*, 37 (January,1987): 120-121.

investigations examined the topic "Art and Ideology," a theme that resulted from the editors' belief that, "traditional history requires a deeper and wider sensitivity to visual materials than it has so far displayed," since both the curatorial and academic approaches leave intact conventional assumptions about the creation and consequences of pictorial meaning." As they concluded in their introduction, "We regard this issue, then, as an inaugural one for the *Radical History Review*: affirming its critical commitment to the historical dimension of the visual arts and to the visual dimension of historical practice."[4] In keeping with this visual emphasis, a second special issue examined the relationship between "Film and History."Edited by specialists in film studies, this issue was intended to provide the journal's readers with current perspectives on radical film historiography as well as serving to "further the dialogue about moving images among Left historians."[5] This engagement with film was an interesting development as there had been little prior contact between film scholars and historians, most of whom were sceptical of and hostile to the theoretical language in which so much of current film analysis was couched. Beginning with this issue's criticism of the representation of history in John Sayles' *Matewan*, and an analysis of the question of memory and forgetting in three films dealing with European history, analysis of the historical validity of Hollywood films would be a regular feature of " Presenting the Past"and would include reviews of historically significant offerings such as the box-office hits "*Mississippi Burning*" and "*Glory*."

A third special issue published in 1989 continued the journal's exploration into the "formation – and deformation – of popular historical consciousness" by examining the power of television "to produce, reproduce and change historical knowledge." As well as analysing a television

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[4] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 38 (April,1987): 6.

[5] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 41 (April,1988): 3.

extravaganza produced in South Africa that misrepresented the reality of that country's history, the issue also presented an interview with Gore Vidal which began with his comment that, "The American people have a passion to know about their past but the TV networks won't show it because they've made up their minds that if Americans had a clear view of their past they might not like the present, they might change it."[6] Indeed, as a previous volume had already inferred, there was a real need to critically analyse television as a powerful medium that was familiar, predictable, and mystifying. That same volume had examined its impact from two very different perspectives. Articles analysing the portrayal of New York City in television sitcoms and television's presentation of the Bicentennial celebrations in Philadelphia in 1987 made clear the need to understand the nature of the television medium, the goals of advertisers who underwrite it and the audiences who watch it.[7] In particular, the need to use extreme caution if one was to look to television documentaries as a guide to the history of the past was evident in reviews of two of the most powerful examples of that category. Both the prize winning series, "Eyes on the Prize," and Ken Burns' PBS documentary, "The Civil War," revealed the danger of how dramatic film footage, eloquent interviews and a moving narrative could appear to be conveying the truth of an event or a series of events. As John Bracey pointed out, "When one is using such materials, either in class or in a workshop or community-based setting, one has to be clear as possible about what one is looking at on the screen,

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[6]Jon Weiner, "The Scholar Squirrels and the National Security State: An Interview with Gore Vidal," *Radical History Review,* 44 (Spring, 1989): 109.

[7]David Marc, "Comic Visions of the City: New York and the Television Sitcom," and Susan G. Davis, " 'Set Your Mood to Patriotic': History as Televised Special Event," *Radical History Review*, 42 (Fall, 1988). The problem of how media audiences made sense of what they see would be examined in a later issue. See Susan J. Douglas, "Notes Toward a History of Media Audiences," *Radical History Review*, 54 (Fall, 1992): 127-138.

what the sources of the images are, and what the assumptions (ideological, aesthetic, etc.)are that guided the selection of some of the images and words and not others."[8]

As academic historians began to remedy their neglect of popular history and the general public and as an emerging professional history movement began to train historians to work in diverse settings outside the classroom, the *Review* continued to go beyond the "how-to-do-it" approach to public history to dissect the message and the methods of popular historical presentation in the United States. Both forms of public history – "people's history," which encouraged projects that challenged the status quo, and the criticism of mainstream versions of the past that reinforced the dominant culture – grew out of the *Review*'s "political commitment to develop and disseminate a critical historical consciousness."[9] According to the editors of *Presenting the Past,* which collected in book form some of the more significant articles on public history first presented in *RHR*, "all aspects of public history must be taken seriously and viewed critically if we are to understand the evolution of popular historical consciousness." As they went on to suggest, "History can in fact empower people, although not merely by celebrating the past or by suggesting 'lessons' to apply to the present." Instead, "History can be used to teach people that the social, political, economic, and cultural institutions that delimit contemporary life are not timeless but rather the products of human agency and historical choices." As they concluded, "grasping the contingent nature of the past can break the tyranny of the present; seeing how historical actors made and remade social life, we can gain a new vision of our own present and future. That is perhaps the most important lesson that historians can

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[8]John Bracey, "Eyes on the Prize II," *Radical History Review*, 50 (Spring, 1991): 183.

[9]Roy Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and Radical American Historians," p. 14.

help people to draw from the past."[10]

Although the mid-nineties would see a decline in the number of articles devoted to public history, this seems to have resulted more from benign neglect rather than from a conscious decision on the part of the editorial collective. It simply became the neglected relative and for a short time, "lurched along in a haphazard fashion with no clear policy" to guarantee that it would continue to have an important role in the journal.[11] Many traditional journals such as the *Journal of American History* now had public history sections and with many of the newer members of the collective more concerned with the practice of public history rather than with criticism of mainstream presentations, the task of monitoring public history was not being done and the whole subject needed to be re-examined to include a greater emphasis on Community and Curatorial studies to reflect the views of its young practitioners.[12] Despite its more sporadic appearances for a time, there is evidence in the recent discussions of the editorial collective on the content and form of the *Review* to suggest that it will continue to play a key role in the future and will likely maintain its status as the largest single topic covered in the journal.

Although not directly connected to *RHR* in a formal sense, a several of the journal's editorial collective participated in the American Working Class History Project created by Herbert

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[10] Susan Porter Benson et al., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), p. xxiii-xxiv. This volume was the first in a new series, *Critical Perspectives on the Past* edited by three members of the *RHR* editorial collective and was originally a spin-off from *RHR*. Although initially intended to be closely tied to *RHR*, taking various theme issues and adapting them for series with royalties going to the collective, the series moved away from the *Review* to publish a wider variety of materials.

[11] Penee Bender, Interview with the author , 8 January 1998.

[12] Adina Back, Interview with the author, 17 February 1998.

Gutman and Stephen Brier in 1981 which was very sympathetic to the journal's concerns regarding popular historical presentation in the United States. Funded by over one million dollars in grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ford Foundation, the project set out to survey the nation's past from the important but often neglected perspective of ordinary men and women and the role they played in the making of modern America. Drawing heavily on both the content and the methodology of the "new" social history, the project produced a multi-media American history curriculum that aimed at establishing a new synthesis to replace traditional textbook history. By using the experiences and behaviour of ordinary Americans to reveal the larger economic, political, social and cultural processes that gave rise to modern America, the goal of the project according to one of its early participants was, " nothing less than a full synthesis of U.S. historical development with the experiences of working people and the changing nature of work at the center."[13] Now known as The American Social History Project, it has made, in the more than twenty five years of its existence, a significant contribution to the teaching of American history by taking some of the best new work in social history and translating it into forms that reach a broader public audience in high schools and colleges. Its multi-media package includes interactive CD-Rom, documentary videos, viewer guides and a wide range of educational materials to train college, high school, and adult and labour-education teachers to use them effectively. The two volume textbook, *Who Built America,* served as the intellectual foundation of the project. Because of its unique focus on the actions and ideas of working Americans, its authors believed that it would permit "the integration of the history of community, family, gender roles, race, and ethnicity into the more familiar history of politics and

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[13]Bret Eynon, "The American Working Class History Project," *Radical History Review*, 32 (March, 1985): 115.

economic development." As they went on to add, "exploring the history of the nation's laboring majority, moreover, renders more intelligible the beliefs and actions of the nation's economic, political and intellectual elites"[14] Although it is difficult to measure the success of the material designed by the project, its work in progress and continued evolution under the direction of Stephen Brier and Josh Brown testifies to the idea shared by *RHR* that a well-conceived history of American working people, written and presented in an accessible style, will help a wider audience understand and appreciate the importance of historical thinking.

Along with the emphasis on public history the journal continued its efforts to define the left historiographical tradition through a series of special issues, interviews, forums and book reviews. The first of these special issues "Agendas for Radical History" presented the comments of five speakers from a symposium held at the New School for Social Research in New York City in 1985. The main speakers at this session were the leading British Marxist historians, Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, Perry Anderson and E.P. Thompson. The published account of this discussion also included the remarks of Joan Wallach Scott, one of the three commentators for the session. Brought together to discuss the opportunities and responsibilities facing left historians in a climate that was witnessing what Thompson called a "closing down"of radical initiatives and impulses, the participants expressed a wide assortment of viewpoints and recommended a variety of priorities to

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[14]Stephen Brier et al., *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. I and II (New York: Pantheon Books, !989, and 1992), p. x-xi. The texts are currently out of print but a new expanded and up-to-date edition edited by Roy Rosenzweig is scheduled for 1999. The two CD-ROMS that accompany the text were produced in cooperation with the *Center for History and Media Studies* at George Mason University directed by Roy Rosenzweig. The most recent endeavour of this partnership is the new website, *History Matters*, where students and teachers can go to learn about, talk about and engage with American history. The website address is *www.historymatters.gmu.edu.*

the more than one thousand radical historians and others who were interested in studying the past from a radical perspective. In addition to the need to defend the ground radical historians had won – most particularly, "a place for the history of ordinary people, common men and women"– and resist conservative attempts to return to a "historical stone age," a second item on the agenda called for a refinement of the tools of the radical historian so that radical history could be enhanced and thus better able to understand the methods of the conservative attempts "to undercut the power of the political analysis that the kind of social history written in the last ten or fifteen years has been able to provide." A third item dealing with methodology would not only see radical historians studying symbols and texts in addition to material conditions and social processes but would also have them include in their methods appropriate means of analysis so they might learn from other fields.[15] Suggesting that the agenda offered by the four historians was "more a look back than a look ahead," Scott argued in her comments that, "if we are to look ahead, to formulate an agenda for the future of radical history, we must include gender as a tool of analysis." This, she added, would involve studies that "develop gender as a category of analysis for all of us – not just for women or historians of women – and that work with complicated notions of processes of cause and change rather than with simple monocausal models." As she concluded, "these times of conservative politics . . . demand that we be willing to forge new concepts, new theories in the heat of battle. For our history cannot be radical history if it isn't self-critical and if it doesn't look to the future."[16] While her comments were prophetic in terms of the future direction of radical history, and the *Review* would certainly demonstrate this as gender relations would become one of the most active fields of

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[15] "Agendas for Radical History," *Radical History Review*, 36 (September,1986): 28.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

scholarship in the journal, it was equally important to remind future radical scholars of E.P. Thompson's conclusion that, "radical history should not ask for any privilege of any kind. Radical history demands the most exacting standards of the historical discipline. Radical must be good history. It must be as good as history can be."[17] This too was an item that needed to be at the top of every agenda for radical history.

In succeeding issues the journal continued to explore the role history and historians play in providing society with a unified conception of the past. Another special issue focussed on the question of " 'Objectivity' and Historical Interpretation," examining the ways in which historians, both in the United States and Europe, had lent their scholarship to an attack on "ideology" in the interest of the political dynamics of the time and showing how even photographic evidence cannot be taken as a direct transcription of reality because of the "political dynamics embedded in the camera's purported objectivity in recording the past."[18] As the nation celebrated the Bicentennial of the Constitution, the journal presented a symposium on the meaning of that document using as a springboard Alfred F. Young's articles that appeared in the newspaper *In These Times* in 1987. These articles represented this well-known radical historian's attempt to forge a new and radical view of the Constitution which interpreted the document not through the eyes of the "Founders" but in relation to the popular movements taking place outside the convention of 1787. Although there was wide disagreement among the six commentators as to how to locate Young's interpretation in the context of recent historiography of the Constitutional era, the editors suggested that the exercise was

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[17]*Ibid.*, p. 42.

