

**Reasons, Chuck, ed. *Stampede City: Power and Politics in the West*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984. \$12.95 (paper)**

**Michael McMordie**

Volume 15, Number 1, June 1986

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018900ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018900ar>

[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

McMordie, M. (1986). Review of [Reasons, Chuck, ed. *Stampede City: Power and Politics in the West*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984. \$12.95 (paper)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 15(1), 96–97.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1018900ar>

discussed. The authors place particular emphasis on the pricing of urban services, asserting that most urban services in Canada are currently underpriced and outlining a number of possible approaches to what they see as more appropriate user charges for various urban services. An entire chapter is devoted to the pricing of urban services. The final chapter, dealing specifically with the financial situation of Canadian municipalities, concerns provincial-municipal transfers. It outlines very clearly the basic theoretical context within which our provincial-municipal transfer system operates, the importance of grants to Canadian municipalities, and the possible impact of intergovernmental transfers on local fiscal behaviour. The only shortcoming of this chapter on intergovernmental transfers is that it is rather silent on the role of the federal government in local government finance. Although the federal government is often a silent partner in the intergovernmental transfer system affecting municipalities, it is an important one. This lack of attention to the historic and current role of the federal government is rather surprising, given the authors' concluding argument.

As already indicated, these sections of *Urban Public Finance in Canada* are very clearly written and represent a successful attempt by the authors to clarify the financial situation of urban governments in Canada rather than engulf the reader in economic jargon. For this reason alone, the book is a useful primer.

The book's main weaknesses emerge in the more theoretical sections. An early chapter deals with the urban public economy and sets out some basic theoretical concepts and arguments about urban public finance, such as the theory of urban public goods and the Tiebout hypothesis. Like the rest of the book, this chapter is very clearly written. But it presents these important theoretical concepts in a rather off-hand manner and does not explore fully the possible implications of their application to different types of urban municipality (for example a rapidly growing suburb versus a stable or declining centre city) or for different classes of people living in our urban centres. The final chapter is also theoretical in that it sets out the authors' own views concerning a needed "new approach" to urban finance in Canada. In a sense, this chapter is the most disappointing of the entire book because, as the authors themselves admit, their prescriptions for the future are so general, focusing on a clarion call for a re-examination of the nation's total governmental system with analysis of urban finances as part of that examination. This reader would have liked two urban economists of the calibre of Bird and Slack push their thinking beyond this level of generality. Perhaps that will be the focus of their next volume on urban public finance in Canada. In the meantime, this book does make a useful contribution.

Katherine A. Graham  
School of Public Administration  
Carleton University

Reasons, Chuck, ed. *Stampede City: Power and Politics in the West*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984. \$12.95 (paper).

These nine essays were written to document the social changes experienced through Calgary's boom of the late 1970s and to establish who benefitted from the apparent prosperity. "Although politicians and businessmen repeatedly told us how great the boom times were, we and many other Calgarians were living through a decline in the quality of living in the city" (Preface, p.1). As this suggests, this collection does not celebrate the great achievements of daring and skillful entrepreneurs. Perhaps those have received their due from Peter Newman or Douglas House. Instead, *Stampede City* presents questionable successes and certified failures as the dominant theme of the boom years.

Prominent topics are Dome petroleum's financial crisis, the city planners' failure to win political support, and the development industry's success at the same game. The role of Calgary's newspapers, radio and TV as "Corporate cheerleaders," is described by Michael Shapcott, a Calgary journalist through the boom. The Stampede, and the 1988 Winter Olympics, are discussed in separate, similarly sceptical, essays. Colin Campbell, on the Stampede, and Reasons, on the Olympics, describe these as projects devised and managed by the rich and the powerful for their own benefit. Manipulation of the political process appears to be the preferred instrument. In extreme contrast, western separatism, as analysed by Don Ray, is shown to be a largely unsuccessful protest movement of small business, whether oil, agriculture or real estate, against big government, big business, Quebec and Ontario. All are seen by the separatist in conspiracy to dominate and exploit the West. The movement had its greatest triumphs, small though they were, when its targets could be personified by Pierre Trudeau.

The final essay, "Casualties of Progress," (by Reasons and Emily Drzymala) provides a concluding summary of the injured bystanders: foreclosed homeowners, victims of construction accidents (the Alberta figures are appalling), discrimination against racial minorities, the unemployed, and the victims of stress and crime. On the positive side it notes also signs of organized resistance, by labour, inner city communities, and the Calgary Disarmament Coalition. The chapter, and the book, close with a report of the 1984 Miss Universe Pageant fiasco and a brief comment on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. In an effort to entice the Pageant, organizers — The Calgary Tourist and Convention Bureau — committed the city to an \$155,000 advance. The organizers failed, lost the money and left everyone involved, from the mayor down, the object of ridicule, this at a time when the boom had bust and the city was making sweeping cuts in staff and services.

