

**Borchert, James. *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980. Blacks in the New World Series. Pp. xiv, 317. Tables, maps, photographs**

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those ranking between 50 and 89 percent shall be considered *elite*" (p.86). This is a long way from their original usage; elite and upper class become variables along some continuum rather than two distinguishable dimensions of analysis.

The study's major findings confirm those already established within the literature but provide important documentation specifically with respect to these six cities. The major finding is that 71 per cent of the data set "were the sons of relatively well-to-do fathers already among the mercantile, manufacturing or banking elite," 13 per cent "were the sons of professional men – doctors, lawyers, ministers, and public officials, all upper-class or upper-middle class occupations in the nineteenth century," and only 6 per cent were farmers' sons and 10 per cent from blue-collar families (mainly skilled craftsmen). Since the first two categories represented only 8 and 2 per cent of the American population in the mid-nineteenth century and the latter two 59 and 31 per cent, respectively, the top 10 per cent of fathers' occupations fill 84 per cent of the elite occupations (pp. 15-19). A mere 2 per cent of the iron and steel entrepreneurs "were from identifiably poor or lower-class families" (p.79), including the widely acclaimed Carnegie brothers.

Ingham ends with four conclusions, each of which reflects a summary of his data and not a test of theory or application of analysis. They are almost trivial. First, "the role of a businessman was not confined to his activities in the business corporation alone." Indeed, Ingham does not explore their role within the business corporation, concentrating exclusively on their "interrelated social contexts." "These range from family and cultural background, to a series of social institutions – residence, school, clubs, marriage and community" (p.221). Second, and difficult to distinguish from the first, "most of these business entrepreneurs were not isolated individuals, but were members of a group, a class" (p.225). This conception of a class reduces it to a very limited notion of the social and fails to explore the political and ideological dimensions, such as their attitudes or beliefs and how these affect their behaviour. Third, "these upper-class business entrepreneurs and their families remained, despite strong class ties, very community oriented and place oriented" by which he means only a few were "cosmopolitan" (p.228). Finally, and it would have been a shock had he concluded otherwise, "there has been more continuity than change among the business elite and upper class in America" (p.231).

As urban history, *The Iron Barons* tells us surprisingly little about the six cities it studies. What effects the iron and steel elites had on each of the cities, their relationships to others within the cities, their politics and activities, even the way they thought, all are set aside. Nor are we told of their business practices and how the iron and steel industry itself changed during this crucial period.

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Borchert, James. *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980. Blacks in the New World Series. Pp.xiv, 317. Tables, maps, photographs.

Behind the imposing homes that lined the streets of Washington, D.C. were the alley dwellings of the class at the bottom of society. Black migration accompanying the Civil War and its aftermath increased the alley population which peaked in about 1897. In that year a special census conducted by the Police Department reported 18,978 alley dwellers, 93 per cent of whom were black. The campaigns waged by housing reformers and the competition for land by businesses and automobile garages gradually decreased the number of alley dwellings during the first half of the twentieth century. By 1970 some of the black "mini-ghettoes" had been transformed into expensive and highly sought-after residences for affluent Washingtonians.

James Borchert's thesis is that Washington's alley dwellers did not demonstrate the social disintegration and pathology described by middle-class students of alley life. By drawing on a rich and complex folk heritage, by utilizing survival strategies developed under slavery, and by adapting positively to urban conditions, the alley population established viable patterns of behaviour and social order.

To Progressive reformers the alley family represented "discord, disorder, and a constant seething 'mixup' of the population," but, in fact, it was a strong institution with considerable flexibility. It extended its boundaries to include relatives and even unrelated children who were generously looked after when they had nowhere else to go. Young, unmarried mothers stayed in their parents' homes, and no particular shame was attached to their situation. The fact that boarders were taken in meant that more people could be drawn on for help in times of trouble. There is some evidence to suggest that families related to one another often lived in the same alley. These extended kinship networks gave support to individuals threatened by unemployment or sickness. Reformers pointed to filthy, junk-filled back yards as outward symptoms of social breakdown, whereas they were actually "the family's savings account and insurance policy." Scrap metal, broken glass, old rags, paper, iron, and tin were potential sources of revenue. Broken orange crates were saved for fuel. The alleged overcrowding of alley households was to a large extent an illusion based on the middle-class notion that every human function requires a different room.

