

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Crossick, Geoffrey, and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Commerce: The European Department Store, 1850–1939*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999. Pp. xvii, 326. Black-and-white illustrations, index. US\$99.95

David Monod

Volume 29, Number 1, October 2000

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016431ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016431ar>

[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

Monod, D. (2000). Review of [Crossick, Geoffrey, and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Commerce: The European Department Store, 1850–1939*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999. Pp. xvii, 326. Black-and-white illustrations, index. US\$99.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 29(1), 68–69. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016431ar>

---

Wilson, Christopher P. *Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Pp. xii, 281. Black-and-white illustrations, index. US\$16.00 (paper).

Christopher Wilson is a professor of English, not urban history, yet his interest in cultural representation has produced a study of "police stories" that will benefit urban studies. Previously he worked on American literature, news reporting, nonfiction, and popular culture. In a series of case studies ranging from the Dora Clark affair of 1896 to Boston's Copney-Grant murders of 1991, Wilson illustrates the complex relationship between the police, the media, and mass culture. The focus is on big-city policing, journalism, and popular culture, specifically in centres such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Boston. Police stories have functioned as "narratives of power" that, even in the case of liberal journalists, tend to allow the police to construct the "reality" of crime and criminality. At times this influence has been direct, such as the LAPD's vetting of scripts for *Dragnet*. But in most cases the influences have been indirect, low profile and more powerful.

Readers are warned that the approach is experimental and the theoretical framework somewhat imprecise. But Wilson attempts to pursue three broad questions: the material forms of police power over the last century; the impact of "cop knowledge" on media depictions of police, crime, and urban society; and the challenges for "outsiders" working on and among the police.

The sources of *Cop Knowledge* include popular journalism, from the early twentieth-century muckrakers to the tabloids of the 1980s, political and academic writing including the works of Reiss, Fogelson, Skolnick, and Monkkenon, and fictional works such as the book and film *The Naked City* and the bestselling 1970s novels of Joseph Wambaugh. Supposedly empirical criminological studies such as James Q. Wilson's *Thinking about Crime*, which signalled and abetted the neoconservative criminal justice policies of the 1980s, can also be considered "cultural storytelling and political rhetoric." And so can popular America television programs such as *Homicide*.

Wilson opens with the Clark affair, which pitted writer Stephen Crane against the "reformed" New York police under commissioner Teddy Roosevelt. Crane, then investigating the city's Tenderloin district, emerged as the chivalrous protector of a woman arrested for soliciting for purposes of prostitution. The second chapter discusses the emergence of the "police procedural" story, which coincided with the second wave of American police reform as promoted by August Vollmer and O. W. Wilson. In these stories, epitomized in the film *The Naked City* (1948), crimes are solved methodically by white-collar detectives. The film was based on a book by an early tabloid journalist, Mark Hellinger, predecessor to populist urban realists such as Jimmy Breslin. The suggestion is that journalists/authors who have worked in the police milieu legitimize police authority through semi-documentary detective stories and reporting.

Wilson next examines the "antiacademic police ethnographies" of Wambaugh, an ex-cop whose fiction reflects the besieged nature of 1960s policing. In *The New Centurions* and *The Blue Knight*, the aggressive policies of the LAPD are endorsed, and minorities, gays, protestors, and liberals are excoriated. The heroes are blue-collar "white ethnics," mostly Roman Catholic (a point the author raises more than once), relying on an artisanal approach to law enforcement that is hostile towards not only "civilians," but also misguided police commanders and their political masters. Wambaugh's television series *Police Story* attempted to build sympathy for the ordinary mobile patrol officer.

Despite the upheavals of the 1960s and declining police prestige, the media and cultural industries retained their fascination with "cop knowledge," especially when it involves murder. A series of "reality" best-sellers on urban crime, easily serialized for television, were produced by journalists who reiterated the police message that crime was influenced not by social-economic factors such as de-industrialization or racism, but individual pathology. Wilson also discusses the strategy of community policing, which may have served as a cover story for a more aggressive response to street, drug, and youth crime.

This book is both engaging and challenging. *Cop Knowledge* is accessible and thought provoking but also difficult in places for the non-specialist. The endnotes provide some assistance to readers unfamiliar with the theories and terminology of cultural criticism. This caveat aside, the study is valuable for reminding us that historical and contemporary accounts of urban crime and policing should never be taken at face value. And we should be careful not to overly enjoy those *Hill Street Blues* reruns.

Greg Marquis  
Department of History and Politics  
University of New Brunswick

---

Crossick, Geoffrey, and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Commerce: The European Department Store, 1850–1939*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999. Pp. xvii, 326. Black-and-white illustrations, index. US\$99.95.

Over the last couple of decades, Geoffrey Crossick has co-edited a series of works, often with Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, that have largely defined the study of the urban lower middle class. Their *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, in particular, is a seminal work in the social history of nineteenth-century small-business people. And now, with Serge Jaumain, Crossick turns his attention to the petite bourgeoisie's indispensable enemy, the department stores.

