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Hudson, James R. *The Unanticipated City: Loft Conversions in Lower Manhattan*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987. Pp.xvi, 160. 15 black and white photographs, 2 maps. \$28.95

Bruce W. Krushelnicki

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undergraduates enrolled in courses in Ontario history. As an adjunct to a course, the book will be useful if the lecturer agrees with Piva about what is important. To me it seems a useful selection. The book is sensibly in paperback. Such volumes help to relieve pressure on library periodical collections, and they should become increasingly popular if changes in the copyright law impose user fees for photocopying.

Bruce S. Elliott  
City of Nepean

**Lane, Roger. *Roots of Violence In Black Philadelphia 1860-1900*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. Pp.v, 174. Index. \$25.00.**

*Roots of Violence In Black Philadelphia 1860-1900* is only 174 pages long but it is the best book written in the last decade about the urban experience of black Americans. Containing a number of provocative ideas that have broader applications for the study of black American history, Lane's study makes explicit what was implicit in earlier studies of black urbanization — the structural basis of American racism. Using an approach to the problem of racial inequality in 19th century America that is both unique and exciting, Lane examines the question of black subordination by focusing on crime in Philadelphia during the last four decades of the century. "The history of crime," he writes, "has ignored almost wholly the Afro-American population of the United States." Lane looks to the peculiar circumstances of Negro life in ante bellum America to explain why blacks were more likely than whites to be criminals after the civil war. The 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments made blacks the equals of whites in theory, but not in reality. When viewed from this perspective, the Civil War and Reconstruction constitute a hiatus, not a revolution, in American racial sensibilities.

In Philadelphia between 1860 and 1900 blacks did not share in the city's expanded economic opportunities. "The experience of American blacks is unique in part precisely because they were not merely bypassed but systematically excluded from the urban-industrial revolution, and this exclusion had important effects not only on criminal behavior but also, through criminal behavior on family life, racial leadership, and urban culture in general." Forced to live on the economic margins of society, Philadelphia blacks turned to crime. The criminal subculture blacks were forced to live in because of social and economic discrimination undermined family structure, bred violence, alienated the black middle class from the lower class, and further poisoned race relations. Black crime, in short, reinforced the racism of which it was a product.

Blacks were usually not successful as criminals. Racism prevented them from entering the more lucrative areas of criminal endeavour. White-collar crimes, such as fraud, embezzlement, and forgery, were closed to blacks. For them, Lane says, this "was a direct analogue of the problem of breaking into white collar employment more generally." The petty theft and burglaries black men engaged in were not profitable. Black women, on the other hand, working as domestics or prostitutes were able to steal substantial amounts of cash and other valuables. Whether working legitimately or illegitimately, black women were able to earn more than their men. This state of affairs did nothing for black male self-esteem and most certainly contributed nothing to family stability.

Late 19th century black Philadelphians lived in a violent community. Homicide rates were higher than for any other group in the city of brotherly love. The roots of this violence lay in the political, economic, and social subordination that dominated and shaped black life. In focusing on the origins of black violence and crime, Lane has made a major

contribution to black history. His book criticizes the cultural paradigm that has dominated black history for the past 20 years, arguing that the "emphasis on a distinctive Afro-American tradition has had important results." This mode of analysis has given blacks agency in history, something an earlier generation of American historians denied them. But the importance that many American historians have placed on the strength, resilience, and adaptability of black American culture has caused them to ignore certain problems inherent in this conceptualization of the black past. One of these problems is the corrosive effect that criminal violence had on black culture. Violence in the 19th century vitiated other parts of the black American cultural tradition. In noting this fact, Professor Lane has vindicated the earlier work of W. E. B. Dubois in *The Philadelphia Negro*.

Clarence E. Walker  
Professor of History  
University of California, Davis

**Hudson, James R. *The Unanticipated City: Loft Conversions in Lower Manhattan*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987. Pp.xvi, 160. 15 black and white photographs, 2 maps. \$28.95.**

Hudson's book on loft conversions in New York City does two things. First, it tells a good story in readable prose about the unofficial transformation of Manhattan's declining manufacturing district - SoHo (South of Houston) district - into an enclave of avant-garde artists in the 1960s and, later, into a trendy haven for the fashionably eccentric. Second, it serves as a useful addition to the field of human ecology in cities.

