

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Lagemann, Ellen Condliffe. *A Generation of Women: Education in the Lives of Progressive Reformers*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. viii, 207. Illustrations. \$15.00

Wendy Mitchinson

Aspects of Urban Heritage  
Volume 9, Number 2, October 1980

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019344ar>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019344ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

### ISSN

0703-0428 (print)  
1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Mitchinson, W. (1980). Review of [Lagemann, Ellen Condliffe. *A Generation of Women: Education in the Lives of Progressive Reformers*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. viii, 207. Illustrations. \$15.00]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 9(2), 145–146.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1019344ar>

synthesis of the analysis or suggestions for future research. Nor are the implications of the processes outlined in the book fully examined. Finally, while some attention is paid to research on transit development in European cities, no mention is made of the several Canadian studies in this field.\* Nevertheless, the strengths of this volume far outweigh its weaknesses. It may be recommended highly, not only to students of urban mass transit, but also to all who pursue historical urban research. Our field of study could use many more comparative investigations of this type. It is to be hoped that *Moving the Masses* represents the wave of the future.

---

\* Such works include Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888-1897* (Toronto, 1977); M.J. Doucet, "Mass Transit and the Failure of Private Ownership: The Case of Toronto in the Early Twentieth Century," *Urban History Review*, 3-77 (1978), pp. 3-33; and D.F. Davis, "Mass Transit and Private Ownership: An Alternative Perspective on the Case of Toronto," *Urban History Review*, 3-78 (1979), pp. 60-98.

Michael J. Doucet  
 Department of Geography  
 Ryerson Polytechnical Institute

\* \* \*

Lagemann, Ellen Condliffe. *A Generation of Women: Education in the Lives of Progressive Reformers.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. viii, 207. Illustrations. \$15.00.

*A Generation of Women* examines the lives of Grace Dodge, Maud Nathan, Lillian Wald, Leonora O'Reilly, and Rose Schneiderman. As progressives all had "a compelling interest in finding solutions to the social problems of the day." Dodge was involved in the New York Association of Working Girls' Societies, the New York College for the Training of Teachers, and the YWCA. Wald founded the Henry Street Settlement House; Nathan was a moving force in the Consumers' League, and both O'Reilly and Schneiderman were committed to the Women's Trade Union League.

The book focusses on the educational development of the five women, education being broadly defined as the "process of interaction by which individual potential (instincts, propensities, talents) is activated, shaped, or channeled and a change (an observable or consciously felt difference) thereby produced in the self." Unfortunately in looking for the changes which occurred in these women, the author tries to "psychologize" each experience, to assess whether it was indeed significant. As a result the book often loses sight of the wider social context in which all five women acted. For example, we learn very little about the progressive era from this book on progressive reformers. Even the life of each woman is somewhat distorted. Each did so much, but because the focus is on "turning points," accomplishments become mere recitals of tasks done and lessons learned. The spark of individuality is lost.

Despite these difficulties *A Generation of Women* does raise important points. It concludes that formal education in itself was

not significant in the lives of the five women. What formed and developed their characters, what gave them the will to persevere were strong inter-personal relationships. The most significant of these was the familial. Within the family each woman developed a strong identity, a sense of herself as an individual, nurtured by the support and encouragement given to her by family members. This instilled in the women confidence to experiment, to push themselves beyond accepted limits, and, as their efforts were met with success, to go further afield.

The second relationship important in their educational development was that of mentor/protégée. A mentor was usually an older woman who took an interest in the younger, instructed her, directed her efforts, encouraged her, and provided her with a role model. Since in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was difficult for women to think that life offered them any fulfillment outside the home, it was crucial that the mentors of the five women studied revealed that role models other than the maternal one existed.

These mentors were all involved in the social service field, a sphere that was seen as an extension of woman's domestic world. The volunteer organizations which emerged from it needed new recruits, new workers with dedication, and those in charge were always on the lookout for such women. Nathan, Wald, Dodge, O'Reilly, and Schneiderman were fortunate - they were discovered. However, the reader cannot help but wonder about the many women who never received encouragement along the way. The success of the five

women seems fragile in so many respects, dependent on being surrounded by people who provided them with the emotional support necessary for the development of self-confidence.

By stressing the significance of personal relationships in the educational growth of these women, *A Generation of Women* raises the question of what the purpose of an institutional framework such as a school system is. It is simply to impart knowledge or is it to develop and mold character as so many in the nineteenth century hoped it would? If the latter, it failed, at least for these women. Was this because they were women and the system as such was not designed with them in mind or was the failure applicable to men as well? *A Generation of Women* does not answer these questions, but in raising them it forces educational history to assume an energetic dimension hitherto unrealized.

Wendy Mitchinson  
Department of History  
University of Windsor

\* \* \*

Hurt, J.S. *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes, 1860-1918*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul [Toronto: University of Toronto Press], 1979. Pp. x, 241.

Today education in England, like that in Canada, is based on two fundamental assumptions. The first of these is that equality of educational opportunity is a right. The individual in each country is presumed to be educable until proved otherwise. The second assumption is that the government has a greater right than do the child's parents to determine how a child is to be schooled. In both