

## Book Reviews

**Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).**

Charles Tilly's history students used to joke that the title of their teacher's well-known work ought to have been: *As Sociology Eats History*. Gael Graham's book on United States high school activism in the sixties has reversed the disciplines in the joke version. This is a treatise about a neglected topic. Library shelves are full of thousands of books and articles on university student activism in the decade of protest, but little comprehensive work on their junior counterparts is to be found.

With the imprimatur of Todd Gitlin, today, Professor of Communications at Columbia University, in the Sixties, a former leader of the Students for a Democratic Society—Gitlin wrote the preface—Gael Graham, introduces us to the various aspects of high school activism in the decade of activism. She roams widely. Race and civil rights, feminism, student rights, dress and grooming codes, student government, student media, the war in Vietnam, and disciplinary codes are presented on the basis of governmental, union and scholarly documents, studies and reports at the time, political memoirs, archives of the national and local media, interviews with former students, teachers, administrators which provide spotty data for her general portrayal of the way it was. The author recognizes that her data are spotty and they prevent her from making definitive claims. Expressions such as: "Scanty evidence suggests..." or "difficult to analyze..." or "there is no evidence that..." or "extremely limited evidence..." are indicative of the problem. And yet, in spite of these significant gaps, a general picture of high school activism emerges in the pages of the book.

What emerges is a rather heroic picture of a minority of high school students fighting for their rights in the American way against the forces of tradition, conservatism, and entrenched interests. The lack of data, of course, makes it easier to tell a clearer, crisper and neater story than what had really occurred. The sympathies of the author are clearly with the students, in spite of her repeated criticism that they never actually specified what their positive view of themselves and their role in the schools and as citizens might be. She criticizes liberal teachers and administrators—the 'doves' in her book—for their paternalism and their pusillanimity in the face of the onslaught by conservative 'hawks'. And yet, the author is clearly on the side of the doves.

The US is an enormously diverse, regionally and geographically sectioned, divided society along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, etc. And the fact that the author, to her credit, adduces data from a wide variety of high schools in different parts of the country does not give us a coherent national picture. But there are other problems with this work that might have been avoided by a sociologically informed (one cannot expect an historian to do the work of a

sociologist) analysis of the reasons for the rise of student activism in the sixties. There is some of this to be sure but the links between the Cold War, the large number of baby boomers, the changes in secondary and tertiary education in the post-War era, the rise of the Civil Rights movement, the changing role of women, the oppressive nature of the culture of the fifties, etc. are not drawn sufficiently concretely or explicitly in relation to the rise of student activism and to the various forms that it took.

The author is at her best when she demonstrates that high school students who became politically or culturally active in the Sixties were not simply aping their older brothers and sisters in college. She portrays the tensions between the high school radicals and those college students who offered to help organize them. And yet she can not seem to capture the unique contribution of the high school activists, such as when she states “The degree to which high school dissent reflected other forms of unrest was less a result of simple mimicry than a demonstration of how thoroughly dissident ideals and practices permeated American society” (199). How much of the high school activism was explicitly high school in nature and how much of it was generated in other communities and focused on the high school? She does not shy away from unpleasant truths concerning the ambivalent role of Black nationalism in ‘re-segregating’ many schools today. But she does not tackle this enormously important aspect of African-American protest then, or now, head on.

Her own sentiments are overwhelmingly supportive of the student activists and one gets the sense that this *parti pris* may have taken the place of a more sociologically grounded and hence objective understanding of the origins, nature, trajectory and significance of the high school activism of the sixties: “However we choose to define ‘the sixties’—as a quest for true democracy, a hunger for authenticity, a revolt against authority—high school students played an active role, contributing to the dynamism and turmoil of the age” (198).

Graham, to her credit, digs out a significant amount of material from many not-readily-available sources that conveys a flavour of the times to readers who are lacking in first hand experience. But at times the material reads like a series of newspaper clippings linked in series to one another. Perhaps I share the prejudice of cutting edge members of the baby boom generation in relation to our slightly younger brothers and sisters who suffered in high schools while we were on the barricades at college. In a way this is their book, a book that might give them a sense of historical importance too, of not having missed the boat, at least on bragging rights. For participation in the activism of the Sixties became a hallmark of honour in a world in which the cultural shift occasioned in part by that activism paid homage to its legitimate progenitors. And this raises another question that the author does not address as fully as she might.

Did the student activists succeed? Here the answer is, yes and no. The activism succeeded in changing the cultural climate of society, even if conserva-

tive governments get elected now and again. It did not if one considers the extreme demands of the students, especially after 1968. Perhaps this ambivalence can best be captured in a recent commercial on television for a large bank which used Bob Dylan's 'The Times They are a Changin'' as the musical motif. The union of students, young workers, feminists, and the Third World, foretold by Herbert Marcuse and others found its expression in reality in radical Islam thirty years later.

Graham's book is evocative of a time. As a serious analysis, it is light.

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**John Hoerr, *Harry, Tom, and Father Rice: Accusation and Betrayal in America's Cold War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005).**

As the title suggests, *Harry, Tom, and Father Rice*, tells the story of three men on a very personal level. The narrative demonstrates how their lives intersect during the McCarthy era and the repercussions of their actions. While many histories of the McCarthy era have focused on the impersonal, political analysis of events, John Hoerr draws on his extensive experience as a journalist to bring the story to life by demonstrating the human impact of the events his narrative describes. This provides another perspective to the studies of famous entertainers such as the Hollywood ten or academics like F.O. Matthiessen.

Harry is Harry Davenport, a representative from Pittsburgh sent to Congress for one term, never to be re-elected. His 1948 election had been secured with union support, but the increasing hostility toward some left-leaning unions severely tested his courage to speak out against the excesses of the anti-communist witch-hunts. The moment which tested his resolve to the point which, in the narrative Hoerr presents, ultimately cost him his political career came when the hearings by a House Un-American Activities Committee turned their attention to members of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE).

Father Rice, is Rev. Charles Owen Rice, who made his name as a fervent anti-communist. His importance to Hoerr's narrative comes from the attacks he concentrated on members of UE. During 1949 the CIO, in a move which strengthened their anti-communist credentials, expelled those unions which were considered to be left leaning. One such union was UE. Father Rice, closely associated with CIO president Philip Murray, provided support for this move and particularly provided a means through which pressure could be placed on members of UE.

Tom Quinn, a welder and leader in the local labour movement, was caught in the anti-communist posturing. A friend of Harry Davenport, Quinn was subpoenaed by HUAC following pressure from Father Rice. However, at the point where Davenport could have offered support to a friend who had played a central role in his election effort, his convictions failed to materialise. To the leaders of the East Pittsburgh Westinghouse plant, this was a betrayal of the support which