

**McMahon, Michael. *Metro's Housing Company: The First 35 Years*. Toronto: Metropolitan Toronto Housing Company Limited, 1990. Pp. ix, 204. Black and White photographs. Cloth**

**Richard Harris**

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predicament that rarely included their own reactions." But when he turns to the "reformulation" of the ghetto after 1925, Ward offers a rapid-fire explication of theory, ethnography, and history. Having entered the terrain of modern sociology and history, Ward seems unwilling to contextualize these texts and read them politically. He fails to analyze this scholarly production as the expression of an unfolding discursive community whose reformulations of the ghetto occurred in the context of immigration restriction, the rise of industrial unionism, pluralist redefinitions of American identity, the civil rights movement, the rise of a "semi-welfare" state, and the emergence of the racially-defined "inner city." This schematic condensation of post-Chicago School sociology and history is all the more telling since he does not address in any detail the scholarly conceptualization of racial inequality. Ward is by no means unconcerned with this issue. He jabs at Harvey Zorbaugh's definition of the "black belt" as a "natural" area. And, he is aware that racial minorities had historically been subjected to a distinct discursive regime. But, for example, he does not discuss Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* or Oscar Handlin's *The Newcomers*, works that explicitly apply conceptions of the European immigrant urban experience to black and Puerto Rican urban communities.

Undoubtedly, it is unfair to criticize an author for not writing the book you wanted to read. But in this case, I believe Ward did not write the book that, on some level, he wanted to write. At a minimum, his book has two plots. The first, fully developed, is announced in the title. It is a historical critique of the ideological and conceptual limits of the writers who first labelled the immigrant "ghetto" and its inhabitants. The second is an unfinished shadow text addressing why (accurately or not) the "original definition of the immigrant slum apparently had prophetic validity as a description of the predicament of the deprived minorities who dominate the inner cities today." But the best he can offer is a cautionary tale: models of the European

immigrant "ghetto" and "slum" were inadequate and ideological. Now that we understand how limiting these "conceptions" proved to be, we can show a little more humility as we go about "naming" the "urban question" today. While not a minor point, Ward's work exposes the need for an explicit analysis of the historical relationship between models of European immigrant urban experience and the conceptualization of racial inequality and white supremacy. In other words, how has our increasingly sophisticated history of the "nation of immigrants" illuminated or distorted our understanding of today's black poor and new immigrants?

Nonetheless, the inadequacies of Ward's book are instructive. Historians have become increasingly adept at uncovering the circumstances, beliefs, and strategies of once unheard historical subjects. Eschewing a "messianic" American pluralism as well as working class teleology, books such as Gerber's and Emmon's show both the constraints of immigrant life under capitalism and the strategies of accommodation and resistance of his human subjects. But, we are only beginning to grapple with what the late Warren Sussman, in *Culture As History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, called the "continuous interaction of the past and present." As Sussman put it, once we leave the archives "the historian composes a set of words that are to be words of his [or her] time." As Ward implicitly reminds us, intended or not, our words become part of the "predicament" of today's "poor."

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**McMahon, Michael.** *Metro's Housing Company: The First 35 Years*. Toronto: Metropolitan Toronto Housing Company Limited, 1990. Pp. ix, 204. **Black and White photographs.** Cloth.

Scholars have not paid much serious attention to public or "social" housing in Canada. Of course there was not much of it to speak of before the Second World War. Since then, through the ups and downs of federal policy, a good deal of publicly-subsidized rental and co-op housing has been built, especially in the larger cities where need has been greatest. Many planning and policy studies have been written in connection with specific projects, but the larger picture has remained elusive: what has been the overall contribution of subsidized housing to the urban housing stock, and how has that stock been produced and managed? *Metro's Housing Company* takes us one step towards answering these questions for Canada's largest city.

The Metropolitan Toronto Housing Company — the Housing Company for short — is as old as Metro Toronto itself. Amidst the vagaries of housing policy in Canada, its status and role is notably ambiguous. It is sometimes confused with the Metro Toronto Housing Authority, the manager of "public" housing for families and the brunt of much criticism down the years. In fact, embodying a strange blend of public and private ownership, the Housing Company has built and managed its housing mainly for seniors and, in McMahon's view, with fair success. It was active during the 1950s and became an inspiration in some ways for the public housing legislation and agencies of the 1960s. Its peculiar legal status made it a 'third sector' agency before the term and concept were popular. Ahead of its time, it has in recent years been somewhat eclipsed by a co-op movement which has attracted the greater part of the rather limited funds for social housing. Even so, through steady activity over 35 years, it has accumulated a stock of about nineteen thousand units. This is almost equivalent to the housing stock of, say, the City of Kingston.

