Urban History Review
Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

White, Jerry. *The Worst Street in North London. Campbell Bunk, Islington, Between the Wars.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. Pp. xii, 312. 15 black and white plates, tables, maps, index. £8.95

John Kendle

Volume 16, Number 2, October 1987

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017800ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1017800ar

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

Kendle, J. (1987). Review of [White, Jerry. *The Worst Street in North London. Campbell Bunk, Islington, Between the Wars.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. Pp. xii, 312. 15 black and white plates, tables, maps, index. £8.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, *16*(2), 235–236. https://doi.org/10.7202/1017800ar

cible in which white-hot revolutionary loyalties were forged" (p. 169). Less convincing is the degree to which merchants alone shaped Boston politics. One is not completely certain about the influence of non-merchant patriots, and Tyler's assertion that the coalition of merchants and traders was, by the 1770s, "indistinguishable" from the town meeting is not fully satisfying.

Minor criticisms like these do not diminish the positive contributions of *Smugglers & Patriots*. Of particular importance is the appendix, which provides invaluable information on issues ranging from loyalty to the various subscription papers and protests signed by members of the merchant community. While the orientation of Tyler's study is more historical and prosoprographical than urban, there exists an underlying sense of how important the city was in mobilizing opposition to Great Britain. Like Carl Bridenbaugh (*Cities in Revolt,* [1955]), Tyler leaves readers with the distinct impression that urbanites took the lead in promoting the American Revolution. Indeed, the commercial program finally adopted by the Continental Association was, after all, the brainchild of Boston's smugglers and patriots.

R.W. Roetger
Humanities Division
Emerson College
Boston

White, Jerry. *The Worst Street in North London. Campbell Bunk, Islington, Between the Wars*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. Pp. xii, 312. 15 black and white plates, tables, maps, index. £8.95.

Campbell Road, commonly known as Campbell Bunk, was a short street in Islington, North London, very near the Finsbury Park tube station. It was built in a piecemeal fashion between 1865 and 1880 and was levelled in a slum clearance program in the 1950s. By the early years of this century it had earned the reputation of being the most notorious street in North London where the police patrolled only in twos, strangers were openly and frequently attacked, and the inhabitants lived in desperate poverty and wretched conditions. Life on the street was always hard-edged and personal and family relationships were often violent and exploitive. Nevertheless, many former residents remembered the street for its vigorous street and community life and its shared antipathy to the world outside the bunk. Jerry White's book is the first attempt to make sense "of the contradictory community within Campbell Bunk, and its contradictory relations with the outside world" (p. 3).

White contends that many of Campbell Bunk's difficulties can be traced back to its stunted start. The slow pace of home building and the delay in providing an adequate road plus the rapidly changing social structure of North London meant that the artisans and clerks for whom the road was originally designed went elsewhere. Single-family occupation was a rarity almost from the beginning and property was divided and rented. Inexorably, the Bunk declined from a street serving the needs of skilled workers and labouring navvies to one whose low rents appealed to the lumpenproletariat eeking out an existence on the margins of London's working force. By the 1890s Campbell Road's reputation was established as "the worst in North London." Little changed over the next fifty years. It remained a haven for the marginal men and women of London life.

In order to trace the nature of change in Campbell Bunk and to clarify its class structure and the socio-economic parameters of life on the street, White uses the Marxist analysis of class. This is helpful in delineating the Bunk's place in North London life and in placing its inhabitants in the context of London's reserve army of labour. White's second chapter is an illuminating treatment of the dynamics of class in inter-war London. But he frankly admits that the traditional Marxist approach was not sufficient to explain some of the continuities and traditions obvious in the Bunk nor some of the changes that took place in the thirties. He therefore turned to gender analysis and, more specifically, to the changing perceptions of masculinity and femininity to help him understand the processes at work in the Bunk. This enables him to explain the way in which the Bunk reinforced machismo. Unable to establish themselves outside the Bunk, lacking any sense of pride or dignity in the wider world, the men of the Bunk established a rigid hierarchy of sexist authority based on brutal self-assertion. Young men bonded together through the shared cult of masculinity with its emphasis on physical strength, display, and bravadacio. Chapter 6, "Young Men: Accommodating Traditions," is an arresting treatment of the way in which the young men of the Bunk molded a life for themselves out of exceedingly sparse material. Rejected by the labour market, sullied by the reputation of the Bunk, young men accommodated themselves to the life of the Bunk and found solace and strength in its communal and street life.

Women, on the other hand, or so White contends in Chapter 7, "Young Women and the New World Outside," reacted quite differently. Their lot in a male-dominated world was not a happy one. The Bunk held fewer attractions for them. They wanted to carve a separate life for themselves. They therefore challenged the Bunk's way of life, self-consciously sought new directions, and pushed hard for change. They were particularly successful in the thirties when employment opportunities improved for young women.

