

## EDITORIAL NOTE

*“Walls are built and then fall, borders are fortified and then shift,  
boundaries are demarcated and then transgressed.”<sup>1</sup>*

This issue of *Left History* centres upon borders and boundaries—both real and imagined—and how these have functioned for members of disparate social groups over time. Our contributors’ work highlights the concept of the border as transcending materiality and representing more than reified lines of nation-states. Complicating the definition of borders to function in the creation of marginalized identities, our authors re-draw the lines of migration, and explore the margins of left history as a discipline.

Bryan D. Palmer’s “A Left History of Liquorice: What It Means to Write ‘Left’ History” is the first installment in a special *Left History* series that reflects upon changing currents and boundaries in the practice of left history, and outlines the challenges historians of the left must face in the current tumultuous political climate. This series extends a conversation first convened in a 2006 special edition of *Left History* (11.1), which asked the question, “what is left history?” In the updated series, contributors were asked a slightly modified question: “what does it mean to write ‘left’ history?”

Palmer charts the impact of major political developments on the field of left history in the last decade, contending that a rising neoliberal and right-wing climate has constructed an environment inhospitable to the discipline’s survival. To remain relevant, Palmer calls for historians of the left to develop a more “open-ended and inclusive” understanding of the left and to push the boundaries of inclusion for a meaningful historical study of the left. To illustrate, Palmer provides a brief materialist history of liquorice to demonstrate the mutability of left history as a historical approach, rather than a set of traditional political concerns. While left history may occupy a precarious position, Palmer remains confident that if historians of the left “dig in [their] heels” and open up the borders of left history, “its lessons and its contribution can fall on the fertile soil of enhanced possibilities for resistance and struggle.”

Juan Carlos Mezo González’s article, “Contested Images: Debating Nudity, Sexism, and Porn in *The Body Politic*, 1971–1987,” examines the vital role played by images featured in the Canadian gay liberation journal, *The Body Politic* (*TBP*), in fulfilling the journal’s project of community development. Drawing on rich archival sources and oral history interviews, González demonstrates the multivalent nature of images, as *TBP*’s use of visual culture did not always serve its intended proactive project of community development. Indeed, some images sparked fierce debates—among both readers and the *TBP* editorial collective—concerning the contested meanings of images, and dissolved the boundaries between what constituted pornography, sexism, objectification, liberation, and even community. Through this

focus on visual culture, González also charts the shift in *TBP*'s mandate from the early 1970s, when the journal was marked by an eagerness to spark debates and shock reader response with images, as compared to the mid-1980s when it was more preoccupied with advertisements and censorship.

Rachel Zellars's article, "‘Too Tedious to Mention’: Pondering the Border, Black Atlantic, and Public Schooling in Colonial Canada," tells a complex story of migration, education, and displacement in eighteenth and nineteenth century Canada. Zellars begins by challenging the traditional narrative of Canada as "gloryland" or "home of freedom seekers," and questions what level of freedom was truly experienced in black Canada. Zellars breathes new life into the scholarship of migration, offering new language, such as "metamigration," to better understand the complex diasporic experience of black migration. Indeed, Zellars broadens the borders of migration to include black migration in conversations about Canadian public school segregation, to establish a pattern of "ongoing captivity" which persisted long after safe arrival in Canada. In this way, Zellars contends that the concept of Canada as a geographical terminus was a site of violence and instability which only proved to function as a borderless "diaspora within diaspora."

Review essayist Brian S. Mueller evaluates recent works on the history of the United States as empire. In "Nationalism, Self-Determination, and Empire," Mueller illustrates that the "United States empire is not always visible." However, by expanding our boundaries of analysis to include the Third World, new forms of control—both direct and indirect—become abundantly visible, and the true reach of the United States empire becomes perceptible.

As always, many thanks to our contributors, book reviewers, and peer-reviewers. *Left History* welcomes our new Article Editor, Alex Gagné. Alex is a PhD candidate at York University studying the history of childcare policy in Canada. This issue of *Left History* marks the departure of editor Kevin Burris. Kevin has overseen many volumes from inception to completion and has spent countless hours ensuring a smooth transition from a subscription-based publishing model to an online-only open access model. We thank Kevin for his leadership, ingenuity, and tireless efforts over the years.

*The Editors*

<sup>1</sup> Marc Silberman, Karen E. Till, and Janet Ward, eds., *Walls, Borders, Boundaries: Spatial and Cultural Practices in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 1.