

## Representing the Canadian Left in *Left History*

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“...where difference can be met with dialogue”<sup>1</sup>

This journal, *Left History* was launched back in 1993, with an explicit objective to have a space dedicated to social history and alternative historical inquiry in Canada. Thus, social history evolves in *Left History* with new directions and ideas, new ways to dive back into the archives, and a great enthusiasm for social history as a dominant field in Canadian history departments. This article will examine how ideas of the ‘left’ were constructed as a historical area of inquiry within this journal. What does a focus towards the left mean? And what unique approaches does it advocate for? This can be characterised by *Left History*’s founding manifesto, the special ‘defining’ issue, five years of representations in the journal, and a glance forward. The beginnings are explored through the journal’s inaugural manifesto, an extensive statement written by the founding editors. From here, I will extend my glance to the 2005 special issue that ‘pauses’ in an effort to define left history. Diving into subject and topics, I will review the articles from 2009 to 2013 and situate my findings within the historiography of new social history, cultural history and narrative positions such as studies in postmodernism, feminism and labour history. Lastly, I will look at how the journal advocates the pursuit of *Active History* with a special issue dedicated to the movement and presented as a way for historians to cross between the ivory tower and society at large.

### Left History and the Manifesto

In the first issue, the founding editors of the journal, Allison Forest, A.M Givertz and Marcus Klee each presented detailed statements outlining their aspirations for the journal.<sup>2</sup> The resulting manifesto was a six-page document entitled, “anything but an eternal truth” references the timely narrative turn of postmodernism and poststructuralism, which questions historical truth statements, favoring the view that history is more subjective than objective.<sup>3</sup> The three essays represent their individual ideas for the journal using a self-reflexive style conducive to postmodernism. At the same time, the three ‘representations’ support the notion that left scholars are different in their ideas but unified around an essential broad approach. As Klee suggests, “...unity of purpose has never been a unique or distinguishing feature of the left, but neither has disunity...”<sup>4</sup> The definition of ‘left history’ in each essay is intentionally left open in order to allow for diversity in approaches and subjects, and for *left history* as journal to eventually define itself. Several ideas are discussed in the essays and specific the-

oretical ideas are put forward, conceptualising what is the root to making 'good' left history.

A prominent theoretical stance in the manifesto is the 'postmodern challenge,' which is addressed in all three representations by the editors. In each of their statements the editors specifically outline their adherence to postmodern strategies as 'radical interventions' into the construction of knowledge. Givertz opens his essay and presents the challenge as:

Postmodernism has interrupted the way we think; it has caused a crisis in theory making but postmodernism is not something we can escape (even if we wanted to). And like others we see this crisis as an important opportunity to re-theorize and to reconnect.<sup>5</sup>

It is an important lens from the 'left' as it presents a narrative turn, moving away from truth claims in history which include focusing only on quantitative methods and objective authorship. 'Left history' from these angles appears limitless and covers anything claimed as subjective—the meeting of personal and political.<sup>6</sup>

Identity is discussed in the manifesto as an overall aim to for the publication in which all "leftists could identify."<sup>7</sup> Digging deeper, for the journal this means to be an "open space" for distinct voices and political possibilities. The editors, for instance, do not identify with a singular position, as say a Marxist and a feminist. Instead, they tend to say 'I am a labour feminist historian'. The nature of this left-plurality allows left historians to adopt many subject positions that weave into their approach and situate their personal view to their scholarship. Klee says, "*Left History's* project of uncovering the numerous marginalised narratives is associated with a commitment to end the isolation of academia and forge constructive links with the arts community and progressive individuals in society."<sup>8</sup> The manifesto specifically addresses the idea that on the left there will be points of convergence and periods of discord. Klee's suggestion that the journal shares a "unity of purpose" but not a coherent position, suggests that disparate topics and approaches can and should co-exist. This can be understood through three areas in the journal including categories of historical analysis, subject of study and the engagement of a multitude of methodologies. Overall, the diversity of perspectives leaves this journal to continually compile possibilities on ways to define and approach the study of left history, resulting in no 'essential identity' across the journal's contributors—both the journal's difference and its strength.<sup>9</sup>

