

stick figure—not the King who denounced the Vietnam war and American materialism.) The women's movement is invisible. There was no mass youth upheaval—just “the radical Idea” and its larkly high jinks. No one might rationally have concluded that the Saigon government the U.S. installed was a fraud. No one could rationally have concluded that there was no political aim that could justify mass slaughter in Vietnam. Collier writes about his post-Mississippi conversion to antiwar work: “Like others, I passed through the early stages of the foreign policy debate painlessly: It was necessary to support the NLF [Vietnamese National Liberation Front] and work against the U.S.” For many others, including this reviewer, the passage through foreign policy positions was not painless, and it didn't settle with quite so much sang froid on the NLF.

“We didn't check facts very energetically,” Collier writes of his days at *Ramparts*, “and paranoia and ideology always overcame professional skepticism.” When they step away from the Stender and Weatherman stories, professional skepticism is still not doing well under the weight of the *idée fixe*. As they fling accusations around, factual botches abound (for some, see Paul Berman's review in the *New Republic* [April 24], his subsequent exchange with Collier and Horowitz [June 26], Hendrik Hertzberg's review in *Washington Monthly* [May] and his letter in the *New Republic* [July 10]). But you can't make a counterrevolution without breaking eggs, right? The Revolution is Dead, Long Live the Revolution—still absolute, still simple-minded, still global. Parachute tours of the Third World are still available for drop-in (counter)revolutionaries, this time in Nicaragua. Careers are still available in instant expertise. The world is still a faceoff between America and communism, only this time the jerseys have been switched. In this phantasmagorical light, potholes in the Berkeley streets and some other dubious policies are the result of the city government's knack for establishing sister-city arrangements in the Third World. (Let's see, then: How shall we account for potholes in New York? Ed Koch's counterrevolutionary tourism in Nicaragua?) There is no fiscal crisis, no race tension, no bureaucratic blindness.

There is just original sin: insufficient love of America, which seems to mean the American executive branch, especially its most brutal wing. Naiveté, stupidity, ignorance, cowardice, bad ideas, malice, and communism are the same. There is no tragedy, only barbarism, Fifth Columns, left-wing McCarthyism. Ideas they detest are really disease: “In the inchoate attack against authority, we had weakened our culture's immune system, making it

vulnerable to opportunistic diseases. The origins of metaphorical epidemics of crime and drugs could be traced to the Sixties, as could literal ones such as AIDS.” People caught “moral scurvy.” Christopher Hitchens is guilty of “moral epilepsy.” “The war lowered our resistance to the intellectual toxins in the air.” Their motto might as well be: *Everything hideous comes from aliens*.

The American situation today deserves the overworked word “crisis.” Poverty and wealth grow, race festers, cities rot. In racial, abortion, and other decisions, the Supreme Court turns the screw toward cultural civil war. Never mind that the cold war is clearly superannuated, both political parties refuse to whisper the secret aloud. America since the sixties is a disappointment, to put it mildly. Some of what is wrong arguably has roots in the sixties. So this is a particularly opportune, indeed necessary time to think carefully about what the sixties and the left were good and bad for. Instead, bellowing as if they were the only veterans of the sixties to wrestle with the meaning of the revolutionary idea or socialism or the United States, Collier and Horowitz give second thoughts a bad name. □

Gerda Lerner

Women's History

A HISTORY OF THEIR OWN: WOMEN IN EUROPE FROM PREHISTORY TO THE PRESENT, by Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, vol. I and vol. II. Vol. I, 591 pp., vol. II, 572 pp. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

The authors of these important and informative volumes, Bonnie S. Anderson, a historian at Brooklyn College, and Judith P. Zinsser, a member of the humanities department of the United Nations International School, came to their task because of the disparity between their traditional training in European history, which omitted the history and activities of women, and their own growing knowledge of women's history. They decided to synthesize recent scholarship in women's history in order “to counter the subtly denigrating myth that women either ‘have no history’ or have achieved little worthy of inclusion in the historical record. . . .”

They have succeeded admirably. Their book is interesting and well-based in representative scholarship in European women's history. It is an excellent introduction to the subject of European women's

history. While offering a broad overview, the authors also stress a few major themes, such as class differences, women's power and influence, and women's struggle against misogyny. Last, but by no means least, they introduce the reader to a fascinating array of individual women, some well-known, but mostly not, whom anyone would find worth knowing.

The broad thematic approach is particularly appropriate for dealing with groups of women who are not easily accessible through traditional sources. The description of "The Constants of the Peasant Woman's World: The Ninth to the Twentieth Centuries" is remarkably vivid, precise, and imaginatively reconstructed from historical, artistic, literary, folkloristic, and demographic evidence. The authors accomplish the difficult feat of reconstructing the past experiences of anonymous, often illiterate women, without portraying them merely as passive victims of circumstances. The peasant women of this account have dignity; they take pride in their work, their children, and their own contributions to family and community. The social histories of "Women of the Castles and Manors," "Women of the Salons and Parlors," and "Women of the Cities" are equally well done. Each describes women's physical setting, their work, their familial and property relations, and their ideas and intellectual strivings. We learn the exact composition of some fifteenth-century dowries in Avignon. We are told the impressive yet heartbreaking life stories of famous French courtesans in the eighteenth century and are introduced to the new opportunities and limitations under which nineteenth- and twentieth-century women struggled for education and self-support.

We empathize with the learned Renaissance women, forced to give up their sexual and familial role in order to pursue their learning. The voices of common women speak strongly and unforgettably, such as the testimony of eleven-year-old Eliza Coats, who told an English parliamentary commission in 1842 that she and her brother pushed carts loaded with coal in the mines. "It tires me a great deal, and tires my back and arms, . . . I can't read; I have never been to school. . . . I have had no shoes to go in to school. . . . I think God made the world, but I don't know where God is. I never heard of Jesus Christ."