[18] " 'Objectivity' and Historical Interpretation," *Radical History Review*, 40 (January 1988): 7- 63.

a useful one as it moved these historians to "reflect variously, on the nature of eighteenth-century American politics, the range of understandings of the Revolution held by radical historians today, and the implications of those understandings for the contemporary left."[19] The need to reevaluate past historiography was further emphasized when the journal published an excerpted version of Nathan Huggins' major essay on the historiography of American slavery, prepared for a new edition of his book *Black Odyssey*, that was completed just before his death in late 1990. This essay insisted that American culture required a drastic revision of the "Master Narrative" through which it understands itself if both race and slavery were to be dealt with adequately and truthfully. In his mind such a new narrative would, "find inspiration, for instance, in an oppressed people who defied social death as slaves and freedmen, insisting on their humanity and creating a culture despite a social consensus that they were a 'brutish sort of people.' " " Such a new narrative," he argued, "would bring slavery and the persistent oppression of race from the margins to the center, to define the limits and boundaries of the American Dream."[20] In the same issue, the legacy of the French Annales School was examined by Immanuel Wallerstein who suggested that the revolution in historical understanding it promised had remained unfulfilled. In his reply to Wallerstein, Andor Skotnes commented that while he found the essay, "provocative and refreshing," specifically because so few radical historians in the United States discuss this kind of "world historical" perspective, he did not find it particularly convincing and argued for the continued usefulness of Marxist categories and the concepts of historical

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[19] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 42 (September, 1988): 4.

[20] Nathan I. Huggins, "The Deforming Mirror of Truth: Slavery and the Master Narrative of American History," *Radical History Review*, 49 (Winter, 1991): 44.

materialism.[21]

In the next issue the journal paid tribute to the dean of American radical historians, William Appleman Williams, by publishing selections from the colloquium held in his memory in Washington in June of 1990. The issue also included a sample of his own work, an essay entitled "Empire as a Way of Life" published in *The Nation* magazine in 1980, and a commentary by a younger radical historian less enamoured with the Williams tradition. According to the editors of this tribute, the selections were not only to honour Williams as the dean of American radical historians but also to provide "an occasion to reflect on traditions and transitions in American historiography." In addition to considering the kind of radical and the kind of historian Williams was, the fourteen acquaintances and historians who spoke at the gathering made a significant contribution to "our understanding of the wide range of shifts in premises and practices that took place in leftist politics and leftist history from the early 1950s to the late1960s." Above all, they concluded, "these pieces collectively raise questions about how we might move forward as radical historians, political activists, critics, and, often, citizens of the American nation-state."[22] Even one young radical historian who was not part of the "Wisconsin tradition," and who professed a "tenacious desire never to be too comfortable with any particular 'truth' or belief," was left to ponder a whole new series of questions that would guide her as she prepared, "to teach tomorrow's classes."[23]

In addition to these special issues that helped to locate this new generation of radical

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[21]Immanuel Wallerstein, "Beyond Annales?" and reply by Andor Skotnes, *ibid.* p. 7-22.

[22] Dina M. Copelman and Barbara Clark Smith, "Excerpts from a Conference to Honor William Appleman Williams," *Radical History Review*, 50 (Spring, 1991): 40.

[23]Dina M. Copelman, "Reflections on a Tradition That I Am Not a Part of But Which Is a Part of Me," *ibid.*, p.103-106.

historians within an American and European left tradition, the *Review* also continued its earlier project of interviewing historians about their historical writings, their experience in the profession, and their personal lives. This new series of interviews began with the Italian cultural historian Carlo Ginsberg who confessed that he did not know if he would call himself a radical historian. He stated that he had never really been a real political militant, and added, "the subjects I have worked on were not regarded, when I started, as politically relevant." However, in his studies of sixteenth and seventeenth century peasants and church authorities, he had, in his imaginative and provocative exploration of the cultural meanings in people's "private lives" – including their fantasies and religious beliefs – opened up a whole new world of challenges for radical historians.[24] A second European historian, Michelle Perrot, was interviewed in volume 37. This French historian, who had shifted from social history to women's studies, discussed the state of women's history in France and the influence of Michel Foucault as an alternative to traditional Marxist models. For this historian, Foucault appeared precisely at the moment of a crisis in Marxism, a crisis in socialism and, "a crisis in all the things we had believed in." In her words, Marxists "developed too many illusions, we had made too many mistakes. In its place, he offered a very critical, but historical analysis as all of his thinking about power, knowledge, and experience could be understood and used by historians." No longer being encumbered by Marxism as the only body of thinking that attracted the attention of intellectuals has meant that other ideas and subjects have become the focus of debate and "this has

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[24]Keith Luria and Romulo Gandolfo, "Carlo Ginzburg: An Interview," *Radical History Review*, 35 (April, 1986): 89-111.

become a moment of great freedom."[25]

The first American to be interviewed was the prominent Southern historian, C. Vann Woodward, who was perceived by many radicals as "part of the liberal establishment, defender of the private university and a pillar of a history profession with pretenses to objectivity." At the same time however, he had also praised Genovese's Marxist interpretation of slave revolts at a Socialist Scholars Conference in 1966, and later, in a review of one of the first new left collections, warned his colleagues that "it would be a mistake for the profession to dismiss New Left historians." In his interview with James Green, he recalled his first political activity in the 1920s, discussed his opposition to conservative trends that dominated the profession in the 1950s, emphasized the central role that class analysis played in his interpretation of American history, and discussed his differences with the left in the New Haven Black Panther trial in 1970 and the Aptheker affair at Yale.[26] What appeared to be a relatively straightforward narrative of the relationship between the history Vann Woodward lived and the history he taught turned out to be the most contentious article published in *RHR*. No other article in the journal's history provoked such a heated and voluminous debate, necessitating a response both from Green and the issue editors. The specific issue that infuriated readers such as the Genoveses, Jesse Lemisch, Manning Marable and John Bracey was Woodward's attempt to justify his opposition to Aptheker's temporary appointment to a post at Yale to teach a course on the thought of W.E.B. DuBois. Aptheker himself replied, asking of Vann Woodward's

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[25]Victoria de Grazia and Laura Frader, "New Subjects, New Social Commitments: An Interview with Michelle Perrot," *Radical History Review*, 37 (January, 1987): 27-38.

[26]James Green, "Past and Present in Southern History: An Interview with C. Vann Woodward," *Radical History Review*, 36 (September, 1986): 80-100.

criticism of his work, "Is such a despicable charge to be left in your magazine bare and naked?"[27] The Genoveses were no kinder, complaining that "the brutal attack on Herbert Aptheker in your pages in no way diminishes him. It diminishes you, the more so since you and your interviewer associated yourselves, by contemptible editorial silence, with transparent red-baiting."[28] John Bracey added, "That Herbert Aptheker has been treated shabbily and his work denigrated by most of the historical profession for the past forty years is undeniable. That such foolishness continues into the mid-1980s and in a 'left' journal is a bit much."[29] Apparently the explanations by the interviewer and the editors were satisfactory as no further correspondence on the matter appeared in future issues. Interestingly enough, the only other example of dissatisfaction with the editorial policies and practices of the *Review* also appeared in 1987 when the History Department at Potsdam College voted to cancel its subscription most likely because of what was perceived as "editorial censurship [sic]" (it seemed that the journal refused to publish a ten-page essay on the Abraham case that supported the case against this young historian by senior members of the Princeton History Department.) The letter also noted that changes in the editorial board had, "weakened rather than strengthened the journal" and that there had been, "a serious decline in the scholarship contained in recent issues of *RHR*." The letter concluded by encouraging the editors to take heed of these criticisms, as "they are undoubtedly shared by other historians."[30] Obviously this did not seem to be

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[27]Herbert Aptheker, " Letters to the Editor," *Radical History Review*, 38 (April1987): 143.

[28]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *ibid.*, p.144-145.

[29]John Bracey, *ibid.*, p.147.

[30]William Matthews, "Letters to the Editor," *Radical History Review*, 37 (January,1987): 5

the case as letters critical of the journal or even letters to the editors never became a regular feature of the *Review*.

Despite this criticism, the journal continued its project of interviewing historians about the relationship between their lives and their writings with interviews of two leading radical historians, Martin Duberman and Joan Scott. In the first of these interviews, Duberman, a gay historian, openly discussed the ways in which his sexual identity had affected his work, his career and his politics. Duberman described his role as a pioneer in the field of gay history, suggesting that the field which was, "essentially the story of being different through time" had already produced a large body of scholarship and was one that had great potential significance. For him, the history of gay people showed that, "despite repression, secrecy and shame, we as a people have nonetheless survived, have insisted on our specialness, have developed coping strategies for survival, and therefore this history can provide real inspiration to everyone else to be just as different as they really are."[31] The discussion also examined his earlier work on the abolitionists and his more recent work on the biography of Paul Robeson as well as his involvement in the first gay studies program at the City University of New York. According to the editors, the interview offered a wide ranging and provocative reflection on a historian's life and work, adding that his opinions about the intrinsic politics of being gay, and his emphasis on the differences between gay and straight people, "open up questions that we hope future articles will pursue further in these pages."[32]

The second and final interview in this stage of the *Review*'s history probed the life and

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[31]Robert Padgug and Jon Wiener, "From the Abolitionists to Gay History: An Interview with Martin Bauml Duberman," *Radical History Review*, 42 (September, 1988): 68-69.

[32] "Editors' Introduction," *ibid.*, p. 5.

career of Joan Scott, a child of postwar radicals who did her graduate work in French social history at Madison in the sixties and who moved to feminist studies after joining the faculty at Brown in 1980. According to Scott, it was here that she first came into contact with feminists in literary studies who introduced her to new ways of thinking that explained, "things that she had not been able to deal with before," forcing her to reconsider her earlier frameworks. Specifically, this exposure to French poststructuralist theory resulted in her being able to, "make sense and think better about 'gender' than I had been able to think before." In addition to describing the relationship between her political and professional life, Scott talked about the difficulties of creating a "master narrative"of the past, the problems of historians using a deconstructive approach, and the place of women's history in post-modern left history. She concluded by stating that her best hope would be that there would be, "more feminists who would realize the importance of deconstructive strategies that challenge naturalized, totalized explanations. I think what we need is to theorize feminism more, to sharpen its critical edge, to develop analyses of gender." [33]

Although Scott's interview was the last one done by the journal until the idea would be revived as part of a major rethinking of the journal's editorial policies in the late nineties, the subject matter that both she and Martin Duberman introduced would assume a significant place in the journal as it continued to develop new areas of investigation as the legitimate concerns of radical history. This commitment to developing new areas for historical inquiry was already in evidence as the *Review* had already broadened its horizons to include a greater emphasis on world history. In a special issue, "Structures and Consciousness in World History," the editors announced, "we wish to

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[33]Elaine Abelson et al., " Interview with Joan Scott," *Radical History Review*, 45 (August, 1989): 47, 57.

make the case for world history to radicals who are accustomed to thinking about history in a more localized scope, and we wish to make the case for a radical approach within world history." Rejecting a Eurocentric approach, they argued that world history was more than, "the analysis and critique of the impact of capitalism and great powers on all corners of the world," and, "more than the analysis and critique of resistance, transformation and renewal in the Third World." In their minds, "The history of the human community has, in addition to these phenomena, an aggregate dynamic which can be seized and understood only by a global and holistic frame of reference."[34] Starting with Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System*, a recent treatment of world history in which the links between and relative importance of social structures and human consciousness played a central role, their study of world history began with a series of articles that expanded or criticized his world-systems analysis as a first step in defining a radical world history. As well as explaining the inequalities of past and present and analysing the dialectics of historical change which now would require an examination of the role of culture in expressing and shaping resistance and revolution, this radical approach to world history would attack "approaches that reinforce notions of western exceptionalism or a dualistic 'Us-Them' world." In the minds of the editors, Americans who hoped to understand the world must continually guard against "putting on the cultural blinders which have become an ironic trait of the American national tradition" just as an understanding of the United States within the context of world history could help to dispel "the dangerous myths of both American omnipotence and decline."[35]

The most meaningful example of this approach was the special two volume issue on South

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[34] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 39 (September,1987): 4.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.

Africa, written almost entirely by South African authors. The contents of this unusual project included nine articles on varying aspects of South African history and historiography, nine briefings focussed on popular history in contemporary South Africa, and six review essays covering books, articles, novels and comics. The articles and the briefings were written by associates of the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and were later reviewed and edited by the *RHR* editors in New York. This History Workshop was founded in 1977 at the University on the initiative of African historians who had studied in England and who were inspired by the work done by the original Workshop group. The members of this collective had produced an important strand of recent work on South African history and during their researches had come into contact with the American Social History Project in New York. Following a visit to South Africa, Josh Brown, who was also an *RHR* collective member, suggested the issue and became its main coordinator. As well as providing an examination from a radical perspective of the main issues of South African history, this double volume exposed some important questions about "the *audience* and *language* of historical analysis." As the editors noted, not only were American readers confused at "the density of language and the allusions and symbols in South African history," but the South African authors were equally surprised at " having to explain the most elementary points." Focussed on the relationship between intellectual work and political struggle, the issue highlighted the complexities and conflicts in the understanding of gender, race and ethnicity, class, and nation in that country and showed that in contrast to America's unwillingness to see history as a political issue, in South Africa "history is an avowed and public political issue, and all parties agree that the study and writing of history are important in defining ideology and politics." [36]

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[36] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review,* 46-47 (January,1990): 4-11.

