

**Crocker, Ruth Hutchinson. *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889–1930.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Black and white photographs, bibliography, index. US \$39.95 (cloth)**  
**Stadum, Beverly. *Poor Women and their Families: Hard-Working Charity Cases, 1900–1930.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992. Pp. xxviii, 235. Index. US \$16.95 (paper)**

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reduced the size of working-class families in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Seccombe's explanation of this process of "starting to stop," what he calls an "un-immaculate reconception," stresses the reciprocities of the working-class bed, where economic necessity met sexual agency in tempering male desire and enhancing women's wants.

Many will find Seccombe's conclusions on change and the reconstitution of the family engrossing in light of concerns with familial breakdown since the 1960s. But, compared to his pains to rethink the long history of family formation, these last pages are suggestive rather than substantive. They open important questions, to be sure, but they do so in ways that strain credibility. Seccombe's statement that "the overall division of labour between spouses is probably more unequal now than in the 1950s" flies directly in the face of much that is happening in working-class households, whatever the persistence of gender roles, and seems less a judgement of actuality and more a statement of political purpose in which the male academic makes plain his gender allegiance.

Because so much more is there, in terms of engagement with a host of conflicting analytic positions, and because Seccombe is usually attentive to counter-evidence, the tilt of the text is not overly off-putting. I found myself less irritated by unsubstantiated assumptions about the masculinist bias of modern labour historians (p. 148) or his blunt generalization that working-class families were ordered by the subordination of everyone's needs to the imperative of replenishing the main breadwinner's labour-power (p. 155), than I was with his somewhat cavalier, and certainly decontextualized, caricature of Klara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg as "party luminaries" crusading against birth control (p. 165) or his willingness to

abandon political and conceptual meaning in a trendy slap at marxism's understanding of class consciousness. In the former instances my disagreements could engage with the entirety of his presentation, whereas in the latter there was in fact little to grapple with save for Seccombe's grinding political axe.

In the final pages, the nuances, reciprocities, and relational developments central to Seccombe's understanding of family formation too often fade into fashionable formulae. Thus, his conclusions concerning gender struggle and fertility decline are, in the substantive chapter on this process, a balanced treatment of the political economy of family formation, exploring the structural constraints and necessities of productive life and the give-and-take of gendered difference within the household. "Husbands were prepared to temper, if not to surrender entirely, their right to incautious intercourse; and wives were better able to insist on restraint when they could appeal to a mutual interest." (p. 193) Pages later Seccombe loosens his political tongue and argues that "the fertility decline was instigated by married women who refused to carry pregnancies to term and became increasingly insistent that husbands exercise sexual restraint.... Most of the major changes in modern family life have been driven by women." (p. 210)

Fortunately, Seccombe's two books present sufficient evidence and analysis to challenge this interpretive bluntness and suggest that historical outcome is not reduced to a gendered choice (and that coming from the gendered sphere acknowledged to have the least access to power). Rather, it is the product of critical negotiations — some direct, but most mediated — involving men and women caught up in the constraints and imbalances of ideology and economy, mutuality and separation. Like no other texts,

Seccombe's two volumes remind us that men and women make all aspects of their history, including themselves, but that they never quite do this just as they please.

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**Crocker, Ruth Hutchinson. *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Black and white photographs, bibliography, index. US \$39.95 (cloth).**

**Stadum, Beverly. *Poor Women and their Families: Hard-Working Charity Cases, 1900-1930*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992. Pp. xxviii, 235. Index. US \$16.95 (paper).**

Ruth Crocker allows social workers such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelly to keep their place among the ranks of urban heroes, but in *Social Work and Social Order*, she strips the laurels from the brows of the settlement movement's "B" team. Beverly Stadum, meanwhile, honours a group of ordinary heroes: women who used charity services, including settlement houses, to cope with poverty. Reading the two books together draws attention to welfare relationships between 1900 and 1930, relationships that helped form the social hierarchies and experiences of poverty in the early twentieth century city.

