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Freeman, Bill, and Hewitt, Marsha. *Their Town: The Mafia, The Media, and the Party Machine*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1979. Pp. 174. Maps, illustrations. \$19.95 and \$8.95 (paperback)

Wayne Roberts

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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policymakers look upon the history of technology and engineering with what seems to be the disinterest or embarrassment normally reserved for the hidden illegitimate child of an otherwise proper family. At the present time, any residents of Canada's foremost industrial city who wish to visit a museum of science or technology, study the history of technology, or pursue a career in these areas must do as this reviewer has done: leave.

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Freeman, Bill, and Hewitt, Marsha. *Their Town: The Mafia, The Media, and the Party Machine*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1979. Pp. 174. Maps, illustrations. \$19.95 and \$8.95 (paperback).

"The water in Hamilton's bay used to be so clear," an oldtimer bragged recently while reminiscing about the city he once knew, "that you could see Rocco Perri." Since Hamilton's king of the bootleggers disappeared one day in 1944, the bay that was once the stomping ground of bootleggers' speedboats has become the murky backwater for one of the great corporate crimes of Canadian history, the Hamilton Dredging Scandal. The *Lunchbucket City* has a thousand stories like these. Marsha Hewitt and Bill Freeman tell some of them. There are stories of crime, corruption, hypocrisy, and deception; incidents in the careers of the power brokers who have made Hamilton *Their Town*.

Hewitt and Freeman tell these stories because they want to

develop an analysis of "the way to which special interest groups come to dominate society." They want to develop their analysis by elaborating on a series of events rather than by elaborating on some general theory. The authors share a vision of a city which involves its citizens, preserves its neighbourhoods, and maintains its natural environment. They also share a theory of how power has been administered to prevent this vision from becoming a reality. They reject a pluralist model of power in which power is held to be widely and evenly distributed throughout society. Instead, they find the elitist model of concentrated and unequally distributed power, a conception made famous by C. Wright Mills, to be useful. The one failing in this elitist model, according to the authors, is its inability to explain how all ranks of society have adopted elite views on most social questions. Thus, the authors are equally intrigued with the interests of powerholders and with the consensus whereby the excluded lose a sense of how their interests conflict with those of the elite.

The authors' approach to the distribution of power in *Their Town* hits the mark quite often. Some chapters such as "Welfare Hamilton Style" deserve to become classics of popular exposé. The chapter contrasts the carelessly generous subsidies and handouts to businessmen during three boom periods in the city's growth with the penny pinching and humiliating dole provided for the city's poor. In this and other chapters, the authors step on the toes of a host of powerful Hamiltonians. The educational and gossip value of material like this had earned the

book a wide audience.

As a portrayal of power and protest in an industrial city, however, the book has several shortcomings. The city's elite is never examined in terms of its members, connections, or levers of influence. Far from providing a systematic account of a ruling class or its factions, the authors' elite or interest-group concept of power, coupled with a narrative approach rather than an analytically comprehensive method of illustrating this power, led them to be overwhelmed by adventurers. The authors spent time on frontmen and hucksters to the neglect of real authorities in the city. Amazingly, for instance, the steel magnates of Stelco and Dofasco are not dealt with in this book.

In the same vein, the exclusively local focus of the book must be questioned. Not only are many of Hamilton's corporations dominated from outside the city's, or the country's, borders, most of the developments in the local real estate market, such as the Jackson Square mall which so upsets the authors, follow patterns set elsewhere in the province and continent. In this respect, the authors would have done well to consider Henry Aubin's conclusion in his famous study of Montreal, *City For Sale*, "Much of what the local radicals call with awe the 'local power structure' is, in fact, little more than a collection of local yokels acting as agents and intermediaries for these much larger global interests."

Instead of analyzing the local power structure, the authors shoot at the easy targets - the mafia hoods, the harbour rats, the real estate con-men, and the political

bagmen. Far from holding a system up for analysis, the authors search out individuals within the elite whose words and actions highlight the abuses of their peers. Reform and radical action are examined in isolation rather than placed in a context in which their successes and failures can be fairly assessed.