This book is a stimulating one to read. The grinding poverty, the helplessness, the false gods that resulted as a consequence of industrial capitalism are not attractive, and White does not indulge in sentimentality for the world that has been lost. His treatment is clear-headed and analytic.

He has ranged widely through a plethora of sources to reconstitute the life of the Bunk. In addition to the chapters mentioned he has others on "Collective Identities," "Ideology, Politics and Forms of Struggle," and "The Family and Social Change" all of which are sharply focused and crisply argued. His book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of working class life in London, particularly of the strained existence of the lumpenproletariat. One of the most interesting features of the book is the skillful blending of oral history into the analysis. The written sources, though plentiful, are not always very revealing, while the lack of census material post 1881 hampers certain avenues of investigation. Oral evidence is therefore vital and White has placed considerable emphasis on it. The total number of oral testimonies is small but each provides insights that would otherwise have been missed. The overall result is a book of rich texture and penetrating analysis.

John Kendle
Department of History
University of Manitoba

Peters, F.E. *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. Pp. xiv, 656. $35.00 (U.S.).

F. E. Peters has produced a unique history of the city of Jerusalem, a narrative spanning nearly four thousand years, a synthesis of the observations and reports of visitors to the city, its denizens, and chroniclers of various times. Peters draws upon Jewish, Christian, Muslim and biblical sources. The book is beautifully bound and printed, and contains many illustrations and photographs, both color and black-and-white. The illustrations include a number of nineteenth century engravings, a color reproduction of the Madaba Map (sixth century CE), and photographs of some of the recently excavated sites in the Old City. In addition, there are photographs of most of the important holy sites as they appear today and a number of historical maps reproduced from D. Bahat, *Carta's Historical Atlas of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1983).

Peters may have bitten off, however, more than he can chew. The book is both lacking in balance and seriously flawed. The majority of attention is devoted to the period of the author's expertise, late Roman antiquity and the middle ages. Relatively little weight is given to Jerusalem in the biblical period (less than 130 pages cover the first two thousand years of Jerusalem's history, while nearly 350 pages are devoted to the fourth century CE through the fourteenth century). Short chapters at the end of the book record the observations of visitors and chroniclers of the sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. Curiously, Peters ends his treatment in the 1840s. One wonders why he bothered with the biblical period at all, for his treatment of the historical sources is both cursory and almost consistently uncritical. In contrast, his handling of the sources for late antiquity and the middle ages, particularly for the period of Muslim rule, is nuanced, thoroughly critical and often quite insightful. It is clear that had *Jerusalem* been more limited in scope, perhaps devoted only to the period from late antiquity to the end of Turkish rule in 1917, it would have been a better book.

The chapters chronicling the history of Jerusalem in the last two millennia BCE are of little value to the historian. Peters presents a series of biblical texts, for the most part without critical commentary. There is rarely discussion of the purpose, date or provenance of these sources. In many cases even the basic commentaries and histories have not been consulted, and Peters rarely seems aware of scholarly discussion (he assumes, for example, the historicity of the patriachs and the Israelite "conquest" of Canaan). Archaeological sources are consulted superficially. In discussing the building of Solomon's Temple, Peters follows the biblical text without reference to archaeological evidence, which in this case is crucial. There is no discussion of Neo-Hittite or Phoenician influence on the building projects of David and Solomon. With the Second Temple Period (515 BCE - 70 CE), Peters begins to evaluate his sources critically (eg. Josephus's source material, p. 42; the date and provenance of Daniel 11, p. 53), yet not consistently, and he seems unaware of some significant primary material. He does not discuss the sectarian literature from Qumran (the Dead Sea Scrolls), where Jerusalem figures prominently as an eschatological symbol (see 11Q Temp and the description of the Heavenly Jerusalem in 1Q32, 5Q15 and DJD 1.134-35, as well as 4Q Flor). The Heavenly Jerusalem is mentioned briefly in the discussion of New Testament sources (pp. 122-23). Why then is there no discussion of the same symbol in Judaism of the period? Peters treats New Testament sources unevenly. One example will suffice. Paul's career is reconstructed almost wholly from Acts, while his own epistles are all but ignored. There is no discussion of Paul's ambivalent relationship to the church in Jerusalem, or the symbolic value of Jerusalem in his writings. In short, Peters's treatment of the biblical material in the first three chapters is seriously flawed. Many important beliefs about Jerusalem arising in the Second Temple Period are left unmentioned, or at least are dealt with only superficially.

Once Peters gets past 100 CE, his scholarship is generally quite impressive. He draws upon the writings of Eusebius, Sozomen, Jerome and various pilgrims to produce an impression of life in Jerusalem in the early centuries of this era. His discussion of the spread of the pilgrimage idea among Christians is interesting, and in particular his treatment of Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources for the medieval period is impressive. The discussions of Jerusalem's status in early Islam (prayer was first directed toward Jerusalem, and only