

**Tyler, John W. *Smugglers & Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986. Pp. xiv, 349. Appendix, bibliography, illustrations, index, tables. \$25.00 (U.S.)**

R. W. Roetger

Volume 16, numéro 2, octobre 1987

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017799ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017799ar>

[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

Roetger, R. W. (1987). Compte rendu de [Tyler, John W. *Smugglers & Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986. Pp. xiv, 349. Appendix, bibliography, illustrations, index, tables. \$25.00 (U.S.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 16(2), 234–235. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017799ar>

The last of the book's five chapters discusses the evolution of the service sector under the impetus of urbanization, growing prosperity, improved transportation, and changing personal habits, and the gradual conversion of the laundry trade from a domestic to a modern factory-based industry. This is followed by an epilogue which reiterates main themes and provides an overview of developments in laundering since the 1930s, and by a useful bibliographical essay.

*English Laundresses* is fascinating, careful and competently constructed. It is also extensively researched in nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals, pioneering private and published investigations, inspector's reports, parliamentary papers, local histories, feminist literature, and histories of women's work and trade unionism. Malcolmson presents a convincing portrait of her heroines as tough, resourceful, assertive women, who often valued the independence their work gave them, and who were both victims and beneficiaries of a changing social and economic system. Because of the general soundness of her book, the author can be forgiven for telling readers about the hand-, workshop- and factory-laundering process in so much detail that their skin will fairly pucker from the 'dampness' rising from the pages.

Kathleen E. McCrone  
Department of History  
University of Windsor

---

Tyler, John W. *Smugglers & Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986. Pp. xiv, 349. Appendix, bibliography, illustrations, index, tables. \$25.00 (U.S.).

Many of the people and some of the events so judiciously portrayed in John Tyler's engaging analysis of Boston merchants will be unfamiliar to readers well-versed in literature on the American Revolution. To most scholars of the period, names like Hancock, Adams, and Otis represent standard historical fare, as do events like the Stamp Act, Townshend Acts, and the Boston Tea Party. But how many historians readily recognized Benjamin Barons, Solomon Davis, John Mein, The Boston Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce, or the Free Port Act of 1766? For those who do not, *Smugglers & Patriots* offers a fresh perspective on the way little known individuals and events contributed to the advent of the Revolution.

Unlike Arthur M. Schlesinger's monolithic treatment of traders in *Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (1918), Tyler argues that Boston's merchant community (N= 439) was divided into three identifiable groups. "General merchants," trading according to the dictates of British colonial policy, were most numerous. "Dry

goods merchants," dealing exclusively with British or East India goods, were more specialized and figured prominently in supporting the nonimportation agreements associated with the Townshend Acts. "Smugglers," seeking to avoid duties on molasses or import goods directly from Europe (primarily Holland), were small in number, but nonetheless politically influential. As Tyler's narrative unfolds, it is quite evident that a strong connection existed between the business interests of each group and political behaviour.

The controversy surrounding the suspension of customs collector Benjamin Barons in 1759 for his liberal seizure policies is a case in point. Eager to safeguard their illicit profits, leading smugglers Melatiah Bourn and Solomon Davis (whose ledgers and letterbooks Tyler uses skillfully to identify illegal traders) supported Barons in a counter-attack against his customs house rivals. As a matter of timing, the Barons affair tied into larger issues, like the writs of assistance case (1761), thus tending to intensify the emerging battle over British colonial policy. Ultimately, Barons lost his bid for reinstatement, but neither "smugglers nor their merchant colleagues forgot the lessons they learned in . . . their struggle against British efforts to restrict their trade within the confines of the Navigation Acts" (p. 63).

That struggle emanated from the Boston Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce (BSETC), the primary "mouthpiece" of Boston's merchant community in the 1760s. Thus, it was BSETC members who spearheaded the attack on George Grenville's revenue measures, influenced deliberations in the town meeting, and rallied merchants against compromise proposals (like the Free Port Act) offered by the Rockingham Whigs. Clearly, Boston merchants had grown accustomed to the benefits afforded by unfettered trade during years of salutary neglect, and, until circumstances permitted one interest group to prosper at the expense of another, they maintained a united front against British legislation.

Unanimity fragmented with the passage of the Townshend Acts, however. Nonimportation provided dry goods merchants and smugglers with an opportunity to weed out under-stocked competitors and fly the banner of patriotism simultaneously. Disagreement over support for, and adherence to, non-importation divided the merchant community and fostered a newspaper war sparked largely by John Mein who, as printer of the *Boston Chronicle*, published the names of patriots who violated the agreements. The unwanted publicity adversely affected Boston's reputation and caused "lesser merchants" to question "the disinterested virtue of the patriot leadership" (p. 137).