Artists began occupying the industrial lofts of SoHo as early as the 1940s, and by the early 1970s they had virtually taken over the area. The lofts had many advantages over conventional apartments. The load-bearing

steel skeletons of the late 19th century industrial buildings offered large, open sunlit spaces well suited to the need of the artists. They suited large projects and provided the privacy from other residents that allowed experimentation with materials and processes as well as unorthodox working hours. As the community grew, the district changed to accommodate the new residents. Working-class bars became meeting places for artists, the number of art supply and hardware stores increased to fill the artists' needs, galleries were established to show their work, and restaurants appeared that catered to the growing number of visitors and tourists to the area.

To document the process, Hudson uses evidence such as residential telephone usage, informal censuses (since loft living was illegal until the mid 1970s), and survey research. In this respect, the work maintains a high degree of empirical credibility. But, because the process of loft conversion was initially clandestine, one gets the sense that the researcher had to scrounge for data. Happily, enough of the supporting information consists of anecdotes of the residents, popular journalistic accounts, and other less systematic but imaginative forms of information. Interspersed among the dry statistics of residential floor space by decade are accounts - some of them amusing - of the strategies adopted by the pioneers of this process to cope with loft life. As a social scientist with more than a little sympathy for the artistic world, Hudson betrays a fascination with the artists' irreverence and their ingenuity. Included are the ways in which residents eluded the by-law enforcers, "ad libbed" plumbing and electrical works, and dealt with such ordinary problems as waste disposal.

On its own, the conversion process under study is intrinsically an interesting one. It does, however, also have instructional and research value, and this is the academic purpose of the book. Hudson regards the conversion process in lower Manhattan as a

case-study useful in refining the theory of human ecology.

Human ecology has come a long way from the deterministic real estate models of Park, Burgess, and Homer Hoyt. In its early manifestation, it attempted to explain settlement patterns and urban behaviour using analogies from the science of natural ecological systems, such as natural competition among species (read social groups). Hudson's work attempts to use the loft conversion process to elaborate a part of the human ecology theory, namely "invasion/succession," a process whereby a social group moves into an area, competes for space and resources, and eventually becomes the dominant occupant. Succession then leads to the mature achievement of equilibrium among the new elements of the social system.

Hudson's application of human ecology to the SoHo district (and also, it should be noted, to the NoHo and Tribeca districts) follows the lead of more recent human ecologists who are attempting to humanize the discipline. Early proponents of this school of thought were criticized for reinforcing an economically deterministic view of the city, and occasionally affirming ethnic segregation practices. More recently it has been blamed for planning practices that require single use of exclusionary zoning, often believed to have contributed to the sterile dormitory suburb and the central business district that becomes abandoned after five o'clock and is devoid of night-life. More recent planning theory has had to struggle against this thinking, promoting instead mixed uses in suburbs and central cities to allow for a richer diversity of urban life and a less monotonous urban landscape.

Hudson's work demonstrates a turn in the human ecology position away from its deterministic roots. In the final pages of the book he confesses to an optimism that the SoHo conversion is perhaps a harbinger of future urban recycling and resettlement

projects. It is a signal that American city life, especially in the central city, is much more resilient than had previously been believed. Seeing in this process an *unanticipated* (hence the title of the book) renaissance of the central city, Hudson believes that Americans will weary of suburbia, regret the abandonment of the urban core, and live once again as an urban society.

Hudson's optimism about the immediate practical prospects for the human ecological view of the city does not follow quite so readily from the data. He argues that social systems can now be understood with more precision. Rather than being fuelled by simplistic determinants such as "natural competition" and "pure markets," human ecosystems are driven by a more complex web of variables, including the deliberate actions of individuals and groups in a political and cultural context. Having learned something about this from the SoHo case, Hudson concludes that human ecology is more than retrospective description and can now be used for more accurate prediction of social system in cities.

The error in this reasoning is that Hudson is trying to create a science of surprise. What makes the SoHo conversion and other spontaneous urban renaissance projects fascinating is that they were not planned — they were positively irreverent towards bureaucratic city planning, extremely ingenious in the face of mindless opposition, and delightfully unanticipated. Some of the best things in life happen despite the best-laid plans.

Bruce W. Krushelnicki  
Institute of Urban and Environmental Studies  
Brock University