

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Korinek, Valerie J. *Roughing it in the Suburbs. Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 460. Black and white illustrations, bibliography, index. Can\$75.00 (hardcover) Can\$29.95 (paper)

Richard Harris

Volume 31, Number 2, Spring 2003

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1015775ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015775ar>

[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

Harris, R. (2003). Review of [Korinek, Valerie J. *Roughing it in the Suburbs. Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 460. Black and white illustrations, bibliography, index. Can\$75.00 (hardcover) Can\$29.95 (paper)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 31(2), 54–55. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015775ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 2003

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Book Reviews

Miller's reliance on local newspapers also detracts from placing the experience of Torontonians in the wider context of the war. The author did not set out to write a comparative analysis of various Canadian cities (although other scholars may now build on Miller's work), but a case study like this would have been stronger if it had been more firmly situated within the national context.

Miller's work is a significant contribution to our understanding of the home front during the Great War. *Our Glory and Our Grief* ensures that historians will no longer assume that Canadian citizens blindly supported the war, tricked by diligent censors or immoral politicians who kept the truth from the public. Despite his focus on the patriotic support of the war, one would still expect issues relating to the city itself – transportation and housing – to be examined, for these too would have impacted on Torontonians and the war. Nonetheless, this book enriches our understanding and is a welcome addition to the thin historiography of writing relating to the role of Canadians on the home front during the Great War.

Tim Cook
Canadian War Museum

Korinek, Valerie J. *Roughing it in the Suburbs. Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 460. Black and white illustrations, bibliography, index. Can\$75.00 (hardcover) Can\$29.95 (paper).

"Suburban" has always meant a place and also a way of life. In the early postwar decades this life centred on home and family and involved a clear division of labour between wives and husbands. In the late 1960s and 1970s, inspired by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a new wave of feminists rebelled against this way of life, and also the manner in which it was endorsed by the media. Among their targets were women's magazines that supposedly stereotyped women as homemakers, urging and helping them to excel in that capacity through wise purchasing and skilful domestic labour. To second-wave feminists, the suburbs became the main site of women's oppression, and women's magazines a leading apologist.

Using the suburbs as a metaphor for women's estate in the 1950s and 1960s, Valerie Korinek, a historian at the University of Saskatchewan, challenges the feminist critique of women's magazines. She shows that *Chatelaine*, by far the most popular periodical directed at Canadian women during the 1950s and 1960s, presented mixed messages that allowed – and arguably encouraged – its readers to reflect critically on the appropriate role of women in Canadian society. There was a counterpoint and sometimes an opposition between the business department, led by advertising, and the editors. The covers and advertising presented a consistent stereotype of the housewife as happy household manager and general purchasing agent. The service departments of the magazine, for example those that dealt with food, home crafts, and gardening, reinforced this image, although they were sometimes a little out of step with the

advertising: a surprisingly large number of the recipes, for example, made little use of the new varieties of packaged food.

In contrast, *Chatelaine's* fiction and editorial matter presented views that questioned the suburban ideal. Fiction, a waning department, often dealt with the dissatisfactions and problems of women's lot, and sometimes of men's too. Formulaic, it usually concluded with a pat resolution. Editorials and feature articles, however, "the most lively and consistently appealing pages", covered most of the important social issues of the day. Especially after Doris Anderson took over as editor in 1958, these were dealt with consistently from a feminist point of view. In 1952, an article entitled "Canadian Women are Suckers" challenged gender stereotypes. Later in the decade two major features, "How to Live in the Suburbs" and "The Sickness of the Suburbs", as well as a series of articles on fatigue by Dr. Marion Hilliard, recognized the deficiencies of suburban living for many women, and anticipated Betty Friedan's better-known critique. In the 1960s, a succession of features, for example those on contraception and poverty, articulated a feminist point of view. Far from hindering the feminist cause, then, *Chatelaine* may be said to have promoted it.

Korinek documents her case effectively, and indeed exhaustively. She scanned the magazine from 1950 to 1969, read and tabulated the published letters, examined the archived unpublished letters from 1962, interviewed key writers and editors (including Doris Anderson) and examined useful readers survey data. These sources allow her to show that readers probed and criticized the messages that *Chatelaine* contained – both those of the advertisers and also those of the feminists associated with the magazine. Given that *Chatelaine's* readership was a cross-section of the female population, the letters in particular show that by the 1960s it was as feminist as any popular magazine could hope to be.

Korinek is less convincing in her attempts to explain why *Chatelaine* differed from its American counterparts. Half of the story, she argues, is that it was mostly edited by women. Maclean-Hunter, the publisher, often ignored their editorial line because its attention was focused elsewhere, on *Maclean's*. The other half of the story, she suggests in the introduction, is that Canadian families were less affluent and Canadian suburbs more diverse. Many were "roughing it" without services and transit. Surprisingly, given the catchy title, Korinek does not develop this argument, perhaps because it is unsustainable. Certainly, as Veronica Strong-Boag has shown, many Canadian women faced real difficulties in the early postwar suburbs. Supposing this was not true in the United States, however, it is unclear how it could have made *Chatelaine* more feminist. Korinek presents no evidence that those who faced the greater hardships were more receptive to feminist ideas. Indeed, such is unlikely since second-wave feminism was, disproportionately, a middle-class movement.