### **Defining Left History**

In the beginning, the journal hesitated to define 'left history', but in 2005, the editors dedicated a special issue to exactly that question. The issue examines the different ways of approaching the practice and the different definitions of left

history, touching on how the field has taken shape from its first issue and suggestions for ways forward. While the manifesto gave an idea of the founding objectives for the journal, this issue looks at how the journal, the editors, and contributors have formed 'left history'. As an evolving product of the new social history, left history firmly places its definition as open, changing and evolving from the founding manifesto. Overall, it does this from the individual perspectives of the editors and contributors constructing a broad leftist outlook through both subject matter and approach. The special issue contains contributions from scholars on the editorial board, that have a distinct understanding of their own role in shaping the field and in how they would like to see it defined, now and into the future. Opening the issue, the editors state the journal's intent as "...a kind of boundary-less space for diverse and perhaps ever contradicting topics and approaches to co-exist."<sup>10</sup> They emphasize that there is no 'tactic' definition, but rather like an evolving door of themes and subjects that echo current historical debates. The subsequent content represents the evolution of leftist historiography over the last decade.<sup>11</sup>

Molly Ladd-Taylor, in her article "My Left History," suggests that the concept comes down to 'politics' situating herself as an activist historian concerned with the history of women and welfare. In her research that examines eugenic sterilization, her attention as a historian is drawn to the power relations between patients and medical practitioners found in health records, however her outlook and motivation in her practice is focused on the ability for her work to promote change for women's health, asserting "if the left cannot achieve a different future, if we cannot imagine it ... we cannot see the transformative changes that happened in the past."<sup>12</sup> Left history is a practice, understood through its ability to address unequal power relations in the present, through learning about the past.

William Pelz and Craig Heron's articles put left history into a political framework. A framework that privileges stories that stand against the dominant political conversations. Pelz says the left is democratic but with a distinct lens on class, gender and race, allowing for a historical practice with subjects and agents that ask the right questions even if the results are not always agreed upon. Historians practicing left history, "refuse to blindly worship the winners," and seek out histories of people that are as diverse in the kinds of people as they are in the kinds of subject matter or in other words, left history "refuses to ignore the serf to praise the king."<sup>13</sup> Pelz's final definition begins with EH Carr's "reason applied to human affairs" and adds the left to history with "...a special commitment to democracy and liberation."<sup>14</sup> In this way, Ladd-Taylor, Heron and Pelz all suggest that left history is political, not in its engagement with formal politics, but in the ability for change, with attention to a certain kind of history, that re-shapes how we engage with difference in the present.

Moreover, the meaning is shaped by the identity of its authors, such as

Franca Iacovetta, an editorial board member and contributor to the journal. In her article, “The Personal, Political, and the Intellectual” she affirms, like Allison Forrest, “I am not a feminist and then a left historian but a feminist left historian.”<sup>15</sup> Her practice is shaped by her attention to immigrant working class women with whom she identifies as having grown up as a part of an immigrant community. Her motivation is in the possibilities for social change, as several authors articulate in this issue, saying a goal is to ‘uncover and articulate’ a kind of politics. Her history focuses on the “...ridiculed and punished critics of the powerful” which from this lens are mostly women.<sup>16</sup> Through her histories, she challenges those powers to “produce emancipatory knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> As a final note, she considers Allison Forest, the feminist founding editor, discussed in the last section that has since disappeared from the journal’s credit:

Writing the history of left history in ways that assume that in the beginning there were a ‘few good men’ who created a radical discipline...and then came the woman who supposedly derailed the radical project.<sup>18</sup>

In this statement she challenges her colleagues, to acknowledge their own bias with the questions they ask and in the ways they write history. Diversity on the left is found not only by subjects and topics, but also by the personal experiences of the historians themselves.

