**Hogan (2016) on Gabin (1990)**

Nancy Gabin and I have been friends and colleagues since long before our first books (Gabin 1990; Hogan 1990) came out. We were both part of the New Social History, but 1990 was when the New Western History (Limerick and others) came out, during the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism (Hartmann and others). Nancy’s book was more timely than mine, in many ways, since it represented a new sort of intersectionality (Patricia Hill-Collins, Myra Marx Ferree, and others)—the intersection of labor history and feminist history. Since we have already read Green and have been alerted to Dubofsky and Montgomery—all part of the new labor history, perhaps I should say a few words about feminist history and the history of feminism.

Feminist theory (in sociology and more generally) is a diverse set of theories, ranging from liberal functional/conflict theory (Elizabeth Garnsey: macro and structural) to conservative (Mary Douglas) and radical (West and Zimmerman) phenomenological—micro and anti-structural, to just plain radical (Dorothy Smith and Myra Marx Ferre). What unites these diverse and frequently contradictory theories into the feminist brand is a focus on women and a political position on the fact that women have been ignored, degraded, or trivialized—often infantilized or hyper-sexualized by serious social scientific and historical analysts.

Lengerman and Niebrugge-Brantley have argued that the focus on women includes the questions:

“Where are the women?”

“What is their situation or circumstance?”

“How is that different from men?”

“How is that unequal to that of men?”

Since history and social science (and psychology) is written by and for men, about men, it is necessary for feminists to deconstruct and reconstruct masculine history with a feminist history that is also a history of feminism. Here the Rights of Men (Locke, Rousseau, Paine) are contrasted with the Rights of Women (Wollstonecraft). The Garrisons and Browns (abolitionists) are contrasted with the Grimké sisters, etc.

Gabin (1990) is a feminist history and a history of feminism, but it is revisionist on both fronts. The history of feminism begins with liberal enlightenment theory (Wollstonecraft) and moves through the doldrums of the 19th century (Margaret Fuller) and abolitionism, toward Seneca Falls and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, then toward Susan B. Anthony and suffragettes—treading lightly on WCTU, temperance, prohibition, and genetic engineering/birth control.

Gabin tells a history of women with their work clothes on. These are women who are workers as well as mothers and wives, who support unionism long before they consider feminism, who are blue collar pragmatists, more likely to listen to a lunch pail socialist than a literary society dame. These women are strong and brave but tend to prefer the company of men. They don’t want to join the Ladies Auxiliary but prefer to sit in with the men. Neither the men nor their wives are very supportive. The union is not supportive. All would rather keep the ladies out than welcome them in. Only the employers (sometimes) welcome the ladies into the auto or defense plants, particularly during the war—when the men are away.

Gabin tells the story of how these brave working class women who have been forgotten by labor and feminist histories were critical in the history of the labor movement and in the history of feminism. Although they were always a minority—industry-wide, even during the war, these women offer evidence to contradict the standard masculinist account of the UAW and the CIO—which we have been reading for several weeks now. They also contradict the claim that the first two waves of feminism were white and middle class—actually, they represent that period between wave one and two, when the movement was in abeyance (Rupp and Taylor), but they indicate that the unions were important abeyance structures, which were ready to seize the opportunities offered by Civil Rights legislation in the Sixties, just as they seized the opportunities offered by the Labor Rights legislation of the Thirties.

Last week we talked about some of this (amongst the guys) after watching Union Maids. Some of these question and concerns bear repeating.

1. How are the authors and subjects of these labor histories similar or different, specifically, when we look at Northern black AFL or Southern black AFL or Western white CIO unions, compared to largely white female CIO workers in the Midwest?
2. How is the stormy relationship between unionism and racism similar to or different from the relationship between unionism and sexism?
3. Where are the communists or even the socialists in the UAW? Isn’t this a CIO union?
4. Where are the blacks? Was not the UAW (but not the AFL-CIO) a supporter of the Civil Rights Movement?
5. Why would senior women support separate seniority and protective legislation? Did not the junior men support the same legislation? How did tenure, age, life-course, and gender affect interests?
6. How and why did women support unions that did not support them?
7. How did the struggle change over time: Thirties, Forties, Wartime, Peacetime, Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies?
8. How did the struggle for labor rights, civil rights, and women’s rights converge and diverge between 1848 and 1990?