Discussion of the alley community, childhood, work

and household management, religion, and folklife further develops the theme that alley residents led well-integrated and well-adjusted lives. They turned the alley into a commons where children could play at a safe distance from the traffic and where adults could lounge and talk. The community transmitted its values to the young, the children being relatively impervious to the school experience. One child wrote:

For, School, is, Just, A,  
Place, For, Fools, and Fools,  
Don't Only, Go, I Go,  
And I, Am, not, A Fool.

Borchert believes that outsiders exaggerated the extent of juvenile delinquency and adult crime. Many "crimes," like numbers, craps, and drinking, were forms of recreation. Fighting reflected the tough yet proud life of alley dwellers. In alley culture the secular merged with the sacred. Worship, rituals, and the pervasive influence of music were interwoven with folk beliefs and practices.

Borchert's sources include the 1880 manuscript census, city directories, newspapers, photographs, and, most importantly, social surveys and participant-observer studies. Most of the latter were completed in either the Progressive era from 1896 to 1914 or the New Deal period of the late 1930s. The author disarmingly acknowledges the deficiencies of these source materials, but he cannot altogether dispel the doubt they cast on his conclusions. For example, in the chapter on childhood 80 per cent of the references are to four studies, three of which were completed in 1938 and the other one in 1941. Yet the generalizations apply to alley life from 1850 to 1970.

Borchert has taken the evidence contained in social surveys and used it to testify against the conclusions reached by the authors of those surveys. All of these earlier students of alley life had either obtained or were in the process of obtaining middle-class and professional positions. They looked for social disorder in the alley, and, of course, they found it. Borchert's criticism of these people, who had the advantage of being able to observe alley life first hand, is reminiscent of the work of Jacques Donzelot and Christopher Lasch. They also take to task do-gooders, social workers, and middle-class reformers. While it may be satisfying to reprimand those who presume to discipline and instruct the poor, it is also possible to romanticize an ugly situation. Borchert knows this. He wants to unearth the "beauty" of alley life without forgetting that the stench of pain is never far away. Some of his comments, however, give one pause. Did alley dwellers really consider fighting a form of recreation and vigorous exercise?

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Wright, Gwendolyn. *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago 1873-1913*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980. Pp.viii, 382. Illustrations, figures, index. \$17.50.

Domestic architecture affects everyone, and spurred on no doubt by the recent Canadian Centennial and U.S. Bicentennial celebrations, interest in historical housing styles is on the increase in North America. For the most part, however, books on the subject are elitist in focus – only the "best" architectural specimens are worthy of discussion. Richly illustrated and slickly produced coffee-table volumes abound for both Canada and the United States. Analyses of the ordinary houses of the middle and working classes are rarely encountered. In *Moralism and the Model Home* Gwendolyn Wright takes great strides to fill this lacuna. This is not simply another picture book of houses, rather it is a careful study of the dynamics of change in ordinary domestic architecture that pays particular attention to the several contexts (philosophical, social, and economic) within which this change occurred. Taken as a whole, this study represents a remarkable synthesis of materials and ideas. There is considerable food for thought here for scholars of many stripes including students of labour history, the women's movement, economic history, the history of education, urban history, urban reform, and architectural history. Architectural change was not, as Wright shows, the sole preserve of the architectural profession. Style is but one component of a city's housing stock.

*Moralism and the Model Home* is a well and imaginatively researched book. Wright's analysis,

relies primarily on three kinds of media, each dealing with housing as form and as social setting, each written by and for a different group; architectural books and periodicals, or the professional press; builders' trade journals and pattern books of house designs, or the more resolutely practical press; and domestic guides and home magazines for women, as well as other middle-class family literature, or the popular press (pp.4-5).

Other sources, such as the records of civic clubs and philanthropic organizations are also drawn into the analysis. Documentation, in the form of footnotes, runs to over fifty pages. The more than fifty diagrams and photographs are all used to complement points that are raised in the text, which is itself remarkably free from typographical errors.

Wright's book is no mere parochial study of domestic architecture, even though it is set in Chicago. The author pays particular attention to the influences exerted on Chicago housing by architectural and planning trends in other U.S. cities and in Britain and Europe. Important subjects such as furniture styles, house ornamentation, and