
Reviews of Books

METHODS/THEORY

KERWIN LEE KLEIN. *From History to Theory*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2011. Pp. viii, 216. \$39.95.

Kerwin Lee Klein's book is a series of linked histories of words descriptive of the domain of historical self-reflection: *historiography*, *theory*, *language*, *culture*, *post-modernism*, and *memory*. These histories, spanning the last hundred years or so, are informed by the author's sure grasp of source material that ranges across varied philosophical, historical, and social scientific terrain: Klein is as at home with W. V. O. Quine as Jacques Derrida, with Clifford Geertz as Saul Friedlander.

Chapter one recounts the rise and fall of *historiography*. Poor old *historiography*, for all its faults (most notably, a tendency in the wrong hands to impose a glibly progressive sheen to the history of historical practice) was, at its best, the glue that united methodology and philosophy of history in a properly historicized self-understanding. With its demise, historians are left with an unhistorical understanding of their own practice; further, that demise has even encouraged a pervasive anti-intellectualism within the mainstream of the discipline. There is perhaps some truth in this thesis; but Klein's own work, convincingly bringing together historical and theoretical understanding even after *historiography*'s apparent demise, somewhat undermines his claim that he is doing more than tracing the rise and fall of the word *historiography*. *Pace* Klein's explicit thesis, the loss of the word does not necessitate the loss of the practice. Perhaps this is why, although Klein regrets the passing of *historiography*, it is with little more than a metaphorical shrug. The conditions of possibility underpinning *historiography* have passed, and there is simply nothing that can be done about it.

Chapters two, three, and four work together, jointly covering the development of the theory of history (or the philosophy of history, or metahistory—for to name the subject matter is to take sides in the debates here described) from the early 1940s to the end of the twentieth century. Despite Klein's claim to novelty, these are, in the main, conventional narratives. We read about the carving out of a space for analytic or critical philosophy of history in the 1940s and 1950s, and of its subsequent irrelevance; of the seizure of this intellec-

tual space by an aesthetic, linguistic approach to history in the 1960s and 1970s—insisting that what historians study (culture) and what they produce (historiography) are both forms of text to be rigorously decoded—and of the development of this language fixated approach into the relativistic contortions of postmodernism.

The impassioned argument of chapters five and six provides a welcome counterpoint to the rather bloodless succession of linguistic rises and falls traced thus far. Klein traces the development of *memory* both within and outside the academy, finding that through this and related words, academic historians have gotten themselves thoroughly entangled in desecularized—or re-enchanted—modes of history. This re-enchantment of history via the Trojan horse of *memory* follows in the wake of two religious movements: the on-going reaction to the Shoah, as examined in chapter five, and the rise of a politicized Christian conservatism, as examined in chapter six. In that last chapter, Klein leaves the dusty world of scholarly journals and professional conferences, and serves up a gripping story connecting the 1980s epidemic of repressed memories of Satanic abuse, Christian Reconstructionist attempts from the 1960s onward to reestablish the United States as a fundamentalist Christian nation rather than a liberal democracy, and contemporary attempts to overcome supposed elitist anti-Christian bigotry by rereading and thereby reclaiming American public spaces. This is how *memory*, *remembrance*, *trauma*, and *repression* are deployed in contemporary culture; and it is into this territory that academic historians have blundered in their retreat from scientism and nihilism, producing the strange blend of postmodern theory and sacred language found in “trauma studies.” Historians have fled into the primordial, warm embrace of *memory* seemingly without awareness that the critical, democratic, and cosmopolitan roots of their discipline are thereby under threat.

Klein is a liberal through and through—and not just in his antipathy to the impact of politicized religion on historical practice. Consider Klein's work as measured against Hayden White's well-known rhetorical schema of a historian's mode of explanation, mode of emplotment, and moral position. Klein seeks to explain the rise and fall of his keywords primarily by situating a word in the context of its time, thereby accounting for its “con-

ditions of (im)possibility.” His narrative form is satire—historians caught in the changing conditions of their time—even where the subject of that narrative itself represents the world as progressive and romantic (historiography), or as fallen and therefore in need of a fundamentalist return to the beginning (memory). Above all, no matter how bleak things may look for the historical practice, Klein has a liberal’s cautious hope for the future, since the one constant is change: “there will be new words.”

