

Veltman, Colin, in collaboration with Odette Paré. *L'insertion sociolinguistique des Québécois d'origine portugaise*. Etudes et documents no. 44. Montreal: Institut national de la recherche scientifique — Urbanisation, 1985. Pp. 104

Victor M. P. Da Rosa

Volume 16, Number 3, February 1988

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017740ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017740ar>

[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**

Da Rosa, V. M. P. (1988). Review of [Veltman, Colin, in collaboration with Odette Paré. *L'insertion sociolinguistique des Québécois d'origine portugaise*. Etudes et documents no. 44. Montreal: Institut national de la recherche scientifique — Urbanisation, 1985. Pp. 104]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 16(3), 292–293. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017740ar>

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Williams, David Ricardo. *Mayor Gerry: The Remarkable Gerald Gratton McGeer*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1986. Pp. 319. \$24.95.

Blumenfeld, Hans. *Life Begins at 65: The Not Entirely Candid Biography of a Drifter*. Montreal: Harvest House, 1987. Pp. 328. \$24.95 cloth; \$15.00 paper.

Biography remains the heart and soul of histories of the senior political jurisdictions. It is a rare commodity at the local. There, patterns and institutions loom rather larger than the players. Structure takes precedence over agency.

Players at the senior levels may actually have influence over event and structure. Or the little influence they do have has more impact on the larger stage. Their lives are at least perceived to be of remark, one way or the other. But the perception remains, I think, an unexamined premise in the history and political science of our time. More likely, such production at the senior levels is more the function of superior record keeping. At the local level there is rarely enough material on which to hang a tale. And often there is found to be more than one tale to tell.

The other tales are often of greater note than the life in politics. Charlotte Whitton's municipal career, for example, generally takes a back seat to her lives as a welfare worker and a public woman. And where the life in local politics was preeminent, most tales remain untold, at least in academic biography. Camillien Houde, of Montreal, is an example.

Neither the McGeer biography nor the Blumenfeld memoir are what might be called authoritative texts, but both offer a rare insight into the world of local politics and administration (if planning in the world of Hans Blumenfeld can be so termed).

McGeer and Blumenfeld were curious contemporaries, both young men in the First Great War, McGeer fashioning his career as a Vancouver lawyer and politician, Blumenfeld caught up in the politics and violence of Central Europe and about to launch a remarkable career as planner that would carry him from Germany to Moscow, New York, Philadelphia and finally Toronto, where, nearing retirement (for most) was engaged as a main player in the planning of Metropolitan Toronto. McGeer had by then died, but in his flamboyant inter-war career had become an MLA, MP, Senator, and twice Mayor of Vancouver.

Williams' biography of McGeer is good work by a former lawyer and now writer and teacher. It has some quite remarkable parts, in particular the correspondence between McGeer and his wife; which documents perhaps more than anything else the toll levied by ambition and politics on fam-

ily life. Its chief flaw, I believe, is a lack of concern for context at whatever level of government the subject of the biography was operating, or even as a young lawyer in the swirling Liberal politics of early twentieth century Vancouver. Certainly there is little, for example, to explain either why McGeer won in 1935 as mayor or failed to run in 1937. At least some of the documentation is there. The indications are that the author was not aware of it. A good book, but one really half done.

The same might be said of Blumenfeld's memoir. Perhaps with such fascinating subject matter, it is not surprising that both authors tend to concentrate on the life. Blumenfeld's perspective from the eye of the interwar hurricane is fascinating. One wishes, however, he had brought more of that perspective to the sections on planning. What was going on in his head as he planned Toronto, especially, would have been rather useful to the students of that city. That is not to say there was nothing for there was a good deal, but this reader yearned for rather more, especially how (or if) the cumulative details of a rich life impinged on the planning of a city, and how (or if) the city influenced the man. What was the relationship of the artifact and the man?

Despite this negative comment, both are good books to read, and Blumenfeld's is especially rich in both its writing and its insights. Perhaps these two represent a beginning of building the biographies and memoirs that would complement the rich work increasingly available on city structure and pattern. It is a pattern largely the reverse of that prevailing at the senior levels. It is also perhaps the occasion to examine the usefulness of biography standing alone. In both these cases the context must be supplied by the reader: the authors do not. The format is that of an older tradition of biography and memoir. It could usefully be abandoned.

John H. Taylor  
Department of History  
Carleton University

---

Veltman, Colin, in collaboration with Odette Paré. *L'insertion sociolinguistique des Québécois d'origine portugaise*. Etudes et documents no. 44. Montreal: Institut national de la recherche scientifique — Urbanisation, 1985. Pp. 104.

