

Oestreicher has set, however, a new standard of excellence in local social and working-class history.

Returning to Montgomery's point of linking social to institutional labour history in a local setting, we suspect that the Detroit study goes about as far as this route may take us. The author offers a rich description of the Knights and their diverse constituency, and quite obviously, the experience of the movement captures the dialectic between working-class solidarity and fragmentation on economic, cultural, and ideological lines. One is increasingly tempted, however, to assert that the rise and fall of the Knights was an autonomous political event with sociological roots and (above all) consequences, but not easily amenable to a sociological explanation, least of all on a local level. Oestreicher could have profited by the reading of the fine Canadian study, Kealey and Palmer's *Dreaming of What Might Be*, that edges toward this conclusion. In triumph and defeat the Knights had a character that defies the canons of Marxist orthodoxy, but so too have all important labour movements. A fragmented social formation was equally responsible for its rise as its demise. The fact is that the Knights *were* destroyed from within and without, and left in their wake the weakest working-class movement in the Western world, the sectional and exclusivist American Federation of Labour.

Virtually all of the local studies of the nineteenth century industrial city that have emerged over the last 10 to 15 years are a critique of the Commons or Perlman schools of U.S. labour history. These schools had either the vice or the virtue of attempting to link contemporary social reality and political dilemmas with the labour past. The "new" urban history may have started out with similar intentions, but has arrived at a different place. As the mysterious Mr. Quin once remarked, "There is no atmosphere in the present," and as the present situation for American workers and their communities goes from bad to worse, a far-reaching synthesis of what has happened remains elusive.

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**Metropolitan Regions or Sunbelt Cities?  
The Fall of Houston and Denver, the "Resurgence"  
of New York and Boston**

Sternlieb, George. *Patterns of Development*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy, 1986. Pp. xv, 289. Tables, index. \$22.95 (U.S.).

McComb, David G. *Galveston: A History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. Pp 267. Maps, index.

Bernard, Richard M. and Bradley R. Rice, editors. *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War II*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983. Pp. x, 346. Maps. \$9.95 paper (U.S.).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s journalists, marketing consultants, and many scholars enthusiastically celebrated the success of the sunbelt; Houston and Denver competed, at the time, to be that belt's "golden buckle." Fiscal crisis and job loss meanwhile gave a sad, nostalgic twist to the title of journalist Ken Auletta's 1979 book on New York, *The Streets Were Paved With Gold*. Just a few years later, something over a third of the new office space in Houston, Denver, and many other recently booming cities was empty (it was said that there was more empty office space in Houston than total office space in Philadelphia, whose metropolitan region houses many more people than Houston's). And suddenly, in the mid- and late-1980s, property values have skyrocketed not only in Manhattan but throughout the metropolitan New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region — and per capita incomes are higher and rising more rapidly in Boston's New England than anywhere else in the United States.

This sudden reversal has exposed the shallow basis on which many economic consultants operate, confused journalists, and thrown a curve at historians. Here we have a case where it really does seem useful to step back from the headlines. George Sternlieb, the enterprising director of the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University, laments that press deadlines and client needs all too often force experts in his field to focus exclusively on "current trauma," thus losing the "broader perspective" that history makes possible (p. 3). If we look at a longer period of time and a wider range of phenomena, we may in fact be able to make sense of the episodic shifts that have caught so many — hard headed bankers and real estate developers no less than superficial pundits — by surprise.

We should start with the long-term rise to dominance of metropolitan regions as the basic form of human settlement throughout the United States. Half of the people in the United States lived in metropolitan regions by 1940, but *all* of the population increase of the next thirty-five years went to these great cities and their surrounding suburbs and satellites. In 1940 the great metropolitan regions were without exception located along the north and middle Atlantic coast, on the Great Lakes, the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers, and on the Pacific: by 1975 Houston, Dallas, Miami, Atlanta, Tampa, and Phoenix had joined the list, earning well-deserved reputations for rapid growth and optimistic business communities. It was in this context that so many observers proclaimed the "rise of the sun belt."

There followed an interesting debate about the reasons for the "sun belt's" success and particularly for the rapid growth of its cities after 1940. Richard Bernard, Bradley Rice and their colleagues emphasized political factors, and