

Barton, Josef J. *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976. \$12.00

Harold Troper

Numéro 2-77, october 1977

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019577ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019577ar>

[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

Troper, H. (1977). Compte rendu de [Barton, Josef J. *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976. \$12.00]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (2-77), 125–126. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019577ar>

and tools are applied consistently. He demonstrates that ethnicity, class divisions, and growing economic inequality were just as influential on Seventeenth Century politics as they would be in the Nineteenth Century; and he clearly shows that it is no longer necessary to remain tied to the small isolated community in order to study colonial society.

David R. Farrell
Department of History
University of Guelph

* * *

Barton, Josef J. Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976. \$12.00.

Josef Barton's Peasants and Strangers is an examination of turn of the century migration by three European ethnic groups to one American city, Cleveland. The volume can be seen as separated into two distinct but closely related sections. In the first third of his volume Barton discusses Italian, Slovak and Rumanian migrants in the context of rural Europe; the remainder of the book explores their settlement and two generations of adjustment and integration in urban America.

Barton's discussion of the European background to migration is the stronger section of the book. The author joins the growing chorus of recent immigration historians who challenge the traditional thesis that turn of the century immigration was largely composed of the victims of wholesale dispossession of land or traditional rights. These uprooted peasants, who Oscar Handlin has argued were the basis for mass emigration to America, were, according to Barton, "not so much candidates for emigration as recruits for militant agricultural unions." Barton's migrants came from areas where modernization had begun, where

the cash economy was a fact of life and cottage industry in decline. Land was widely distributed but over-population or inheritance laws precluded many from "making it". The move of these migrants from Europe to America was less escape than it was mobility.

The discussion of the migrants life in Cleveland proves less satisfying. Much of Barton's analysis centres on each group's problems of upward social and economic mobility and the different rates of mobility between them. He also tries to explain the differential rates of assimilation and, in so doing, accepts the thesis that over a few generations national or ethnic identification gradually blends into a wider identification with religious groupings.

In this study Barton combines traditional historical sources, including materials in the immigrants' languages, with oral and quantitative sources. Unfortunately, one is somewhat uncomfortable with the size of Barton's sample, his value laden definition of mobility and unfortunate neglect of several problems in urban immigration historiography, such as the "bird of passage" issue and different status accorded occupational advance within an ethnic structure as opposed to that outside that group structure. This reader would have been better served had Barton given the immigrants' Cleveland experience the same depth of historical analysis he was able to accord their premigration European experience.

Harold Troper
 Department of History & Philosophy
 Ontario Institute for Studies
 in Education

* * *