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PERO GAGLO DAGBOVIE. *African American History Reconsidered*. (The New Black Studies Series.) Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2010. Pp. xviii, 255. Cloth \$75.00, paper \$25.00.

In this book, Pero Gaglo Dagbovie seeks to add a new paradigm that “focuses on the role, function, and meaning of African American history over time” (p. 11) to a “new black history,” while taking a fresh look at a number of longstanding issues and problems such as the scholarship of teaching and learning that are essential to such a study. In search of a new black intellectual history, Dagbovie illustrates the popular and powerful notion articulated by the late John Hope Franklin: “every generation writes its own history.” Divided into six chapters, the book offers a refreshing look at African American history from a number of different perspectives, each in its own way central to the author’s purpose. For example, Dagbovie takes on the challenging task of unpacking the question, “What is African American history?” and all of the complexities that go along with such an intellectual undertaking.

These issues, of course, have real implications for the future study of African American history. In an especially insightful chapter on approaches to teaching and learning, Dagbovie observes that “African Americanists have not made many noticeable contributions, in terms of publications, to the important field of historical scholarship on teaching and learning” (p. 76). While I agree in the formal sense of scholarship, one could argue that organizations such as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History continue the enterprise started by Carter G. Woodson—whom Dagbovie treats extensively in this volume—that had at its center issues of teaching and learning.

This observation is important, for as Dagbovie makes clear in an equally illuminating chapter entitled “‘Ample Proof of This May Be Found’: Early Black Women Historians,” African American female educators played a crucial role in both the creation and dissemination of African American history. In the process, Dagbovie explores the important, if often undocumented, contributions of African American female teachers, historians, and bibliophiles. Pointing to a deep intellectual tradition among black women educators, Dagbovie artfully chronicles the missionary zeal

and deep understanding of the political uses of the past many of these women exhibited in their work. Although not always professionally trained, black female novelists such as Frances Harper used history as a backdrop to advance racial uplift and inspire activism. Even more illuminating is the discussion of Progressive-era black women historians like Washington, D.C. school teacher Laura Eliza Wilkes, who published a monograph in 1919 exploring the military service of African Americans in the nation’s early wars but found herself facing perceived sexism.

Dagbovie’s treatment of the circumstances surrounding the discovery of an unpublished manuscript by Woodson demonstrates one of the greatest strengths of the book: the author’s willingness to wrestle with the complex motivations and obstacles that have confronted and in many ways continue to confront historians of African descent. The desire to produce uplifting historical accounts while adhering to the academy’s demand for scholarly detachment is a study in W. E. B. Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness. Dagbovie reminds the reader that black scholars have had to balance “their radicalism with scientific scholarship and objectivity as well as their self-imposed social responsibility (as well that imposed by historical context) of representing and defending the masses of their people” (p. 79).

Throughout the book, Dagbovie illuminates two of the questions associated with African American history that go back to its mainstreaming in the 1980s: who owns black history, and who has a right to record and interpret it? In the process, he acknowledges some of the important challenges that go along with evaluating the historic mission and purpose of African American history as defined by early pioneers like Woodson, including how to make it relevant to the lives of the new “millennial” generation often chided for its lack of historical consciousness. In the final chapter, for example, Dagbovie explores the use of genocide as a framework for teaching African American history. At the same time, his re-examination of the literature on the polarizing figure of Booker T. Washington speaks to a longstanding debate among scholars about the virtues and failings of the so-called “Wizard of Tuskegee.”

Such formulations and questions make the book a highly informative and engaging read. Rich and concise, it is praiseworthy scholarship and highly recommended.

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MICHAEL ROTHBERG. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. (Cultural Memory in the Present.) Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. 2009. Pp. xvii, 379. Cloth \$70.00, paper \$24.95.

This book’s fundamental insight is extremely important: that in many cases memory is not a zero-sum endeavor in which public attention to one historical event