While *Left History* reaches out to find the marginalised voices of the past, Geoff Eley says the left historian may also find themselves “confined to the margins.” He argues that the historian must find an audience through attention to quality. Historians studying class, gender and race issues have less direct connections to wider movements. Political alliances between left academics and left citizens are changing. For historians and social movements the common relationships of the past are gone, there are “no more parties left to join.”<sup>19</sup> Political movements are not as connected to political parties for example, and that has left conversations on wider causes wavering with academics left out, and with little left but to write a good history that is lasting.

In a similar political fashion, Craig Heron blames the rise of neo-liberalism over the last part of the twentieth century that saw the rise of consumerism over values, and reduced the left to the sidelines. He makes a case that the responsibility of ‘left history’ is to stay focused on how “...the world has never operated the way the neo-liberals suggest.”<sup>20</sup> Like Eley, he says left historians have to get out there and speak to contemporary social justice causes, and listen to them. Left history as a future goal needs more room to counter neo-liberalism and share histories that can contribute to a different kind of trajectory.

However, Jeet Heer asks left historians to perhaps dive out of their personal interests in left history of the working class and radical social movements and to consider the other side of the spectrum, ‘right history.’<sup>21</sup> Quoting the sociologist Alan Wolfe, the, “...left in America has not paid as much attention to the right, as the right has paid to the left.” Heer suggests that the sustained focus

on movements considered left has resulted in a gap in the historical literature on American conservatism. Left historians can examine the racist, sexist or homophobic roots of conservative ideas alongside the trajectories of different conservative leaders. His basic message is 'left history' would benefit from "knowing thy enemy" because the history of conservatism is too important to be only the focus of historians that identify from the right. He suggests through these statements, that historians on either side interrogate their work from a bias and that to balance this inherent limit, we need to evaluate these histories from either side. Heer argues that historians of the left need to also focus on the right. In fact, "the future of left history may be right history."<sup>22</sup>

The special issue, therefore, dives into the question: what is 'left history'? However, the answer looks a lot like the conclusions drawn up in the founding manifesto. It is political, it is gendered, it can be subjective, but follows no single conceptual trajectory, and maintains the idea that left history is an evolving open space.

### **Representing the 'left history' (2009 to 2013)**

An initial glance at the articles and issues of *Left History* over a recent five-year period clearly shows that labour history prevails, and is mixed with other topics such as women and labour, race and labour and Marxism and labour. This is important, because the term 'left' is conventionally associated with 'left-wing' politics that in Canada are mainly aligned with labour unions but have a strong history with Marxist and socialist positions. Yet, Marxism as a theoretical position is rarely discussed, suggesting that this journal is located within the new left rather than within what some consider the old left, embedded in Marxist thought and socialist ideals.

Attention to the Canadian labour movement comes through in several articles. The Winnipeg General Strike, a substantial event in labour history is re-examined by Michel Beaulieu.<sup>23</sup> Beaulieu focuses his analysis on workers in Northern Ontario who supported the strike from remote regions —thereby shedding fresh light on a much-covered historical event. However, beyond counting the subject of labour is the approach authors take on labour, as Craig Heron discusses in his article "Worker's of the World, Give me a Call" which looks at the relationship between historians and labour activists.<sup>24</sup> Heron, notes the sharp division between activists and academic historians that hinders their ability to work together and support each other. He states, "labour activists want history to provide straightforward lessons from the past, and to reaffirm the stories that circulate among them."<sup>25</sup> Activists want a narrative that directly supports their activities, without the academic agenda that involves different responsibilities such as grant deadlines, publications and documenting source materials to construct history for a specific academic conversation.

