

## Editors' Note

In the silence of abjection, when the only sounds to be heard are the chains of the slave and the voice of the informer; when everything trembles before the tyrant and it is dangerous to incur his favor as to deserve his disfavor, this is when the historian appears, charged with avenging the people.

Chateaubriand's above statement, from an article that appeared in the *Mercure* of July 4, 1807, remains an unsettling one for the historical profession. Only a generation after the article's publication, the academic discipline of history began to be institutionalised, largely on the basis of an imagined Rankean methodology that promoted scientific detachment, objectivity, and a narrative style that spoke only of the facts. Avenging the people would be the task of revolutionaries or altruistic social reformers, not professional historians. In a way, the profession has remained tied to its initial disciplinary foundation, letting facts speak for themselves while ignoring the epistemological problems engendered by such fantasized, cold detachment. As every good historian knows, however, examining the minutia of any metanarrative reveals counter-discourses and resistances that throw the absolute hegemonic value of such accounts into doubt. We would like to think of *Left History* as a medium for resistance that undermines any story of the professional discipline as a sterile, fact-based, nation-builder.

Since its inception in 1993, under the editorship of, for the most part, Adam Givertz, Marcus Klee, and Bryan Palmer, and published out of Queen's University until 1997, the journal printed articles from a distinctly leftist outlook and became an important medium for a variety of theoretical perspectives. In particular, *Left History* became a site for debate between theoretical positions, particularly between historical materialism and post-structuralism. The journal moved to York University in 1997 and Patrick Connor, Jeet Heer, and Nicholas Rogers assumed the editorship. Under their inspired direction the content of the journal continued to diversify and its scope broadened. They recently turned *Left History* over to the present editors, and 8.2 is the product of the combined efforts of the outgoing and incoming editors. We would like to thank Patrick, Jeet, and Nick for all of their hard work and continued guidance; we can only hope that we will live up to the high standard of scholarship and editorial acumen set by our predecessors.

Our respect for the political and intellectual commitments of the journal means that the content and direction of *Left History* will continue along its present path. Readers will be glad to know that there is no movement within the editorial collective to change the name to *Right History*. Our current priorities

include maintaining the standard of publication that *Left History* has held in the past while also broadening the scope of the journal by expanding and diversifying our website to allow for more online content. We have also made changes to the editorial board in the hope of better engaging the diverse interests and knowledge that comprise the larger editorial collective of *Left History*. And the present issue, in itself, is a microcosm of the diverse perspectives and topics that readers have come to expect from *Left History* over the years.

Over the past decade, cultural history has moved from the fringes to the centre of history, mediating much needed dialogue between philosophy, popular culture, and the traditional concerns of the historian. In her article on *Thelma and Louise*, Aspasia Kotsopoulos does just that, persuasively arguing that the film needs to be understood as a historical and cultural event emphasising the multiple interpretations engendered by the film's polysemic nature. By analysing *Thelma and Louise* as an event Kotsopoulos is able to contextualise the diverse interpretations the film elicited from reviewers, providing much needed insight into the gender wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Kotsopoulos's reading of *Thelma and Louise* brings up important issues concerning gender and sexuality, themes that have become familiar terrain for readers of *Left History*. Similarly, David S. Churchill's article on the Toronto gay/lesbian publication, *The Body Politic*, analyses a personal advertising controversy that occurred in 1985. Churchill not only singles out an important moment in gay/lesbian politics in Toronto, he also opens a window into the sexual politics of the time, exploring the framing of vital issues from sexuality and race to power and the politics of radical publishing.

Fortunately historians of more traditional fields have taken notice of the exciting new avenues of historical analysis opened by the likes of cultural history and the history of sexuality. Peter Cole's article on Philadelphia's longshoremen and the Industrial Workers of the World is a case in point. Cole focuses on the "Philadelphia Controversy" as a turning point in the relationship between developing American communism and the decline of the IWW after the First World War. By utilizing the work of David Roediger, Cole is able to contextualise the internal and external controversies that surrounded the IWW in the 1920s around issues of race.

Intellectual history, as well, has benefited from, in particular, post-structuralism, and Daniel Rosenberg's article on the all too familiar story of a university being transformed from an inclusive, equitable institution, to an entrepreneurial institution dominated by the market economy, draws out many links between power and knowledge. Rosenberg meticulously reconstructs this shift at Adelphi University from 1985-1997, arguing that a neo-conservative ideology provided a common discourse linking trustees, administrators, and researchers, directing a common set of policies and procedures. The administration and the Board of Trustees managed to establish administrative sover-

eighty and even institute their ultra-conservative ideology as the core curriculum, with the expressed purpose of rectifying the intellectual and moral vacuity that supposedly had taken over the campus.

The diverse fields of history that this issue contains – from cultural history to history of sexuality, and from labour history to intellectual history – have become commonplace in the pages of this journal. Radical changes are clearly not necessary; we would simply like to regularise practices that have already occurred in the journal at certain points such as review essays and theme issues. We look forward to continue to produce the high-quality articles people have come to expect from *Left History*. It is an extremely exciting time to be engaged in historical analysis and perhaps it is only now that Chateaubriand's conception of the historian can be realised. We can only hope that *Left History* helps provide a medium for that historian to appear and avenge the people.

The Editors  
March 2003