These general criticisms can be illustrated by reviewing the treatment accorded three major subjects within the book: the Mafia, John Munro, and the labour movement. The chapter on the Mafia in Hamilton argues that the "mob" is a permanent institution which has evolved from the bootlegging of Rocco Perri through the gambling and narcotics handled by Johnny Papalia to today's unnamed man in a grey flannel suit. The mob, which has depended on corruption to survive, has always prospered in Hamilton. Today, according to the authors, it is an *eminence grise* of the city's political life, and mobsters rub shoulders with legitimate and respectable businessmen.

Apart from some sloppy research, which may result in a slander suit against the authors, this chapter suffers from some fundamental problems. To start with, and notwithstanding the low incidence of crime among Italian immigrants, the book carries on the xenophobic tradition of equating organized crime with the mob, hence with the Mafia, and hence with Italians. This is wrong on two counts. First, a cross-section of society is involved in organized crime, which is simply crime on an organized rather than sporadic basis. The big biker gangs and their farm teams, which specialize in porn, bootlegging, and drug manufacture, are part of a network

of organized crime and have even fielded a candidate for mayor of Hamilton. Second, much of the "crime" with which an organized Italian mafia has been falsely associated, has simply reflected the spontaneous community behaviour of working class immigrants. As many as one-third of the houses in the choice immigrant area around the steel mills doubled as homes and bootleg joints during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. These one-family bootleg operations catered to pre-union shift workers, who usually finished their twelve and thirteen hour shifts after the licensed taverns were closed.

After falling victim to an ethnic stereotype, the authors err in identifying organized crime with rackets like gambling, prostitution, and narcotics. In fact, these frequently-mentioned fields of activity do not touch the full limits of organized criminal activity. Organized crime of many other kinds occurs in Hamilton, and, in some instances, its acceptance by members of the establishment is crucial to its existence and to any explanation of the tolerance displayed toward it. The authors cannot claim that this is an unknown fact, especially in a labour city like Hamilton.

Finally, the authors accept the stereotype of "legitimate" and "illegitimate" business, thus ensuring that they will only hit at a few scapegoats whose guilt lies mainly in breaking laws rather than making them to their own advantage. Morton Shulman suffered from this same misconception when he worried that "organized crime is penetrating increasingly into legitimate areas of business by fair means or foul." Al Capone, the Chicago gangster, saw no such conflict between ganster and

capitalist ethic. "Don't get the idea that I'm knocking the American system," he insisted. "This American system of ours...call it capitalism, call it whatever you like, gives to each and every one of us a great opportunity if we only seize it with both hands and make the most of it (Frank Pearce, *Crimes of the Powerful*, p. 127). Organized crime is within the mainstream of economic activity in a competitive class society and is not confined to minority ethnic communities or deviant groups like gamblers. In the competitive real estate and construction businesses the unseen black hand may step in when the unseen hand of the market is too slow. In other areas of enterprise more gentility is required, and the hand must be quicker than the eye.

The study of John Munro's Liberal party organization by Henry Jacek, the one contribution to the book not made by Hewitt or Freeman, is an interesting description of a powerful political machine. Among his accomplishments, Munro was able to win an Italo-Canadian riding from a Conservative who was Canada's first Italo-Canadian Member of Parliament and has been able to hold this industrial working class riding from the NDP. Jacek is interested in the Munro machine's ability to penetrate into the heart of neighbourhood life and establish reciprocal relations between the politician and the electorate, either through constituency service work or through patronage. Patron-client relationships are seen as an important aspect of Munro's machine. But to reduce Munro to a ward politician is to belittle him and underestimate the effectiveness of his approach. The real secret of Munro's success is his plebian manner and his left-liberal, almost

populist, style. As Minister of Health and Welfare, during the hectic days of poor people's movements, Munro was able to enlist the help of an endless run of welfare rights activists, community organizers, and humanitarian social planners. As Minister of Labour during wage and price controls, he talked about labour-business-government tripartism. Jacek's neglect of Munro's political style overlooks what some would interpret as the historic and dynamic relationship between liberal-populism and ward-heeling corruption. They may be seen as points on a continuum, in effect allies, not polar opposites. Neglect of the functioning of a modern political machine can only result in a superficial analysis of part of the means by which the populace is controlled in a liberal democracy.

