

Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (London and New York: Routledge 1994)

Joanna Bourke's work on the twentieth century British working class is history from below with a vengeance, but unlike many studies with a similar starting point, it exhibits little interest in moving upwards from her subjects to form broader links with the traditional concepts and categories of social or labour history. Bourke's workers are individuals whose lives are rooted in the quotidian tasks of making ends meet and carving out small areas of power and autonomy, and their identity is shaped more by gender, by locale, by educational and occupational opportunities and by the domestic round than by political ideology or institutional affiliations. The work is revisionist in an unusual way: it does not so much seek to modify as to dismiss as irrelevant much of the conceptual framework shaping the historiography of modern British society, whether of left or right, whether feminist, socialist, Whig or Tory. The result is a provocative, sometimes annoying, but vigorous and interesting work, which leaves us little wiser about how organizations such as the Labour Party or the trade unions channeled working class energies into coherent and sustained activity, but a great deal more knowledgeable about the recalcitrant raw material they had to work with.

The author's chapters on the body, home, marketplace and locality reveal the more intimate and more individually based approach used to analyze the experience of manual workers and their families. A final chapter on "Britishness," far from exploring the construction of a cohesive sense of national identity, examines instead the way in which the fragmented subsets of gender, ethnicity and locality sometimes accidentally overlapped, yet just as often conflicted. The introductory quotation from the seventeenth century savant Sir Thomas Browne sums up this section: "The world I regard is myself." (170) Bourke has little time for either the onward march of Labour school or for scholars who have studied, and who emphasize, the communal solidarity of the neighborhood. Instead

of “the political, the masculine, and the consensual,” she wishes to prioritize “the private, the feminine, and the discordant,” (4) and to replace the older study of the rise of working class consciousness with the newer interpretive categories of sex and violence that she claims now dominate modern historical research. At first sight her suggestion that the body replace class as the primary locus of historical investigation prepares the reader for a reworking of recent gender/class debates, until the full extent of her Hobbesian vision of how society works becomes apparent. In her discussion of gender relations within the home, for example, she wastes no time in waxing indignant over the separate spheres, rejects any romanticized notion of a sisterhood of working class wives, and sets to work to show how working class women as individuals operated in a hard-eyed, calculative way to wrest autonomy for themselves and build up domestic power over husbands, sons, and elder daughters. She interprets the “working class community” of much research as a nostalgic and retrospective construct, substituting instead the morally neutral term of “locality,” where neighbors and kin could be either allies or competitors in the fight to scratch out a living, but were rarely uncomplicated friends, and where solidarity was usually invoked for purely instrumentalist purposes.

The work is built upon a large range of autobiographies and memoirs from the period, supplemented by many journals and books of the time devoted to specific social problems or specific groups within the working class. Although some manuscript collections are used, the larger oral history archives in England seem to have been ignored, and some strange omissions — such as Paul Thompson’s path-breaking work on the Edwardians — can be noted in the otherwise impressive bibliography. In each of the chapters Bourke provides a useful overview of the main legislative changes and socioeconomic trends which helped shape and set the limits on the topic under discussion. Having provided the structure, she then explores how and why working class individuals made their choices and acted within these constraints to maximize their personal welfare and security.

The focus of the discussion throughout is on the minutiae of daily life among the manual working class, yet it takes on a cumulative grandeur, as the battles Bourke examines are real and important — indeed, she argues, central — to the author's subjects: the control of sex and sexual behavior, power and authority in the family, opportunities for social and economic advancement within the labour market, status within the neighborhood, and so on. This is a politics of everyday life that displays a sophistication in dealing with interest groups, points of leverage, negotiating strategies, hegemonic and subordinate discourses, and socioeconomic constraints that one usually associates with innovative histories dealing with wider issues in politics, society or culture. In its deftness and its perceptive handling of the personal, the book brings to mind some of the work of French historians on similar themes, but in Bourke's case it is underpinned by a solid and impressive British empiricism. On virtually every page is an interpretation or analysis or insight that emerges smoothly from the carefully selected evidence. The material never gets bogged down in an antiquarianism of urban and industrial life, yet the hypotheses are firmly anchored to fact.

Where, however, does such an investigation of individuals "stripped of ... institutional affiliations" (1) finally get us? If we are in agreement with Peter Stearns' assertion that "the menarche should be as important as the monarch" in historical research, then Bourke's work is, in its own terms, total and self-contained history. Yet her concise overviews of the wider changes in British society in the twentieth century — rising real incomes, State welfare programs, the move from inner city slums to council estates, growing opportunities for further education, the effect of two major wars — which shaped the environment within which individuals operated, appear as *dei ex machinis* rather than as, in many cases, the result of concerted action by the members of this "class" or "community" as a whole. It may well be that the latter concepts are built from diverse and conflicting fragments, and are usually viewed through the lens of nostalgic retrospection, but nonetheless, on Bourke's own evidence, they existed, and they were actual and

powerful forces in the channeling of individual desires into effective action and long term programs during this period. *Working Class Cultures* shows us how complex, non-determined and conflictual any historical treatment of the construction of common activity would have to be. It is an excellent corrective to the vague and simplistic generalizations of some modern British social and labour history. But it does not invalidate that need to connect individual experience, outlook and behavior to larger trends and developments over time which lies at the heart of the historical enterprise.

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Ward Churchill, *Indians Are Us? Culture and Genocide in Native North America* (Toronto: Between the Lines 1994)

In this collection of essays Ward Churchill, a Co-Director of the American Indian Movement of Colorado and an associate professor of American Indian Studies and Communications at the University of Colorado/Boulder, revisits a set of intellectual and political issues that have featured prominently in debates between American Indian activists and academics in recent years. Of central concern to Churchill is the manner in which Euroamericans' past and present cultural representations of Native North American peoples reflect and sustain a set of genocidal proclivities that continue to operate and to reinforce one another at several levels within contemporary North American society. He also devotes approximately equal attention to naming and describing the practices of "a whole herd of hang-around-the-forts, sell-outs and 'nickel' Indians" whose "collective negative example" he cites in the acknowledgments as having done much to propel this book to completion. These twin targets for cultural and political critique come in for a ranging examination that is buttressed by large numbers of footnoted secondary sources and cadenced with