While the journal also explored such diverse issues as state power and the resistance to that power by popular movements from below, the most active field of scholarship that developed in the eighties was the history of women, or gender relations. Beginning with volume 35, four women's historians offered new challenges to traditional interpretations of women's place in the history of work by finding women in "unexpected places, looking more closely at social forces shaping the labor market and employment patterns, and investigating the cultural and economic relations of paid and unpaid work."[37] Ranging from a study of unpaid housework, to Pullman women, to Alice Kessler-Harris' personal account of the Sears case, these articles revealed the complexity of divided values and practices among women and within the working class, and challenged labour historians to expand their boundaries to understand that women share a different culture from men. As Kessler-Harris concluded, "Surely there is something useful to the notion that women are somehow 'different' from men." While such a conception has helped to identify research questions and issues in which "distinctions become ways of pursuing knowledge about how and where and when they are created and overcome," it has also meant "that we have to remember and articulate, explicitly and consciously, the historical context about which we speak, for as Ellen Dubois warned us several years ago, what is offered as explanation, can also be used as justification." [38]

A second special issue entitled, "The Women's Story," analysed from a European perspective, "feminist challenges to the traditions of analysis and narrative that have been regarded as the stuff of history writing." As the editors explained, "we are interested in exploring the routes

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[37] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 35 (April,1986): 3.

[38] Alice Kessler-Harris, " Equal Opportunity Employment Commission v.Sears, Roebuck and Company: A Personal Account," *ibid.*, p.76.

feminist historians are now taking into the new disciplines, new methodologies, and new theories in an effort to capture a wholeness that even the best versions of radical social history have lacked."[39] In particular, the issue examined the feminist uses of post-structuralism, and in an encounter between three academics, a historian and two literary critics, the matter of how this theory was transformed in the hands of historians. As expected, the discussion failed to resolve the tensions arising from the threat post-structuralism posed to materialist theory in general. Indeed, the discussion concluded that Judy Walkowitz's historical paper, drawn from her research on Victorian society and culture, so firmly rooted in the material world, so deeply researched, "and so stubbornly empirical as to warm the hearts of all historians, nevertheless calls the whole enterprise of doing history into question." The problem centred on the question of causality and the extent to which actors were created by their texts as they create. This dilemma was complicated by issues of class and the differing access to power which further confused the problem of agency. As Walkowitz concluded, "Sorting out the whole question of agency . . . it's complicated! You know, how much power are we talking about that is really in the hands of individuals and groups? It's, once again, an empirical question!"[40] The marriage between feminist historians and post-structuralism was still unconsummated as they would continue to debate the extent to which post-modern theories of language could provide feminist historians with tools for analysing both meaning and experience.

In recognition of the fact that gender history and the history of sexuality had become two of the "most dynamic and theoretically provocative fields of historical inquiry," the journal published

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[39]"Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review,* 43 (January,1989): 3.

[40]Judith Walkowitz, "Patrolling the Borders: Feminist Historiography and the New Historicism," *Radical History Review*, 43 (January, 1989): 43.

another special issue, "Gender Histories and Heresies," that aimed at examining "some of the new directions this work is taking – and should take." One such direction was the effort by historians to explore men as "gendered historical actors" so that manhood as much as womanhood had become a historical problem. The articles in this issue moved into new territory by investigating a broader social history of men, examining the construction of masculinity, recognizing that gender is a relational category and manliness relies on conceptions of womanliness, and as well showing how a history of gender was not just concerned with gender roles but with, "ways in which gender structures cultural discourse." Feminism and feminist history had not been forgotten, as an essay by the editor of *Feminist Studies* examined the shifts in feminist politics and French historiography over the past twenty years considering the questions "What is feminism?"and, "Who is a feminist?" using the perspective of the history of French feminism. As she contended, the French experience was of particular interest, "since it is from France that the words 'feminist' and 'feminism' ('feministe' and 'feminisme') come to us." As well, the French example had shown that the debates over the meaning of feminism were "much older than a generation, indeed, are as old as the term *feminism* itself." Above all, she concluded, "Differing constructions of feminism have never been only a question of semantics but rather have included different political perspectives. What or who we choose to include as feminist or choose to exclude from feminism has political implications . . . it has always been constructed politically." [41]

While the subject of feminism and feminist history occupied a critical role in the journal's development, it would be difficult to claim that it had been "at the forefront"of this field for, as one

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[41]Claire Goldberg Moses, "Debating the Present, Writing the Past: 'Feminism' in French History and Historiography," *Radical History Review* 52 (Winter, 1992): 79-94.

of the longtime collective members has admitted, "In the United States, women's history has found its most important expression, for example, in such specifically feminist journals as *Signs* and *Feminist Studies*."[42] Still, as *RHR* entered the nineties, it would continue to publish a valuable body of scholarship in the areas of gender and sexuality largely due to the influence of the younger and female members of the editorial collective – as that body underwent a considerable change in membership, resulting in a more even gender balance, in contrast to the male dominance of earlier collectives.

While this period of renewal, from the mid-eighties to the early nineties, saw *RHR* become a more polished and widely accepted scholarly journal, it is also important to note that it retained something of the "raucous sense of humour" that it promised in its first statement of principles. Josh Brown's comic strips, "Adventures in the Skin Trade" and later "Osborne at the End of History" were a regular feature of the journal until the early nineties. The first of these depicted the misadventures of Benson Misantrope, a radical historian with a "tenuous hold in the academic world" who struggled with his sixties radicalism as he dealt with the academic world of conferences, job-hunting, his uncomprehending students at Malapropos U. and a university administration forging sinister ties to large corporations and the South African government. Misantrope struggled and stumbled forward into the future until he was granted "a rather precipitous form of sabbatical" only to reappear briefly on one further occasion as an unemployed academic contemplating the futility of life, or at least his life trapped in a comic strip "that's really an expository argument."[43] The adventures of young

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[42] Roy Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and American Radical Historians," p. 15.

[43] Josh Brown, "Adventures in the Skin Trade," *Radical History Review*, 62 (Spring, 1995)): 252.

Osborne were limited to a satirical and much shorter journey into a void from which he is forced to escape the "End of History." In addition to the comic strips, the *Review* is unique in being the only scholarly history journal to have a humour column. Inaugurated in 1984 as a column of "notes and comment on recent news stories that have a direct bearing on the work of historians and on the character of popular memory," "The Abusable Past" has been a regular feature of the journal since that time. The items in the column range from the "ephemeral to the immediately threatening" and were the work of the pseudonymous "R.J. Lambrose" who had just been appointed to the "Theodore Roosevelt Folding Chair in American History at St George's Medical School in Grenada"[44] and who, most recently, was responsible for curating the, " 'Dress for Success' retrospective exhibit on White House Interns at the National Museum of American history, co-sponsored by the Gap and Victoria's Secret."[45] Although the column's place in a scholarly journal was unique, and although it was always most entertaining, it appears that it was not always appreciated. According to one critic, *RHR* seemed to have found "traditional scholarship boring and has, therefore, added a cartoon section and news commentary to take up space which could be better utilized to highlight the work of emerging radical historians. We still find history and radical scholarship to be quite interesting and that it requires no comic relief."[46] Despite this criticism, the need for an irreverent and humourous commentary on the foibles of the American political and academic elite has remained a constant in the journal's efforts to foster an agenda, that is, in the words of one of the trio who make up "R.J.

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[44] R.J. Lambrose, "The Abusable Past," *Radical History Review*, 28-30 (September, 1984): 28-30.

[45] "Notes on Contributors,"*Radical History Review*, 73 (Winter,1999): 219.

[46] "Letters to the Editor,"*Radical History Review*, 37 (January,1987): 5-6.

Lambrose," "at once, activist and scholarly, radical and historical, seeking to both understand the world and to change it."[47]

In volume 49, published at the beginning of the journal's third decade of operation, the editorial collective announced that the journal which had been self-published by the MARHO collective and housed at John Jay College for most of its existence was about to experience what would be the beginnings of a major change in the way the journal would be produced. Not only would *RHR* be shifting its academic affiliation and editorial offices to New York University and its Tamiment Library, but it had also acquired a new publisher, Cambridge University Press who would, beginning with the next volume, assume the task of producing and distributing the journal. This step, the notice went on to indicate, would provide the collective, "with more time and energy to devote to editorial work," as they would continue to retain " full editorial control over the content and style of the journal." [48] With the institutional security provided by this arrangement, the immediate future of the journal seemed to have been guaranteed not only from a financial perspective but also because it promised to make life easier for the collective members now that this administrative burden had been lifted from their shoulders.

In the few years since the very survival of the *Review* had been in question, the journal had succeeded in renewing itself and establishing a new agenda for radical history with a focus on public history outside of the university. World history, especially a radical approach to world history became an important new area for historical inquiry and the journal continued to explore the left historiographic tradition in its special issues and interviews with many leading radical historians.

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[47]Roy Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and American Radical Historians", p. 16.

[48]"Notice," *Radical History Review*, 49 (Winter, 1991): 5.

Equally important was that it continued to provide both a forum for new work by younger historians, sometimes defending their work against unwarranted attack, and a place where radical perspectives on the American past could continue to be debated. At the same time it managed to retain some of the flavour of its earlier counter-cultural origins by adding a comic strip and a blasphemous and humorous commentary on current events to its agenda. Now, with the new publishing arrangements and the growing maturity and acceptance of the magazine, combined with the coming of age of a third generation of radical historians who would become a major presence in the collective in the immediate future, there was a need for yet another new radical agenda. Once again it was time for radical historians to develop new conceptions of their place inside and outside the academy.

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A New Generation

Having successfully negotiated the new contract with Cambridge to produce and distribute the journal, the editorial collective seemed to have resolved its financial and production problems at the same time it gained the institutional security of being published by a respected university press. Despite concerns about the loss of creativity resulting from the more regimented production guide lines and the fact that this would be a significant change from the old "guerilla way" of production, there was a feeling that the new publisher would be much more competent and that the resulting professionalization was, "the only alternative to going out of business" as the *Review* was forced to compete for readers with a growing number of scholarly journals of history that had emerged in recent years.[1] Although there were some early complaints about production standards regarding type-faces and crooked illustrations, the only other concern had to do with the marketing and circulation efforts of the new publisher. Subscriptions from individual and student subscribers had been declining since 1991 when Cambridge assumed control of circulation, causing the collective to

[1]Roy Rosenzweig, Interview with the author, 14 January 1998.

complain that "currently we do not know who/what/where our subscribers are nor whether or not our current marketing efforts are effective." On the whole, however, the connection to Cambridge was viewed as a generally favourable one which could have been more beneficial had *RHR* been promoted more effectively.[2]

As the journal settled into its new home at New York University with its new found financial freedom, it established a format that it would continue to follow, with one major exception, throughout its subsequent publishing history. Printed three times a year, each annual output included two thematic issues dealing with concepts that had been discussed and approved by the collective. The third issue was usually a non-thematic one and for the most part was a place to put a variety of articles that had been approved for publication by the journal's internal readers. Each issue included an "Editors' Introduction" that gave the issue coordinators, usually two in number, an opportunity to explain the context of the issue in addition to providing an overview of its particular contents. The core of each issue continued to be a selection of scholarly monographs presented in a section entitled "Feature Articles." These four or five refereed articles related to the issue theme, or, in the case of non-thematic issue addressed widely divergent topics that varied in time and location. In some instances, these articles were supplemented or replaced by "Special Sections" that ranged widely over a variety of topics from a consideration of Germany "After the Wall"– which, in volume 54 examined history and historiography in the former German Democratic Republic – to "Combatting Amnesia: Counter-Obituaries for Richard Milhous Nixon" in volume 60, where thirty-six radical activists and intellectuals presented a variety of anti-Nixon post-mortem essays that were united by the desire "to see that RMN does not 'rest in peace', at least not where historical memory is

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[2]Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes, *Radical History Review,* 16 September 1995, p. 6.

concerned," in addition to serving as a further contribution "to the backlash that is already in progress against organized historical amnesia of the Nixon years."[3] Other special sections were devoted to forums that resulted from *RHR*'s participation in activities outside of the journal. Volume 57, for example, presented the topic, "Imperialism: A Useful Category of Analysis?", an expanded version of a joint *RHR*/MARHO Forum at the 1992 American Historical Association Meeting. [4] A later issue would forego refereed articles altogether and in what the editors described as a, "deliberate effort to engage with historical topics in a more directly political fashion" presented the discussions resulting from a forum organized by *RHR* and the Graduate History Program at CUNY as well as an enlarged version of a roundtable discussion from the 1996 Berkshire Conference on the History of Women.[5]

The other regular features included a section on "Public History" usually limited to one article and largely devoted to exhibit reviews, and an enlarged book review section "The Past in Print" which carried over a policy from the late seventies that prevented the journal from reviewing the books of editorial collective members, apparently stemming from the belief that it was inappropriate to review one's own work.[6] Although Benson Misanthrope had disappeared as a regular feature, "The Abusable Past" continued its humourous comments on current events and happenings of interest to historians. While letters to the editor would appear in response to articles in the journal

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[3]Andor Skotnes, "Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 60 (Fall, 1994): 135.

