



Your shopping cart is empty.

Fulltext search

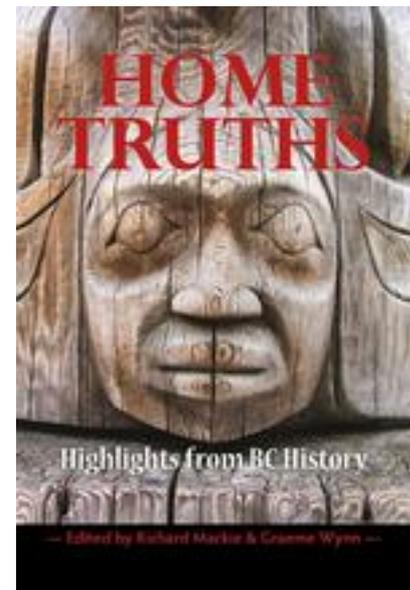
Apply

[Twitter](#)[Facebook](#)

- [About](#)
- [Issues](#)
- [Book Reviews](#)
- [Multimedia](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Submissions](#)
- [OJS](#)

- [Upcoming Book Reviews](#)
- [Search](#)

Home Truths



Edited by Richard Mackie and Graeme Wynn

[Harbour Publishing](#)

1. 1
2. 2



1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4

Equality Deferred: Sex Discrimination and British Columbia's Human Rights State, 1953-84

Equality Deferred: Sex Discrimination and British Columbia's Human Rights State, 1953-84

Dominique Clément

Reviewed by Lisa Pasolli



In Canada, Dominique Clément tells us, human rights legislation has been mainly associated with discrimination against women. In British Columbia, the women's movement was deeply invested in human rights discourse and practice, and by the 1970s gender-based discrimination cases, many of them focused on equal pay, far outnumbered those that dealt with issues of race, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation. It makes sense, then, that *Equality Deferred* tells the history of BC human rights primarily through the lens of sex discrimination. Clément's focus is on the years between 1953 and 1984 and the "competing visions" of a human rights state that the Social Credit and NDP governments sought to implement during this period.

As Clément points out, there exists no single collection of BC Human Rights Board of Inquiry decisions,

making systematic research difficult. Nevertheless, he has pulled together an impressive collection of government and private records that together document many important cases. While the first three chapters offer a lengthy discussion of pre-1953 provincial and national human rights law that could perhaps have been condensed given the book's stated focus, thereafter Clément offers a lively and important window onto the inner workings of policy and legislation. The most compelling parts of *Equality Deferred* are those that focus on the people – the administrators, members of Boards of Inquiry, lawyers – who embodied the “competing visions” of the human rights state. The ineffectiveness of the Sacred Human Rights Acts of 1969 and 1984, Clément suggests, can be explained in large part by unsympathetic administrators, most of them male. In contrast, the Human Rights Code passed by the NDP in 1973, though not without its limitations, was applied robustly for several years owing to the activist agenda of administrator Kathleen Ruff. Clément's interviews with Ruff and others provide fascinating insights into the human machinery of the state, and remind us that political history benefits from careful attention to individuals.

Historians of Canadian feminism will find much of value in this book. We have a richer understanding of groups like Vancouver Status of Women, for example, because of Clément's accounts of their role in shaping human rights legislation. Moreover, the stories narrated by Ruff and her colleagues enrich our understanding of 1970s feminism. Ruff and many of the women she recruited were veterans of the women's movement, and they believed that taking up civil service positions was one important way to effect feminist change. This was happening around the country; in Ottawa, for example, bureaucrats like Frieda Paltiel were working to implement the recommendations of the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women. Femocrats and “state feminists” like Paltiel and Ruff, not surprisingly, often saw their goals of implementing progressive social policy stymied by entrenched systems of power. Nevertheless, their efforts and struggles also need to be considered as an important part of the story of second-wave feminism, especially since grassroots activism and organizations often take centre stage in existing accounts of this period.

Equality Deferred is engaging and well researched, and offers important food for thought about the capacity of human rights legislation to actually promote equality. Throughout, Clément challenges readers to recognize the victories of the human rights state while at the same time acknowledging its inability to address systemic discrimination. Indeed, Clément suggests, the individualist and gender-neutral discourses of human rights ran, and continues to run the risk of harming rather than helping the cause of collective gender equality. *Equality Deferred* is an important contribution to the history of human rights, but just as significantly it reminds us of the contemporary opportunities and limits of a human rights state in achieving gender justice.

Dominique Clément

[*Equality Deferred: Sex Discrimination and British Columbia's Human Rights State, 1953-84*](#)

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014. 332 pp. \$34.95 paper

This review has not yet appeared in *BC Studies* and may be altered upon publication.

BC Studies: The British Columbia Quarterly

University of British Columbia | 6303 NW Marine Drive, Room 2

Vancouver BC | V6T 1Z1 | T: 604.822.3727 | E: info@bcstudies.com

© 2015 BC Studies. All Rights Reserved.

[Site Map](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Web Design by [Burst! Creative Group](#)