

Criticisms of *Oral History Theory* are minor and relate mainly to the book's format, though the book would be improved by the inclusion of charts and models that outline the theories being discussed. Models would reinforce the ideas being presented and aid students who are visual learners.

This book is an excellent reference tool for oral history students. It provides useful insight at all stages of an oral history project. Abrams' clear explanations of terminology and theories allow novices to better understand when to apply particular theories. She illuminates theory with dozens of recent examples, demonstrating how particular theories have been employed in oral history projects around the world. Abrams combines her masterful grasp of theory with practical advice to guide others. Anyone who is interested in understanding the complexities of the oral history theory would benefit from reading this book.

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Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011). 308 pp. ISBN 9780774819473 (hc), \$85.00.

Donica Belisle, an Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Athabasca University, is perhaps best known for her previous Marxist-feminist works, in article form, addressing Canadian consumerism in the early- to mid-twentieth century. Her recent book *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* does not veer from this path and serves as an assemblage of these previous arguments, taking into consideration a wide variety of companies, including Eaton's, the Hudson's Bay Company, Spencer's, Sears, Morgan's, Simpson's, Woodward's and Dupuis Frères for her present analysis. In keeping with her previous works, Belisle emphasizes the

various paternalistic and exploitative relationships found within the realm of early-twentieth century Canadian department stores, while emphasizing those cases in which these relationships were compromised.

With this work Belisle hopes to push beyond the ‘consumer-as-duped’ versus the ‘consumer-as-active’ paradigm that has dominated the landscape of Canadian consumer historiography; instead, she aims to present a portrait of early twentieth century Canadian consumerism as a complex web of business, state, and consumer interests, claiming that this approach “avoids simplistic depictions of consumers as either passive or liberated” (6). This type of approach has already been introduced in the work of both Joy Parr and Cynthia Wright, who also advocate a multi-faceted approach to studying Canadian consumerism in the twentieth century. Belisle’s study points specifically to major retail stores—here, Eaton’s and the Hudson’s Bay Company get the most attention—as epicentres of Canadian modernity during the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries; in this she draws inspiration from American historian Susan Porter Benson who focuses on American department stores during this same period and their important role as sites where issues such as modernity and gender were negotiated.¹ Making Canadian department stores even more striking as examples was, as Belisle emphasizes, their activity in all three aspects of the marketplace: production, distribution, and consumption. *Retail Nation* builds on the work of Parr and Wright who focus on post-Second World War consumerism as well as race and gender issues within Canadian consumption, respectively, but differs in that it points to the importance and centrality of mass retail during an earlier era and its influence on the development of Canadian society in later years, especially when concerning notions of gender and nationhood. As such, although Belisle’s work is somewhat repetitive in the international context, drawing heavily from American consumer historiography, it serves as a valid

1. Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890–1940* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

contribution to the Canadian discussion on historical consumerism, touching on issues that have not yet been addressed in the Canadian context.

Divided into seven chapters, *Retail Nation* covers much ground, with paternalism emerging as the pervading theme throughout most of the work. Belisle begins her book by arguing for the importance of department stores in Canadian consumer development; this is contrasted with the British and American examples wherein department stores held a far less prominent position. In an effort to explain the uniqueness of the Canadian experience, Belisle traces the post-1896 geographic and demographic evolution of Canadian settlement during and after the Sifton era, drawing parallels between the changes in consumer demand that occurred during this period and the simultaneous growth and expansion of Canadian department stores. Most interesting are the correlations Belisle reveals between stores, their commodities, and their consumers on one hand, and a burgeoning national identity on the other. As such, Belisle argues that department stores were largely responsible for creating an ideal Canadian identity and for defining “modern Canadian life as consumerist, middle class, and white” (7).