[4]Van Gosse, ed., *Radical History Review,* 57 (Fall, 1993): 4-98.

[5] "Liberalism and the Left: Rethinking the Relationship," and " What Comes after Patriarchy? Reflections on Gender and Power in a 'Post-Patriarchal' Age," *Radical History Review,* 71 (Spring, 1998): 3-51, 52-95.

[6]Steve Brier, Interview with the author, 4 November 1997.

there was no regular section devoted to correspondence from *Review* readers.

The major revision in the journal's format was the inauguration, in volume 56 in the spring of 1993, of a new regular section, "Teaching Radical History. According to Van Gosse, one of the original organizers of the section, the idea originated with his co-editor Priscilla Murolo who, "brought it up that we could run syllabi and it would be different and useful. I liked the idea and jumped in with her and it took off. Later others took over and really expanded its focus. It seems very popular, though we don't do readers' surveys."[7] Ironically, it was this section that saw *RHR* return to its earlier roots. The call for the meeting to discuss expanding the *MARHO Newsletter* into a journal in 1974 had suggested seven topics that other "professional journals and left magazines do not emphasize." A majority of these subjects dealt with the concerns of radical historians as teachers and the early issues of the journal responded by publishing discussions of teaching strategies, articles on the politics of the university, reading lists for courses and large numbers of course syllabi. By 1977 these features had largely disappeared from the journal for a number of reasons including, according to one historian, the possibility that, "as the young historians who wrote for the journal became more experienced as teachers, they lost interest in such questions. Or, perhaps, the realization of the growing conservatism of undergraduate students discouraged radical historians about the political prospects offered by the classroom."[8] Some fifteen years later it was important once again to address the problems of the classroom and to "provide an arena for sharing problems and strategies, to provoke debate and contention, and to facilitate a greater consciousness of our common mission." This situation arose largely because of an awareness that "although more than ever 'we are everywhere'

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[7]Van Gosse, E-mail to the author, 10 September 1997.

[8]Roy Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and American Radical Historians," p. 12.

there has been a considerable falloff in communal solidarity since the early days of radical history-making." And as the editors for this new section added, "because teaching is our central public and political engagement, we think that one of the best ways to enhance our practice as radical historians is to exchange information and ideas about what we do in our courses."[9]

The first installment of this section focussed on a diverse selection of courses on race and ethnicity in the United States, followed by course syllabi dealing with American cultural history and teaching the war in Vietnam. Since that time, its field of interest has been expanded to include syllabi for survey courses on Latin American history, as well as courses on the history of sexuality, the history of science with an emphasis on the Cold War, and a three-part series on imperial, cross cultural and world history. In seeking syllabi, commentaries, essays or think-pieces that might illuminate problems and issues connected to teaching, the coordinators of this section made a concerted effort to have these materials relate more directly to the thematic content of the issue in question. For example, in a recent issue which looked back one hundred years to the subject of American Imperialism in the Caribbean and the Philippines in 1898, "Teaching Radical History" presented several essays and syllabi to accompany the feature articles which dealt with the American presence in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.[10] More importantly, this section of the journal has been the occasion for two special editions of the *Review*. The first of these special issues focussing on teaching was devoted to an examination of the teaching of gender, a subject that had occupied a significant amount of space in the journal's pages. The section was deliberately entitled "Teaching Gender" rather than "Teaching

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[9]Van Gosse and Priscilla Murolo, " Introductory Comments," *Radical History Review*, 56 (Spring, 1993): 101.

[10]"Islands in the Sun," *Radical History Review*, 73 (Winter, 1999).

Women's History," to reflect "the pivotal theoretical shifts that occurred in the mid-1980s, when many historians moved to consider the gendered nature of the past rather than focussing on histories of women in America, and in many ways the contributions to 'Teaching Gender' reflect and highlight some of these changes."[11] As well as syllabi in gender studies this expanded edition solicited essays addressing "pedagogical issues related to teaching gender," and Ellen Dubois, an *RHR* collective member and a pioneer in the field of gender studies, launched this initiative with her "Historical Reflections on Teaching Women's History, in which she considered the importance of region, race, time frame and the experiences of her students in the courses she developed in her speciality. As she concluded, "I have a pretty good sense of what I give to the students, not just my knowledge of women's history but my experience of a very different historical time which needs to be remembered, even defended right now. What I get back from them is less clear to me; but since whatever progressive possibilities lay in the future and are in their hands, I need to listen very carefully."[12]

A second teaching special brought together two very different topics, radical mentoring and labour education, in an attempt to examine the problems and possibilities of educating radical scholars and activists in today's world. The presentation of the first of these themes was a departure from the typical format of "Teaching Radical History," in that it contained no syllabi or reading lists. Instead, it put forward the impressions of both professors and students as they reflected on their experiences in mentoring relationships. As the introduction to this discussion noted, "Radical mentors occupy a peculiar space in the academy." Interestingly enough, helping students become "professional" academics was often foreign territory for many scholars who were "made" by "acts of resistence

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[11]"Editors' Introduction", *Radical History Review*, 64 (Winter, 1996): 2.

[12]Ellen DuBois, *ibid.*, p. 11.

against such professionalization." However, as the introduction goes on to note, "the acceptance of New Left scholarship and its descendants into the mainstream of the historical profession opened the possibility that radical historians could guide left-leaning students into the 'professional' academic left." Despite this opportunity, practice had not necessarily followed this path and thus there was a need to "reconsider the practice of academic mentoring and investigate how radical historians are made."[13] As expected, the chief culprit was the lack of time to do the job brought on by budget cutbacks in recent years that had had a profound impact on most university and college history departments. These cutbacks resulted in many history department members facing overloaded teaching schedules, increased class sizes, and an increasing number of adjunct appointments, with less time for students. As well, many graduate students were struggling to cope with jobs and families in addition to their studies. In addition to these constraints, the devaluing of liberal arts education worked "to all but erase the 'role' of mentor from university life" as many colleges and universities looked more and more like "educational super markets and less like communities of learning." Still, as the articles in this special issue demonstrated, there were many opportunities for worthwhile mentoring relationships both inside and outside the academy. At the same time, there was also an awareness that mentoring was not a one-way street but involved a sharing of learning opportunities between mentors and students and in some cases did not always need to involve professors actively. Above all, as Robert Buchanan's article suggested, given the time and the space, a radical mentor could have a significant impact on students' academic lives. As he summarized this relationship, "Certainly, the students with whom I have worked have brought deep meaning and satisfaction to my life. More important, their

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[13]Karen Sotiropoulos, "Introduction: What is Radical Mentoring?" *Radical History Review*, 72 (Fall, 1998): 4.

successes demonstrate that radical, humanist teaching can be a powerful tool for human liberation and, perhaps, social change."[14]

The second part of this issue examined new approaches to labour education, a relatively moribund field that was never made a priority by the trade union movement in the United States. Often seen as a problem rather than a solution, American labour education, unlike the British example, was largely focussed on "training union staff and stewards in the legal and contractual rules of trade unionism rather than in the broader issues of class relations, solidarity, and organizing." With new leadership and a growing awareness of the fact that trade unions were in crisis, organization and mobilization have received greater recognition, which "ignited debate and discussion throughout the labor movement," and opened up "new opportunities for labor education."[15] The two articles in this section described new approaches in this field aimed at "helping workers become active agents in building a labor movement for themselves." As the editor of this segment argued, "this open-ended form of education empowers workers by demonstrating that labor knowledge comes from them, not from above." In his own university-based labour studies program, students, for example, were to use their classroom learning by going back to their own communities and developing "action projects in which their position as union members became part of building solidarity with sweatshop workers in the United States and abroad." The section concluded with a sampling of other innovative projects from around the country, experiments carried out in other non-traditional sites and formats as well as a report on labour education in South Africa.[16]

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[14]Robert Buchanan, "Radical Mentoring at Goddard College," *ibid.*, p. 44.

[15]Paul Mishler, "New Models for Labor Education," *ibid.*, p. 56.

[16]*Ibid.*, p.57.

Originally conceived as a means of reaching a wider audience as well as attracting writers from a wider variety of schools, "Teaching Radical History" has established itself as a major component of the journal. Both the range and the nature of the materials have broadened considerably as the section has been more carefully designed to parallel the subject matter of the journal's thematic issues. Although the early requests for submissions resulted in "some weird stuff" being sent to the editors, the segment has had a good response from all levels of careers in the profession and, as the originator of the section suggested, helped to make *RHR* less exclusive, so that it was not just limited to people from large universities, but succeeded in attracting "a wide variety of people who would never have written for the journal" had this opportunity not existed.[17]

While the format of the *Review* has remained largely unchanged since it began being published by Cambridge, significant developments were taking place behind the scenes in the editorial collective that would have a significant impact on the journal's future direction. When the journal had first begun and throughout most of the seventies, almost all of the editors were either graduate students or beginning assistant professors, primarily in their twenties or early thirties. Although the collective received an infusion of new blood during its period of crisis in the mid-eighties, it was no longer the same group of young, politically-committed, radical historians who saw themselves and their project as "challenging in fundamental ways the capitalist intellectual paradigm."[18] As the journal entered the nineties, more than three-quarters of the members of the editorial collective held tenured faculty positions with a few people working in non-teaching jobs (museums and publishing) and it included only two graduate students. According to Roy Rosenzweig, the average age of the collective

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[17]Priscilla Murolo, Interview with the author, 5 December 1997.

[18]Priscilla Murolo, *ibid.*

members was now over forty, having gone up ten or twelve years since the early days. Given this profile, he was forced to admit that " It is hard to rail against the historical establishment when you are a part of it."[19] As some of these older members pursued other career interests or became disaffected in one way or another with the direction of the journal, which for some had become "too tame," and had ceased fighting intellectually, and had become an organization more concerned with a search for professional identity, there was considerable erosion in the collective membership making it was necessary to do a house-cleaning job on the masthead and begin the task of recruiting a new wave of young radical historians to define what the journal would be for the next generation. [20]

A major concern in recruiting these young radicals was the awareness that in the past the collective had been dominated by straight, white, male Americanists and the journal had published more American history than anything else, although it had always included women and large numbers of European historians and European history articles. In addition to achieving a gender balance, recruiting efforts in the nineties have consciously attempted to expand the diversity of the collective by adding people from a variety of subject fields and ethnic backgrounds. In particular, aggressive efforts have been made to recruit non-white historians and historians of the non-western world as well as historians of gay and lesbian sexual orientation to provide the journal with a broader global perspective, to replace its early focus on labour and twentieth-century American history. Initially this recruiting drive resulted in an influx of graduate students from New York University and the Graduate School at City College so that there was some concern expressed about the possibility of stocking the collective with people from one institution. (Apparently, at the collective meeting in the fall of 1993,

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[19]Roy Rosenzweig, "*Radical History Review* and Radical American Historians," p. 16.

