

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Higgins, Benjamin. *The Rise- and Fall? of Montreal: A Case Study of Urban Growth, Regional Economic Expansion and National Development*, Moncton: Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development, 1986. Pp. 256. \$12.95 paper

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Volume 16, Number 2, October 1987

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017791ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017791ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

### ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

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### Cite this review

Lithwick, N. H. (1987). Review of [Higgins, Benjamin. *The Rise- and Fall? of Montreal: A Case Study of Urban Growth, Regional Economic Expansion and National Development*, Moncton: Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development, 1986. Pp. 256. \$12.95 paper]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 16(2), 227–228. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017791ar>

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Higgins, Benjamin. *The Rise- and Fall? of Montreal: A Case Study of Urban Growth, Regional Economic Expansion and National Development*, Moncton: Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development, 1986. Pp. 256. \$12.95 paper.

In this study of the past and future of Montreal, Professor Higgins applies his formidable expertise in the field of economic development to finding solutions to the serious problems facing that city, a city he loves. His approach is both surprising and satisfying. The surprise is his immersion in the details of a single "case," a procedure generally eschewed by economists because few generalizations or valid tests of hypotheses can be undertaken. And, as we shall see, this creates certain problems for him in making his case.

On the other hand, the work is satisfying because, using the tools of his trade, he explores the breadth and depth of the circumstances that led to Montreal's difficulties. The depth pertains to the temporal dimensions of the study, which covers the entire past and glimpses of future. The breadth entails an original and generally rewarding analysis of Montreal's macro-spatial interactions, with its immediate hinterland, the province of Quebec, Canada as a whole, and other international metropolises.

But if there is a wealth of particular insights, the study lacks a coherent structure that would have made it a much more powerful analysis of its subject. Ruthless editing could have reorganized the material so that the historical material need not have been scattered through the first five chapters in an annoying sequence of periods, 1961-73, 1642-1941, 1973-1983, and 1941-1983. The review of the theoretical literature in Chapter 6 should have been placed at the beginning of the study, to be used not only as the basis for prognosis, as Higgins does, but as a vehicle to help explain the past. As it stands, those not familiar with Higgins' theoretical orientation will have some substantial difficulty following the logic of his arguments, particularly when attempting to explain past events. There are abundant data provided (48 tables), to prove certain key points, but the tables are often overly complex. The five graphs are poorly labelled and generally of little help.

Higgins is ambivalent about Montreal's decline. He recognizes that it is more a problem of perception, of its position relative to Toronto, than an absolute problem. Indeed, the pressures that would speed up its development might destroy the unique ambience that he rightly argues makes Montreal such a desirable place to live. He also seems uncertain about Montreal's linkage to the rest of Canada. He asserts that "the conflicts in Montreal are symptoms of unresolved Canadian problems, they are not intrinsically Montreal

problems" (p. 20). The reason, he claims, is to be found in the fact that Montreal is "Canada's major metropolis", (p. 18) "a nerve centre which both responds to economic and social change, and which transmits change to the rest of the country" (p. 9).

This is a popular view, but limited evidence is presented for it. Indeed, elsewhere evidence is presented to demonstrate Montreal's great economic autonomy, not only from Canada, but from the rest of Quebec. Many of his conclusions depend on precisely the degree to which Montreal is integrated with its region and the national urban system, an issue that would require an interindustry framework of the sort used so insightfully by Caves and Holton several decades ago. Lacking an empirically based framework, the bits and pieces on both sides of this important issue leave the reader confused and frustrated. At one point, Higgins himself concludes that Montreal's real significance lies essentially in its size and structure, and not in its role in the regional and national economies.

But these bits and pieces are themselves insightful. In chapter 4, Higgins mercifully debunks the image of Montreal as a growth pole for the rest of the province, an image that led to enormously costly and largely ineffectual regional policies that dominated the 1970s. His review of the economic determinants of separatist sentiment is of some interest, although again, without a theoretical framework, the logic becomes contorted on occasion. For example, he attributes the lower income of francophone Montrealers in the 1960s to their limited ownership position. But the evidence he cites (p. 64) indicates that 60% of the income differential was due to differences in levels and patterns of education. Other findings of the B&B commission stress the importance of attitudes to risk-taking and aversion to private-sector, profit-oriented activity. The anglophone responsibility for all this is arrived at by suggesting that these choices were forced on the francophones because the occupations were not opened to them. No doubt this was partially the case, but what about the province's own education policy, the importance of which is underscored elsewhere (p. 161), the role of the church, and other plausible explanations? A comprehensive assessment of Montreal has to do better than recite tired, data-free arguments.

