

In chapter nine, Jones sums up her study and draws her conclusions. "What is the upshot of our investigation", she asks. "I conclude", she goes on, "that the level of living attained on the eve of the American Revolution by typical free colonists, even the 'poor' ones, was substantial. It included sufficient food and drink, including meat, cider, and often strong liquors, candles and sometimes oil lamps for lighting" (p. 340). Perhaps the author will allow those of us who deny that her "typical free colonists" ever lived — except, of course, in the imaginings of the abstracted and fantastic world of statisticians — to concur that there is something inspiring and uplifting in the view that in early America "the level of living, even of the 'poor', was usually sufficient for vigorous activity" (p. 341).

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P.-A. LINTEAU, RENÉ DUROCHER and J.-C. ROBERT, *Histoire du Québec contemporain: de la Confédération à la crise (1867-1929)*. Ville Saint-Laurent, Québec: Les Éditions du Boréal Express, 1979. Pp. 660.

This mammoth volume is a long overdue breath of fresh air in the study of the history of Quebec. Examining only the period 1867-1929, the authors have drawn together the findings of much contemporary research to dispel some of the hoary myths that have dominated too many previous textbooks. For students outside Quebec this work is a welcome and valuable correction to the narrow distortions that riddle Mason Wade's *The French Canadians 1760-1967*.

*Histoire du Québec contemporain* is broad in scope, almost too broad, focussing on the economic and social development of the province with some discussion of cultural, literary and artistic achievements during the period. The dominant concerns of the authors are with population growth and distribution, economic change through industrialization, urbanization, education, the labour and women's movements, and the changing role of the provincial government in a society that is itself being rapidly altered in nature. The central theme of this book is a consideration of the process and dynamic of social and economic transformation in the first phase of industrialization.

In this regard, *Histoire du Québec contemporain* provides a cogent picture of the arrival of industrial technology in the province in the last third of the nineteenth century. Quebec did not enter the so-called modern industrial age in 1960, as some would have it, but faced the crisis of industrial and urban growth at the same time as Ontario with about the same consequences and problems. The authors rightly stress that timing was the crucial factor. Quebec moved from artisan craft production to large-scale industrial factory production abruptly. The technology and necessary capital came from outside while the local, predominantly French, population provided the requisite pool of unskilled or semi-skilled labour vital to the success of early capitalist ventures. Once the process had begun, it was difficult if not impossible to reverse or even slow its relentless progress. Well before the turn of the twentieth century the economy of Quebec was being transformed by industrialization, but in such a way as to result in economic control and expertise resting with non-French Canadians aided and abetted by provincial politicians, who at best thought they were bringing prosperity to the province and at worst saw an opportunity to ensure their personal fortunes by providing a political climate

favourable to the interests of international big business and capital. As Michael Bliss so ably demonstrated in his critical study, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business 1883-1911*, nineteenth-century capitalists permitted no national sentiment to cloud their visions of progress and prosperity, a view that most leading politicians, at every level, endorsed.

By illuminating the Quebec experience and attempting to place it in its cultural context, the authors go a long way toward explaining in precisely what ways the impact of industrial growth in Quebec was different from the Ontario example. To appreciate fully this argument, however, the book tends to assume some prior knowledge on the part of the reader. The connection between the social and economic impact of industrial development on the Québécois, large-scale foreign ownership of factories and natural resources and the economic-centred nationalism of twentieth-century Quebec is clear more by implication than demonstration. Yet in providing considerable discussion of the role of the provincial government in the process, particularly the personal and financial links between cabinet members and big business, the authors open the way to examining the pattern of industrial and urban growth in Quebec with far greater precision and perception than previous textbook treatments. Terry Copp's *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* exposed many of the problems that *Histoire du Québec contemporain* explores.