[20]Victoria de Grazia, Interview with the author, 11 December 1997.

one senior professor showed up with four graduate students from his institution whom he intended to propose for membership.) Facing the prospect of a "huge crop of new people" as they tried to rebuild the journal, and without any formal criteria for determining collective membership, it was decided at an ad hoc meeting in December of that year to develop a process to nominate and elect new members to the editorial collective.[21] This process, which appears to have been in operation by the next year, set a "soft" limit of 40 members for the collective and requires that all future candidates go through a formal nomination and ratifying process. In addition to submitting the request in writing, nominators are also required to make a strategic case indicating how the nominee meets the needs of the collective: for instance, whether the person would broaden the scholarly fields represented on the collective. While no official "quotas" exist, the collective's criteria include, "a strong presumption for people who specialize in fields other than US history," as well as a willingness, and the ability to attend, the semi-annual editorial collective meetings.[22] Membership in the collective was no longer an automatic process, and with one exception, all of the nominees since 1995 have been young scholars who work in areas other than American history. While the task of balancing the collective's gender, ethnic, geographical and age ratios, as well as widening the scope of the subject fields represented by its members, is still in the process of transformation (it has not been terribly successful in recruiting people of colour and black history has generally been under-represented in its pages) the changes seem to have ensured that it will continue to be a working collective. They have also helped to maintain a healthy environment in which the energy and enthusiasm of the junior people is balanced by the "institutional memory" of older members who continue to play a significant role in the affairs

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[21]Van Gosse, Interview with the author, 18 January 1998.

[22]"Editorial Collective Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 21 September 1996.

of the collective.[23]

As well as the changes in membership, a major organizational change in the structure and operation of the collective was needed to improve the functioning of that body. With the addition of so many new members, and confronted with the problem of defining its mission – particularly its role as a radical magazine as more and more of its unique characteristics were incorporated into mainstream journals – the old decentralized system of what was primarily a social group was no longer functioning effectively. The demands of running the journal had outgrown the capability of two semi-annual meetings, and there was even some concern as to whether or not the journal would survive. But, as Theresa Meade pointed out, "the older people really thought the journal had to go on," as its contribution to radical history was a valuable one and should be preserved. The attitude of the "younger crowd" was somewhat different, as they were prepared to abandon the journal if it was unable to find an effective voice to meet the challenges presented by this new set of circumstances. The resolution to the problem of maintaining an effective working collective was to add an administrative level to the operation of the group in the form of a Steering Committee that would act as its executive body. Consisting of two co-chairs, a treasurer, three, later four, subcommittee or department chairs for each of the journal's main sections and one or two at-large members, this body, meeting on a regular basis, would suggest policy and coordinate the workings of the collective including establishing the agendas for the regular semi-annual meetings in March and September. Working with the managing editor who was responsible for the administrative work of the collective including shepherding each issue of the journal from its beginning stages to the final product (a process that could take up to two years,) the chair of the Steering Committee has had the unenviable

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[23]Ellen Noonan, Interview with the author, 23 September 1998.

task of "riding herd"over the large group of very diverse scholars who have the final say on editorial matters.[24] This arrangement has provided a more structured governance and a smoother functioning of the collective without burdening the group with a centralized hierarchy. Various members of the collective have rotated in and out of the committee and the unanimous election of nominees to the various posts over the past few years seems to point to the success of this reorganization.

In addition to the "Teaching Radical History" section, largely organized by the newer members of the editorial collective, the impact of these changes affected *RHR* in different ways as the journal attempted to redefine its mission as a scholarly journal of radical history. The generational transformation of the collective had a considerable impact on the content of the journal as this new cohort of young historians, whose orientation toward history was largely influenced by feminist, gay-lesbian and post-modern cultural studies, and less by the Marxism contained in the studies of E.P.Thompson and Herbert Gutman, replaced class and particularly working class American history with an analysis of issues that reflected this new orientation. This new emphasis was apparent by the fall of 1994, in issue number 60, which, although it not a theme issue, presented three feature articles in which gender was central to the authors' analyses including, one by Martha Vicinus that reviewed the main currents in lesbian history and questioned some of the "assumptions and definitions that have become common parlance in a field that was, "under-theorized and under-researched." In her mind, while queer theory and gay and lesbian history had much to share, gender still made a difference and

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[24]The position of Managing Editor has existed since 1993 and has been held since that time by a series of graduate history students at New York University who hold a graduate fellowship for two years which provides them with the funding to work on the journal. This *RHR* fellowship was organized by Danny Walkowitz the *RHR* collective member who was instrumental in finding a home for the journal at that institution. Adina Back, Interview with the author, 17 February 1998 and Ellen Noonan, Interview with the author, 23 September 1998.

the historical evidence suggested that it was impossible to subsume lesbian history under the paradigms of either queer or gay history. As she went on to argue, "Modern sexual behaviour cannot be divorced from its intersection with race, class, and other social variables, nor can it be wholly a matter of fashionable, presentist metaphorizing."[25] A number of these concerns were examined more fully two issues later when the journal presented a special thematic number devoted to lesbian and gay history and queer theory entitled, "The Queer Issue: New Visions of America's Lesbian and Gay Past." In this number, the editors acknowledged that while a growing body of sophisticated work in lesbian and gay history based on the methods of social history documented the existence of sexual communities and traced the production of "modern" sexual identities, other methods have arisen that could have a significant impact on future studies. In particular, the new field of queer studies,which "foregrounds questions of representation and combines literary, psychoanalytic, and theoretical approaches to analyse the production of a range of deviant gender and sexual subjectivities," provided such an alternative approach. Although there had been little dialogue between the two, the journal hoped to "suggest the possibilities for examining the relationship between lesbian/gay historical studies and projects in queer studies," and examine whether queer theory was of any value as "an analytical or conceptual framework from which to view or practice history."[26] The special issue included eight feature articles that ranged widely over the ways in which "queer" might point the way to methodologies that would broaden the questions asked about the lesbian and gay past, the political and intellectual debates surrounding these fields, and examples of other new work in lesbian/gay/queer

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[25]Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory," *Radical History Review,* 60 (Fall, 1994): 62-63.

[26] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review,* 62 (Fall, 1995): 2.

history. The articles were complemented by a "Teaching Radical History" section that presented syllabi for four courses that explored the history of sexuality, pointing out that "the interdisciplinary perspectives that inform recent scholarship on sexuality have also generated some extraordinarily rich courses."[27]

This interdisciplinary focus was the emphasis in subsequent issues of the journal, including two thematic issues in 1996. The first of these, which examined the relationship between history and anthropology, was highlighted by guest editor and anthropologist Gerald Sider's lengthy analysis of the "Bread and Roses" strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912 from a social science perspective and the critical response of four historians of labour history and working class politics to his analysis.[28] The next issue examined the theme of popular culture or "hoax-proof history," whose status as "a transfer point for genres and ideas between classes and groups makes it a politically challenging, unstable site," situated at "the intersection of cultural studies and social history." The articles, which the editors suggested were responsive to the "general theories of cultural studies and interpretation, particularly those that challenge descriptions of representation as merely reiterative,"were also embedded in context and were historically specific. In analysing the images presented in the postbellum pictorial press, the vaudeville industry, the Buffalo Bill wild west show, and the controversy over the rap song "Cop Killer," as well as syllabi on the teaching or the impossibility of teaching popular culture, the journal again examined a field that "because it seeks after the ephemera of everyday experience and lived ideology, necessarily relies on theory – theory sometimes so

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[27]"Teaching Radical History," *ibid.*, p. 202.

[28]" The Praxis of Anthropology and History," *Radical History Review*, 65 (Spring, 1996).

estranged from context that it is hard to differentiate the sincere from the farcical."[29]

Other issues co-ordinated by some of the younger members of the collective included one on the topic of ethnicity, identity, and the historical profession which examined the history and present day reality of "minorities" in academic settings such as schools, museums and other public history settings. The contributors to this issue took as their task the critical assessment of their own positions within their professional contexts in addition to their analysis of those same professional settings. Thus, the editors suggested, "these papers reveal a number of the ways in which we are all implicated as academics, public historians, or museum professionals in the perpetuation and dissemination of certain ideas about the academy, museums, multiculturalism and diversity." Recognizing that the roles scholars play in the presentation, writing, and teaching of history and the social sciences are as important as the topics they teach, write about and exhibit, the essays in this issue showed "why these discussions should be at the forefront of the historical enterprise." The key to their analysis was cleverly conveyed by the issue's cover art, a masked face, constructed of two separate masks, one Chinese and one Afro-Puerto Rican, forcing the reader not only to "recognize hybrid forms but to come to terms with virtual reality, that is, the existence of images that are other than tangible or 'real.'" In the articles, the authors discussed the implications of being "hybrid academics," dealt with " hybrid" subjects and techniques, and showed how to "enact the hybridities," which for them was the need to consider the "connection between personal and professional personas and dilemmas and to bring this complexity into our scholarship, teaching and politics." As they concluded, "one thing that becomes abundantly clear is that hybridity is a continual performance."[30]

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[29]"Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 66 (Fall, 1996): 1.

[30] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 68 (Spring, 1997): 1-3.

The special issue that followed, entitled "Culture and Poverty," represented an attempt to have the journal engage in contemporary political debates, in this case the attempt to characterize poverty as a social pathology rather than the consequence of the structural and social inequality in American society. In particular the editors hoped to examine how radical historians might intervene in "public debates on social policy and poverty by disrupting discourses that hold poor people responsible for their economic conditions, and that criminalize and pathologize poor people." As well as investigating the power of culture in the reproduction of economic inequality, the essays also offered an opportunity to learn from poor people and social activists who have challenged these interpretations in the past, and finally, in the teaching section, also suggested some ways in which scholarly work might be used to reshape political debates at a time marked by "the vilification of the poor people and the abandonment of a public commitment to the provision of economic and social equality." Above all, events such as the 1997 President's Summit for the Future, made explicit the relationship between culture and poverty, and showed the "power of cultural productions to normalize poverty, objectify and sanitize poor people, and relieve the state of any responsibility for creating – and assisting – an impoverished class."[31]

Even the relatively new field of environmentalism and environmental politics has received attention, as a recent issue tried to bring together "environmental politics with essays on the politics of the environment." In their treatment of this theme the articles focussed on the historical context in which this concept developed as well as on the "the human impact of environmental change," emphasizing the extent to which geography, and beliefs about the environment, often shape social relations and inequities. Defining environmental politics in a broad fashion, the editors saw it

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[31] "Editors Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 69 (Fall, 1997): 4.

encompassing not only struggles over "resources and the preservation of 'natural' spaces, but also the geography and politics of the built environment."[32]

While it is possible to recognize these themes as an attempt to broaden and refocus the content of the journal in order to speak to the interests of a new generation, it is not clear that the journal has attracted the substantial following of young radical historians that it did in its early years. Lacking the political edge that characterized the journal during the period when MARHO was an active organization, there does not seem to be the same sense of "movement" that previously sustained radical historians other than an "identity politics," which one former member of the collective suggested, "tended to limit discussions of power to cultural politics" and which some left writers have claimed, "led us all into a cul-de-sac of ethnic particularism, race consciousness, sexual politics and radical feminism."[33] Circulation figures have not been impressive and the number of subscribers, particularly individuals, has dropped in recent years so that there is some concern about the impact of the journal, and about the expansion and even retention of its audience.[34] In particular, how important is the *Review* for today's young radical historians? Is it simply a place for them to demonstrate their research skills and add to their resumes in order to get tenure? These are questions that cannot be answered with any degree of certainty as the journal and its publisher have not made any serious attempts to determine who subscribes to *RHR* or who its readers might be. What can be said is that the editorial collective is very conscious of these issues and seems to be making a concerted effort to

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[32]Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review* 74 (Spring, 1999): 1.

[33]Robin D.G. Kelley, "Identity Politics and Class Struggle," *New Politics* (Winter,1997): 85 .

[34]" Editorial Committee Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 16 March 1996.

produce a journal that will continue to be of interest to radical historians.