In a similar vein within the topic of labour history is an example from Jeremy Milloy who used a failed attempt at unionization for fast food workers in order to learn from the past and mobilize workers for the future.<sup>26</sup> Milloy's work provides an example of historical writing that engaged with contemporary activism. The gaze here is not an objective narrative of history but a trajectory as Milloy positions his case and announces his audience as the "primary agenda for the left unionists should be about building democratic radical unions that can win agreements."<sup>27</sup>

Breanne Fahs, interviews American activist and artist Ben Morea, a controversial activist whom identifies as a part of the radical left, and for Fahs a possible hero for the left.<sup>28</sup> Morea charges that there are so few heroes in history from the left, stating the problem is simply, "the radicals don't write history."<sup>29</sup> The challenge is the kinds of attention needed to find the activist stories from the past, voices unrecorded, not documented or just lost, to learn from the previous generations of activists. Morea suggests, "you've got to find the little things that completely resonate with you. You can't get the whole story but you can get little glimpses of it...you have to read between the lines."<sup>30</sup> Postmodernism, perhaps, provides a frame here that allows for a fragmented history; to find the lost heroes and share what remnants are left. These histories may not be the whole story, the true story, nor the entire story, but a part of a story; one that may connect some of the missing dots.

Turning attention to the dots, the bits of information harnessed to tell a history is not only the starting point for historians, but consideration to the types of sources is vital to constructing left histories. Trevor Griffey, in his review essay explores how three authors use archived government intelligence documents to write left history in the United States. Their success, he argues is limited partly because access to these files is extremely difficult even with open government laws. At best, the files, once obtained, are flawed, censored, and biased. His challenge is how scholars can make these complexities visible, and not shy away from complicated histories, but read deeper into what the source, such as FBI files in this case, exposes. Griffey puts forward:

For historians to take seriously the question of government repression in their cultural and political histories, they are going to have to learn how to gain access to these kinds of collections. Otherwise they will accommodate the government's desire to shape the course of history without leaving a trace.<sup>31</sup>

Sources that are difficult for historians to access can leave a significant gap that goes unrecognized by society. However, once obtained these sources can expose what powerful governments attempted to bury.

Another way to access the history of the left is reading alternatively into readily accessible sources, providing a critique to what may appear as a straightforward activist narrative. Kari Winter and David Castillo in their article,

“Imperious Freedom: The Tangled narratives of Anti-Human Trafficking Discourse” examine three books that advocate for the end of modern day slavery.<sup>32</sup> Their critique proposes that historical narratives are flawed representations that impact the anti-human trafficking campaigns overseas. Winter and Castillo conclude that the activist narratives in these books do little to stop trafficking and in some cases have done major damage. Through deep reading of these books they find that the activists are situating themselves as saviors, not taking in the complexity of the situation of women in forced prostitution, but focus on acting like heroes sweeping in and attempting to simply shut down the operations. The sources of analysis, the three books, present a subjective but unresolved narrative of victim, trafficker and hero. Alas, these heroes are not the kind sought by the left, as the authors point to how these heroes resemble those exhibited through the tradition of grand narratives, such as the biographies of imperialists and colonial missionaries, saving those that need saving with a self story that blocks the voice of those being saved.

Representing voices of those who left few traces in the archive is a particular challenge to feminist history. The narratives of and from women were absent for many years; in part from a lack of sources and in part from a scarcity of historians brave enough to seek out those stories. During this five-year period, the journal has made various contributions to women and gender scholarship. Topics range from explorations into women’s involvement in social movements, women as activist leaders and specific discussions around gender histories. An example of this journal’s dedication can be found in the editorial note to a recent publication where the editors highlight women and the role of gender in various activist movements over the last century.<sup>33</sup>

Samuel Galen Ng’s article explores the relationship between two organizations in the US during the 1970s, the Black Panthers and STAR (a gay rights group).<sup>34</sup> These he points to as somewhat unlikely allies but with more commonalities than prior scholarship has given credence. For example, both groups were made up of individuals that represented and advocated for the rights of oppressed gender and racial identities. In particular, towards the feminist position is the focus in this article on how leaders such as Sylvia Lee Rivera grew her organisation called STAR that though set within the women’s and gay rights movement went farther focussing on transgendered youth and street transvestites. The article examines the trials and tribulations of the organization STAR and the radical queer activist Rivera. Through this depiction Ng demonstrates the nuances of activists’ experiences that are so often untold.

