

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

McGahan, Peter. *Police Images of a City*. American University Studies Series XI, Volume 4. New York: Peter Lang, 1984. Pp. 217

Ian Taylor

Volume 14, numéro 1, juin 1985

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017897ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017897ar>

[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

Taylor, I. (1985). Compte rendu de [McGahan, Peter. *Police Images of a City*. American University Studies Series XI, Volume 4. New York: Peter Lang, 1984. Pp. 217]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 14(1), 85–86.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1017897ar>

of professionals and managers responsible for heritage conservation.

The second couplet of essays concerns issues surrounding transformation of sites formerly in economic uses to recreational use within the provincial parks system. Historians may find the well-trod planning process elucidated in Paul Campbell and David J. Cuming's "Mines and Mills at Gold Rock" useful as an illustration of both the utility and the limitations of historical information in shaping planning decisions; experienced heritage planners may, however, find the assessments somewhat presumptive and the analysis of the preferred alternative lacking in rigour. Various professionals unfamiliar with practical heritage conservation may find Ed McKenna's case study of the cultural landscape at Sandbanks the most useful item in the volume. The balance between preparatory work and field work and the heavy emphasis placed upon analysis and composite illustrations as opposed to historical narrative give clear focus to the roles played by the historic past in present planning for heritage conservation.

The final couplet, Fram's study of the Toronto Power Station at Niagara and Miller's of the Newmarket Bridge, highlights the importance of documented historical significance to heritage recognition and the importance of people in heritage conservation — in Fram's essay as users of an adapted resource, in Miller's as the community's decision-makers in a conservation controversy. Both essays also take the issue of conservation beyond research and planning — Fram in his holistic examination of potential adaptive use of the power station and Miller in the forceful photographs of the preserved Newmarket Bridge in its new park environment. The success story of the Newmarket Bridge ends the volume on an upbeat note, which contrasts, sometimes poignantly, with the ambiguity of earlier essays as to the future of the resources studies.

The volume is profusely illustrated, generally with excellent effects. A good balance of historical and contemporary photographs affords a strong visual grasp of the nature of resources. Composite plans or original line drawings in virtually every essay offer an impressively effective vehicle for communicating findings, information and analysis to the reader. There is, however, no list of illustrations. Some photos are reduced to a scale where both their detail and their impact are lost. While photos are numbered and captioned, plans and drawings frequently receive neither identifier, and some plans lack north indicators. Although captions are used effectively, virtually none of the illustrations is keyed into the text.

It is good to see this book re-issued. Its first very limited edition did not reach many of the libraries of either institutions or individuals where its conservation philosophy and its

demonstrated approaches to heritage conservation problems can be most useful.

Susan Buggey
Prairie Region
Parks Canada

McGahan, Peter. *Police Images of a City*. American University Studies Series XI, Volume 4. New York: Peter Lang, 1984. Pp. 217.

Peter McGahan's concern in this study of St. John's, Newfoundland, is with the content and the origins of the police's "imagery" of the urban environment. It is conceived as a contribution both to the general architectural literature on environmental perception and to the growing body of literature on the social and physical context of policework.

Based on a small number of interviews (37) with members of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, the study reveals the author's own real affection for St. John's, and some familiarity with its changing character. Particular attention is given to the decline in the population of St. John's downtown core and the increases in the population in fringe areas, like Portugal Cove and Mount Pearl. On the basis of the interviews conducted and his own knowledge of the City, McGahan is able to offer an account of police imagery of the different areas of St. John's and implicitly, therefore, an explanation of the different approaches which the police tend to adopt in their interventions in different parts of the city.

At the centre of the police conception of St. John's is a very clear notion of the parameters of the downtown area. This older area of St. John's, abutting its famous docks, has in recent years become the site of a large number of night-clubs and bars, and is in turn associated in the police mind with persistent "trouble," including fights, public drunkenness and other offences (predominantly reported during the evening). However, apart from this firm conception of the downtown, McGahan is able to show that police officers' perception of the city *cannot* be understood institutionally (as a tight reflection, for example, of the nine police areas into which St. John's is divided). Instead, police imagery tends to be focused around certain physical or ecological landmarks or boundaries which are subconsciously used to demarcate areas along cultural lines. Some low-income housing estates tend, by nature of their physical character and geographical limits, to be seen as "trouble areas" although second-order considerations can also lead officers to distinguish between the culture of individual streets or between different neighbourhoods within otherwise apparently homogeneous urban areas. Later chapters in the study address the differences which the police perceive in the types

of crime and the degree of cooperation they encounter in these different areas: not surprisingly, police officers tend to conclude that the crimes are more "anti-social" and the population more antagonistic in "trouble areas" than they are elsewhere in the city. The problem of policing of the downtown, in particular, has spawned a High Complaint Unit to act as a regular support to the routine police patrol in that area, and, in the final chapter, McGahan reports that the officers of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary appear to becoming resigned to the inevitability of having to carry arms (which that force has not routinely had to do since its establishment in 1895). The perception overall of the urban environment in St. John's is that the city is becoming more "metropolitan" and that it will thereby encounter many of the problems of policing that occur on mainland North America.

