

Scobie, James R. *Secondary Cities of Argentina: the Social History of Corrientes, Salta, and Mendoza, 1850-1910*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Pp. XVI, 276. Maps, black and white photographs, illustrations, notes and index
Szuchman, Mark D. *Order, Family and Community in Buenos Aires 1810-60*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Pp. XIII, 307. Figures and tables, illustrations, methodological appendix, notes, bibliography and index

Brian M. Evans

Volume 18, numéro 1, june 1989

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017833ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017833ar>

[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

Evans, B. M. (1989). Compte rendu de [Scobie, James R. *Secondary Cities of Argentina: the Social History of Corrientes, Salta, and Mendoza, 1850-1910*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Pp. XVI, 276. Maps, black and white photographs, illustrations, notes and index / Szuchman, Mark D. *Order, Family and Community in Buenos Aires 1810-60*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Pp. XIII, 307. Figures and tables, illustrations, methodological appendix, notes, bibliography and index]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 18(1), 95–96. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017833ar>

Centuries of American Planning explore many of the episodes in city development and urban planning in the United States, but, precisely because they are separate essays, do not present a comprehensive look at the development of the planning movement. *Planning the Capitalist City* attempts to present an overview of the connections between the development of planning thought and the realities of how planning was carried out. Too often, however, it fails to see the complexity of the situation and becomes mired in its ideological approach to planning. *Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement in the United States* is an intellectual biography that does not demonstrate well enough how ideas were carried over into actions; it also overemphasizes one person's impact on the city planning movement. What is needed are works showing more clearly the connections between ideas and actions, ones that explore in some detail the cooperation and conflict between different groups and individuals active in the planning movement. Until such works appear, urban planners will be unable to benefit fully from the study of planning history. For instance, an examination of the complex relationships between planners, business groups, and labour groups in the progressive period might well offer insights useful for those seeking to redefine the relationships between planners, government, and minority groups in the present day.

Mansel G. Blackford
Department of History
Ohio State University

Scobie, James R. *Secondary Cities of Argentina: the Social History of Corrientes, Salta, and Mendoza, 1850-1910*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Pp. XVI, 276. Maps, black and white photographs, illustrations, notes and index.

Szuchman, Mark D. *Order, Family and Community in Buenos Aires 1810-60*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. Pp. XIII, 307. Figures and tables, illustrations, methodological appendix, notes, bibliography and index.

Before his untimely death, Jim Scobie had, by the volume and quality of his publications, become the best-known and most-respected interpreter of Argentina to the English-speaking world. The scholarly community, therefore, should welcome with excitement this posthumous work, so ably completed and edited by his friend and colleague Samuel L. Bailey. In a sense *Secondary Cities of Argentina* is a continuation of a sequence. In 1964 Scobie published *Argentina: a City and a Nation*; a decade later *Buenos Aires: "Plaza to Suburb"*. Then his focus turned from the metropolis to sleepy Corrientes, colonial Salta, and burgeoning Mendoza.

Crucial to an understanding of this book is his belief that these secondary cities, and others like them, "linked rural economies and inhabitants with the outside world while insulating the traditional rural environment from the changing character of large urban centres. In this intermediate position economic relationships and social structure changed slowly . . . continuity within the secondary centres thus reinforced conservatism, accentuated the gap between major cities and the rest of the country, and contributed to the resistance to change that characterizes much of Latin America today."

Within this framework, the three cities are then described, compared, and contrasted. And what a dramatic contrast they provide.

The chapter on Corrientes, the first city, is subtitled "A Study in Stagnation." Here the central theme is that for reasons internal and, primarily, external Corrientes grew only modestly and was never able to capitalize on advantages it sometimes appeared to possess.

In contrast, Salta ("The Sleeping Beauty"), despite severe problems of health and hygiene and a rigid social structure, was eventually able to develop its pre-existing economy and to add some modest local industrial development.

Mendoza presents a more complex and dynamic picture. Despite the devastation of the 1861 earthquake, the city revived quickly, and by the end of the 19th century had entered a period of rapid demographic and economic growth. Alone of the cities studied, Mendoza attracted a large number of southern European immigrants who transformed the Pampas. Yet even Mendoza failed, in the period under review, to develop a new social structure or to transform the Cuyo region, of which it had become the economic centre.

Technically, *Secondary Cities of Argentina* is well produced. Its maps, diagrams, graphs, and tables are clear and meaningful, and it is well illustrated. Even more important, the notes and sources, despite Dr Bailey's modesty in the matter, are organized, informative, and succinct.

