

Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America

Geraldine J. Clifford

John Hopkins University Press

Baltimore, MD

2014

XX+458pp. (hardback)

ISBN: 13: 978-1-4214-1433-1

Review DOI 10.1108/HER-12-2015-0031

107

This book is the culmination of over two decades of research on women and the profession of teaching. Geraldine Clifford, a distinguished Historian of women's history, offers in this book a comprehensive and compelling history of women teachers' lives that contributes to our understanding of the sociology of a profession. It is a vivid collection that depicts the considerable impact women as teachers had on the lives of individuals, communities and cultures. The "Good Gertrudes" of the title, a term for teachers coined by the American Sociologist G. Stanley Hall, underscores the patriarchal and infantilizing view of women who made up the vast majority of the teaching workforce. Much of the text centres on the ideas and conditions that stimulated images of women teachers as kindly, obedient and sexless and their relegation to particular kinds of work such as teaching small children and being responsible for the socialization of young girls.

Evident across the 13 chapters is the extensive archival research undertaken as well as the use of oral histories and representations of women teachers in popular culture to illustrate the gradual but inevitable feminization of teaching. A key strength of this text is the skilful interweaving of examples from international contexts that further highlight the rich and complicated histories of women and teaching. The text is organized thematically and within each chapter there is attention to chronology.

Chapter 1 concentrates on the domestic environment and the convent school as appropriate sites for literate women who wanted to teach. This chapter provides a foundation for wider discussions on common schools (Chapter 2) and the domestication of women's teaching labour (Chapter 3). Across these chapters Clifford addresses the exclusion of poor and black students from these early forms of schooling but also widens her argument to account for the effects of immigration on teaching. Common themes that emerge from the individual stories presented are the low wages, low expectations and the enduring powerlessness that women faced (Chapters 4 and 5) as well as the social, economic and political restrictions women experienced because of their gender (Chapters 6 and 7). The narratives presented speak to the teachers' experiences and the often misogynistic system in which they worked. The professionalization and unionization of teaching overviewed in Chapter 8, while demonstrating the evolution of the profession, further contributes to an understanding of the complex and contradictory experiences of women teachers. These realities are further explored in Chapter 9 which documents the interactions with powerful male administrators and effectively describes the social stereotype of the teacher held by parents and communities.

Clifford describes Chapter 10 as "non-event worthy" history. Across this chapter are "local, habitual and mundane" (p. 229) stories which are, in effect, situated histories. It is in these meaningful and eventful histories, the lived lives of teachers that answers to historical questions reside. Clifford uses this chapter to contextualize women teachers' experiences through the use of memoirs, diaries and journal excerpts. Although the examples are



somewhat numerous and repetitive of the same point, the impression created is the richness of individual lives. Across Chapters 10 and 11 Clifford deals with the intersection of teaching and religious belief and shows how Christian scripts were used to further explain women's spiritual importance as teachers.

Turning her attention outwards, the focus of Clifford in Chapter 12 is the central and significant role women played in the social, political, civil and economic emancipation of women. Embedded in discourses of the civic duties of women teachers, Clifford traces the involvement of white women teachers in international feminist crusades such as suffrage, temperance and women's rights. As involved citizens, women teachers campaigned for women's property rights, the end to child labour, prison and mental health reform and abolition. A small segment of this chapter is devoted to early feminists of colour such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary-Ann Shad Cary. Clifford does explain that women of colour were reluctant to join wider movements particularly in the post-Civil War period when race relations were fraught. It is in this chapter that Clifford addresses the thesis of women's sphere of work and challenges the notion that "the rhetoric of a woman's place must be seen for the possibilities it offers, as well as the restraints it imposes" (p. 315). In the final chapter Clifford is persuasive in her argument; there are multiple ways in which the sphere of women's work widened over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to reflect the changing context of the professions for women. The core conclusion of this impressive text is: women will continue to be a majority in the teaching profession into the foreseeable future.

There is an intellectual energy about this text. It is thoroughly researched, the writing is lively, and the author skilfully weaves the personal, the political and the professional. This is an important contribution to the history of teaching and women teachers and in many ways a scholarly bookend to the impressive career of Geraldine J. Clifford.

Tanya Fitzgerald

Faculty of Education, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820-1932

Tim Allender

Manchester University Press

Manchester, UK

2016

333pp.

ISBN 978-0-7190-8579-6 (hardback)

Review DOI 10.1108/HER-10-2016-0036

Tim Allender's *Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820-1932*, is an engrossing account of state-sponsored education for women and girls in colonial India and how the same delinked itself from the state to develop its own autonomous space, over a 112-year period. Taking female education in colonial India as the backdrop, the author argues that "the interaction between state and schoolgirl created a powerful and distinctive symbiosis that evolved over time" (p. 3). In the long run, such interaction, Allender points out, demonstrated that the "colonial project remained capable of evolution, producing broader outcomes that both accentuated and reconfigured race and class and gender boundaries as they related to women and girls in India" (p. 3), a reiteration of the argument that he has made in his preceding monograph "Ruling through Education: The Politics of Schooling in the Colonial Punjab" (2006), where he made the point that colonial policies were neither uniform or preconceived and that these evolved over time. In *Learning Femininity*, Allender echoes the same contention.