Boston's merchant community never regained its unanimity. Aside from pinpointing divisions within the trade, Tyler argues convincingly that the Townshend Acts split Bostonians on a more profound level. More than the Tea Act or the Coercive Acts, it was nonimportation that "became the cru-

cible in which white-hot revolutionary loyalties were forged" (p. 169). Less convincing is the degree to which merchants alone shaped Boston politics. One is not completely certain about the influence of non-merchant patriots, and Tyler's assertion that the coalition of merchants and traders was, by the 1770s, "indistinguishable" from the town meeting is not fully satisfying.

Minor criticisms like these do not diminish the positive contributions of *Smugglers & Patriots*. Of particular importance is the appendix, which provides invaluable information on issues ranging from loyalty to the various subscription papers and protests signed by members of the merchant community. While the orientation of Tyler's study is more historical and prosopographical than urban, there exists an underlying sense of how important the city was in mobilizing opposition to Great Britain. Like Carl Bridenbaugh (*Cities in Revolt*, [1955]), Tyler leaves readers with the distinct impression that urbanites took the lead in promoting the American Revolution. Indeed, the commercial program finally adopted by the Continental Association was, after all, the brainchild of Boston's smugglers and patriots.

R.W. Roetger  
Humanities Division  
Emerson College  
Boston

---

White, Jerry. *The Worst Street in North London. Campbell Bunk, Islington, Between the Wars*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. Pp. xii, 312. 15 black and white plates, tables, maps, index. £8.95.

Campbell Road, commonly known as Campbell Bunk, was a short street in Islington, North London, very near the Finsbury Park tube station. It was built in a piecemeal fashion between 1865 and 1880 and was levelled in a slum clearance program in the 1950s. By the early years of this century it had earned the reputation of being the most notorious street in North London where the police patrolled only in twos, strangers were openly and frequently attacked, and the inhabitants lived in desperate poverty and wretched conditions. Life on the street was always hard-edged and personal and family relationships were often violent and exploitive. Nevertheless, many former residents remembered the street for its vigorous street and community life and its shared antipathy to the world outside the bunk. Jerry White's book is the first attempt to make sense "of the contradictory community within Campbell Bunk, and its contradictory relations with the outside world" (p. 3).

White contends that many of Campbell Bunk's difficulties can be traced back to its stunted start. The slow pace of home building and the delay in providing an adequate road

plus the rapidly changing social structure of North London meant that the artisans and clerks for whom the road was originally designed went elsewhere. Single-family occupation was a rarity almost from the beginning and property was divided and rented. Inexorably, the Bunk declined from a street serving the needs of skilled workers and labouring navvies to one whose low rents appealed to the lumpenproletariat eeking out an existence on the margins of London's working force. By the 1890s Campbell Road's reputation was established as "the worst in North London." Little changed over the next fifty years. It remained a haven for the marginal men and women of London life.

In order to trace the nature of change in Campbell Bunk and to clarify its class structure and the socio-economic parameters of life on the street, White uses the Marxist analysis of class. This is helpful in delineating the Bunk's place in North London life and in placing its inhabitants in the context of London's reserve army of labour. White's second chapter is an illuminating treatment of the dynamics of class in inter-war London. But he frankly admits that the traditional Marxist approach was not sufficient to explain some of the continuities and traditions obvious in the Bunk nor some of the changes that took place in the thirties. He therefore turned to gender analysis and, more specifically, to the changing perceptions of masculinity and femininity to help him understand the processes at work in the Bunk. This enables him to explain the way in which the Bunk reinforced machismo. Unable to establish themselves outside the Bunk, lacking any sense of pride or dignity in the wider world, the men of the Bunk established a rigid hierarchy of sexist authority based on brutal self-assertion. Young men bonded together through the shared cult of masculinity with its emphasis on physical strength, display, and bravado. Chapter 6, "Young Men: Accommodating Traditions," is an arresting treatment of the way in which the young men of the Bunk molded a life for themselves out of exceedingly sparse material. Rejected by the labour market, sullied by the reputation of the Bunk, young men accommodated themselves to the life of the Bunk and found solace and strength in its communal and street life.

Women, on the other hand, or so White contends in Chapter 7, "Young Women and the New World Outside," reacted quite differently. Their lot in a male-dominated world was not a happy one. The Bunk held fewer attractions for them. They wanted to carve a separate life for themselves. They therefore challenged the Bunk's way of life, self-consciously sought new directions, and pushed hard for change. They were particularly successful in the thirties when employment opportunities improved for young women.

This book is a stimulating one to read. The grinding poverty, the helplessness, the false gods that resulted as a consequence of industrial capitalism are not attractive, and White does not indulge in sentimentality for the world that has been lost. His treatment is clear-headed and analytic.