As a part of the continuing attempt to expand the scope of the journal and attract a wider and more diverse audience, the editorial collective has now moved into the field of electronic journalism. More specifically, the journal developed its own website, created by Andor Skotnes, which it shares with the *Radical History Newsletter*, edited by Jim O'Brien and Bob Hannigan. The site serves largely as a support for both the journal and the newsletter and in the case of *RHR*, includes an overview of the journal's unique features, sample writings from past issues, tables of contents and indexes from past issues, the names of the editorial collective, calls for papers for future issues and subscription information. Two newer sections entitled "What's Happening," featuring a calendar of upcoming events and links to other sites of interest, and "Features," which includes images, essays and humour are still in the process of being constructed and remain somewhat limited in scope at this time. Although there has been some discussion of connecting the website and the journal more effectively, the site is rather large as it is and apparently there is some reluctance to using it as a political vehicle and making such links, simply because of the work involved.[35]

One interesting aspect of this development is that it has brought the editorial collective into closer contact with the editors of the *Newsletter*, which has been published continuously since 1969, sometimes in conjunction with an organization such as MARHO and sometimes, including currently, with no official tie to any organization. The link between the *RHR* and the *Newsletter* was strongest in the late 1970s when a subscription included both publications. In 1981 the journal and the *Newsletter* split, and although the *Newsletter* continued to process its money through *RHR*, it was entirely dependent on subscriptions and more recently, on voluntary contributions from its readers for

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[35] The address for this site is <http://chnm.gmu.edu/rhr/rhn.htm>.

its continued existence.[36] The editors of this semi-annual publication, a sixteen to twenty page production consisting of two articles on current issues and a section entitled "Recent Books and Articles of Interest" that provides updates of recent publications of interest to radical historians, reappeared at an *RHR* collective meeting in 1996 when the website was being established. These editors returned again in 1998 when the *Newsletter,* finding itself in the "red" to the amount of seventeen hundred dollars, made a presentation to the collective outlining its financial problems and received a grant of fifteen hundred dollars from that group.[37] More importantly, it was suggested by several collective members that the editors of the *Newsletter* should become more involved with *RHR* and attend regular meetings of the editorial collective to report on its activities as both publications continued to share the development of additional avenues for electronic communication. The result of these renewed contacts was the addition of Jim O'Brien, the former *Radical America* editor, to the Steering Committee of the collective to focus on improving the website. As Roy Rosenzweig observed, regarding Jim O' Brien, during the discussions of this proposal, "If JO's willing, very good. The online stuff is the future – it will be good to make our connections closer."[38]

An even more ambitious project has been the sponsorship of a new e-mail discussion group coordinated by Eliza Reilly and Van Gosse. It had first been discussed in 1996 and after considerable difficulty getting organized was finally launched in early May of 1999 and already attracted over four hundred "subscribers."[39] According to the introductory announcement, *H-RADHIST*

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[36] "Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 21 September 1996.

[37] Bob Hannigan and Jim O'Brien, *Radical Historians Newsletter*, 78 (June, 1998): 1.

[38] "Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 13-14 March 1999.

[39] *H-RADHIST <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~radhist>.*

was to serve as a forum for the discussion of "historical, theoretical and political issues that routinely emerge from the study of history from a radical perspective, in which knowledge of the past is informed by a commitment to a radically democratic and egalitarian transformation of the present." Intended for an audience of historians and other scholars, "who approach the past as feminists, radical democrats, marxists, neo-marxists and post-structuralists, as well as the larger audience of activists who want to enter the historical conversation," it is also open to people from outside the left who want to explore or contend with "radical historical perspectives." Although it is too early to determine the success of this particular project, its first few months of operation seem to be a good indication of just how difficult it will be maintain the list and keep it as open as possible so that editorial direction will be limited to generating the widest range and scope of discussion, "from all historical periods and areas of the world" and ensuring the civility of those discussions.[40] Already the discussions have come to be dominated by a small number of repeat participants who have contributed what seems to be endless numbers of submissions, and as one participant observed, "Unlike the women's history listserv, which I value enormously, this list is rarely used to share information on events or sources. Instead the highly theoretical and lengthy exchanges too often feel like some kind of intellectual cockfight."[41] One member of the collective indicated that among a number of reasons for his lack of involvement was the fact that "the bitter exchanges on *H-RAD* have really alienated me."[42] At the same time, at least one other long established radical historian expressed disappointment with the subject matter that was

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[40]"Welcome to H-Radhist,"*<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~radhist/about.html>*.

[41]Phlllis L. Eckhas, "REPLY:What's in the Air?", in H-RADHIST < h-radhist@ h-net.msu.edu>. 8 July 1999.

[42] Ian C. Fletcher, "REPLY: World History", in H-RADHIST <h-radhist@h-net.msu.edu>. 18 August 1999.

being debated when he asked, " What's in the air that makes the list members and organizers think that the kind of thing we've been getting here is radical history? Genovese's Historical Society and other right-wing organizations are capitalizing on the left's failure to think more seriously than this about radical history. Those with a passion for doing history, and some purpose, are finding nothing here."[43]

Despite these criticisms of the group, the discussion continues to move forward, and following an interjection by one of the editors noting the "uncollegial" tone of some of the submissions and suggesting some more specific subjects to focus the discussions, the quality of the postings is far more civil, although some of the subject matter seems to be of only marginal relevance to the study of history from a radical perspective.

Perhaps the most important concern facing *RHR* is the need to redefine the role of a radical journal of history because of the changing nature of the discipline. Awareness of this need was first addressed by Van Gosse in an issue he coordinated early in 1993, when he suggested that "From the inside looking out, the *RHR* is reaping the fruit of its own belated success and the sea changes in historical discourse since its founding two decades ago. The mainstream has opened up so much that, in practical terms, much of what we have published in recent years could easily appear in the profession's leading journals."[44] Apparently the editors of both of these journals, the *American Historical Association Review* and the *Journal of American History*, subscribed to *RHR*, and according to one collective member, not only have these mainstream journals begun to publish many of the subjects pioneered by the *Review*, but even the layout of one of these journals was modelled on the

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[43] Jesse Lemisch, "REPLY: If This Is Radical History, I'm the Pope," *ibid.*, 9 July1999.

[44] Van Gosse, "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 57 (Fall, 1993): 2.

graphics of *RHR*.[45] For reasons that should be clear, this situation was "both gratifying (especially for the *RHR's* founders, who long toiled on the fringe of respectability) and disturbing." As Gosse concluded, "What is the mission *now* of the *Radical History Review*, other than maintaining our own general-purpose, mildly heterodox forum?"[46] Adding to this concern was the realization that as a generalist journal, facing stiff competition from the new scholarly journals of history that had begun publishing in recent years in a variety of diverse subject fields, it would become increasingly difficult to consistently publish strong articles that were broadly conceived and had a wide appeal that could not be published elsewhere. As Pamela Haag was to suggest, "the journal needs a fingerprint, some distinguishing characteristics."[47]

In fact, the attempt to redefine the journal has occupied a considerable part of Van Gosse's tenure as chairman of the editorial collective from 1994 to the present. A primary focus in coming to grips with this question has been the meaning of the first word in the journal's title and more specifically, what does it mean to be a radical historian at the end of this century? For the past several years, the editorial collective has repeatedly questioned what the word "radical" actually signifies. In renewing a debate that was very much a part of the first MARHO newsletters, the collective has been forced to once again take up the task of defining "the intersection of the radical and the historical." While Gosse has suggested that the members of the collective did not pay a great deal of attention to formal, written definitions of "radical history" because they were very pluralist in their approach, he

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[45] Josh Brown, Interview with the author, 11 November 1997.

[46] Van Gosse, "Editors Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 57 (Fall, 1993): 2.

[47] Pamela Haag, "Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 22 March 1997, p. 3.

did state emphatically that the journal did not, "write and publish only for and about 'radicals.' " As he went on to explain, "For one thing, we have no clear idea who falls into that category anymore – do we ourselves, now that so many of us are established members of the profession? More specifically, how does our commitment to 'radical history' influence what we publish, or seek to publish?" As this self-questioning got underway the only certainty was that "whatever the word 'radical' means, it should not suggest comfort, or predictability."[48]

In this ongoing self-examination of who they are, what they publish, and what it means to be radical, the collective, after much shifting and refocussing, has still not completed the task of redefining the role of a scholarly journal of radical history. While there appears to be a consensus that they do not want to duplicate the work of mainstream journals and just publish articles that could be submitted elsewhere, they have not agreed on how they can combine the old and the new to accomplish this objective in practice. Just how difficult reaching such an agreement might be was apparent very early in the debate when the collective discussed Andor Skotnes article, "What Is a *RHR* Article?" The only conclusion the group reached was that while one cannot produce a formula that will fit every article printed by *RHR*, "a successful article should try to engage, in an explicit manner, the political issues raised therein." In seeking to broaden the horizons of the journal's readership authors, both as historians and as political agents, should be encouraged or perhaps required to engage issues beyond the parameters of academic work, although it was unclear whether this would require articles that employed a materialist analysis or reflected a socialist politics.[49] When the topic was discussed at a later meeting, several members of the collective who had acted as "screeners" agreed that they had

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[48]Van Gosse, "Editors Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 57 (Fall, 1993): 2.

[49]"Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 17 September 1994.

approved articles which were "good" rather than having specific political or content criteria, and although some believed that articles should be politically appropriate before being accepted for publication, others argued that the "political views of the collective have become fairly diffuse" and doubt was expressed about the possibility of being able to establish a unified political standard.[50]

One proposed solution to the problem of determining what articles the journal should publish was that the collective solicit articles as a means of ensuring that the journal would have a more specific focus. However, concerns were expressed about the problem of turning down a solicited article that the collective found to be unsuitable and about the more serious problem of drawing on a limited circle of scholars, because the *RHR* readership and collective were a rather narrow group that would need to be enlarged if such a proposal were adopted. The discussion on solicitation of articles was not pursued, as a second, more "radical" proposal tended to dominate the group's deliberations. This was the suggestion by Roy Rosenzweig that the *Review* no longer publish refereed, monographic articles, a far more drastic change that would result in *RHR* looking more like a magazine and less like an academic journal. The discussion of this proposed change in the format of the journal provoked a lively debate in which the majority of participants seemed to support the traditional reliance on monographic articles because there was no guarantee that other journals would publish radical work, or if they did, it would most likely be the work of well-established scholars not younger radical historians in search of tenure. Although there was a need to broaden the base of readers and contributors, it was wrong to assume, as one participant observed, that monographic articles would only be read by scholars, and in fact, the juxtaposition of formats (refereed articles alongside the "Teaching Radical History" section,

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[50] "Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 22 March 1997.

for example) was one of the things that made *RHR* interesting.[51] Although the discussion did not generate any specific recommendations on this proposal, it is interesting to note that the Spring 1998 issue, "Past Politics, Present Questions," contained no refereed articles although the editor did indicate that "this was not a conscious or permanent omission, but rather a response to a series of opportunities."[52]

In addition to these discussions regarding the format and content of the journal the collective has also spent considerable time examining their activities as a group, in particular the extent to which they, as a group, should become involved as political actors both inside and outside of the academy. Several recent events seem to have given promise to the idea that the left was coming back to life. A recent "Teach-in With the Labour Movement" aimed at building a new alliance between labour activists and campus-based intellectuals brought 2500 people to Columbia University in the fall of 1996, and the following year the formation of the Scholars, Writers, and Artists for Social Justice, an outgrowth of the campus-labour teach-ins that swept the United States, was created for the express purpose of rebuilding the alliance between progressive intellectuals and the labour movement that had been destroyed in the 1950s. [53] More recently this new militance was further demonstrated by a report at a recent collective meeting on the formation of a Black Radical Congress, which was organized "to make black radicalism visible as an alternative to the rightest, capitalist answers," provided by

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[51]"Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 27 September 1997.

[52] "Editors' Introduction," *Radical History Review*, 71 (Spring, 1998): 1.

[53]For a discussion of these events see, Priscilla Murolo, "What Kind of Alliance?" and Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Long Road Ahead," in Jim O'Brien and Bob Hannigan, eds., *Radical Historians Newsletter,* 75 (December, 1996) and Andor Skotnes, "A New Step Toward a Labor-Intellectual Alliance," *ibid.*, 78 (June, 1998).

groups like the Black Muslims and their Million Man March, to a black community in crisis.[54]

With the labour movement and other left organizations seemingly in a period of revival and with a stronger activist sentiment on the board, there was some consideration given to seeing the collective resume its contacts with an activist intellectual tradition, perhaps serving as a bridge between the academy and outside movements and public historians, in the form of a network and support system. The first time this was brought up in the collective there was considerable interest, but this was tempered by a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards creating "another organization," when the editorial collective already had its hands full doing the journal. Few concrete suggestions resulted from this activity and there were no crucial changes in the collective's activities other than the recommendation that it should establish two committees, one to develop a mission statement and come up with guidelines and mechanisms for implementing changes and a second to focus on new methods of interdisciplinary outreach and recruitment. While this process of self-examination had not proven to be particularly fruitful, the need to more fully develop both the professional and public identities of the editorial collective and the journal continued to dominate collective meetings and would ultimately culminate in a major exploration of goals at the Spring meeting of the collective in March 1999.