For those interested in the evolution of the «rapports des communautés culturelles québécoises avec leurs concitoyens francophones et anglophones» and the changes that have taken place during the past ten years, this is an informative and well-documented study on the language choices of the

Portuguese living in Quebec. It is an unpretentious case study based on data collected from 255 Portuguese households interviewed in 1984 in the Montreal region. It documents that the Portuguese community has chosen French as its second language, primarily because they have found employment in the francophone sector of the economy. But the members of this francophone (and francophile) ethnic community have sent their children to English schools and, as a result of this, Portuguese youth, while trilingual, tend to integrate into the English-speaking community. In noting this phenomenon, the authors attempt to demonstrate that the situation has changed drastically with the enforcement of provincial language legislation (in particular Law 101) that has put a rein on this tendency and that, at present, most young people of Portuguese origin are moving towards French. In positing this, Veltman and Paré tell us that this aspect of language policy must be interpreted in the light of political choices made in the larger system and seen as what could be a consequence of shifting political alignments.

Through the use of questionnaires, the authors bring out the role of the immediate social context in the choice of language and the shortcomings of the concept «langue d'usage unique» used by the Canadian census. According to Veltman and Paré, «on peut notamment reprocher à cette notion subjective et globale de véhiculer une réalité disparue.» Thus, their study shows that, even if the language spoken by the Portuguese is Portuguese, among members of the same generation, they speak French or English. None of these questionnaire replies offers startling new insights, but they do illustrate clearly that the census question reflects the language of intergenerational contacts and is not particularly suited to the study of language shifts.

This working paper could be profitably read in the context of two available books on the Portuguese in Canada (i.e., Anderson, G. and D. Higgs, *L'héritage du futur*, and Alpalhão, J.A. and V. Da Rosa, *Les Portugais du Québec*), that document different socio-economic aspects of the Portuguese communities in Canada. To our surprise, these two monographs are absent from the bibliography.

While this is not a publication for the beginning student, it is deserving of attention by those interested in new research on linguistic shift in Canada. Thus, the study fills a gap in our knowledge of immigrant groups in the province of Quebec. While it can never be considered as a definitive work on the topic, it probably will be of some use to students seeking basic data on language choices made by immigrants in Montreal. As stated before, what would have enhanced its utility is a broader and more comprehensive description of the socio-economic niches occupied by the Portuguese communities of Quebec.

A final note: It would have been appropriate, for the sake of precision, to make reference to Montreal in the title. As a matter of fact, the findings may or may not apply to other

«Québécois d'origine portugaise» living in Hull or Quebec City, for instance.

Victor M.P. Da Rosa  
Department of Sociology  
University of Ottawa

---

Helman, Claire. *The Milton-Park Affair: Canada's Largest Citizen-Developer Confrontation*. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1987. Pp. 183. Illustrations. \$12.95.

Ratepayers and residents operate under serious disadvantages when fighting developers. The money is always concentrated on the other side and the city politicians, all too often, believe that their bread will be buttered better by the developers, not the voters. It takes time and effort to mobilize a community, endless hours attending meetings at City Hall and raising funds, hours that could be more usefully spent doing a job or simply playing with the kids. Staying power, in other words, is not the notable characteristic of a citizens group. And yet, sometimes it all comes together; sometimes the residents can defend themselves and emerge out of the fire as a stronger and more viable community.

Milton-Park is in Montreal, located just to the east of the McGill University campus. In the late 1960s, the housing stock in the area was slightly run down, but still sound. The residents were a bilingual mix of working class and middle class, hippies, professors, and workers, all of whom enjoyed living within a fifteen minute walk from the centre of town. But that very advantage attracted developers, ironically in this case two lapsed communists who had split with the party in 1956 and set out to make money. The developers put together a proposal, attracted funding from private and public sources and declared themselves ready to clear the slums.

Aided by a mole within the Montreal planning department, aided not at all by the politicians, the tenants and owners began to organize. Newsletters poured out; marches set off for City Hall; street festivals brought the wider community into the neighbourhood; the media was pressed into service; and the developers' spies were rooted out. Given the population of the area, there were political agendas being played out as the Maoists jostled with activists of various hues. Inevitably a core group of twenty developed, led by a McGill professor. Who else, after all, had the time to spend fighting City Hall and the access to mimeograph and xerox machines?

Milton-Park lost some of the early battles as its disorganization hurt it. The developer cleared a great tract of land for a hotel-apartment complex. But then the cost of money began to rise, the October Crisis hurt Montreal's image and