McGahan's study, as should be obvious, is primarily a piece of reportage, summarising and interpreting a series of interviews with practising police officers. As such, it has its interest, particularly for anyone with even a passing knowledge of the city of St. John's. Beyond that, its value is more questionable. Even the most casual visitor to Newfoundland will conclude that the Province is quite different from the rest of Canada, and that any generalisation to Canada from studies undertaken there would be quite perilous. The suspicion must be, for example, that one would not encounter the same level of knowledge of urban areas and neighbourhoods and their residents among police in the capital cities of Alberta and Ontario as is reported for police in St. John's. McGahan spends too little time here in accentuating the cultural specificity of Newfoundland in general and St. John's in particular.

McGahan also offers us a study that is devoid of any obvious theoretical curiosity, and of any concern to relate his findings to other related empirical work. There is certainly no sense here of any of the recent work of David Harvey, Manuel Castells, Michael Harloe and Peter Saunders on the political economy of the city and, in Harvey in particular, the dynamics of spatial segregation. There is no reference to the attempts of scholars elsewhere (like John Baldwin and Tony Bottoms in their study of "problem estates" in Sheffield, England) to *explore and interrogate* the logics whereby different areas acquire different "reputations" and the way in which reputations are sustained and elaborated or possibly qualified, even down to the level of individual streets. These logics, of course, involve the in-depth study of local culture (including its folklore) over time, and cannot be read off from a small number of interviews, especially when the interviewees' perceptions may be so systematically "correctionalist" or antagonistic as those of police officers. Such studies must be aware, indeed, of the existence (and relative autonomy) of *conflicting* definitions of a city amongst its different classes and vis-à-vis urban authority. And it is only after understanding the "complex totality" of the city that one can sensibly advance what might be more *effective, pop-*

ular, and responsive ways of policing its different parts. Sadly, none of these considerations — vital as they are to debates in urban sociology and in political disputes over city policing in Britain and in some parts of the United States — emerge from McGahan's essentially journalistic study.

Ian Taylor
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University

Capeci, Dominic J., Jr. *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit: The Sojourner Truth Housing Controversy of 1942*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984. Pp. xi, 240. Map, index. \$37.95.

In *Race Relations in Wartime Detroit*, Dominic Capeci, Jr. turns his attention from the Harlem race riot of 1943, the subject of a 1977 study, to the Detroit housing controversy and riot of 1942. The immediate cause of conflict in the Motor City was a contest between Blacks and Poles for occupancy of the federally constructed Sojourner Truth Homes, which were built to remedy a shortage of housing for defense workers. Named for a famed Black abolitionist, the initial implication was that the two hundred units would be occupied by Blacks. However, yielding to pressure from unscrupulous realty and political interests, federal officials reassigned the project to Whites, which prompted a Black protest under the battle cry, "We Shall Not Be Moved." Led by their Sojourner Truth Citizens Committee, the protestors succeeded in having the project reassigned back to the Blacks. On February 28, 1942 Whites touched off a riot as they attempted to prevent the first Blacks from moving into their homes.

Capeci's tightly written, highly detailed account is essentially a search for meaning beneath the surface protest. In order to uncover the root causes of the controversy, he devotes his first four chapters, almost a third of the text, to a history of Detroit's race relations, mayoral politics and economic development in the era between the world wars. These pages are fascinating. They reveal a changing, troubled city. Detroit had racial segregation that was maintained "by custom, law, and violence," political leadership that was too limited in stature to appreciate and solve new problems, and great differences between the living standards of Whites and Blacks. With regard to racial conflict, Capeci demonstrates its prevalence before the Sojourner Truth explosion, in 1940 at the Belle Isle recreation area and in 1941 at the Northwestern and Lincoln High Schools. Interracial violence was clearly on the rise as 1942 approached.

Capeci carefully delineates the elements and issues involved in the Sojourner Truth dispute itself. In turn he