Despite the stated intent of the authors, the result of their efforts is hardly a systematic and balanced analysis, nor does it deliver adequate documentation of rapid social change.

Throughout they fail to establish a sufficient context for comparison, to present the Calgary experience in the light of development elsewhere. How sycophantic is journalism in other Canadian cities, how are other civic exhibitions managed, which other cities have coped better with explosive urban growth? Only the discussion of construction accidents shows just how bad the local record was compared with other provinces and against the earlier Alberta figures. The other arguments presented are too often without a clear frame or solid foundation.

The recital of instances of mismanagement, manipulation, and waste records some useful material for a future history of the boom years, and will win the reader's agreement that all this is deplorable, that somehow things should be better, but fails to suggest what improvement is likely, or how it might be achieved. The one contributor with experience of political office, one-time alderman Elaine Husband, explains that she chose not to run again despite strong support because she had no interest in playing "loyal opposition." Organized community power was more important, she felt, in improving the balance of a political process dominated by business interests. Her choice seems to confirm a disheartening message: representative government doesn't work, the representatives are either pawns or powerless; the best you can do is join the manipulators by establishing your own power block. Urban evolution is reduced to social Darwinism.

Stampede City was clearly not intended to address the larger questions of civic life and growth. Nonetheless they are implicit in the experience presented and the perspective taken. What roles should and do power blocks, administrators, politicians and voters play in shaping the city, and the experience of its citizens. Can and should everyone's immediate interests be equally powerful? What place is there for the vision of a Burnham and the ambition of a Drapeau? In the light of their efforts, Calgary's ambitions, and its failures, seem modest. This collection reminds us of both.

Michael McMordie  
Faculty of Environmental Design  
University of Calgary

---

*Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Special Issue: Ethnic Art and Architecture, XVI (Fall 1984). Calgary: Canadian Ethnic Studies Association, 1984. Pp. 186. Illustrations. \$7.00.

The Canadian scholarly journal, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, published three times a year, periodically devotes special issues to specific themes in ethnic studies. The recent Fall issue of 1984 was one such volume, devoted to the topic of ethnic art and architecture in Canada, some 186 pages with nine major articles, one research note, a review article, sev-

eral book reviews, and a special bibliography centred upon the theme of the issue.

Although the declared topic is ethnic art and architecture, the thrust of the issue is clearly towards ethnic architecture. Of the major papers only two deal directly with ethnic art; the review article and the research note address the art component of the theme, but in general it appears that ethnic art receives short shrift. Although it may be argued that architecture is an art form, it seems unfortunate that the editors did not separate out the two themes as distinctive manifestations of ethnicity, and devote an issue to each theme, rather than attempting to integrate them in a single issue.

Architecture and ethnicity is covered here from a variety of standpoints. The approaches range from the analytical to descriptive and from the innovative to conventional. Taken together they provide a good barometre of the level of scholarship in the field and provide a ready indication of those fields which are making significant contributions to this facet of ethnic studies in Canada.

The collection of articles opens with papers by Trevor Boddy and Radoslav Zuk, who address, respectively: "Ethnic Identity and Contemporary Canadian Architecture," and "Architectural Significance and Culture." The following articles range across domestic and religious vernacular ethnic architecture, from the structure and symbolism of a Swiss-German Mennonite farmstead of Waterloo County, Ontario; through Doukhobor architecture; to ethnic religious architecture as exemplified by three churches in Sydney, Nova Scotia.

In Canada there is an unfortunate but common misconception that ethnic contributions to the Canadian architectural heritage are confined to the quaint or picturesque heritage of European folk architecture transferred to Canada by those who pioneered the agricultural frontiers of the New World. In his opening article Boddy refutes this as he argues that recent immigrants and Canadians from ethnic and religious minorities have enjoyed considerable success as architects. Of these, the Edmonton Métis, Douglas Cardinal, the Winnipeg Franco-Manitoban, Etienne Gaboury, and the Toronto-based Japanese-Canadian, Raymond Moriyama, are perhaps the best known. Through a review of their careers Boddy attempts to isolate the one factor which has caused them to rise to the top of their profession. He argues that the role that their ethnicity has played was, and is, that of a "simulacrum which focuses and forges character within a far-too-homogenized culture" (p. 13). More prosaic, but probably of equal significance was the position of all three outside the social elite of Canada's two "founding nations" and their consequent exclusion from a social network through which contacts could be made and contracts awarded. Pushed by circumstance to obtain work strictly upon their own demonstrated merits they made