

Ramirez, B., and Del Balzo, M. *The Italians of Montreal: From Sojourning to Settlement, 1900-1921*. Montreal : Les éditions du Courant, 1979. Pp. 54

Ezio Cappadocia

Volume 11, Number 3, February 1983

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019022ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019022ar>

[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

Cappadocia, E. (1983). Review of [Ramirez, B., and Del Balzo, M. *The Italians of Montreal: From Sojourning to Settlement, 1900-1921*. Montreal : Les éditions du Courant, 1979. Pp. 54]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 11(3), 85–86. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019022ar>

In the same year [1917], someone informed the Children's Aid that returned soldiers were occasionally visiting the home of a mother with three children in the absence of her husband. Although a visit to the home by a lady probation officer revealed a tidy house and no evidence of serious neglect, the reported goings-on of the mother were enough to have the home placed under the watchful eye of the probation officer.... The mother was allowed to keep her children (p.388).

Despite Klassen's failure to consider class conflict as an interpretative model for understanding the work of the society the article provides much interesting material on an important issue of urban social history whatever conceptual framework one wishes to adopt.

Although the Phillips, Betke and Klassen articles, and many others, are interesting in their own right, many of the papers raise the perennially important issue of the relative importance of individual or group initiative (free will) and uncontrollable forces (determinism). Should the historian who wishes to explain the development and growth of urban centres be concentrating upon the "booster" or such factors as physical geography, initial advantage, or even the CPR? The volume stresses individualism, a necessary counterbalance to the most forceful contemporary trends in the discipline of history, but for my money the determinist case is stronger. That is, historians would do well to commence their study of the rise and decline of urban centres with the "forces," bringing in individual initiative as a subsidiary, though not insignificant, consideration.

One of the corollaries of the booster school of historiography is that it attempts to assign winners and losers in the urban development sweepstakes. This has some utility but certainly creates problems in interpretation. Did winners attempt, or wish to do, anything substantially different from losers? What about the comparative initiative and skill of winning and losing boosters? In fact, it is difficult to detect significant differences in entrepreneurial goals, strategies and abilities; more important were the forces boosters could assist or exploit. As well, the rules for ascribing boosters and their urban centres to the categories of winners and losers are unclear. In this volume Minnedosa is presented as a mild success story by Barry Potyondi, Lethbridge as a mild failure by Andy den Otter, and Strathcona as a failure by John Gilpin. Using different criteria one could challenge all these judgements. Moreover, Max Foran's article on Wesley Orr, a Calgary booster, complicates the issue even more since Orr turns out to be a booster ahead of his time, that is, a failed booster in his own day, but a prophetic and therefore ultimately successful one from the perspective of today. Given this variety, Artibise's article on the widespread phenomenon of boosterism on the Prairies, wherein the characteristics of boosterism are presented and the use of

the concept in historical analysis is discussed, is most appropriate. Artibise and his colleagues in this volume have established that boosterism will be an important consideration whenever urban development on the Prairies is considered. Paul Voisey's article on southern Albertan towns clearly demonstrates the fruitful use to which the concept of boosterism may be put. This paper, based on wide research, including oral history, shows real sensitivity in examining the various factors, boosterism included and highlighted, related to the development, stagnation or decline of towns.

The articles in this volume, taken individually or collectively, are creditable additions to Canadian historiography. The Canadian Plains Research Centre is to be commended for publishing this book, not only because of the material contained therein, but also because of its high technical quality – good binding, careful proofreading and useful statistical tables (although the reviewer noted two discrepancies in the statistics and there may be others). Even at a softcover price of \$15, this volume is good value.

William M. Baker
Department of History
University of Lethbridge

Ramirez, B., and Del Balzo, M. *The Italians of Montreal: From Sojourning to Settlement, 1900-1921*. Montreal: Les éditions du Courant, 1979. Pp.54.

As the title indicates, the authors of this slender but informative volume have sketched the quite normal process by which the Italian immigrant to Montreal went from sojourning to settlement. The two decades covered deal with a period of important immigration into Canada, to be repeated after World War II. The inter-war years were years of rigid quotas, and during the Depression of almost total exclusion.

This slim volume emphasizes the early social history of Italians in the large metropolitan centre. To anyone familiar with the problem of adjustment immigrants faced, nothing here comes as a revelation or surprise. The authors do touch, necessarily sketchily, on every aspect of the process by which sojourners gradually became settlers; the 1,398 of the 1901 census became 13,970 by 1921.