Stadum's argument is a challenge to the depiction of welfare recipients as dependent. Against the enduring right-wing stereotype of poor women as helpless, lazy, and chronically reliant on handouts, Stadum describes a highly resourceful group of working-class women, for whom

## ***Book Reviews / Comptes rendus***

charity was of marginal use. Stadum's data were drawn from case files of the Minneapolis Family Welfare Association, sampled to represent three household forms ("intact" family, family headed by a widow, or one headed by a once-married, now solo mother) and two chronological cohorts (one whose cases were opened in 1900-1910 and another of cases dating from 1920-1930). Loosely reflecting Minneapolis's population, these files represented mainly American-born and overwhelmingly white women. Among the 300 women whose files were in her sample, Stadum argues, the constants of poverty were more notable than diversity among household types or change over time. These constants included victimization — by male kin, employers, and social workers. But also recurring were tactics of mutual assistance and negotiation and qualities of hope, initiative, and independence.

Although offering points for comparison with Stadum's book, Crocker's addresses an entirely different question. That is, were American settlement houses in their early years really anti-racist, culturally pluralist, social democratic, feminist agencies that only later declined into conservatism? Her answer is "no." Examining seven different settlements in Indianapolis and Gary, Indiana, Crocker argues that, in these smaller cities, settlement houses were from their beginnings allied with conservative forces: business, churches, Charity Organization Societies, and collaborationist black elites. Consequently, the work these settlements did centred on adjustment and uplift, confirming rather than challenging the subordinate social place of most African-Americans and working-class, usually immigrant women. Assistance to immigrants generally was tied closely to **Americanization**. While she describes Americanization campaigns as having become especially intolerant during the Red Scare of the 1920s, Crocker, like

Stadum, points to continuities with the pre-war practices.

Crocker's argument goes to show that the settlement movement was not in its essence a reform movement. Backing from churches meant that settlements served as agents of proselytizing and recruitment, not social change. The work with immigrants was not meant to fashion a culturally diverse America, but was "cultural imperialism." (p. 214) The declared goal of one settlement house — "to work for the clearing away of [the] shadow [of an insistent race caste]" — contrasted sharply with its actual reinforcing of segregation. (p. 92) Crocker's case against the "heroic account" of the settlement movement is sound. But, as she points out, drawing on other histories, the settlements' conservative goals were not necessarily accomplished.

Stadum's book reminds us vividly of one reason why this was so: i.e. why well-used social services, such as settlement houses, did not often successfully colonize the minds of those who took their help. Stadum's central point about the client-agency relationship is that getting help from charities was only one of many ways poor women survived, and (like all their "solutions" to poverty) taking charity was a temporary, partial recourse. Thus represented, the client-social worker relationship threatened little harm to the clients, and benefitted them mainly in narrowly practical ways. Stadum summarizes her chapters on women as mothers, as wage-earners and as wives by concluding that "each woman's life was broader than her role as 'client'," (p. 149) and only then goes on to the final chapter on women as charity recipients. In short, "'reciprocity' was not the controlling dynamic in the household" (p. 155). This meant that, whether or not social workers aggressively promoted strange values, the women they helped were able to resist what they resented. Resis-

tance was possible because even the most material help the charity offered was essentially only temporary.

This client-centred perspective on early twentieth century welfare practices corrects an excessive view of the cultural power of the middle class. And yet, Stadum may understate the ill effects of social work's cultural imperialism. This is not to say that Stadum fails to report the struggles and the frequent ill feeling in the client-social worker relationships she studied. But she appears not to find these harmful. By contrast, British historian Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* reminds us, for example, that, in the context of a class society, a labourer's child may learn a certain self-hatred by only once observing an officious helper's attempt to humiliate her mother. While independent-minded adult women may have been able to dismiss social workers' tutting and tsk-tsking, the children of these families may not have. If client-social worker tensions made children feel bad, then Stadum's portrayal of feisty mothers tends to confirm, in spite of her interpretation, that welfare services exacted from their clients an intangible price for the practical benefits they offered.

