

Colton, Timothy J. *Big Daddy : Frederick G. Gardiner and the Building of Metropolitan Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. Pp. xii, 216

Warren Magnusson

Volume 10, Number 2, October 1981

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019099ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019099ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Magnusson, W. (1981). Review of [Colton, Timothy J. *Big Daddy : Frederick G. Gardiner and the Building of Metropolitan Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. Pp. xii, 216]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 10(2), 57–58. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019099ar>

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Colton, Timothy J. *Big Daddy: Frederick G. Gardiner and the Building of Metropolitan Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. Pp.xii, 216.

Timothy Colton's last book was on generals and commissars in the Soviet Union. Perhaps it is appropriate that he has followed it with this study of the man who promised to run Metropolitan Toronto "like Stalin" (p.80). Fred Gardiner was never quite the dictator he and his contemporaries liked to imagine, but he stands out among Canadian municipal politicians as a remarkably forceful figure. He was the C.D. Howe, if not the Stalin, of municipal government in the 1950s – able and willing to use every resource available to him to promote economic development. Unlike Howe, however, he worked from a position of relative weakness, at the head of a government with limited powers and doubtful legitimacy, without the support of a cabinet or a political party and without the formal powers usually given to a chief executive. Despite this, he was able to act with remarkable effect. There were, of course, other factors which worked in his favour, but, as Professor Colton explains, Gardiner's energy, shrewdness, and determination were crucial to his success.

Colton's book on Gardiner's career ought to be of great interest to every student of Canadian urban history. Despite its ostensibly narrow focus, it offers a more complete account of government and politics in the formative years of Metropolitan Toronto than the more general surveys like Albert Rose's *Governing Metropolitan Toronto*. For instance, Colton at last puts the formation of Metropolitan Toronto in its proper historical context. He makes clear that various schemes for metropolitan government had been under serious consideration for almost thirty years before the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto was finally established. The events of the 1930s suggest that a metropolitan government might well have been created even if there had not been a crisis in suburban servicing after World War II. Colton is able to bring this out because he was willing to do the sort of careful historical research which most political scientists would rather leave to their colleagues in other departments. At the same time, he reveals his peculiar skills as a political scientist in a careful analysis of the character of Gardiner's political leadership. There are very few accounts of political leadership in this country which are nearly as good. Colton passes beyond generalities to show exactly how Gardiner related to his executive committee, the council, his department heads, the senior governments, the press and the public; in doing so, he makes Gardiner's success explicable and illuminates the entire political process.

The biographical format allows Colton to offer a study of political leadership and an analysis of metropolitan politics in the same book, but most readers will find the purely biographical elements of this volume rather tedious. Colton writes clearly and simply, but he lacks the special skills which enable a biographer to illuminate a man and his times by focusing on the seemingly trivial details of his subject's life. In Colton's hands, the trivia remains trivia. *Big Daddy* only becomes interesting in Chapter 3, when the account of Metro Toronto begins. One wishes that Colton had given more space to the political analysis at which he excels and left the biography to someone else. A second source of frustration is that he is so reluctant to draw out the implications of the story he tells. The family history of the Gardiners provides a nice illustration of clientship in politics in Orange Toronto. Gardiner's rise in the Conservative Party and the close relation between his business and political activities are equally interesting for the light they shed on the structure of politics in Ontario. Colton, unfortunately, does not comment on such matters. This may be attributable to a political scientist's deference to historians, but even with respect to the contemporary period Colton is extremely cautious. He does bring out the fact that Gardiner's policies in relation to public housing, urban renewal, mass transit and so on were more enlightened than his later critics were willing to admit. He also explains how Gardiner's development policies led to the problems which generated later protests. What is lacking, however, is a comprehensive, critical assessment of the policies Gardiner pursued. One wonders whether there were other and better options available to Gardiner and, if so, whether he could have acted upon them without losing office. These are questions which ought to be raised about any political leader, not only to follow for an assessment of his leadership, but also to deepen our understanding of the determinants of public policy.

This is, as a whole, an uncritical biography. Since Gardiner's views have been so much out of fashion for the last decade, we perhaps should welcome a reasonably sympathetic account of his career. However, being neutral about Gardiner is like being neutral about C.D. Howe; it involves a political statement which ought to be made explicit. The timidity of this book on that count may be related to its abstractness. Although it offers a very good analysis of Metro government and politics and of Gardiner's leadership role, it fails to situate these subjects in a wider Canadian context. No comparisons are made between Toronto politics and municipal politics elsewhere in Canada. The obvious comparisons between Howe and

Gardiner, or Gardiner and Drapeau, are missed. Indeed, Colton's frame of reference for analyzing municipal government is American, not Canadian. Perhaps because of this, he has little to say about the way Gardiner's policies related to the development strategies being pursued by other governments in Canada at the same time. Given recent interest in the role of the sub-national state in promoting economic development, it would have been interesting to have a more complete comparative analysis of Metro's role under Gardiner in relation to the activities of other governments.

