

Holli, Melvin G., and Jones, Peter d'A., eds. *Biographical Dictionary of American Mayors, 1820-1980; Big City Mayors*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981. Pp. xii, 451. Tables, \$69.50

Donald F. Davis

Volume 11, numéro 3, february 1983

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019026ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019026ar>

[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

Davis, D. F. (1983). Compte rendu de [Holli, Melvin G., and Jones, Peter d'A., eds. *Biographical Dictionary of American Mayors, 1820-1980; Big City Mayors*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981. Pp. xii, 451. Tables, \$69.50]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 11(3), 88–88.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1019026ar>

Hershberg can claim more success in the pursuit of a new concept of urbanization but the most important step remains his own introductory chapter which is more an inspiration to research than a specification of actual process. *Philadelphia* emphasizes innovative themes such as the changing interrelationships of residence and place of work during industrial development, and the objective meaning of class and race within nineteenth-century urban social structure. However, important gaps remain in the delineation of Philadelphia's urbanization; many Canadian historians will be disappointed, for example, that the promotional activity of civic leaders is largely ignored. Between the lines, Hershberg also conveys this kind of disappointment and he undoubtedly would have welcomed to the project historians interested in topics such as civic politics.

Chad Gaffield  
Department of History  
University of Victoria

---

Holli, Melvin G., and Jones, Peter d'A., eds. *Biographical Dictionary of American Mayors, 1820-1980: Big City Mayors*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981. Pp.xii, 451. Tables, \$69.50

This biographical dictionary details the political careers of 679 individuals who served as mayors of fifteen selected American cities between 1820 and 1980. The fifteen cities – Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and St. Louis – were chosen, the editors state, because they “have maintained *consistent* leadership in population and historical importance since the 1820s,” the decade “popular election became the norm” in municipal politics in the United States. Not everyone will be happy with the selection criteria, the editors admit, but they promise a second volume to cover the mayors of fifty American cities omitted from the present study.

Although they vary in length, the biographies generally run about 500 words and relay valuable information on the family background and business interests as well as the political career of each mayor. Important elections are highlighted, the results dissected, and major political trends briefly noted. As well, the biographies discuss the form of government, population, and place of each city in the urban hierarchy during the incumbency of each mayor. Information is most complete for mayors elected since 1960, with current office-holders receiving the most print. Each entry also includes a note on sources, which scholars will find extremely useful since doctoral theses, manuscript collections, newspaper obituaries and the like

are listed in addition to the more usual published material.

The dictionary also offers twelve appendices, the most useful of which group the mayors by city, political affiliation, ethnic background, religion and place of birth. Surprisingly, given the ubiquity of the pocket calculator, the editors have not commented on trends in office-holding for the fifteen cities, either individually or as a whole. They limit their remarks to a two-page preface in which they plead the importance of studying big cities, a point surely conceded by all those who would consult this dictionary. It is disappointing to see the editors make so little use of the data they have compiled. Moreover, their taciturnity leaves the reader quite uncertain as to the rationale behind appendices tabulating the American urban population for the period 1790-1970, the population of the fifteen cities from 1820 to 1960, and of their ethnic and racial composition at arbitrarily selected intervals between 1860 and 1970.

Obviously the editors have aimed this volume, and presumably the larger one to follow, at reference libraries and, given the high quality of scholarship in the biographical entries, libraries should acquire it. Individual scholars will no doubt find the price too much to pay for a work that fails to draw more general conclusions about the American political system.

Donald F. Davis  
Department of History  
University of Ottawa

---

Alexander, John K. *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980. Pp.xi, 234. \$15.00

*Render Them Submissive* offers a curiously fragmented and one-dimensional view of attitudes towards poverty in an urban setting during the economic dislocation of the 1760s, the war between America and Britain, and the post-revolutionary era of reform and reconstruction. Despite these momentous events, John Alexander argues that neither the nature of poverty nor the “general” attitudes towards it changed in Philadelphia. All that he is willing to concede about underlying social and economic conditions is that the doubling of the city's population might have augmented distress. What changed was the political climate in which poor and non-poor co-existed. In this new environment, Alexander postulates, the poor became a sinister, dangerous class which the leaders of post-revolutionary urban society wished to control and reform rather than simply to relieve. The book's hypothesis, then, is that the extension of the franchise, part of the vaunted American egalitarianism, gave political power to