Clearly, over the span of Van Gosse's tenure as chairman of the editorial collective , there have been a serious attempts to avoid being swallowed up by the mainstream. Most of these attempts have been aimed at making more of an intervention, whether it was in focussing on theme issues in the journal that made a clear political intervention, publishing fewer monographs or, in the case of the collective, suggesting more direct activities such as forums and caucuses, reviving the Sustainers

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[54] Lisa Brock, "Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 19 September, 1998.

program to raise funds for awards and grants to support radical scholarship, and establishing a speakers bureau. This process seems to be moving to some kind of a resolution as a result of the events that transpired at the March 1999 meeting. At that two-day session, the editorial collective meeting devoted the majority of their time to a structured exploration/discussion of goals. Despite some concern about numbers (only 18 of the 35 or so members and staff were present for the meeting) the people present decided that the need for changes in the activism of the group required that they continue with their agenda and proceed with four discussion groups that would analyse the group as political actors in the historical profession and in the public sphere from the perspective of both the journal and the collective. As Van Gosse explained, "We're on the cusp – we've been a collective that exists to put out a journal, now we seem to be at a point where we can say we do that but we also do other things,"or as another member observed, " we may be on the cusp of expanding into new fields or spinning wildly out of control . . . ."[55] Regardless, the time had come where the group wanted to stop talking and doing nothing, and wanted to stop having the same conversations over and over again.

After each of the four groups completed their discussions they reported back to the larger group and summarized the results of their deliberations. Suggestions ranged from organizing new departments, to assessing the journal's impact, addressing people's history and academic labour, improving *H-RADHIST* and the website, choosing themes more relevant to current issues, showcasing political content and intent, having each issue with its own organizing committee instead of department committees, and, finally, a suggestion to "form a *RHR* organizing committee whose goal it is to help facilitate, create or return a radical historical perspective to movements and settings and

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[55] "Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 13-14 March 1999, p. 9.

engage in social change, activism or debate."[56] The last suggestion in particular was a rather familiar one that seemed to be setting the stage once again for a renewed competition between the scholarly and activist role of the radical historian. However, it was apparent in the group that there was a strong emphasis on the need to provide "a historical take"on this activism rather than on the need to man the barricades as in some of the past disputes. After what appeared to be a lively discussion, there seemed to be general agreement that the journal was "the most valuable thing" and that it was important to keep it going. Indeed, some felt that in talking about ideals they may have overestimated the amount of change that would be needed to invigorate the journal. To which Van Gosse added, "I agree and I want to add that we are NOT falling apart. We really are a well-oiled machine. The departments all produce. On the energy front, we need to sift through the collective again. There are members who are less active because they are at a different state in their lives," and, he added, "we have managed to stay together and Teresa Meade says it is because of our professional framework. I think the left now is so weak, separated amongst itself that the pluralism of the *RHR* could be a model. We aren't talking about political opinion, but giving it a political perspective." Despite these reassurances however, there was still a feeling in the group that "If we don't do some of the things suggested here, we are running the risk of becoming just another dumb academic journal." As Kevin Murphy went on to argue, "We have to run the risk of internal disagreements hashing out politics. We need to get in touch with more groups and we need a more vigorous discussion, even risking dissent."[57] For the collective it seemed that the issue was not so much about becoming more personally active but about producing a journal that was in fact "readable by activists." In the end, after holding a straw vote on the four reports, the steering

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[56] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

committee indicated that there was "immediate strong support for broadening the journal." Following another wide-ranging discussion on how this might be accomplished, the group agreed to use issues 77-80 to experiment with the new approach and suggested eleven "Steps Through 2001" that would involve soliciting viewpoints on the direction of the journal, investigating what people are doing with history (on the left and right), encouraging issue coordinators to produce shorter, more accessible articles, developing new columns on academic labour and technology, and taking a more fluid approach to departments. At the very least the September 1999 meeting of the editorial collective should be an interesting affair. While none of the proposals are particularly earth-shattering, it will be interesting to see if the collective members have the energy to implement these changes, which should make for a stronger journal of radical history by appealing to the broader audience who, most members believe, will read the journal and who might even buy a subscription.

Outwardly, the nineties saw few changes in *RHR* either in form or content, with the exception of the "Teaching Radical History" section and thematic issues with more of a political edge which reflected the differing perspectives of the collective's newer members. At the same time, the relationship with Cambridge University Press provided the journal with considerable financial security so that money was no longer a weighty matter. As it turns out however, the relationship with this publisher has its problems, particularly in the areas of circulation and promotion, so that the editorial collective is presently considering moving the journal to Duke University Press. This move, which would bring in additional revenue as well as improving the look, promotion, and online capabilities of *RHR*, is one more decision that the collective will need to consider in the short-term.

While the "look" of the journal remained constant, the most critical issues were being dealt with behind the scenes in the collective's semi-annual meetings. Specifically, as the momentum of

radical history slowed decisively in the nineties and as they have been confronted with the growing concern that the mainstream of the profession has caught up with them, the group has been forced to enter a rather long period of self-examination in order to consider the meaning of the first word in the title of the journal, what it means to be a radical historian, and *RHR*'s role as a scholarly journal of radical history. As the journal approaches its twenty-fifth anniversary, that question remains unanswered but, as the recent deliberations of the collective seem to indicate, the journal is alive and well and awaiting the next radical upsurge. In the meantime it appears that it will continue to experiment with various modifications over the next two years in order to broaden its scope and reach a wider audience. While these debates have been intense, it appears, at least to this point, that the members of the collective have been able to reach a consensus in their attempts to create an agenda in the search for a radical past that is both scholarly and activist. At the very least, while these new ideas are being forged into concrete proposals, *RHR* will continue to raise hackles, and will provide a meaningful alternative to most mainstream professional journals of history, as it analyses and challenges "hierarchies of class, race, gender, sexuality, and empire, from a variety of radical and oppositional perspectives" in its attempts to reject conventional notions of "scholarly neutrality and 'objectivity'" while approaching history from an "engaged, critical, political stance."[58]

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[58] "Overview of RHR,"*Radical History Review* Website, <http://www.chnm.edu/rhr>.

Conclusion

" Every true history is contemporary history."[1] With these words, the Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce introduced the idea that the past is constantly being re-examined by scholars in light of their own prevailing ideas, assumptions, and problems. This tendency of every age to develop its own climate of opinion has meant that every generation of historians is likely to reinterpret the past in light of their own particular view of the world and thus will rewrite the past based on the problems and issues of the present. Croce's statement has particular relevance to the writing of radical American history. While the study of these three radical history journals reveals a common tradition of dissent both from the mainstream of the profession and from traditional narratives of the American past, it is also clear that in expressing that dissent each journal, representing its own age, has spoken with a different "voice" in its interpretation of how that past has been constructed. In the case of *Studies on the Left*, it was a voice that spoke of "corporate liberalism" and the global expansion of American capitalism. Unlike *Studies*, *Radical America* sought to uncover the sources of American radicalism and developed a voice for those peoples at the bottom of society who had largely been excluded from the American narrative. Finally, the *Radical History Review* spoke to the post-New Left radicals who tried to combine the roles of scholars and activists in the classroom, and expanded the idea of radical history to include new areas for study such as public history while broadening its scope to include a global radical perspective.

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[1] Quoted in Gerald N. Grob and George A. Billias, eds., *Interpretations of American History*, second edition, (New York, The Free Press, 1972), p. 1.

As well as reinterpreting the American past, historians on the left have also continued to debate the critical questions, What is "radicalism"? What is "radical" history? and What is the role of the "radical" historian? without reaching any definitive answers. Despite the efforts of radical historians like Howard Zinn, who devoted an entire chapter of his book, *The Politics of History*,[2] to an attempt to define radical history, each generation of radical historians, through their journals, has constantly re-examined their answers to those questions in light of their own climate of opinion. The ongoing debate surrounding this issue was particularly apparent in a recent posting on the new *H-RAD* discussion group when one of its moderators, Van Gosse, suggested from his contemporary perspective that the word radical is "an historical artifact from a time when 'radical in the U. S., was popular shorthand for 'left wing.' " He went on to add, "From my perspective 'radical history' is a kind of necessary fiction for a pluralistic left perspective on both writing and making history that accurately mirrors – though not really challenging – the general eclecticism on the left itself "[3]

For the young graduate students who founded *Studies on the Left*, the United States of the late fifties and early sixties was a society in turmoil, and in such a climate, a history that lacked depictions of a contentious past seemed unrealistic at best and hypocritical at worst. Faced with what they believed was an intolerable atmosphere of repression and conformity in the historical profession, disillusioned by the altered nature of American society and the myth of American equality, international power and wealth, and as products of the disenchantment with the old left, they called for a "radicalism of disclosure" that would be the basis for a new America, an idea that was reflected

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[2] Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History*, second edition, (Urbana, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1990), chapter 3.

[3] Van Gosse,"Radical Approaches to History," in H- RADHIST, <h-radhist@msu.edu>. 24 May 1999.

in the title of the collection of essays reprinted from the journal a short time after its collapse. In an attempt to overcome the "paralysing effect" of forcefully maintained academic standards, the journal expressed, "the quintessential faith in hidden truths to be revealed by the independent-minded scholar." In the minds of these young scholars, "the bold action of a minority would help to reinvigorate intellectuals within and outside university walls."[4] They succeeded admirably in this task as they were able, during their four short years in Madison, to create a public presence for this new history and begin the revival of radical scholarship in America. In developing what became known as the "corporate liberalism" thesis they created a new understanding of the American political economy, with their assumptions of the elite manipulation of foreign policy and the co-opting of workers and their institutions into a corporate liberal hegemony.

In approaching this task, they began to work out their dual role as historians and radicals, initially opting for a scholarly orientation similar to the professional image of their non-radical historian elders. They would write history disinterestedly and objectively and the truths they would uncover would be sufficient to aid the growing New Left movement. Their task would be to contribute to the consciousness and ideological development of radicals as intellectuals not as practical activists. The journal's purpose was not to actively transform society but to develop the analysis and social theory for those who would. This initial scholarly orientation of the journal was soon challenged by a group of scholars who disputed the relevance of scholarship without active political engagement, and when *Studies* moved to New York the problem of relevance and activism became more acute. The new editors pushed the journal hard in the direction of the growing New Left movement as analytical scholarship seemed to be somewhat irrelevant, with the United States poised

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[4] Paul Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p. 25.

on the eve of "the American October." Although a determined counterattack critical of "mindless activism" revived the desire to develop a new theory of American society based on socialism, the strain of combining scholarly professionalism and political activism proved too much for the journal and the schisms and confrontations over the issues of radical activism versus radical scholarship continued to defy compromise. So according to one of its former editors James Weinstein, *Studies* ceased publication, having "outlived its historical purpose." [5]

The demise of *Studies* had not only left radical historians without a place to publish, it had also left them with a dilemma that was to plague their work from that point forward. Two years later, for example, the two dissenting groups found themselves locked in mortal combat at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting when the activist Radical Caucus tried unsuccessfully to have that organization go on record as opposing the Vietnam War and elect Staughton Lynd as its insurgent president.[6] The words of Eugene Genovese continue to speak volumes about the fierceness of this debate when as the leading proponent of the scholarly left he attacked the Radical Caucus shrieking, "we must put them down, we must put them down hard (stormy applause from the Gentlemen), we must put them down once and for all!"[7] Although lacking the bitterness of those early struggles, recent debates in the *RHR* editorial collective have shown that this issue is still very much a concern for contemporary radical historians.

As *Studies on the Left* faded from the scene, *Radical America*, the second Madison journal,

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[5]James Weinstein, "*Studies on the Left*: R.I.P.," *Radical America* (Nov.- Dec. 1967), p. 6.

[6]See Jesse Lemisch, "Radicals, Marxists, and Gentlemen: A Memoir of Twenty Years Ago," *Radical Historians Newsletter*, 59 (November 1989)

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

began publishing in an attempt to fill the gap and more specifically to provide a scholarly component for the growing SDS organization. Despite the ties between the two journals in both location and constituency, they took distinctly different political and intellectual paths. As the expression of a second generation of graduate students unencumbered by the baggage of the radical past, and whose experiences in Madison were very different, particularly their more negative experiences with both the History Department and the University, *RA* rejected *Studies*' assumptions of successful elite manipulation of the masses. Immersed in the actual radicalism of the New Left, the journal's editors would attempt to showcase, "the struggles of the past in order to enhance prospects for struggles of the present."[8] Initially it attempted to provide a historical and theoretical basis for the student movement by examining the history of radicalism in America and trying to unburden America's radical past from layers of an oppressive liberal consensus analysis. Because the student left had never known about these native radical traditions, the editors felt they needed to rectify this shortcoming in their education while at the same time breaking down the barriers between the activist and intellectual members of the New Left. The journal analysed recent developments in movement history, the role of popular and working class culture, and women's liberation. It enthusiastically welcomed the idea of "history from the bottom up," and in a turn toward Marxism adopted as its mentors C.L.R. James and E.P. Thompson, whose concept of class the editors believed to be most useful in the attempts to analyse American society from the perspective of "the inarticulate."