To make such criticisms is, of course, to suggest that Professor Colton ought to have attempted a more ambitious book. To say that is somewhat unfair, but it is also a compliment, for it reflects the confidence inspired by the work which has already appeared. *Big Daddy* is an important addition to the literature on municipal government and politics in Canada, and its central chapters are a model for the analysis of political leadership. Every student of urban politics in Canada should read it.

Warren Magnusson
Department of Political Science
University of Victoria

Ingham, John N. *The Iron Barons: A Social Analysis of an American Urban Elite, 1874-1965*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978. Contributions in Economics and Economic History, No. 18. Pp.xix, 242. Tables. \$19.95.

The Iron Barons is not social history as we have come to expect it, breathing meaning into the everyday life of days past, but social profiles of an elite based on detailed, statistical depictions. It is part of a tradition which seeks to debunk the Horatio Alger myth of 'rags to riches' in American business built around the biographies of exceptional men like Andrew Carnegie. This tradition, represented by authors such as E. Digby Baltzell, G. William Domhoff, C. Wright Mills, Thomas C. Cochran, F.W. Taussig and C.S. Joslyn, Ferdinand Lundberg, Gustavus Myers, Chester McArthur Destler, William Miller, Suzanne Keller, Mabel Newcomer, Reinhard Bendix and Frank Howton, and Frances W. Gregory and Irene D. Neu, has successfully demonstrated that the privileged reproduce themselves and access to the upper-most positions in the economy is very restricted. The novelty of John Ingham's study is its focus on six key steel cities during the period when the iron and steel industry was being consolidated as a major avenue to wealth and power.

In many ways the all too short Preface is the most important part of the book, providing something of the business background for the industry. It outlines the movement from many small iron producers prior to the Civil

War to the huge vertically and horizontally integrated complexes which arose thereafter to service the booming railway and construction industry. Aside from some casual remarks suggesting the determinism of location (coke in the northeast and iron ore from Minnesota's Mesabi Range) and technology (the Bessemer process which changed the economy of scale), there is no explanation for the processes of centralization and concentration within the steel industry. Since this forms the basis for the elite Ingham is studying, it is surprising that he chooses to ignore these basic structural factors. This would have served as a valuable complement to what Ingham says is "the major purpose of this book to trace the rise of hundreds of men and families to positions of wealth and power in the rapidly expanding iron and steel industry of the late nineteenth century" (p. xviii).

Ingham's data include "every listed officer from every iron and steel plant, regardless of size" in the cities of Bethlehem, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Youngstown, and Wheeling, as listed in the *Directory of Iron and Steel Manufacturing Plants in the United States and Canada* for the years 1874 to 1901. This major source, supplemented by some local sources, resulted in a set of 907 iron and steel manufacturers located in 164 companies. Of these he located 696 or 77 per cent of those listed. These data are systematically presented for each city using such independent variables as class origins, neighbourhoods, religion, education, social clubs, marriage patterns, and listings in *Social Registers*. Readers of *Urban History Review* may be particularly interested in the discussion of neighbourhood and class.

Strictly restricting the analysis to social profiles of the powerful, as Ingham does, abstracts their 'characteristics' from their practices and effects. In this case it also separates them from the prevailing social forces – the processes of consolidation and organizational changes mentioned in the Preface but then dropped. As a result, the book is a key reference work for those interested in specific aspects of each city rather than one which will be read throughout.

Although empirically rich, the study is theoretically naive. There is an electric use of sociological theory but it bears little on his evidence and does little to illuminate 'the facts.' Indeed, the key concepts used in the study are most confusing. He defines elite "as a group of individuals who have attained the principal economic decision-making positions in the iron and steel industry" (p. 10) and "the term 'upper class' describes a social class rather than describing a purely economic category; it stresses non-economic, social relations" (p. 11). These definitions are fine as far as they go and reflect conventional wisdom within the literature. Where the confusion enters is when they are actually used in the study. Ingham says, for example, "Those neighbourhoods with over 90 per cent [listed in the city's *Social Register*] shall be considered *upper class*;