

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Russell, Victor L. *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pp. vii, 360. Index. \$12.95

Murray W. Nicolson

Volume 14, Number 2, October 1985

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018008ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018008ar>

[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

Nicolson, M. W. (1985). Review of [Russell, Victor L. *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pp. vii, 360. Index. \$12.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 14(2), 222-223. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018008ar>

Many of the problems of this heterogeneous collection—especially the lack of cohesion and references to larger contexts—could have been overcome by a good introduction. Unfortunately the introduction is one of the weakest essays of the collection. Although there are many themes the editors could have brought together, such as the relation between cities and recreational land, they chose instead to offer weak generalizations. Cities are barely mentioned as the editors concentrate on wilderness preservation. Their thesis that recreational land development is marked by continuity and change seems particularly unenlightening. While most will find one or two articles that are useful, most too will still hunger for a more meaty look at the evolution of recreational land use in Canada.

C.J. Taylor
National Historic Parks and Sites
Parks Canada
Ottawa

Contents

Themes in the investigation of the evolution of outdoor recreation, *J. Marsh* and *G. Wall*; Changing views of the land as a recreational resource, *G. Wall*; Pioneer recreation and social life, *E. Morgan*; Canada's national parks: past, present and future, *J.G. Nelson*; The evolution of recreation in Glacier National Park, British Columbia, 1880 to present, *J. Marsh*; Recreation and conservation: the struggle for balance in Point Pelee National Park, *J.G. Battin* and *J.G. Nelson*; The evolution of the Ontario Provincial Park system, *K. Morrison*; The development of tourism in Nova Scotia, *C.A. Moffat*; The changing patterns of tourism in Ontario, *R.I. Wolfe*; Recreational land use in Muskoka, *G. Wall*; Northern Ontario's tourist frontier, *J. Benidickson*; The development of tourist accommodation in the Montreal Laurentians, *J. Lundgren*; A history of recreation on the Trent-Severn Waterway, *F. Helleiner*; Banff townscape: an historical-geographical view of urban development in a Canadian national park, *R.C. Scace*; Mowat and a park policy for Niagara Falls, 1873-1887, *G. Killan*; The fluctuating fortunes of water-based recreational places, *G. Wall*; The beginning of municipal park systems, *E. McFarland*; The development of supervised playgrounds, *E. McFarland*; The Vancouver park system, 1886-1929; a product of local business, *W.C. McKee*; The Canadian National Exhibition: mirror of Canadian society, *G. Wall* and *N. Zalkind*; Paddling for pleasure: recreational canoeing as a Canadian way of life, *J. Benidickson*; Camping for fun: a brief history of camping in North America, *G. Wall* and *R. Wallis*; Tourism development, conservation and conflict: game laws for caribou protection in Newfoundland, *J. Overton*; The development of snowmobiles in Canada, *R.W. Butler*; Historical artifacts as recreational resources, *V.A. Konrad*; Outdoor recreation and the Canadian identity, *G. Wall*.

Russell, Victor L. *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984. Pp. vii, 360. Index. \$12.95.

Of the numerous works printed in celebration of the sesquicentennial of the City of Toronto, this is one of the better. With a good introduction, Victor Russell, Manager

of the City of Toronto archives, co-ordinates the talents of eleven of the best scholars researching Toronto's history. The well-written essays, based on solid research, furnish new detail about public ownership, utilities, urban politics, construction and civic pride. The overall theme of this collection of essays portrays Toronto as a city that works, one with a distinctive civic culture based on stability through consensus. One cannot quarrel with what is said so much as with what is not said by the editor and contributors.

The major problem with this consensual approach to Toronto is naivety. Cities are complex social systems and Toronto, among them, is by no means unique. It seems that "the holism" of Robert Redfield and Milton Singer is a sub-conscious element in this particular consensual theory, for Russell, like these urban anthropologists, parallels "an urban homogeneity that discounts ghettos, unassimilated urban migrants, ethnic conflicts and all other behavioral and ideological disparities that define an urban centre."

In his article, "A Struggle for Authority," Paul Romney concludes that "the politics of ethnic and ideological fragmentation would give way to those of pluralistic consensus: a limited tolerance of diversity. . . ." This statement tends to indicate that Romney was selective in his reading. Certainly the *Toronto Mirror*, the second *Canadian Freeman* or the *Irish Canadian* fail to support Romney's conclusion of ethnic consensus between 1840 and 1890. Moreover, the Irish press showed the politics of ethnic conflict. Similarly, Gregory Kealey, in his persistent search for an unified working class, begins his article, "Orangemen and the Corporation" with the statement that "ethnicity and religion do not stand outside class." Yet, he dismisses any attempt to define ethnicity and religion within the framework of what he considers "class" to be. Furthermore, he fails to discuss what the Orange Order represented and what and whom it opposed. Nicholas Rogers in his article, "Serving Toronto the Good," would have us believe that the involvement of the Orange Order with the police force was "openly tolerated on the implicit assumption that it would not embroil the force in party politics" and therefore the police were "no longer a political weapon." Actually the police, politicians and Orange Order were elements in a vast protestant apparatus that kept Toronto within their power well into the twentieth century and therefore one wonders what was their "significant contribution to the making of Toronto the Good," beyond shutting out Irish Catholics from civic employment.