Freeman's chapter on "Hamilton Labour: The failure of an opposition group" is critical to the book, since it is used to explain the absence of any real alternative to the business elite's model of the city. In keeping with the views of most elite theorists who write on the labour movement, Freeman argues that "labour politicians have operated simply as a vested interest group with a limited set of objectives, rather than as a political party dedicated to bringing substantial improvements to the working class and limiting the power of business." This view of labour's relation to municipal reform or radicalism is incorrect and dangerous. Criticisms of labour politics in a city must be set in the context of working class developments elsewhere in the country. Hamilton workers probably have the most profound and longlasting experience with

municipal politics of any workers in the province, certainly more so than workers in Sudbury or Toronto, and this involvement has been characterized by variety and vitality. This was true of CCF figures like Sam Lawrence, whose policies as mayor were crucial for the victory of industrial unionism in 1946, and James Murdoch, a Trotskyist alderman, who spoke out during the 1950s on all issues, including the nuclear facilities at McMaster University and Stelco's pollution. Moreover labour politicians have the same responsibility as business politicians to present an industrial strategy for development. Labour tries for a strategy consistent with maximum employment, good wages, and decent working conditions and thus is not simply imitating business because it wants development. Working against an effective labour-based reform movement is the structure of municipal finance which encourages unselective commercial development and a dependence on senior levels of government. To this must be added the abandonment of the city by the academic community of McMaster University, thereby depriving Hamilton of one of its natural leadership groups. While none of this explanation is intended to whitewash the labour movement, it does suggest the difficult situation in which it operates. The problems have never been the simplistic ones that Freeman raises, of indentifying with broad community concerns.

There are, however, problems. Hamilton citizens, as a recent CMHC study reveals, are concerned about unemployment, inflation, and air pollution, none of which can be tackled directly at the municipal level. The parliamentary focus of the CCF-NDP has been an important

factor in keeping the most prominent activists oriented to Queens Park and Ottawa, rather than the municipal arena. These are problems of a different order than those raised by Freeman, problems which transcend black and white moralism. In one of his childrens' books, *Cedric and the North End Kids*, Freeman tells the story of Cedric, a shy, black, immigrant child, who ends up as a chum of a porkish, loudmouth Hamilton native who sports a sweatshirt emblazed with Hamilton's motto, "The Ambitious City." Eventually, the loudmouth is caught trying to steal a toy mountie from a local smokeshop, and the ambitious lad is saved the penalties of *hubris* only by the good sense, solidarity, and sound morality of Cedric. If only real life were this simple, Bill Freeman and Marsha Hewitt could have written a very good book.

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#### THE POVERTY OF LIBERAL AND MARXIST ANALYSIS?

The following two reviews by Toronto urban activists are published together not just because they provoke thought about community values and the future of American cities, but also since they are concerned with the concept of "privatism" which has been so much a part of urban-history writing during the past ten years. Both reviewers are alert to the ways in which "privatism" - the search for private gain with a sacrifice of community values - is a constant feature of urban affairs. Their reviews go beyond this, however, and challenge two approaches to understanding the

city and its current problems. Alderman Richard Gilbert tears a strip off the hide of a social-science liberalism and optimism evident in American literature. Jim Lemon takes a critical view of European structuralist Marxism and even the more humanistic British labour-history branch of Marxism. A geographer and community-focused reformer, Lemon wonders about the constraints of a class analysis. Perhaps the Toronto experience, described in places by Alderman Gilbert and implied in Jim Lemon's accent on community, could lead to distinctive thoughts about power in the urban setting, the theme of the 1982 Urban History Conference to be held at the University of Guelph.

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Arthur P. Solomon, ed. *The Prospective City*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1980.

This review should be regarded as a curiosity piece rather than as an aid to scholarship. It describes and assesses a book about American cities, written for the most part by academics for academics. Before reading the book I knew next to nothing about American cities and even less about the scholarly study of urban matters. Perhaps my only qualification for this enterprise is that I have been studied by academics in my capacity as a member of Toronto's City Council, which occupation brings me most of my income. It is as if an Austrian stone-mason were being asked to comment on the architecture of neighbouring Italy.