Looking at a similar period within the feminist movement, Amanda Ricci explores Pan-African feminism in Montreal communities.<sup>35</sup> Through this example she highlights divergent ideas of feminism in Canada, from women in different places and subjected to different realities. A striking note in this article was the diversity that existed in the feminist movement in one city. Different

feminisms connected to the same place are articulated as “competing feminist nationalisms” and captured through the theoretical framework of third wave feminism. The first example highlights that newer feminist identities linked to racial minorities and gay women changed the trajectory of feminist notions of a collective identity and created a more inclusive movement vocal about its diversity. Ricci demonstrates the political nature of feminist movements with her discussion of (1) the upheaval in Quebec centered on francophone identity and (2) the civil rights/black power movements in the US. She argues that black women in Montreal saw their movement as separate from other women’s groups in Quebec, such as the *Front de liberation des femmes*, who strongly aligned their messaging within Canadian separatist movements and francophone identities. Euro-Canadian feminism was different than African-Canadian feminism because of how the lived realities of each group contrasted, from cultural understandings to their social positions in Quebec. The majority of black women in Montreal were Anglophones from the Caribbean. Largely viewed as foreigners in Quebec society, black women were subjected to various discriminations, were consistently impoverished and held different notions of equality. Further, black women activists fought to be heard, not just by Euro-Canadian women’s groups, but also, by black activist groups whom were largely represented by men. Subsequently, they started their own organisations led by activists such as Dorothy Wills. Evidently feminist representation requires integrating multiple perspectives and identities with different kinds of heroes. After all, feminism at its roots is about equality, which is understood from how our historical narratives are integrated and acted upon in society for social change. This forces the historian to look deeper into the archive to discover who shaped the movement, or to find those untold movements such as the one Ricci shares. Profiling different kinds of feminist movements is a vital way this journal and left history contributes to the opening of feminist dialogue, illuminating the diversity of Canada’s past.

*Left History* has remained focused on advocating for marginalised people of the past, to shape the present. This journal’s strength is in continually finding new ways of looking at the female story, black story, immigrant experience, the suppressed activist, and to a lesser extent the historian’s craft. Canadians paying attention are fortunate during this time, to have access to new ways of knowing our past and harnessing a deeper understanding of cultural diversity today. However, several scholars recognise that for these alternative histories to influence change new audiences beyond this journal and beyond the history classroom need to be found.

### Active History: a way forward

Recently, this journal's response to finding new audiences and reaching beyond the academy has been on the focus of Active History. In this final section, I look at this movement as a path forward for the practice of left history in Canada as it is a way to act upon the initial objective of this journal. Coming back to the inaugural issue and the editor's note, Klee says, "Left History's project of uncovering the numerous marginalised narratives is associated with a commitment to end the isolation of academia and forge constructive links with the arts community and progressive individuals in society."<sup>36</sup> While the first part of this statement is realized throughout the articles reviewed, the way to broaden the audience and the types of contributors were unclear, until the appearance of Active History.

