

**Linteau, Paul-André. *Histoire de Montréal depuis la confédération*. Les Éditions du Boréal, 1992. pp. 616. Illustrations. \$29.95 paper**

**Michael McCulloch**

---

Volume 21, numéro 1, octobre 1992

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019253ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019253ar>

[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

McCulloch, M. (1992). Compte rendu de [Linteau, Paul-André. *Histoire de Montréal depuis la confédération*. Les Éditions du Boréal, 1992. pp. 616. Illustrations. \$29.95 paper]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 21(1), 69–70. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019253ar>

**Linteau, Paul-André. *Histoire de Montréal depuis la confédération*. Les Éditions du Boréal, 1992. pp. 616. Illustrations. \$29.95 paper.**

Linteau makes clear that he was born and bred in Montréal, and loves his city (7). This is not in itself a problem, although none of his three maps gives street-names, and this occasionally makes his text opaque to the non-Montréalais. The author does not quote extensively from primary documents, but the many illustrations give a zest that the narrative might otherwise lack. Finally, someone from Québec City or Trois-Rivières might doubt his conclusion that Montréal's history makes it "une ville typiquement québécoise," but as a "laboratoire social," certainly Montréal is unsurpassed (557).

Linteau makes clear both what his book is and is not about. It is not an architectural history (8), although it explains the shifts in types of housing that marked the different phases of Montréal's growth. This is also not a study in historical geography; while references are made to the importance of the St. Lawrence in the economic development of the city, the local topography does not figure largely in this history. What Linteau has set out to create is a synthesis of the "dimensions économiques, sociales, politiques et territoriales du développement de la ville" (8). Central to his analysis is that Montréal was once the metropolis of Canada, and now is the metropolis of Québec. It is in these terms that the book must be assessed.

Linteau divides his book into four chronological parts. The first covers the period between 1867 and 1896. Clearly, for Linteau, the most important aspects of this period is the emergence of Montréal as the industrial centre of Canada. As a result, the non-industrial poor rate only a passing mention (63). The second and

longest part, looks at Montréal between 1896 and 1914. This is "l'âge d'or" of Montréal and the period "la plus fascinante" for the author (9). He specifically challenges Terry Copp's interpretation, insisting that the general prosperity of the period improved the standard of living of the working class (216-217). This too was the "belle époque" (209) of Montréal's élites. The third part looks at the "Bouleversements" of 1914-1945 as Montréal deals with the problems of two World Wars and the Great Depression (283-425). The final part of the book deals with the period between 1945 and 1991. Linteau admits it his approach here "prendra plus l'allure d'un essai" because after 1960 he finds it difficult to separate the history of Montréal from the history of Québec. This is perhaps the least satisfactory of all four segments. It concentrates overwhelmingly on the period between 1960 and 1990. Growth and recession flow together, and the time that Montréal shared with Toronto as the Canadian metropolis is given short shrift.

It must be understood that for Linteau metropolitanism is a framework rather than a theme. He does not discuss the way in which Montréal's metropolitan status affected its development, nor the way in which the city's dominant status affected the development of the rest of Canada. Metropolitanism was the natural gift of Montréal's location, and its waning was the inevitable consequence of the transformation of Canadian economy as east-west links shifted to a north-south orientation. Western expansion also played its part. Further factors mentioned are the more complete development of Ontario's hinterland and the greater wave of American investment in Ontario (287-8).

This is surprising, because Linteau seems to have a particular interest in the creative possibilities of his city's élites. Élite groups dominate Linteau's book.

This is to be expected, in that the institutional development of Montréal is one of the book's main themes. This gives pride of place to the wealthy and influential of the city. Even in the 'social' parts of the book, however, we find that the élites predominate. In the central part of the book, the "élites" are described in pp. 166-177; working class organizations are covered in pp. 177-9. This proportion, *mutatis mutandis*, is preserved throughout the text. Linteau concludes by saying

Montréal doit, tout comme à fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, compter sur le dynamisme et la concertation de ses élites pour mener à bien une nouvelle phase de son développement (557).

Such a conclusion raises the question of the role of cultural factors in Montréal's history. Ronald Rudin has recently identified Linteau as one of the foremost of the 'revisionists' who minimize the importance of ethnicity in Québec's history (*CHR* LXXIII no. 1 (March, 1992):35). Given that "La diversité" of culture and ethnicity is one of Linteau's major themes (8-9, 525), it is worth considering here. He accepts the "francisation" of Montréal as a natural and inevitable fact. His sense, however, of the impact of different groups is left unclear. We are told that "Déjà, la présence des Irlandais au sein du groupe britannique ajoute un élément de diversité ethnique et sociale" (47), but we are left uncertain what this diversity entailed. Linteau has no reservation about the use of stereotypes about anglo-canadian bourgeois; their family relations were defined by "un décorum tout britannique (169-170).

His discussions of religion focus overwhelmingly on the French Catholic Church. While he admits his inability to deal with the diversity of the Anglo-Protestant experience (183), more detail might have been useful on the formation of Irish and Italian parishes.

## ***Book Reviews / Comptes rendus***

Linteau offers one pattern for an understanding of ethnic relation in Montréal: *le cloisonnement ethnique* by which different groups created their own social and cultural institutions. This mechanism, he avers, existed from before the Confederation period until the 1960s (164-5, 216-7, 223-4, 323, 474ff.). It helped, Linteau feels, to defuse inter-ethnic tensions until the dawning of the universal welfare state. The positive nature of this system is more asserted than demonstrated. At

one point only does he discuss it explicitly: its role in the proliferation of medical institutions during "la belle époque." He comments "les besoins étant tellement considérables, on peut estimer que deux hôpitaux valent sans doute mieux qu'un seul (223-4). This is surely a tendentious statement.

The book is well-written and well-crafted. It is written in an accessible style that makes it easy to read for both the profes-

sional and the amateur. Its thematic structure makes it perhaps more of a work of reference than a closely-written analysis. This is in accordance with the wishes of the author, who hopes to do no more than "lever un coin du voile" of Montréal's history.

Michael McCulloch  
Department of Philosophy, History and  
Politics  
University College of the Caribou