As with Crossick's other collections, this volume is timely, arriving at a point where interest in its subject is growing, but where the field remains fragmented. Unfortunately, unlike Crossick's other books, this one merits a lukewarm welcome.

Reflecting the multiplicity of approaches to the study of the department store, the articles in this collection range from

treatments of architectural design to explorations of the socio-economic dimensions of mass consumption. Overall, what the contributions share is a vision of department stores as symbols rather than as business enterprises. This book looks through the plate glass and imagines the people surging along the streets outside. Two of the articles—those by Tim Coles on department store locations in Germany and Gábor Gyáni on class and consumption in Budapest—are contributions to debates about the extent and speed of economic modernization. Others, such as Erika Rappaport's on the image of shop girls on London stages and Christopher Hosgood's on the feminization of shopping, assess the impact of occupational and consumer mobility on Victorian and Edwardian women. Articles like these do not tell us much about department stores, but they do represent the breadth of information that might be gleaned from trade sources and from contemporary discussions of marketing.

*Cathedrals of Consumption* begins well, with a fine synthetic article by Crossick and Jaumain. Displaying Europe's goods, departmentalizing the scholarship, and tantalizing with unfulfilled suggestions, Crossick and Jaumain's contribution is not unlike the stores they study: big, all-encompassing, and strangely out of step with the times. They offer us a reassuringly familiar social history of the departmentals, their primary concerns being the class basis of consumerism and the politics of opposition to the great stores. They seem uncomfortable with the cultural deconstruction of retailing and with the feminism that informs many of the contributions to the volume. Still, it is an auspicious beginning.

Things quickly unravel. Clare Walsh spends too many pages telling us about eighteenth-century retailing and why what we take as department store innovations were nothing new—an exercise not unlike comparing apples and oranges and concluding that both are fruit. Then Tim Coles tells us that department store chains in Germany migrated from small places to large, and he makes assertions based on an assumption that one can accurately profile the classes of consumers by assessing store attributes (defining stores as serving the upper, middle, or working class on the basis of their location and aesthetic characteristics). Hosgood and Rappaport, who both focus on London, and Lisa Tiersten, who writes on Paris, then offer articles about the impact of department store shopping and selling on women's roles. Hosgood sees shopping as empowering, Tiersten does not, and Rappaport is not sure. Uwe Spiekermann follows with a discussion of attitudes to shoplifting that tells us how medical and legal perceptions changed but not why. In a chapter on Ghent, Donald Weber then reveals that department store advertising sold “the genteel classes” what they wanted (it commercialized bourgeois culture) and so manifested the “dream marriage” between the middle class and the great stores. Although, in passing, Weber offers interesting insights into retail developments in a small city, his main point provides nothing new in a way not easily understood.

And so it goes. There are bright spots—Hosgood's and Rappaport's articles are fine enough—and I liked Kathleen

James's comparison of the design of the Wertheim store in Berlin to the Schocken store in Stuttgart, which, while saying nothing new about Wilhelmine or Weimar culture, does make one more aware of the sheer beauty of some of these stores. But there is also much here that is very weak indeed.

Most surprising is the absence, once one moves past Crossick and Jaumain's article, of a comparative approach. There is a defiant nationalism to the collection: Gábor Gyáni cites nothing but Hungarian works, Uwe Spiekermann has eyes only for the German, Hosgood refers only to the British. Surely in a book about *Europe*, a book that grew, after all, out of an international conference, one might expect people to at least try to think comparatively. In fact, though the North American scholarship is largely ignored, the United States gets more references in most of these articles than other European countries. The result, unfortunately, is that contributors end up providing complex national justifications for developments that are common to many countries.

Readers of this journal will be similarly disappointed to find little attention given to the interplay of local, regional, and national agents. Department stores are fascinating because they are both highly localized enterprises and purveyors of national and international product cultures. They develop in and because of local markets, but they do not necessarily reflect, in their architecture or in their advertising, regional tastes or ideals. The tension here is especially intriguing for urban historians, but it is largely absent from this collection.

*Cathedrals of Consumption* is an unexpectedly disappointing book. While it does fairly reflect the range of scholarship department stores are attracting, it adds little that is new or challenging. Some of the articles are certainly worth reading—most notably the introduction—but given the high cost of the volume, one must conclude, *Caveat emptor*.

David Monod  
Department of History  
Wilfrid Laurier University

---

Baxandall, Rosalyn, and Elizabeth Ewen. *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened*. New York: Basic Books, 2000. Pp.xxii, 298. Black-and-white illustrations, index. US\$27.50, Can\$41.50 (cloth).

The strength of the economic boom of the 1990s has been likened to that of the 1950s. It has spawned a new wave of suburban development, together with a renewed interest in the subject by academics, planners, and the public. Those who wrote about suburbs in the 1950s marvelled at the novelty of what was happening, and sought no precedents. Today, many writers look backwards, some nostalgically, others from a desire to trace how we arrived at our present state, and a few to draw lessons. With all three purposes in mind, Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen claim to tell us “how the suburbs happened.” Addressing a broad audience, they speak of a suburban history