The journal's special issue on Active History in 2010 followed a conference held at York University in 2008 and the launch of an outreach project also at York called Active History, which ultimately explored ways to engage the public.<sup>37</sup> Victoria Freeman in her article explains how she conceived the term as "useful shorthand" that captures both the idea of an activist historian and the understanding of the way history is in constant motion and changing.<sup>38</sup> The objective of Active History is to articulate and cultivate a socially engaged practice of history that heeds the call to reach out to the community. In this way it is a form of public history with a more explicit activist-centered approach.<sup>39</sup> What all the contributors to the special issue seem to agree on is that this practice is not new, that there are many historians that have embraced this idea and have found ways to make history relevant. The special issue goes a step further and aims to bring like-minded historians together to discuss these ideas and cultivate a kind of cohesive movement for the profession. Victoria Freeman, a contributor to the issue and founder of the conference feels that scholarship should have a goal to enhance the wellbeing of the community and move to a model that is more of a 'collective enterprise' rather than working as a lone scholar. She offers the example of historian's engagement with colonialism in Canada that has resulted in what she describes as white people talking to each other. Active History aims to broaden that conversation. Jim Clifford brings attention, in his definition of Active History to the concept and practice of 'shared authority' especially in the practice of historians working with living history. Shared authority refers to participants in oral history projects who play a role in not only sharing their stories but also constructing the process of making history which includes dissemination.<sup>40</sup> According to Clifford, Active History allows for the ability to "think with history." In this way, his ideas fit similarly with Freeman's, in that the "role of history is to serve the present while looking to the future."<sup>41</sup>

Thomas Peace in his article proposes that if there is an active history there must be a passive history. Initially, he examines the possibility of a passive

historian but quickly moves to focus on how non-historians deal with histories. Passive history, he puts forward is history consumed with minimal effort, a narrative that provides a “sense of the past” without a critical engagement to what is presented. It is about how our lives are informed through our own past and histories, alongside how we consume history. Historical narratives, for most non-historians are generally formed through inattentive encounters with stories, such as the tourist at a museum or watching a late night television program. Peace suggests that “from these narratives we construct our place in the world and the ways in which we think it can be shaped.”<sup>42</sup> What active ‘left’ history aims for is a way to privilege alternative narratives and offer non-historians a way into building the story, moving from consuming what is presented to us to questioning who and why a story is told at all.

Joy Parr critiques the way active history was practiced within the field of political history. She points to how historians were active outside of the academy through contributing to and advising the agendas of political leaders in Canada.<sup>43</sup> Following the Second World War and up until the 1980s, historians were involved in influencing the directions of political parties, however, most of the impact was not from left practicing historians. Similar to contemporary active history movements were the labour historians who allied with union representatives and other publics. In the 1970s a few historians were active in contributing to the debates of the time and the ongoing political upheavals. However, left leaning historians and their subsequent contributions remained somewhat marginal in their influence on the political agenda at the time. Therefore, Parr advocates for a return to this direct engagement with politics, but from the social histories that drive left narratives in Canada. What is exciting is the recent momentum in active history with the evolving ways this sentiment is being put to practice.

Tim Grove’s Toronto’s Missing Plaque Project, is an example of Active History depicted in the special issue, where the stories of long forgotten protests, riots or place names are told through posters. The posters seem like an intervention to the cityscape, explicitly marking the location of forgotten moments. In the journal, images of three posters are shown, the Halloween Riot in 1945, the Yonge Street Protest in 1992 and the Wonscotanach River poster that explains the Indigenous name and history of what is known today as the Don River.<sup>44</sup> In these examples, the project does three things, it identifies the actual location, it tells an alternative story and it presents this in a visual narrative with the poster “plaque” depicting both text and images. The Toronto Star covered the story, stating how, “with a stack of homemade posters, a sponge and a tub of wheat paste, Tim Grove is revising the story of Toronto.”<sup>45</sup> Grove is not an academic historian, he is an activist, yet he is literally bringing history to the public. Important is the very visible nature of the posters providing a history to people unlike museum or television programs. Still it is not merely passive

because the message is strong and represents a moment of forgotten significance; the consumption of this narrative is active. Like a history in motion, there is no funding for this project only volunteer support from the community and the posters are temporary with the narrative intended to be read in transit.