Perhaps the inclusion of additional articles would have modified this illusionary consensus. Material is available demonstrating that an elite group, representing a Protestant majority, held hegemony over the city and led it to metropolitan dominance. Irish Catholics, who formed one-quarter of the city's population in 1850 were locked out of its political, social and economic life. To them the city was a 'hollow-town'; consensus meant assimilation and loss of ethno-reli-

gious identity. They built a separate society beyond the confines of the Protestant city, and their history is as intriguing as the majority one described in this work.

In addition, inclusion of an article similar to those found in Robert Harney's, *Gathering Place*, would have more accurately portrayed the most significant change in Toronto's society, its evolution from a WASP to an ethnically and racially composite metropolis. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century Toronto's history reflects a complete lack of tolerance and consensus. And if the city was or is now "forgoing a consensus" why today is there a journal, *Currents: Readings in Race Relations*, published by the Urban Alliance in Race Relations, with articles like, "Confirming Discrimination in the Toronto Labour Market?"

This work, however contains a number of excellent articles, including those by C. Armstrong and H.V. Nelles on public ownership movements, by Gunter Gad and Deryck Holdsworth on the evolution of office buildings and districts as being symbolic of Toronto's position in the business world, by J.M.S. Careless on the semi-centennial of 1884, and by James Lemon on Toronto's position as a North America city. Lemon describes many of the positive features of Toronto and expresses concern about the growing gap between rich and poor. Unfortunately, he stopped short and should have examined the poor from a racial, ethnic and class standpoint which would have defined clearly the widening disparity and lack of urban consensus.

The reader is left with the conclusion that Toronto has not overcome the tensions found in other, major, North American cities. Leaving out evidence to the contrary is no proof of any consensus. Certainly, a closer look at current American social and urban literature might have produced a more believable thesis. In examining a great city like Toronto, it is necessary to view the minority position as well as that of the majority.

Murray W. Nicolson
History Department
Wilfrid Laurier University

Contents

Preface, *Victor L. Russell*; A struggle for authority, *Paul Romney*; Orangemen and the Corporation, *Gregory S. Kealey*; Captain Bob and the Noble Ward, *Barrie Dyster*; Serving Toronto the Good, *Nicholas Rogers*; The first hurrah, *J.M.S. Careless*; Servicing the modern city 1900-30, *Roger E. Riendeau*; The evolution of the board of control, *Patricia Petersen*; The rise of civic populism in Toronto 1870-1920, *Christopher Armstrong* and *H.V. Nelles*; A triumph for public ownership, *Frances Frisken*; Building for city, region, and nation, *Gunter Gad* and *Deryck Holdsworth*; Toronto among North American cities, *James Lemon*.

Colburn, David R. *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. Pp. xi, 258. \$30.00 (U.S.).

Trotter, Jr., Joe William. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Pp. xvii, 302. Tables. \$24.95 (U.S.).

Prior to the Civil War almost all Black Americans lived and worked in the rural South. Starting with Reconstruction, however, Black migration into Northern and Southern cities began and by the 1920s the typical Afro-American was as much a city dwelling worker as he was a sharecropper or farmhand. *Black Milwaukee* by Joe William Trotter, Jr. and *Racial Change and Community Crisis, St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980* by David R. Colburn, both deal with the Black urban experience in modern America. These two cities exhibited similarities and contrasts; they demonstrated that although most Black Americans nourished similar aspirations the means toward their realization varied considerably according to circumstances.

Milwaukee and St. Augustine differed greatly in their economic bases. At the turn of the century most of Milwaukee's Blacks worked at low paying jobs in the service sector labouring as cooks, porters, waiters, bell boys, domestic servants and washroom attendants. Then industrialization in the form of iron, steel, tanning and brewing changed the city's economy. At first Milwaukee Blacks found themselves frozen out of factory work but the decline of foreign immigration plus heightened demands for manufactured goods allowed Afro-Americans to enter these occupations usually on the lowest rungs of the ladder. Contrary to the classic Marxist pattern, Trotter notes, proletarianization of the Blacks did not represent a loss of the autonomy provided by skilled crafts but rather a step upward from poorly compensated service employment. Unlike Milwaukee historic St. Augustine, oldest city in the United States, remained completely dependant upon the tourist trade from which it derived 85% of its wealth. Since no significant manufacturing industries emerged, both Blacks and Whites continued in service pursuits.

In population and in social organization the two cities diverged markedly. Afro-Americans in St. Augustine constituted 23.2% of the population. Subordinate to Whites they lived in a world of separate schools, separate washrooms, separate drinking fountains, separate hospital facilities and separate churches — all sanctioned by law and by custom. In contrast, as late as 1945 Milwaukee's Blacks comprised only 1.6% of the population. Unlike St. Augustine, Milwaukee did not legalize segregation but informal "gentlemen's agreements" whereby White owners agreed not to sell to Blacks except in designated areas helped to create Black belts in the city. Some Afro-Americans encouraged this segregation including ministers who wanted full congregations,