There is, however, a major weakness in this exposition of the impact of industrialization: the organization and methodology of the book itself. *Histoire du Québec contemporain* is divided into three parts: an overview of the geography, natural resources and population of the province; and sections on the periods 1867-96 and 1896-1929, outlining the economy, society, politics, and culture and ideology in each period. In many ways this is overly ambitious. To make this book in any way manageable, each section, and the many sub-sections in each, becomes a catalogue of information, an outline of a problem rather than the detailed development and resolution of a historical problem. By recounting rather than critically assessing contemporary scholarship, the book is a curious blend of old and new, raising more questions than are answered. To be fair, a textbook should provide a solid outline while detailed analysis can follow in the monographs of others; and yet *Histoire du Québec contemporain* has about it the aura of missed opportunities.

Methodologically, the statistical data that loom large in this work constitute much of what is new and important in the book. In the past, textbooks on this period have relied on impressions, sometimes false, about the nature and scope of industrialization and its impact. This book presents in clear form concrete information about population, about government revenues and expenditures, about the economic growth in the period and who prospered from it, and much more as well. Frequently, however, the data are permitted to overshadow elucidation or explanation. Statistics set out in neat tables by themselves do not fully inform; they need to be integrated tightly with the analysis. This quantitative approach, though valuable in some contexts, demonstrates its ineffectiveness when the authors turn to intellectual and cultural problems, particularly with regard to the role of the Church in Quebec society and the intricacies of nationalist ideology in this period of the province's history. Often the treatment *Histoire du Québec contemporain* accords to these issues does not advance our understanding or knowledge. For example, in the all too brief discussions of the career and influence of abbé Lionel Groulx, this work does little to challenge the cliché that Groulx represented a conservative clerical nationalist view that, in rejecting the horrors of the modern age, wanted to retreat to some idealized rural golden age of the past. Likewise, the place, role and power of the Church in the period 1867-1929 is inadequately explored. Granted,

competent studies on church affairs are few in number, but significant work that has been done (by Roberto Perin on M<sup>re</sup> Bourget, for example) has been largely ignored. The bibliographical entries at the end of these sections are overly burdened with dated scholarship. Finally, because of the compendium approach to the book itself, and its emphasis on social and economic concerns, the ideological and clerical components of Quebec's past are treated in isolation from the larger global contexts of both nationalism and church history between 1867 and 1929. Just as the economic and social changes that occurred in Quebec were part of a general transformation of western society by industrialization, so, too, was Quebec buffeted by all the intellectual currents that swept Europe and North America in the nineteenth century, ideas and influences that embraced both secular and Catholic notions. To fail to make this clear is to leave the intellectual history of Quebec out of the mainstream of western developments, allowing the province to be treated, as it has been in so many previous cases, as a strange exotic divorced from the experience of the rest of North America and the reality of its time. While Linteau, Durocher and Robert are successful in piercing the haze of mystery surrounding much of Quebec's economic, social and political development in the period, they have not achieved a comparable result when dealing with culture, Catholicism and nationalism.

On balance, as a textbook, *Histoire du Québec contemporain* is a success. Textbooks by their very nature never answer all the questions or explore all the problems. To the extent that this book has opened new themes and presented a fresh approach to the past, especially on the economic and social history of Quebec, it is an important contribution to recent scholarship. Its weaknesses leave room and scope for more work to be done by others with, one would hope, as much care.

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HARVEY J. GRAFF. — *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City*. New York: Academic Press, 1979. Pp. xxii, 352.

Graff's polemic on literacy, much-debated and by now often attacked, raises three distinct questions:

- (1) Does his evidence, drawn from certain nineteenth-century Ontario cities, really show that education for literacy conferred few unique advantages on working people in industrializing cities?
- (2) Does his narrative evidence, drawn from the mouths of Canadian and other school promoters, really suggest that those people imposed literacy education in order to domesticate the "dangerous" working classes?
- (3) Is there some larger frame of reference into which Graff's concerns might be translated, and what would be the appropriate research strategy for such a frame?

Answers to the first two questions can focus our speculations about the third. Graff argues that ascriptive status, not just literacy, gave people advantages. His data also support an alternative formulation, which he begins to state: illiterates had real options, but these options varied with ethnic or class context. The uses of literacy also varied between groups. Often, school promoters who thought to con-