Settlement patterns suggest that, if anything, *Chatelaine's* readership should have been more conservative than those of American magazines. In the 1950s Canada was a less urban, and a less suburban nation, than the United States; a high proportion of *Chatelaine's* readership came from rural areas and small

Book Reviews

towns. The letters that Korinek presents indicate that, as we might expect, women from such areas expressed 'traditional' views about their role. If Korinek had explored more fully the implications of settlement for the views of Canadian women, she would have been compelled to look elsewhere for an explanation of *Chatelaine's* policy. She would also, surely, have come up with a different title.

Richard Harris
McMaster University

Brophy, Alfred L. *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921, Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. Xx, 187. Illustrations, bibliographic essay, index. \$40.00 (cloth)

Wilder, Craig Steven. *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. Tables, bibliography, index. Pp. Xii, 325. US \$35.00 (cloth).

Recent attention to the reemergent reparations movement for the descendents of American slaves has brought debates about the historical legacy of, and responsibility for, past oppression to the forefront of popular discourse. Two compelling new books, one by historian Craig Steven Wilder and the other by legal scholar Alfred L. Brophy, extend the scope of this discussion by examining it in terms of the history of American cities.

Wilder's *A Covenant with Color* surveys Brooklyn's history from its fifteenth-century beginnings as a Dutch agricultural colony founded on slave labour to the creation of America's largest urban black ghetto in the decades following World War II. His sweep of more than four centuries has one fundamental rationale. He wishes to demonstrate once and for all that racism is not simply a product of the unfortunate prejudices inevitable in human nature, nor is it ultimately responsible for social inequality, as is so often claimed or believed; rather racism is an ideology of power deeply imbedded in society's material relationships used to create or perpetuate inequality. While this is certainly not a new claim, Wilder's demonstration of its validity throughout Brooklyn's history gives us a valuable demonstration of racism's sustaining power as an instrument of power, and particularly how it has been used in shaping cities. He shows us that not much has changed since Brooklyn's Dutch chose to single out Africans (as opposed to Native Americans, Jews, Quakers, or any other reviled population) for superexploitation, not out of innate prejudice but rather out of their ability to exercise mastery over the already enslaved. Similarly, in a new insight on the history of the unholy alliance of federal policy and private real estate interests and the creation of the second ghetto in Brooklyn, Wilder shows how redlining moved from targeting a broad swathe of Brooklyn's non-WASP population to focusing on black neighborhoods, not because of basic bigotry, but rather in order to cement the development goals of powerful banking, insurance, and real estate interests in the city. Thus, Wilder would argue, we should not simply examine the impact of the legacy of slavery (or rather, "the legacy of mastery," as he puts it

in one of his many masterful reversals of liberal clichés about African Americans and their condition), but rather focus on the perpetuation of the "covenant with color" to the present.

Wilder's implicit secondary objective is to refute another widely held shibboleth – that of the North, and particularly the urban North, being somehow unconnected to the worst abuses of the racial system of the plantation and then Jim Crow South. Thus he shows us the brutality of Brooklyn's supposedly "gentle" slave system and the recalcitrance of King County's planters in relinquishing control of their human property long after emancipation had legal force in New York State. Hence he also reveals how Brooklyn's dependence on the textile and sugar industries bred a pro-slavery majority in the antebellum period. Finally, and insightfully, he shows how the northern wing of the Democratic Party both before the Civil War and long into the twentieth century attracted urban "white" ethnics not simply through Tammany-style patronage but also, explicitly, through its support of white supremacy throughout the nation.

While Wilder's work is based significantly on primary research, its greatest value is as an extended essay bringing together the insights of a broad body of recent scholarship in a fresh way to build his case about continuities in the history of whites and their "covenant with color," using Brooklyn as his case. However, in his desire to cover so much ground, some of his evidence in the text and the tables is underanalyzed leaving a few of his conclusions less than self-evident. Furthermore, in his quest to explore continuities in the relationship between race and power, Wilder gives little more than thumbnail sketches of the changing contours of the black or white communities through time, leaving readers with a number of tantalizing questions related to his thesis and to the history of Brooklyn. Given the portrait of overwhelming pro-slavery support Wilder paints, why was Brooklyn a national centre of white abolitionism and the refuge of choice of Manhattan's black elite after the draft riots of 1860, as he himself reveals? Were there no significant changes in the dynamics of race and power as Brooklyn's black population fluctuated between being a third of the total in the slavery era, to a miniscule minority in the eighty years between the Civil and Second World Wars, to one-third again by 1990? Most pressing, what was the African-American response to the "covenant with color"? Readers catch compelling glimpses at possible answers to this final question, but no sustained view of the African-American community or its reactions. Surely the powerless are in a very good position to say something about the power held by their oppressors.

This very possibility lies at the centre of Alfred L. Brophy's *Reconstructing the Dreamland*. In a detailed examination of the infamous Tulsa riot of 1921, Brophy places the contrasting black and white visions of the American legal system at the heart of his examination of what happened and why. For African Americans, and especially for a vocal and militant minority of veterans returned from World War I, the law was about justice and about the ideals of democratic citizenship and equality, which were so sorely lacking for black people in Jim Crow Oklahoma. For whites, and particularly those in power, it was an instrument of control, intended to maintain the social, and particularly racial, order.