

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Nader, George A. *Cities of Canada, Volume One: Theoretical, Historical and Planning Perspectives*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975. Pp. ix, 404. Maps, illustrations. \$15.95

Nader, George A. *Cities of Canada, Volume Two: Profiles of Fifteen Metropolitan Centres*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976. Pp. xii, 460. Maps, illustrations. \$18.95

Alan F. J. Artibise

Numéro 1-76, june 1976

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019559ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019559ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Artibise, A. F. J. (1976). Compte rendu de [Nader, George A. *Cities of Canada, Volume One: Theoretical, Historical and Planning Perspectives*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975. Pp. ix, 404. Maps, illustrations. \$15.95 / Nader, George A. *Cities of Canada, Volume Two: Profiles of Fifteen Metropolitan Centres*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976. Pp. xii, 460. Maps, illustrations. \$18.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (1-76), 40–45.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1019559ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1976

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

é
rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

character, is unfortunate and simplistic, and demonstrates the necessity for improved relations between amateur and professional historians.

As Mr. O'Neill says, St. John's is a truly interesting city, with a very definite character. It has long needed an historian, and even if Mr. O'Neill fails to satisfy he has performed a valuable task. One hopes that this book will help awaken in the citizens of St. John's an awareness of their heritage, and a determination to save it from the ravages of arterial roads and Trizec.

Professor J.K. Hiller
Department of History
Memorial University of Newfoundland

* * *

Nader, George A. Cities of Canada, Volume One: Theoretical, Historical and Planning Perspectives. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975. Pp. ix, 404. Maps, illustrations. \$15.95.

Nader, George A. Cities of Canada, Volume Two: Profiles of Fifteen Metropolitan Centres. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976. Pp. xii, 460. Maps, illustrations. \$18.95.

Although these books are certainly a valuable contribution to the growing field of Canadian urban studies, they are also a disappointment. Their value lies in the sweep of the subject covered in two volumes, making them strong candidates for use as textbooks in a wide variety of urban study courses across the country. It is disappointing, however, that such a major effort should yield only this limited dividend and not break much new ground in terms of approaches to the study of the Canadian city.

As the title of Volume One suggests, this book is divided into three equal parts reflecting the goals Professor Nader had in mind in preparing this study. Part I is a description of the major forces which

operate on the contemporary urban system in terms of both inter-urban relationships and the internal structure of cities. It includes a discussion of current theories relating to such areas as the external urban system, internal city structure, urban land use structure, and the city centre. Part II is an overview of the historical evolution of the Canadian urban system. It deals with the Canadian city from the period of forts, trading-posts and missions to the metropolitan centres of today. Part III concentrates on current urban problems in the areas of finance, planning and government. Volume Two consists of a description of fifteen metropolitan areas under the headings of historical development, economic base, land-use structure and planning policy. The fifteen metropolitan centres included in this volume were selected on the basis of both size and geographical location, and were chosen from among the twenty-two census metropolitan areas defined by Statistics Canada for the 1971 census. According to the author "the number of centres was limited to fifteen in order to produce a book of moderate length, while the need to include a geographically representative cross-section made the elimination of some metropolitan areas in Quebec and Ontario unavoidable" (p.ix). The seven metropolitan areas that were not included are Chicoutimi-Jonquière, Kitchener, London, St. Catherines-Niagara, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, and Windsor.

The principal value of Cities of Canada is that together the two books are the most complete general urban studies textbooks produced to date and as such will be welcomed by the growing number of teachers involved in urban studies courses. Since the books discuss such a wide range of topics and cities and bring together so much recent research in the field, they should appeal to a wide audience. Whether urban studies are being taught in a geographic, planning, or historic context, the teacher and student will find something of value in these volumes. They are also attractive for these uses since they contain over one hundred maps and figures, over seventy-five tables, and almost eighty illustrations.

Cities of Canada have many weaknesses, however, both as textbooks and as pieces of scholarly research. They are written in a terse style with little effort made to touch on all the varied dimensions of urban Canada. While some topics - such as population growth, economic

development, and even the "city centre as a unique functional zone" - are dealt with in great detail, others - such as the social and political development of the cities discussed - are virtually ignored. In the section on the historical evolution of urban Canada in Volume One, for example, there is a glaring lack of material on such topics as urban society, politics, and the physical environment. No where is mention made of the fact that cities in pre-confederation Canada were generally dirty and cluttered, with crowded and unpaved streets, miserable shanties in back allies, few gas lights or sewers, and much hardship and poverty. And these omissions are not corrected to any major degree in the second volume profiling fifteen metropolitan centres. Indeed, lack of material of this kind is general throughout the volumes. A judicious attempt to include some mention of the social and political development of urban Canada would have added immeasurably not only to the readability of these books, but also to their claim as "exhaustive" studies.

The author's decision to dispense with footnotes, while understandable from the point of view of their use as textbooks, is also regrettable. Not understandable is the fact that neither book contains the "comprehensive" bibliography proclaimed on the dust jacket. The author states in Volume Two that "the primary emphasis was on the inclusion of generally available material" (p. x). This was an unfortunate decision since it effectively excludes a listing of most unpublished thesis work, an area where a great wealth of material has been produced in recent years. Indeed, the author could well have included not only a more extensive bibliography, but some comments - based on his own research experiences - on the primary sources available for the study of the Canadian city would have been most welcome.

