

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Bodnar, John. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985. Pp. xxi, 294. 17 Illustrations. \$27.50

Stephen Steinberg

Volume 15, numéro 1, juin 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018919ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018919ar>

[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

Steinberg, S. (1986). Compte rendu de [Bodnar, John. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985. Pp. xxi, 294. 17 Illustrations. \$27.50]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 15(1), 117–118. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018919ar>

study of its semiotics, its system of signification, of the symbols which mediate consciousness and, by investing commodities with distinctive values, structures social relationships. To exemplify this approach, the volume reprints a study of the controversial building of the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur which followed the Paris Commune.

More ambitious is the 160 page essay on Paris from the 1848 Revolution to the Commune. During this period, following what Harvey identifies as the first full-fledged crisis of overaccumulation, the urbanization of capital began to reshape the Parisian landscape. Baron Hausmann's grand works and the attraction of finance capital to investments in the built environment liberated the city from "the almost medieval physical infrastructures" which constrained capitalist accumulation, from its old landscape and from those memories attached to it. In their stead, the segmentation of residential areas and the segregation of functions within the city supported contradictory consciousnesses. Hausmann and the *haute bourgeoisie* refused to conceive of Paris as more than a composite of diverse, shifting and nomadic individuals and interests from which no permanent community could form beyond that expressed in loyalty to the authority of Empire and the symbols of money. Though the spatial transformation destroyed the old Parisian neighbourhoods and *quartiers*, the specialization that its fine gradient of land rent imposed, concentrated in space class reproduction fragment by fragment. The "structured coherence" that this created formed a consciousness which penetrated "the veil of fetishism" of urban life. This was expressed in the production of symbols and the invention of traditions that created a new imagination and memory linking together disparate fragments of the working class and radical elements of the bourgeoisie. From this, and upon the new material base, sprang "the greatest class-based communal uprising in capitalist history" — the Paris Commune.

Harvey's defence of a material base for urban consciousness will be debated by theoreticians, more able and more inclined than this reviewer to question whether, in the final instance, consciousness formed in the social relations of production is more important. Still, his two volumes have persuaded this student of the history of capitalism to ignore less blithely the problems of space.

David G. Burley
Department of History
University of Winnipeg

About twenty years ago a prominent historian lamented that immigration was one of the least studied chapters in American history. Since then there has been a great proliferation of studies, most of them conducted by new breeds of immigrant historians, labour historians, family historians, and ethnic historians of various stripes. *The Transplanted* is an attempt "to make something of a summary statement" (p. xv). Though limited to urban America, it is a synthesis of the voluminous research on this subject (some 400 titles are listed in a "selected" bibliography). Since most of these are narrow empirical studies of particular groups in particular times and places, there is obvious need for more general studies that not only synthesize, but also raise the analytical focus to a higher level of generality, one that hopefully will add theoretical perspective and new insight. Does *The Transplanted* succeed in this endeavor?

In his introduction Bodnar acknowledges the need "to move beyond the restricted field of vision" and "to move beyond the older framework of analysis" (p. xvii). In this respect, however, the book is disappointing. Bodnar seems to be groping for a framework of analysis. The term "capitalism" is invoked in the first two sentences of every chapter, but rarely appears again until the conclusion. Bodnar's stated objective is to examine how "capitalism was encountered in urban neighbourhoods, factories, mills, offices, mines, and homesteads," but there is only a thin analysis of structure and process. Rather the unit of analysis is the individual, and the focus is on how immigrants, as individuals and as members of groups, adjusted to the circumstances and exigencies of their immediate situation. For example, the chapter, Workers, Unions, and Radicals, examines how immigrants responded to the "political ideologies which pervaded the world of the immigrant worker and awaited selection" (p. 85). Only scant attention is given to the social forces and historical developments that defined these ideological choices in the first place. With his vague allusions to capitalism, Bodnar flirts with a larger theoretical framework, but it is not one that is integral to his rendering and analysis of immigrant history.

What Bodnar *does* do is to marshal together findings from disparate studies under a number of general headings, thus allowing for relevant comparisons and contrasts. For example, the first and longest chapter, The Homeland and Capitalism, describes conditions that different immigrant groups experienced in their respective countries of origin, and that induced them to emigrate. Successive chapters focus on families, workers, the immigrant middle class, the church, and immigrant relations to their native cultures and the cultural institutions of their adopted society. Here the book is at its synthetic best. Bodnar has sifted through the voluminous literature, organizing his empirical materials to point up areas of similarity and difference among groups on these selected topics. The density with which these facts are presented is not always conducive to readability, but there is much information compiled in these pages that will be of

Bodnar, John. *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1985. Pp. xxi, 294. 17 Illustrations. \$27.50.

value to any student of immigration who cannot claim Bodnar's mastery of the literature.