Another example, described by Wendy Cheng, Laura Barraclough and Laura Pulido is a partnership between academic historians and community partners where the method is a tourist map—like a poster visually sharing an alternative story of places and people. Two projects *A People's Guide to LA* and *A People's Guide To NYC* are guides with maps that feature the work of several organisations and undergraduate students who have adopted various methods such as oral history to document stories and places that were entirely *left off* the map. For example, regions of LA that were populated by mostly Latino or Asian communities offered an alternative to those in mainstream tourist guides that featured only places occupied by the white and rich residents of Hollywood and Malibu. The alternative stories included walking tours, created by social justice organizations showcasing Chinatown or Little Tokyo or stories from south LA collected by local high-school students from their grandparents and other community elders. In the other example, undergraduate students at New York University set-up a class blog and documented alternative histories of places around NYC using contemporary photography with historical records. The students documented places of political upheaval, workers strikes, the forced removal of immigrant housing and the location where police killed a young Harlem man. The guides operate as an outward tool to educate the public but the process is also inward to the students. Cheng et al. propose the pedagogy of active history is about active learning, directly engaging with a place and practicing a place-based history. Students partaking in the projects learned about their own neighborhoods and covered subjects such as the environment, culture, politics, literature and the arts. In this way, they suggest that the *People's Guide* “does not simply offer an alternative reading of past, but rather integrates history and place as a pedagogical lens through which to engage diverse people in critical analysis of their present reality and future dreams.”<sup>46</sup> It forms the two-way bridge between community and the academy and as the authors suggest builds participatory democracy—from the roots up.

Projects that are hands on and in the community offer students and activists a chance to develop their positions in society, extending the venues of history and expanding a capacity for change through student driven energy. This kind of direct participation from students is what Stuart Henderson advocates for in his critique, that is a kind of reflection on the discipline which confronts what he sees as a contemporary generation of “passive nihilists.”<sup>47</sup> He says, “in a world that is all too rapidly blowing itself to pieces, the passive nihilist closes his eyes and makes himself into an island.”<sup>48</sup> This charge against contemporary students of history comes from a comparison to the earlier times, the glorified

protest era of the 1960s and 1970s, when students were loud in their opposition to the war in Vietnam and environmental destruction. He suggests that students today have lost this drive but this inaction is not merely “benign” it is destructive to Canada’s development. He charges that Active History, as a social movement derived from the university, potentially creates a ‘safe’ space for the nihilist to leave the island, an island that Henderson sees as a harmful societal void. His plea to students of history and perhaps the entire reason to practice Active History is to try and realize that:

It is not okay to be disconnected, to be solely focused on seeing heaven in a wildflower, perfecting your warrior pose, achieving inner peace...if self-amelioration is your only contribution to the politics of resistance, you are hurting people.<sup>49</sup>

Passive history and nihilism is what Active History wants to challenge through engaging students and citizens at large, to contribute to movements and the process of social change. Active History represents a bold way forward.

Active History challenges the ways histories are made visible through deliberate methods that privilege left narratives and find ways to embed them in the consciousness of Canadian society. Active History as a left history practice allows for multiple representations of the past that aspires towards a new kind of historical dignity. Contributors throughout this journal continually argue that the left has no single identity and it is continually in motion, developing its ground and attempting to find ways to better attend to the unattended. Active History aligns with this ideal, its objectives are clear but not concrete, they are not new, they are not the only truth and the process for making history active is in development.

## Conclusion

Historians look to the past not only for new stories but to also understand how to improve the craft of history. Diversity within stories, people, and scales is partly a result of the space opened from the narrative turns of postmodernism, the almost abandonment but remaining grip of Marxism and the new voices forging ahead with an evolving feminist lens. *Left History* provides a safe space to explore positions that are new or difficult because there are no historians from the right to argue back at the ways left historians refocus on ‘limited identities’ or women’s histories. What this journal does is add value to the archive, to show that Canada as a nation is diverse albeit perhaps uncomfortably diverse in its activisms and prejudices. For this journal’s contribution to the craft of history, authors demonstrate ways of finding hard stories, using new kinds of sources, and finding untold social movements. What exactly defines *Left History* going forward? Perhaps, the raw irony of everything new is old extends to Active History, a movement that finds new ways to present the past and connect the missing

'dots' with new kinds of heroes. Most important, is in finding ways to build the two-way bridge, with paths between community and the academy. What is left is a journal that contributes to a dialogue without being shy to making history's epistemological trajectory a little muddy.