The books have many other problems as well, and it would be impossible to deal with all of them here. From the point of view of the urban historian, however, the sections in both books dealing with historical development - and the use of this material in "viewing the contemporary urban system from an evolutionary viewpoint" (I,p.ix) - are woefully inadequate. Several examples of the author's neglect or inadequate grasp

of historical material may be given, although urban historians could certainly add others. In the discussion of Saskatoon's development in Volume Two, Professor Nader makes note of that city's unique experiences in the area of municipal investment in undeveloped land.* He states that "the possession of large inventories of land from these periods [the post-1913 boom era and the Depression] was not unique to the city - virtually every other western Canadian city had acquired land in a similar way. During the housing boom after the war, however, most municipalities (including Edmonton and Calgary) disposed of their land holdings, but in 1953 Saskatoon formally adopted a policy of continuous land acquisition in order to maintain a land reserve sufficient to meet its development needs for fifteen to twenty years ahead" (p. 330). Having made this important point, the author does not then make any attempt to explain it. The important questions left unanswered are why did Saskatoon adopt this course of action while other cities did not? And did Saskatoon's successful experiment in this area have any impact on land policies in other cities? By leaving these and many other questions hanging, the author is treating the historical dimension as window dressing, not as an integral part of the explanatory process.

Another example of the author's narrow view of significant factors in the development of Canadian cities is his complete neglect of the role of individual and group decisions. The reader is not told whether he agrees or disagrees with recent historical studies which stress the importance of the initiatives taken by business groups in the rise of Winnipeg to metropolitan status; or with the lack of dynamism among the business leaders of maritime cities and those cities' decline in the late nineteenth century. Although the historical studies that deal with these cases may well over-emphasize the internal, human factors as opposed to external factors in the rise and decline of respective cities, Professor Nader takes the opposite extreme by concentrating almost exclusively on the external forces. And this tendency to ignore internal

* A detailed account of Saskatoon's experiences in this area is Don Ravis, Advanced Land Acquisition by Local Government: The Saskatoon Experience (Ottawa: Community Planning Association of Canada, 1973).

factors is common to both books; it is, certainly, one of the major weaknesses of this study.

These examples point out one of the major differences that still divide social scientists and historians in their accounts of urban development. Urban geographers and economists still tend to overstress theories of city location and growth with the result that cities most often are seen as the creation of complex economic and geographic factors that focus in a particular time-space dimension. In terms of this kind of analysis the rise or decline of particular cities appears logical and even inevitable. But as historians continually point out, men also play an important part in making cities and the success or failure of one city relative to another is never solely determined by impersonal, external forces. Man interacts with his environment and shapes the character and form of the city through his beliefs, needs, and actions. In short, cities are founded and develop in distinctive ways as much because of deliberate decisions by individuals and groups as because of external forces. And until some scholar goes to the trouble of giving due attention to both these obviously important factors, our understanding of urban development in this country will be limited. Unfortunately, Professor Nader has not succeeded in these books in bringing the two areas together.

A further flaw that deserves comment is that one of the author's major goals for Volume Two, namely "to ensure a consistent and systematic examination of each metropolitan centre" for the purpose of permitting "comparisons between cities" (p. ix), is virtually ignored in practice. Although each metropolitan area is discussed under similar headings, the material presented in each is rarely comparable. With the exception of tables on population growth and labour force by industry, the statistical material presented on each metropolitan centre varies considerably. Data presented on the value of building permits in Saskatoon from 1910-1974, for example, is not repeated for any other city. And material on each city's ethnic, religious and age composition is also not included. The maps contained in the book, while generally excellent, do not always allow

for comparison. The author apparently took the maps he discovered in various planning studies and simply reproduced them in the book. An attempt to provide a set of standard, original maps for each city would have given his study an avenue for comparison which it simply does not have in its present form.

Far more regrettable than these flaws, however, is the fact that the author did not devote any attention to the conceptual or methodological problems faced by those interested in the study of the Canadian city. After having completed the vast amount of research that obviously went into the preparation of this book, it is certainly unfortunate that Professor Nader did not choose to share with the reader any of the lessons he must have learned along the way. It would have been enlightening, for example, to have had Professor Nader, an urban geographer, comment precisely on the role he believes the historical dimension plays in the development of theories of urban evolution. Since one of the great attractions of urban studies as a research area is its ability to bring together the approaches and insights of a large number of disciplines, some mention of the problems and potential of inter-disciplinary urban studies would have been most welcome. Instead, these two books only indicate how far off we are from any integrated history of the Canadian city. Hopefully, Professor Nader will comment on the subjects of methodology, conceptualization and interdisciplinary communication in future publications.

Alan F.J. Artibise
National Museum of Man

* * *

Harney, Robert, and Troper, Harold. Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience, 1890-1930. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975. Pp. x. 212. \$14.95.

In terms of its stated objectives, Immigrants is an ambitious