As a study in comparative ethnic history, *The Transplanted* is a useful antidote to the provincialism that is almost endemic to immigrant studies and that tends to obscure the larger picture. For example, Bodnar demonstrates how groups differed in their premigration experience, and argues that this was consequential for their rates and patterns of socioeconomic mobility in America:

To a large extent what you were in the homeland would play an important role in determining what you would become in the structure of industrial capitalism, a point which suggests that inequality within and among immigrant groups often originated not from a vague American system of social mobility or nebulous cultural variables but from an inherited status. Success depended less upon the fact that you were a Jew, an Italian, or a German and more upon where your structural origins were in the pre-migration homelands of Jews, Italians, or Germans. (p. 142)

Such insights vindicate a comparative approach to immigrant history. They are especially instructive for sociologists who act as though ethnic history began at Ellis Island, but also for historians who still argue the importance of "nebulous cultural variables," forgetting the historical, social, and economic context in which these cultural variables are rooted.

Stephen Steinberg
Department of Urban Studies
Queens College and the CUNY
Graduate Center

Garner, John S. *The Model Company Town: Urban Design Through Private Enterprise in Nineteenth-Century New England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984. Pp. xiv 288. Maps, illustrations, charts, appendixes, notes, bibliography, and index. \$22.50.

In this study of the development of single industry towns in nineteenth-century New England, John S. Garner takes issue with the commonly held view of company towns as grim, oppressive bastions of capitalist power. The accepted version of the squalidness of factory town design is successfully challenged in Garner's argument that in several instances, particularly Hopedale, Massachusetts, the company town was well designed and superior to the typical worker housing found in big-city slums, and in the privately developed and unplanned villages and towns that sprang up around industrial sites in the early nineteenth century. In fact the company town was a purposeful reaction to the squalid image of industrial life.

Garner divides *The Model Company Town* into two sections. The first gives an encompassing description of what he terms nation-wide examples of or derivations of the "Model Company Town." Four New England company towns, one each in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, and Rhode Island, are compared and their common features are described with regard to general layout, the issue of paternalism, and housing. In these towns the company policy was to attract and to keep reliable, highly skilled workers by offering better living conditions than at other industrial sites. The presence of the mill owner as a town resident also contributed to a better environment. Professional town planners were hired to plan the landscape and the well-constructed houses and to minimize crowding. Excellent services, including clean water, roads, good schools, and libraries, were also provided.

Garner's descriptions or definitions of industrial satellite towns, government towns (especially Greenbelt and TVA communities), and new towns are accurate and useful to the urban historian or anyone interested in the history of town planning. Yet the author does not offer any new information in these definitions and fails to discuss Hopedale in relation to any of them. While Garner's intention is to avoid confusion for the reader among the various types of settlements, these definitions do not necessarily pertain to nineteenth century planned single-industry communities. Thus, the organizational structure of the work — creates rather than prevents confusion.

The second part of the book focuses specifically on the company town of Hopedale, Massachusetts, noted for its "significant achievement in industrial organization, housing, and site development." Hopedale was founded in 1842 as a religious commune and purchased in 1856 by Ebenezer and George Draper, manufacturers of textile machinery. The Drapers successfully operated it as a company town for the next one hundred years. Garner provides a rich pictorial and documentary record of the Draper firm and the community of Hopedale. His chapter on paternalism is especially good. He provides an excellent definition of this paternalism by stating that it encompassed "a pervasive evangelism, a Protestant work ethic, and a belief in the principle of noblesse oblige." This paternalism led employers to exercise responsibilities not only in the internal affairs of the companies but in external matters (i.e. the living conditions of their employees) as well. While Garner maintains that a prime motivation of this paternalism was to provide positive living conditions in order to attract better workers, it also contributed to the workers' sense of pride in their company and in their company's product as well as to a resignation to low wages and limited occupational mobility.

Garner's ultimate argument seems to be that model company towns demonstrated a number of successes. These include a demonstration that the spatial design and architectural standards of a community could significantly influence