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## NOTES

Alison Forest, A.M Givetz, and Marcus Klee. "anything but an eternal truth: representing *left histories* Three Representations," *Left History* 1.1 (1993): 3-10. Reprinted in this issue, of *Left History* 18.2 (2015).

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Molly Ladd Taylor, "My Left History," *Left History*. 11.1 (2005): 15-16.

William Pelz, "What is Left History?" *Left History*. 11.1 (2005): 18-19.

Ibid.,19.

Franca Iacovetta, "The Personal, Political, and the Intellectual in Left Feminist History," *Left History* 11.1 (2005): 26-33.

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Ibid., 33. The Editors of *Left History* noted this omission and have restored Alison Forrest's name as a founder as of *Left History* in the masthead as of issue 17.1, Summer 2014.

Geoff Eealy "Writing In Opposition," *Left History* 11.1 (2005): 33, 20.

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Jeet Heer, "The Case for Right History," *Left History*, 11.1 (2005): 34-35.

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Michel S. Beaulieu, "Reacting to the Workers' Revolt: The Lakehead and the Winnipeg General Strike," *Left History* 14:1 (2009): 8-32.

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Ibid, 51.

Jeremy Miloy, "Learning on the Job: the 1998 Squamish McDonald's Campaign and New possibilities for Fast Food Workers," *Left History* 16.1 (2012): 55.

Ibid, 82.

Ben Moreau is a self-identified anarchist that was mostly active in the 1960s. He was a leader of an anarchist group called Motherfuckers that were responsible for several illegal actions, including occupying the Pentagon. Before this interview he was underground for forty years. See interview:: Breanne Fahs, "Reading between the lines: Ben Morea on Anarchy, Radicalism and Revolution," *Left History* 16.1 (2012): 37.

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The Public History Directory is also through York History Department which aims to connect public history such as museums or tourist sites and academic history. Access at <http://pubhist.info.yorku.ca/>.

Referenced by Clifford is Concordia History Department's Conference on Shared Authority in 2008 through the Centre for Oral History, which is a similar movement to Active History. Accessed at: <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/sharingauthority/>.

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<sup>42</sup> Tom Peace, "The Call of Passive History," *Left History* 15.1 (2010): 21.

<sup>43</sup> Joy Parr, "The Terms of Engagement: Elements from the Genealogy of

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Active History,” *Left History* 15.1 (2010): 27-28.

<sup>44</sup> The Missing Plaques project is in the city of Toronto and organized by Tim Groves. It aims to share ‘hidden’ histories through the use of historical plaques. Find more information at: <http://missingplaque.tao.ca/>. Images of the posters are shown in *Left History* 15.1 (2010): 61-64.

<sup>45</sup> Rachel Mendleson. Missing Plaque Project unveils Toronto’s untold history. *Toronto Star*, Aug 20, 2013, accessed November 25<sup>th</sup> 2013, [http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/08/20/missing\\_plaque\\_project\\_unveils\\_torontos\\_untold\\_history.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2013/08/20/missing_plaque_project_unveils_torontos_untold_history.html).

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<sup>47</sup> Stuart Henderson, “Disappointment, Nihilism, and Engagement: Some Thoughts on Active History,” *Left History* 15.1 (2010): 37.

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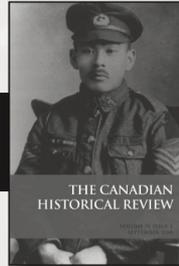
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