The most interesting part of the story deals with the conflict between the Italian consular officials and the "old" established Italians on the one side and entrepreneur Antonio Cordano, the agent the CPR used to hire immigrant labour, on the other. In January 1909, Cordano organized a parade for himself and had two of his foremen crown him, with a replica of the Italian crown, as

"King of the Workers." The authors naturally rely a great deal on the Royal Commission that reported in 1905 on the practices of immigrant labour agencies.

Ramirez and Del Balzo's study was first given in Toronto at the "Little Italies in North America" conference sponsored by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario. All the papers presented there, including this one, appeared in the society's 1981 volume. The authors justifiably pay tribute to the work of Robert Harney, the guiding spirit of the society, whose major work on the Italians in Canada is eagerly awaited.

Ezio Cappadocia
Department of History
McMaster University

Person, Dennis, and Routledge, Gavin *Edmonton: Portrait of a City*. Edmonton: Reidmore Books, 1981. Distributed by McClelland and Stewart Limited. Pp.240. Illustrations. \$29.95

This work is not intended to be a comprehensive, analytical history of the city. It is a pictorial volume, containing over 400 photographs and enough text to explain each photo as it illustrates some aspect of Edmonton's history. Edmonton is more fortunate than most cities in having its past well photographed almost from its origins. Hence, beginning with an 1871 photograph of Fort Edmonton, this attractive volume documents Edmonton's transition from a rough-hewn fur-trading post to a modern, regional metropolis.

The volume is organized chronologically into eleven chapters: Fort Edmonton (1795-1870), Beyond the Fort (1871-91), Birth of Strathcona (1875-1911), Edmonton: The Town (1892-1903), City and Capital (1904-11), Amalgamation and Boom (1912-14), War, Women and Wings (1915-29), Depression and War (1930-46), Oil Capital (1947-57), Growing Up (1958-70), and Metropolis (1971-81). Each chapter has a short but useful introduction and virtually all the annotations are detailed and perceptive. The book also has a good index, a rare tool in such a volume. It is highly recommended as a useful, entertaining and well-produced volume.

Alan F.J. Artibise
Department of History
University of Victoria

"Urban Development in Latin America: A Special Issue." *Comparative Urban Research*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1980). Pp.134.

This special number contains six articles drawn from papers presented at an urban studies symposium of the 1976 International Congress of Americanists (ICA) in Paris. This symposium was one of seven held between 1966 and 1979, a series which is to be continued at the 1982 meeting of the ICA in Manchester. Richard Morse's effective introduction, besides providing background needed by non-specialists and explaining the intent and content of the volume, also includes a bibliographical appendix allowing the reader to locate the nearly 140 articles making up the broader effort.

The articles fall into two categories. The first four (by Gasparini and Margolies, Borah, Brading, and Browning and Roberts) provide chronological overviews, and the last two (by Gilbert, and Clarke and Ward) deal with present-day dilemmas. Of the first group, that by Graziano Gasparini and Luise Margolies, "Urban Settlements of the Incas," is clearly the least satisfactory. Largely limited to a discussion of settlements as physical entities, this article barely touches their economic, social and political functions. Although regrettable, the authors' caution may be well founded since they deal with an era for which sources are either archaeological or unreliably literary.

Woodrow Borah's "Demographic and Physical Aspects of the Transition from the Aboriginal to the Colonial World," which is largely concerned with meso-America, is more useful. For that region, of course, archaeological and literary sources can be supplemented with Indian and Spanish archival material. In any case, Borah presents a stimulating overview of the literature, focusing particularly on the interplay between the aboriginal condition and Spanish desires in the creation of a new urban framework. Harley L. Browning and Bryan R. Roberts' "Urbanization, Sectoral Transformation, and the Utilization of Labor in Latin America," although more theoretical in its orientation, comprises none the less a fine companion piece to Borah's effort. The emphasis here is on the impact on the urban milieu of the shift from British to American hegemony. For Browning and Roberts, that shift had important consequences for the Latin American city because of the profound differences between the U.S. and U.K. economies. Wedged in between these two fine overviews is David A. Brading's "The City in Bourbon Spanish America: Elite and Masses," a pithy account of conditions in that period which reminds the reader that "it was the base rather than the apex of urban society that defined the individual characteristics of each city" (p.81).

The second group of articles is oriented to the present. Alan G. Gilbert, in "Planning for Urban Primacy and Large Cities in Latin America: A Critique of the Literature," raises questions about the literature's prevailing hostility to primate cities. The treatment is interesting and may be of particular interest to Canadianist scholars. Lastly, Colin G. Clarke and Peter M. Ward examine the