Michael McMahon, the final author in what he acknowledges to have been a collaborative endeavour involving the MTHC and the Metro Toronto Archives, tells the story

well. His main concern is, perhaps as it must be, to disentangle the ways in which the MTHC responded to changes in the political and policy environment. The status of the Company was called into question several times, and its story is, in large part, one of adaptation and survival. McMahon is especially good at setting the scene for the Company's birth. It is probably here that he drew most heavily upon the acknowledged assistance of John Bacher, a colleague in the Metro Archives whose PhD thesis is the definitive history of federal housing policy up to the 1940s. McMahon says rather less about the administrative policies of the Company and very little, except by implication, about what it meant (and means) to live in Housing Company projects. He notes that, after an initial phase of low-rise construction in Metro's suburbs, when the Company began to build in the City it was forced by land costs to experiment more and more with high rise slabs. He is aware of the social implications of this decision. A grainy reproduction of his own photograph, showing a man with a cane walking home to his unit in one of the larger slabs, marked the frontispiece. But in the text he passes over such issues lightly.

It should not be surprising if the balance is weighted a little. The impetus for the volume came from the Company itself, which wished to produce a commemorative history. Such volumes can become mere catalogues of achievement. *Metro's Housing Company* is far more than that: it marks the real accomplishments of the Company by setting them in their political context, and shows where difficult decisions had to be made that some might regret. It needs a map, ideally one keyed to the list of projects in appendix 6, and the illustrations of people and projects might usefully have been referred to specifically in the text. But there is a good deal of useful material here for the history of public and social housing in Toronto which, one day, someone should write.

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**Reiss, Steven A. *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989. Pp. xii, 332. Tables, maps, illustrations, index.***

*City Games* is a very badly written book about a very interesting topic: the relationships between the development of American cities and the development of organized sports. The book is valuable to anyone trying to understand or teach American sports history because it is a compendium of most of the important developments in American spectator sports. It has the added value that the sports are discussed particularly as they have related to urban ethnic groups.

Steven A. Reiss, who is professor of history at Northeastern Illinois University and editor of the *Journal of Sport History*, has organized the book around important questions in sports history. The focus of his discussion is on the development of cities and urban culture between 1870 and 1960. In that period, Reiss reviews in detail the relationship of sports to urban social structure, to racial and ethnic groups, and to urban spaces. Organized youth sports, the development and commercialization of professional spectator sports, and the relationship of sports to urban politics, organized crime, and American business are all discussed at length. A final chapter examines sports in what Reiss calls "the Suburban Era" from 1945 to 1980.

There is, however, little clear analysis of any of the questions the book covers. Reiss takes little care to portray human beings, individually or in the aggregate, who are subject to human passions, desires, habits, abilities or limitations and who actually lived in the past Reiss covers. The writing is imprecise, repetitious, and full of vague, ill-

defined phrases and neologisms — for examples, "zone of emergence" is used a multitude of times, "sports" and "sport" are used interchangeably, and the following sentence opens a concluding paragraph: "Urbanization's impact upon sport in the radial city was particularly crucial because of changing spatial relations."

Reiss expects his often misused words to carry substantive historical content or precise analytical meaning, but he rarely provides the content or the meaning. In his conclusion, for example, he writes: "The importance of athletics to city folk was stressed by the widely accepted positive sporting creed which by the turn of the century had become the conventional wisdom. Athletics and, in particular, team sports were regarded as symbols of democracy and as integrative mechanisms which taught traditional small-town values to urban youth. Many agencies tried to implement the ideology to Americanize and assimilate urban boys, especially impoverished second-generation inner-city lads . . ." There is no further definition of "sporting creed" or "ideology," no explanation of "integrative mechanisms" or "assimilation," and no description of any "agencies" or of the real people who "stressed" or "regarded." It is a shame a book so full of potential interest, which brings up so much of importance about its subject, was so inadequately edited.

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**Kemble, Roger. *The Canadian City St John's to Victoria: A Critical Commentary. Montreal: Harvest House, 1989. Pp. xiii, 220. Illustrations, appendices. \$19.95. Paper.***

Books on the topic of Canadian cities, particularly those that set out to address the physical, phenomenal environment, are not common. The publication of such a text is therefore welcome, sight unseen.