The organization of this book departs deliberately from traditional historical patterns. The authors explain their conceptual framework in the introduction: Their central thesis is that "gender has been the most important factor in shaping the lives of European women. . . . While differences of

historical era, class, and nationality have significance for women, they are outweighed by the similarities decreed by gender. [It] gives a basic commonality to the lives of all European women." Further, "until very recently all women were defined by their relationship to men." Most women have lived their lives as members of a male-dominated family and have been responsible for childrearing and household maintenance. Women's work, whether inside the home or outside of it, has been undervalued. Most women have always had to work at other than domestic chores; the double burden "of caring for family and home and earning additional incomes has characterized the lives of most European women and differentiated them from men." Finally, the misogynist tradition, which denies women's full humanity, reappears "in every era and every European nation. . . . These negative cultural traditions have proven the most powerful and the most resistant to change."

These observations have been widely accepted by historians in the field, although many of them would include in the list of women's commodities the universal feature of control of women's sexuality and reproduction by men. In omitting this, Anderson and Zinsser follow a tradition that deals with sexuality and reproduction mostly from the demographic perspective. The more radical feminist analysis, which sees the question of sexual control by men over women as a central aspect of women's historic situation, in my opinion offers a richer and more complex perspective. But that is a matter of the authors' philosophy on which reasonable people could well disagree.

Starting from a conceptual framework that is representative of current scholarship in women's history, Anderson and Zinsser go considerably further: They conclude that the similarities of women's condition based on gender are greater than the distinctions between women based on class, nation, or historical era. This theoretical approach leads them to the novel organization of these two volumes. They tell the story of European women as an entity, not divided or significantly affected by nationality. And taking off from Joan Kelly's insightful remark that "one of the tasks of women's history is to call into question accepted schemes of periodization," they threw periodization out altogether, except for major periods such as the Middle Ages, the world from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and the modern world. Instead, they tell the story of women by concentrating on women's functions within European society. The result of this approach is ambiguous.

It is arresting, certainly, and forces our attention

away from the traditional framework of patriarchal history, which is all to the good. It places women at the center of inquiry. I am well aware of the advantages of this approach, because I organized a collection of women's history documents in this way, disregarding chronology and emphasizing aspects of the female experience as organizing principles. In the late 1970s, this approach was innovative and called attention to the continuities in the female experience, such as the sameness of housework and domestic work over several centuries. It also made the self-perceptions of women the focus of attention, especially since most of the documents in the collection were first-person accounts. These advantages still operate; but this organization is not as appropriate to a narrative history spanning more than a millennium and encompassing several national entities. The authors' disregard for national entities has the effect of emphasizing similarities while disregarding differences. This may seem to bear out the authors' thesis, but it does so at the cost of distorting the historical evidence by omission. For example, industrialization proceeded quite differently in various continental countries and in England. Yet in this account it appears that for women the process and the outcome were everywhere the same. In fact the enactment of labor-protective and mother-protective legislation varied greatly in different countries, as did the specific ways in which welfare-state legislation addressed the needs of women. This kind of specificity is lost through over-generalization.

Interestingly, the way this book is organized has the effect of contradicting the authors' thesis in regard to class. As stated above, the accounts of the various groups of women, such as peasants, ladies of the manor, urban workers, and so on, offer a vivid group portrait in which differences by class are dramatically made visible. The overall effect of this organization is to illustrate the importance of class differences among women, something the authors deny in their basic conceptual framework.

The departure from traditional chronology is probably the most problematic aspect of this book; it has the effect of flattening women's history to a degree that distorts its reality.

Women, throughout historical time, have lived in a world dominated by men. They participated in creating that world, maintaining it, transmitting its values to their children, and, within its confines, they bargained for improvements in their own conditions. One can argue, and I think Anderson and Zinsser show convincingly, that women also created what has sometimes been called a "women's culture," an alternative mode of thought and

organization, a series of "free spaces" in which women could develop their own way of life and formulate their own vision of society. Such free spaces were often seriously confined by patriarchal constraints, such as the female abbeys and convents of the early Middle Ages, or the female salons of the eighteenth century, which depended for their existence on the salonieres' ability to please the men who supported them. Above all, women have shared in the major transforming events of history, whether they caused them or not, whether they adapted or transformed them. It is this later point that is lacking in the design of this book.

The authors say persuasively, "Traditional approaches to history must be adjusted and augmented to include the female as well as the male." In these volumes they have offered us a somewhat disembodied slice of actual history, the history of women told as though the history of men did not exist. This is a useful counterweight to a centuries-old approach that presents the history of men as if it represented the history of women as well. To say that the "solution" for transforming the historical account so as to include both men and women as principal actors has eluded the authors of this book is not to say that anyone could have done much better, given the present state of scholarship in the field. They have provided us with a thoughtful and carefully selected synthesis that is not only worthwhile in its own right but challenging in the questions it raises and fails to resolve. □

Judith Stein

The Robeson Story

PAUL ROBESON, by Martin Baum Duberman. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. 804 pp. \$24.95

Martin Duberman's excellent biography supplies a great deal of new information and insight about a man previously shrouded in myth. What Paul Robeson thought is still elusive—he wrote very little and maintained a "protective secretiveness" that not even his friends could penetrate. But Duberman's sympathetic portrait of the public man facilitates interpretation.

Duberman's book benefits from but shares the limits of recent revisionist work on the Communist party (CP). This history has revealed important truths about the party's American roots—except that in these treatments communism itself tends to