There are several serious omissions from his explanation of Montreal's problems, ones that raise fundamental questions when his proposed solutions are presented. The first is the absence of any discussion on the role of the tariff in preserving the antiquated industrial structure of the province and the city. Also, there is only passing reference to Montreal's micro-situation. Can there be any doubt that the costs of Drapeau's megalomania have seriously hampered

the economy, with its tax burden some 25% above Ontario's, an inflated wage structure that eroded its competitive position and resulted in high unemployment, and the enormous opportunity costs of spending public resources on bread and circuses?

In reviewing Montreal's prospects, the author is hard pressed to find any comparative advantages, other than Montreal's universities and her cultural and environmental ambience. These, it is felt, will provide the basis for attracting managers of footloose industries, if carefully planned. Indeed, Higgins has always had serious reservations about market solutions, but his favouring of intervention as a way out of this dilemma is mildly puzzling in the light of past federal efforts (MSUA, DREE), and more important, his scathing review of the Mirabel fiasco. Notwithstanding, his list of general principles (218ff) should be reviewed by all policymakers because they highlight the importance of building interurban and interregional linkages as an integral aspect of any solution. Unfortunately, no concrete plans are drawn up, and, in the hands of opportunists, these generalities lead to the kind of simplistic approaches that are featured in the Picard report (of the Consultative Committee to the Ministerial Committee (de Cotret) on the Development of the Montreal Region, November, 1986).

Despite these concerns, the study is full of interesting observations, clear thinking, and wise suggestions. Anyone interested in Montreal's past and future will profit from reading it over and over. It is to be regretted that the excellent raw material was not reworked into what could have been a genuine classic.

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Arthur, Eric. *Toronto No Mean City*. Third edition revised by Stephen Otto. University of Toronto Press, 1986. Bibliography, index, 272 black and white plates, 17 maps, \$18.95 paper.

In the mid 1950s Professor Arthur put his future at Toronto's School of Architecture on the line in order to defeat the proposed new city hall (already designed and out to tender) and to set up an international competition for a building that would, in his words "proudly express its function as the civic centre of government." As we all know he succeeded in this and did not become the next director of the school. One cannot help but wonder how much of the trouble that has beset the school since that time stems from those events. In any case, the point here is that Arthur's campaign for the city hall, and his book on the architectural

heritage of the city both stem from the same source: his understanding that architecture is not just the expression of a culture but is very importantly a means to the attainment of one. His pessimistic assessment of Toronto's future reflects his awareness that few other people either in the architectural profession or in civic life realized this.

The book, a very timely re-issue 23 years later with added maps and illustrations, is still a highly personal and intimate account of buildings well known and well loved by someone with a keen eye for both the authentic and the phoney. Professor Arthur described it as a history of taste but it is really a *tour de force* of connoisseurship. The main body of text is in five chapters that cover Toronto's history from its very first beginnings to the end of the nineteenth century. It is a continuous narrative that unfolds exactly as it might if one were fortunate enough to be able to wander around the city with Arthur as guide and companion while the buildings were still standing. His fun in finding architectural treasures and his knowledge of the oddities and profundities connected with them make it a sparkling adventure.

And this is the main point of the exercise. Heritage can not be based on some abstruse assessment of a building as "important" to an academically reified architectural tradition. Fundamentally it must be valued because it is our own and we recognize its worth. This is also the hooker.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Arthur's book is his unflinching capacity to recognize architectural quality even in works that he finds of highly questionable taste. Although he would certainly not advocate Gothic or any other revival he responds enthusiastically to "gothic revival at its best" (Chapel of St James-the-Less, St. James Cemetery) while castigating the former customs house — "Rome has many examples of this kind of pilfering, but it was usually better done" — with the same kind of withering accuracy that terrified his students and kept them honest. His assessments and interpretations are always grounded in the architectural quality of each building, not in its membership in any school, style, fashion, fad or movement.

Surely this is the only sane basis on which heritage can proceed. We can not save everything older than 1914. Arthur's book documents the amazing turn-over in buildings that has already taken place in the city's short history. And while he laments many needless losses he sees this process as essentially healthy and inescapable. But, as he emphasizes so eloquently, within a context of continuing active development we must still value those buildings and places that have real quality and we must somehow learn to recognize the quality that exists in the heritage that we have. Few of us are able to bring to bear the acuity of mind and eye that Professor Arthur possessed. But he is a wonderful guide and example. There have been few architects in Toronto able to be so dedicated to both progressive ideals and heritage values at the same time. I well remember, with