Chapters three through six focus heavily on the themes of paternalism and emotional labour, drawing heavily on both Belisle’s previous work and that of American Historian Arlie Hochschild on flight attendants in the post-war decades, and the gradual commercialization of private feelings.² Drawing attention to the inherent paternalism in relationships between male managers and both female salespersons and female customers, again drawing from the work of Benson, Belisle highlights the gender hierarchies that permeated department stores during this period. Contemporary assumptions of female intellectual inferiority and the belief that women belonged within

² See Donica Belisle, “A Labour Force For the Consumer Century: Commodification in Canada’s Largest Department Stores, 1890-1940,” *Labour / Le Travail*, 58, 2 (Fall 2006): 107-44; Donica Belisle, “Negotiating Paternalism: Women and Canada’s Largest Department Store, 1890-1940,” *Journal Of Women’s History*, 19, 1 (Spring 2007): 58-81; and Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

the domestic sphere translated into a system where women rarely achieved management roles. Of course, these pro-male environments were further buttressed by racial and class hierarchies that were reinforced in a similar manner. Belisle accuses early department stores of using promotional materials to portray “First Nations people as pre-modern, Africans and Asians as labourers, and whites as consumers. . . [thus] department stores suggested how mass merchandising helped to establish modern European civilization. This political economy drew upon imperialist legacies in its construction of race hierarchies” (69). It is in these discussions that Belisle is at her strongest, relying on her extensive research on the issue of paternalism, and revealing the more oppressive aspects of early twentieth century Canadian retail.

Belisle’s final chapter analyzes the response of those who were critical of department stores and the rise of mass retail. For many Canadians, the hedonistic consumerism associated with the monumental shrines of shopping was viewed as a danger to the purity and wholesomeness of white women. Other social reformers and labour leaders viewed the mass retailers as a threat to the development and sustainability of small, local businesses. Belisle argues that while these critiques were prominent and widespread, they were never able to significantly hold back the development and growth of big stores. This was largely due to the critics’ failure to address and find a competitive solution to the convenience and selection offered by retailers like Eaton’s or the HBC, and their failure to gain government support in their struggle against Big Business.

Retail Nation offers readers an extensive look at the rise and development of mass retail culture in early twentieth-century Canada. While self-admittedly the author focuses mostly on Anglophone examples, insight into the Francophone experience is still offered with examples from Dupuis-Frères, the major French-Canadian department store of this era. Belisle’s analysis is also heavily weighted towards the feminist perspective and the exploitation of women as both labourers and consumers within the sphere of department stores; as such, issues of masculinity and mass retail culture tend to fall to the wayside. There is much work to be done in this area in the future,

including further investigation into the links between mass retail and early-twentieth century constructions of masculinity. In terms of analysis, *Retail Nation* draws heavily from American historiography on consumer culture, and from Belisle's own previously published articles, making it somewhat redundant both in terms of a contribution to the international historiography of consumerism during this period and those contributions already made by Belisle to the Canadian historiography on this subject. However, to those readers unfamiliar with her work, Belisle has presented a useful contribution to the Canadian discussion, while offering a thorough explanation of existing historiography, both within and outside the Canadian context. To those readers who are familiar with Belisle's previous work, *Retail Nation* offers similar arguments but with much greater detail and more in depth analysis. Additionally, Belisle has successfully engaged with pre-existing works throughout her book, making *Retail Nation* an excellent introductory work for any student or scholar interested in consumer history both within a Canadian or an international context.

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Nancy Christie et Michael Gauvreau, *Christian Churches and Their Peoples, 1840–1965: A Social History of Religion in Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2010). 232 pp. ISBN 9780802089496 (cloth), 65,00\$; 9780802086327 (pbk), 27,95\$.

Cet ouvrage a été rédigé par deux auteurs : Michael Gauvreau, professeur en histoire de l'Université McMaster et Nancy Christie, détentrice de la bourse Eakin en études canadiennes de l'Université McGill pour l'année 2010–2011. Gauvreau et Christie sont tous deux des spécialistes de l'histoire de la religion au Canada anglais. Partageant plusieurs publications communes, ils se sont