While both Crocker's and Stadum's interpretations stress continuities in the experience of poverty and the purposes of the settlements, each also remarks on changes in other areas. For instance, Crocker notes that various settlements began with grassroots funding but became stable only with support from big business, the community chest, or a large church. On the significance of this change in funding, she agrees with Judith Trolander and Roy Lubove: more conservative funding sources narrowed what few openings the settlement houses had provided for staff and clients to transcend the directors' missions of control and conversion. So, in spite of her hav-

ing argued against a pre-lapsarian state of reform grace, Crocker must allow that, in most of her seven cases, there was at least a shift from one kind of conservatism to another, or from mild variety to a severe one. These are not the dramatic changes in social relations that figure in the Hull-House-centred historiography. But perhaps in Crocker's smaller cities, subtler shifts were important ones. Where even a thin version of respect for immigrants or an old-fashioned variant of women's power was remarkable before the 1920s, so too would have been the repression in the 1920s of these small innovations.

With respect to the client-social worker relationship, the main change Stadum observes in the lives of "hard working charity cases" is that the 1920s cohort was less likely to get "practical services" from their social workers. Stadum's interpretation of these data shows very clearly the influence of present-day social work precepts. Today's social worker may be taught (at least in a feminist social work course) that the best the professional can offer is unobtrusively to assist clients in their own self-help initiatives. Compared with that approach, neither the sending of pre-determined grocery orders nor the scientific investigation of a poor woman's life is politically acceptable. As Stadum points out, in both of these older modes of social work practice, the hierarchy was the same. But this political judgement, with which I agree, unfortunately relieves Stadum from discussing the historical meaning of the change.

For historians of Canadian cities, both of these histories confirm that research in "marginal" areas is valuable. For example, Stadum's book echoes some of Suzanne Morton's more historically-situated findings about the lives of working-class Halifax women in the 1920s. And Crocker's depiction of the settlement

houses allows us to see that religious enterprises such as Winnipeg's All Peoples' Mission and Halifax's Jost Mission were representative of part of the North American settlement house movement. In other words, by analysing places other than the acknowledged centres of social change and people other than the well-known heroes, these American historians have demonstrated what all Canadians should know: that "central" is not typical.

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Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, and Madeline D. Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993. Pp. xvii, 434. 16 black and white plates, bibliography, index. \$37.50(Cloth).

The development of contemporary gay and lesbian communities has been traced by historians of sexuality to the upper-class lesbian salons of Paris in the 1920s and to the military single-sex communities of the 1940s. Here we have a very important study documenting a competing predecessor, namely the working-class lesbian communities organized around downtown bars in the 1940s and 1950s. Kennedy and Davis' careful and massively detailed study of the women who socialized in Buffalo bars in the days before gay liberation argues that the young women who in the 1970s established lesbian-feminist communities eschewing the butch-fem roles of earlier lesbian cultures owe more to their foremothers than has hitherto been acknowledged.

The study is based on a relatively small number of lengthy and intensive oral his-

stories, usually gathered over a series of interviews. The authors clearly experienced difficulties in getting women to begin talking—many were suspicious of academic studies, some were afraid of exposure, others were simply not interested in recounting the details of a life that they now regard as a closed chapter. But once sitting down in front of a tape recorder, these women talked and talked, engaging in lengthy and sometimes self-critical analyses of the mores of the golden era of the "diesel dyke." The authors deserve credit for letting their sources do a great deal of the analysis, not just the storytelling.

During the period covered in this study (1940 to 1960), women who wanted to be part of the women-loving community had to choose between being butch, and hence adopting certain hypermasculine behaviours, or else being a fem and having to constantly defer to butches. This study shows that many of the women felt this to be unnecessarily restrictive: a good number changed roles depending on the situation, and some dressed butch but acted fem or viceversa. While playing around with the binary opposition, however, women did not seriously question it. The authors imply that it was only with the rise of a strong women's movement, in the late sixties, that it became possible for women to love other women without constructing themselves as either masculine or feminine. And yet, the butches were not simply imitating men: as the authors point out, they were very clearly distinct from those women who disguised their sex and passed as men. One of this book's most valuable contributions is revealing the complexities of the butch identity assumed by women who wanted to act like men and yet still be perceived as women, not men. Many butches, for instance, acknowledged that they wanted to be mothers, and some were. *And the butch* sexual style, which revolved around