This book is readable, interesting, and informative to the widest readership, and it stands as a worthy monument to Scobie's memory.

Mark Szuchman's *Order, Family and Community in Buenos Aires 1810-60* makes an interesting comparison to Scobie's book. Both deal with aspects of urban history in 19th-century Argentina and are works of mature scholarship, but there the resemblance ends. Scobie's work is essentially urban history conceived as

historical geography; Szuchman's conceives urban history as urban sociology, and, above all, tries to recreate family history. As such, it is a major pioneering study in a field of Latin American research hitherto largely ignored.

By and large Szuchman is successful, given the difficulties preserved by the data and the general absence of previous works. In the first chapter, entitled "Home, Neighbourhood, Power," he states his goals, first "to integrate traditional evidence and quantitative evidence" and secondly "to reconcile social history with issues of political legitimacy and social control."

It is, of course, notorious that most Latin American societies have signally failed this second test, and one of the most interesting features of Szuchman's book is the way he shows how some of Argentina's deepest social malaises can be traced to the early 19th century — plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

Szuchman's work may be appreciated on two levels. It rewards a person with only a passing interest in things Argentinian because it is clearly presented and quite readable. Here the choice of illustrations is especially felicitous. At the other level, Szuchman's work is a detailed microstudy aimed specifically at Latin American specialists, especially those whose field is Argentina. Here he attempts to integrate the traditional evidence with statistic of data. The approach is by topic: "Disorder and Social Control," "Growing up in the City," "Youth and Challenges to the Moral Order," "Children, Politics, and Education," "The Political Dimensions of Household Changes," and then a conclusion on "Masses and Political Obligations."

Some of these topics are rather more straightforward and self-contained than others, and again the nature and detail of the extant data make some themes easier to comprehend. In general terms, Szuchman has done a good job in melding a mass of

material into a coherent whole. My only reservation, albeit a personal bias, is against his occasional use of sociological jargon, which is never elegant and frequently incomprehensible to the non-specialist.

Taken together, the works of Scobie and Szuchman are complementary. Both are major contributions to scholarship and are recommended to any Canadian who wants to learn something of Argentina — a country which, after all, is one whose historical development is frequently contrasted with that of Canada, not always to the benefit of ourselves.

Brian M. Evans
Department of Geography
University of Winnipeg

Davis, Donald Finlay. *Conspicuous Production: Automobiles and Elites in Detroit, 1899-1933.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988. Pp. XXI, 282. 15 black and white plates, tables. \$29.95 (U.S.)

As Eugene Ferguson cautioned more than a decade ago in "Toward a Discipline of the History of Technology," historians must never "fail to note the importance of enthusiasm that is evoked by the technology." In the example of the automobile, such enthusiasm was not merely for the vehicle's technological capabilities but also for the social meanings the automobile represented. The automobile's social meaning, as Donald Davis argues in *Conspicuous Production*, had a profound influence not simply on the automobile industry itself, but also on the very community in which such industry was located.

In a tightly written and well-documented account, Davis bridges both urban and business history to examine Detroit's automobile elite up to 1933. Relying on a wide variety of corporate and personal biographies, as well as statistical profiles, he

demonstrates how a study of the industry cannot be divorced from a study of the wider community. The rise of the automobile industry was inseparable from the growth of Detroit, for, as Davis argues, the "gasoline aristocracy" that guided the industry exerted influence beyond the boardroom and into the community itself.

An important contribution of *Conspicuous Production* is to dispel the myth that the early automobile industry was a meritocracy. It was not, Davis contends, an industry led by self-made men, reflecting the openness of the social structure. Entry was not necessarily restricted, but success was predetermined to some extent by wealth, and not all aspiring manufacturers had the same chance to succeed.

According to Davis, the quest for social prestige by early automobile entrepreneurs carried over into their marketing strategies, such that social ambitions often dictated model policy. The social prestige hierarchy of the community served as a model for the price-class hierarchy that developed within the automobile industry. When Detroit's pre-automobile elite became involved in automobile manufacturing at the turn of the century, the status connotations of the product could not be ignored. The pressure was on the early entrepreneurs to build a vehicle worthy not only of their own name, for most early makes bore a family surname, but also of their social peers. While the search for social prestige caused the public to purchase costlier automobiles, it also pushed the manufacturers to build more expensive vehicles. That process, which Davis terms conspicuous production, forms the central theme of the book.

Central to this process, and thus to Davis's argument for conspicuous production, is the conviction that the automobile was a consumer product unlike any other. Following its introduction in the 1890s, the automobile was, Davis contends, the most important status symbol among consumer