Following the collapse of the student movement and *RA*'s subsequent move to Boston, its vision broadened to include a critique of everyday life in the shop, on the street and in the bedroom. Indeed this analysis of the American working class, including "its female and black components,"

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[8]Paul Buhle, *History and the New Left*, p. 29.

would constitute, as James Green's collection of the best of this material would clearly demonstrate, the core of its identity as a radical journal of history . In addition to its strong blue collar perspective, Boston was also an early centre of the women's liberation movement, and once it became clear that the spread of student radicalism to factory and blue collar neighbourhoods offered no panacea for the collapse of the New Left, "the gradual confluence of politics and personalities around feminist concerns took place as a matter of course."[9] Shortly after its move to Boston, the journal underwent something of an identity crisis and began concentrating more exclusively on contemporary activist issues. From the very beginning, only a relatively small number of the articles published in the journal were scholarly or theoretical material, but by its fifteenth anniversary, with the right on the offensive and with radicals experiencing a sense of deep cultural isolation and alienation, the distance between *Radical America* and scholarly historical work, although considerable in the beginning, widened substantially in the 1980s until *RA* became just another left political magazine.

By this time the fragmentation between activism and radical intellectual work had reached a point where there seemed to be little connection between the two and the meaning of radical intellectual work in a period of political and cultural retrenchment was even more confused. The university was no longer a focus of political activity and left historical analysis had become a sterile academic exercise. Having succeeded in imparting the importance of working-class, black and women's history as key elements in understanding the unique character of American society, the horizons of radical history had narrowed considerably and the role of the radical historian was even more uncertain. The new conservative political mood of the eighties and the isolation of the intellectual left in specialized academic disciplines had, as one young radical observed, "depressing

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[9] " Introduction," *Radical America*, 16 (3, 1982): 5-6.

implications for radical professors and graduate students committed to the creation of a left public sphere," and "the already tenuous links between the academic left and radical politics are in danger of disappearing altogether."Given this situation, the exchanges in the sixties and early seventies between activists such as Staughton Lynd and scholars such as Eugene Genovese about the conflicting claims of "personal politics, public activism and scholarship now seem conspicuously dated." As he concluded, "For those of us who have personally known the history of American radicalism more as a bewildering period of defeat and despair than as a shared experience of accomplishment and expectation, our position as intellectuals, professional historians, and radicals is now more confused than ever."[10]

By the time Blake published his article in the *Radical History Review*, that journal had already been in operation for some ten years. Although this journal has reflected some of the same concerns about academic professionalism as *Studies on the Left* and *Radical America*, it provided and has continued to provide a singular focus for the publishing of professional, radical history for the past twenty five years. As a creature of the post-New Left era the journal initially reflected the concerns of a generation of activists who, with the death of the Movement, would attempt to carry out their activist agenda in the academy through teaching and scholarship. At that moment, in the late seventies, the development of a "critical history" that would challenge in fundamental ways the capitalist intellectual paradigm seemed to be at the heart of their radicalism. In reaching beyond the boundaries of "bourgeois professional" they hoped to develop and legitimize a Marxist intellectual tradition that would reflect the work being done by the British Marxist historians who epitomized the

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[10]Casey Blake, "Where are the Young Left Historians?" *Radical History Review*, 28-30 (September,1984): 115.

relationship between historical scholarship and political commitment. For these young Americanists, many of whom were attracted to the growing field of social history and more specifically labour history. The attempts of E.P.Thompson and his American counterpart Herbert Gutman's to develop a Marxism that stressed the centrality of class and class struggle and which focussed on "lived experience" and the "agency" of those at the bottom of society seemed to mesh perfectly with the hopes of these radical scholars that common people could make their own history and that they could create a history of the inarticulate.

Despite the growth in the community of radical historians in the professional hard times of the 1970s and 1980s, the expectations of these scholars were never fulfilled, just as their hopes for a radical recasting of the American past never materialized. Facing meagre employment opportunities, confronted with an anti-radical bias in the profession, forced to deal with a resurgent right wing that had these radical historians under attack and on the defensive, and without a political movement except feminism to galvanize intellectual energies, the journal experienced a moment of crisis that saw it come close to ceasing publication.[11]

Given these problems and faced with the ever present difficulty of defining radical history and the role of the radical historian in light of the growing diversity of what was now considered as acceptable left scholarship, there was a concern that the notion of "radical" history was so fragmented that it had little, if any, coherence at all. To counteract this criticism and the growing tendency to equate radical history with specific fields, such as women's and labour history, the journal struck out

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[11] For a discussion of the fate of radical history see especially, Kent Blaser, "What Happened to New Left History? : Part 1, An Institutional Approach," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, (3 Summer 1986): 283-296. The other pertinent work is "A Round Table: What Has Changed and Not Changed in American Historical Practice?" *The Journal of American History*, 76 (2 September 1989): 393-488.

in a new direction by making public history a regular and substantial part of the *Review*. With increasing numbers of historians working outside the academy and in keeping with its commitment to develop new areas for historical inquiry, public history with its dual focus on "people's history" and the "public" presentation of the nation's past in the mainstream media, provided a new arena for a radical perspective on the past. Equally important in the editorial collective's redefinition of its role as a journal of radical history were two other important initiatives introduced in the late eighties. First, it was no longer to be focussed solely on radical American history but began the process of developing a broader international perspective that, in response to the shrinking of time and space and the consequent globalization of national cultures, would begin to examine historical change from an enlarged world-history perspective. Secondly, it would also develop and analyse gender issues such as the history of sexuality which reflected the growing power and influence of feminist historians in the profession during the eighties.

In the early nineties, as the journal broadened its coverage and as the editorial collective became more inclusive, with the addition of more young, female, non-white and third world historians, it was forced once again to attempt to redefine its role and consider the place of the radical historian both inside and outside the academy. This process of self-examination for both the journal and the collective was made even more critical because of the journal's successes. It had become a respected scholarly journal published by a reputable university press and many of the collective members had become an integral part of the historical establishment, holding offices, presenting papers and chairing sessions at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians. More importantly, the mainstream journals had not only begun to publish the same kinds of articles by the same authors but had even borrowed some of the unique

RHR features, such as visually dramatic covers, commentary on films and exhibits, and politically based debates. The result has been a lengthy debate on the meaning of the first word in the journal's title, the purpose of a "so-called" journal of radical history and the role of a radical historian. This debate has revolved around the issue of whether or not the collective exists solely to produce the journal or whether both the collective and the journal have a role to play both inside the profession and in the wider public sphere. At this point in the journal's history, there are no definitive answers to these issues other than an agreement that the journal is still at the core of their existence, and that "We want to be activist, accessible and widely read."[12] Not having been able to decide exactly who they are, they have agreed to consider a number of relatively moderate reforms in content and style that seem unlikely to provide any long term solution to the problem of how radical history will be constructed in the next millennium.

Perhaps the most relevant question at this time is whether radical historians and radical history are obsolete. If one judges by the references in several recent historiographical collections and monographs, the absence of any mention of radical history is a good indication that it no longer occupies a prominent place in the profession.[13] The writings of radical historians are no longer included

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[12]Editorial Collective Meeting Minutes," *Radical History Review*, 13-14 March 1999.

[13]See for example Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood, eds., *Imagined Histories*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998); " Special Issue:The Challenge of American History," *Reviews in American History*, 26 (1 March 1998); Joyce Appleby et al., *Telling the Truth About History* (New Yor k:W.W. Norton 1994); "The Practice of History: A Special Issue," *The Journal of American History*, 81 (3 December 1994); and Eric Foner, *The New American History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

in collections of essays offering conflicting interpretations of American history.[14] Radical history no longer can claim a significant amount of space on the agendas of the AHA or the OAH annual meetings and there is no category for "radical history" in the more than forty headings included in the Recent Scholarship section of the *Journal of American History*. Just as the Left has been a footnote to the political and economic developments of the eighties and nineties, so too it appears that radical history has failed to achieve its full potential.With the growing specialization and fragmentation of the historical profession it has had little or no impact on historical scholarship for some time. We have public historians, urban historians, political historians, intellectual historians, historians of the family and sexuality, specialists in immigration, ethnicity and internal migration, specialists in material and popular culture, but few who see themselves primarily as radical historians. Has radical history become irrelevant because it is too steeped in class analysis to deal effectively with the issues of race and gender? Is radical history a study that is critical of mainstream historiography and its celebration of the status quo, or is it a history that will offer "alternative interpretations distinctly from the left?" As one historian suggested, "If that is a criterium for radical history, then much of the gender, cultural and racial studies of the past fifteen years do not qualify as radical history. They insert the group studied into the traditional narrative instead of offering a study of their subject as an alternative interpretation."[15] Has radical history been reduced to identity politics or is it simply a pluralistic left perspective that mirrors the general eclecticism on the contemporary left? Indeed, does having rescued, "the poor

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[14]For example, the fifth edition of Grob and Billias eds., *Interpretations of American History* published in 1987 replaced all of the articles written by radical historians in the second edition published in 1972.

[15] Thomas J. Humphrey, "REPLY: Radical Approaches to History," in H-RADHIST.<h-radhist@h-net.msu.edu>. 21 May 1999.

stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott from the enormous condescension of posterity"[16] mean that there is little else to investigate as radical historians?

Despite the generational and theoretical difficulties inherent in any attempt to define radical history and broaden its perspective, the very least that can be said is that there is still a need for a history that seeks to understand the reality of the past because it provides the tools for understanding and changing the present. As the editorial collective of *RHR* and other radical historians continue with their attempts to re-define their place in and outside the profession, they would do well to consider the advice given by E.P. Thompson when he was interviewed by *RHR* in 1976. As he remarked, "We need our radical history journals . . . socialist intellectuals must occupy some territory that is, without qualification, their own: their own journals, their own theoretical and practical centers – places where no one works for grades or for tenure but for the transformation of society . . . places that prefigure in some ways the society of the future."[17] Although Thompson's vision of radicals occupying their own territory continues to be an unfulfilled dream, radical historians have successfully created their own journals and, in the case of *RHR*, continue to expend considerable amounts of energy in an attempt to maintain their identity in an environment that no longer considers them to be particularly relevant.

Although radical historians are still confronted with the conflict between the activist and scholarly impulses that are inherent in their work, and although they continue to grapple with their identity as each generation of radical scholars redefines the meaning of radical history, the journals in

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[16]E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p.12.

[17]"Interview with E.P. Thompson," *Visions,* p. 22-23.

this study represent unique and different attempts by three generations of left scholars to provide a definition of radical history and an explanation of the role of the radical historian. Although it is impossible to determine which of the three was more perceptive in its political ideas, cultural insights or historical analysis, taken as a whole, all three have made important contributions to the understanding of the American past by broadening its scope to include the place of radical movements, groups and classes at the bottom or on the fringes of American society, and the reactions of those in power to the radical element in that society. By providing an alternative view of the American past, these journals helped to restore a sense of excitement to the study of that history – a study that is no longer "solely the story of the rich and powerful, of the white and male." As *RHR*, the only remaining radically oriented professional journal devoted exclusively to history, prepares to celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary the editorial collective can point with pride not only to their joint successes but also to the many individual scholarly accomplishments of individual members which now includes the Pulitizer Prize for history awarded to Mike Wallace for *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898.* How far from the founders minds must such an accomplishment have seemed when MARHO was being organized some twenty-five years ago.[18]

Still, as voices of dissent reflecting the mind set of their respective generations, the three journals at the core of this study spoke and continue to speak to the need for a new radical narrative of the American past. Unfortunately that grand synthesis, despite the best efforts of radical historians to reach a wider public, has not been realized and may never become a part of the story of the American past. If narrative history is the "end product of what historians do . . . where they put it together and

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[18]Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

make sense of it for the reader,"[19] then radical historians have still have a great deal of work to do. Rather than debating grand theories, "cutting edge" methodologies and the analytical arguments of specialized monographs in a style that, "favors subtle distinction and academic jargon at the expense of accessibility," there is a greater need to explain to ordinary Americans the meaning of events in their past, why they occurred, and how their current place in the world reflects their own experience. If current radical historians fail to make their findings accessible to an intelligent but not expert reading public which is eager to learn, then left history will be ineffective in its response to present concerns and will continue to remain a relatively insignificant force in the profession.

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[19]James M. McPherson, "History: It's Still About Stories", *The New York Times Book Review*, 19 September 1999, p. 35

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