

**Donald B. Freeman. *A City of Farmers: Informal Urban Agriculture in the Open Spaces of Nairobi, Kenya*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. pp. xxiv, 159. Illustrations. \$34.95**

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Volume 21, numéro 2, march 1993

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016799ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016799ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Leo, C. (1993). Compte rendu de [Donald B. Freeman. *A City of Farmers: Informal Urban Agriculture in the Open Spaces of Nairobi, Kenya*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. pp. xxiv, 159. Illustrations. \$34.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 21(2), 121-122. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016799ar>

ponder the latest social and political absurdities at once enliven the book and suggest its unabashed subjectivity. Richler speaks only for Richler, and Quebecois are they, not we (though sometimes oui). He largely approves of Trudeau and Levesque: his list of the hapless and the venal is long.

Much of the controversy is generated by Richler's power to both pique vanity and pinch a nerve. The country is troubled and Richler has overlaid a largely cogent analysis with venom and hurt. This is no surprise: Richler has never been a respecter of the Law of the Father, whether in family, religion, or country. *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* is a significant artifact in the current national debate, but it does make one wonder if Uncle Benjy was not ultimately correct in his deathbed advice to Duddy Kravitz:

You've got to take them to your heart no matter what. They're the family remember, and to see only their faults (like I did) is to look at them like a stranger.<sup>7</sup>

As a postscript, there is one vignette that Richler does not include in this book, one meaningful to this reviewer, an Anglophone who grew up in a northern Quebec mining town in the Fifties and Sixties. (Best to declare one's biases on this topic.) At the memorial service for Hugh McLennan in the Birks Chapel at McGill University in the fall of 1990, an end-of-an-era feeling was in the post-Meech air, melancholy hovering over the dark-suited, mostly elderly mourners redolent of an earlier era in WASP Montreal. Mordecai Richler was there, and one eulogist solemnly declared that with the death of the author of *Two Solitudes* and *Return of the Sphinx*, the mantle of Anglophone Montreal writer had passed to Mordecai Richler. It was a moving moment, and there was a pal-

pable feeling in that shadowy, crowded chapel that this was so. The mantle surely streams from very different shoulders, and its gifted wearer must wonder if it is not really a hair shirt.

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The centrality of agriculture to an understanding of African society, as well as to hopes for that continent's economic development, is gradually gaining growing recognition in scholarly literature. Industrialization, which was seen by many in the 1960s and '70s as the primary instrument of the search for prosperity, has clearly failed to realize the hopes for it. Even urbanization, a much more durable and genuinely influential phenomenon, has not cut the ties of the

majority of Africans to their rural origins, or diminished the importance of agriculture to economic survival and prosperity.

*A City of Farmers* underlines this point by drawing attention to the widely-neglected fact that agriculture permeates even urban society. In a fascinating and long-overdue study, Prof. Freeman reports the results of two investigations of urban agriculture in Kenya, focussing on a questionnaire administered to a random sample of urban cultivators in Nairobi. The study yields a substantial body of information on the urban farmers, their agricultural practices, their previous occupations, their other activities and the importance of agriculture in their lives. The information is presented effectively and yields important insights into the society and economy of a major African city. The author points out, for example, that the majority of urban cultivators are women, and that their position in the city reflects the burdens imposed upon them in a patriarchal society. He presents evidence of the extreme poverty of many urban farmers and shows that urban agriculture is often desperately important to their survival. He shows how traditional land usages have helped to shape a distinctly African approach to land rights and social responsibilities. He catalogues the reasons for engaging in urban agriculture, gives a great deal of information about the agriculturalists, and details crops and locations. In the process he offers much insight into the society of Nairobi and, undoubtedly, many other African cities. All of this is done well.

The least satisfying part of the study is a brief, somewhat unfocussed history of the development of the city of Nairobi, the purpose of which is apparently to describe how open space currently devoted to urban agriculture escaped urban development. The study raises too many interesting questions to justify this side trip. Another shortcoming, perhaps

unavoidable, results from the questionnaire—regrettably not reproduced in the text—that apparently asked standardized, simple-answer questions of a random sample of more than 600 respondents. With this method, the author gleaned a large body of replicable data, but was understandably not able to achieve as much depth as students of Kenya society and politics might wish.

For example, one would like to know more about how urban agriculture is related to the rural agrarian economy, and thus the society as a whole. Do some urban farmers maintain relations with kin elsewhere in the country, and what are the economic dimensions of such relations? To what extent is residence in the city a reaction to intolerable conditions in the rural areas, and what is it that was intolerable? To what extent is the move an attempt to seek a better life in the city? The author speculates on the answers but the survey method necessarily prevented him from finding out his respondents' own answers to those questions.

It would also be interesting to know what role ethnicity plays in the politics of urban agriculture. Is the central city more ethnically mixed than the suburbs because the people there prefer to live near the area where they eventually hope to obtain employment, as the author speculates, or because Kikuyu people and perhaps Wakamba are loath to allow others to encroach on "their" territory?

Another set of questions has to do with Kenya's development strategy. Freeman hints at a problem when he points out that lack of investment in rural agriculture and industry drives rural residents, frustrated by lack of economic opportunity, to the cities. However, rural escapees do not find the golden opportunities they hope for. In the end they often find them-

selves practicing an insecure and usually ill-financed form of peasant agriculture in their back yards and on railroad rights-of-way in the city. Freeman's study reminds us that the failure of many third-world governments to create conditions for the profitable pursuit of small-scale rural agriculture and industry has the perverse side-effect of displacing peasant agriculture from rural areas to cities. However, the study does not address these implications of its findings. There is much scope here for further study.

Obviously, Prof. Freeman could not have been expected to do justice to all these questions in a slender volume. What he has done is a valuable study that provides an excellent base for further investigation of agrarian society and urbanization in Africa and elsewhere in the third world.

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**Kuklick, Bruce. *To Everything A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. pp. xii, 237. 22 black and white plates, maps, essay on sources, and index. \$19.95 (U.S.).**

This is a history of a ball park, the neighbourhood it was a part of, the teams that played in it, and particularly the place of the park in the lives and imaginations of the fans, players, and owners. It was no field of dreams, in the middle of an Iowa corn field. Baseball is, for Bruce Kuklick, a peculiarly urban phenomenon. A Ronald Reagan might reinvent it for his Iowa radio audience in the 1930s, but big league baseball grew with the cities.

Shibe Park (much later renamed Connie Mack Stadium) opened in 1909. It was the first of the privately-financed con-

crete and steel stadiums, the successors to the often dangerous wooden structures of the late 19th century. Three of these ball parks still survive—Wrigley Field in Chicago, Fenway Park in Boston, and New York's Yankee Stadium—Comiskey Park in Chicago closed last year. Shibe survived over sixty-one years as an anchor to North City, a new neighbourhood that developed in the shadow of Philadelphia and persisted into an era of demographic transformation and the harsh politics of urban renewal.

Benjamin Shibe, a sporting goods manufacturer and his partner and field manager of the Philadelphia A's, the legendary Connie Mack, located their new stadium in an area previously referred to as Swampoodle. Cheap open land and its accessibility by the Broad Street trolley, as well as three railway lines, made the site appealing. Opening day fans approached an ornate French renaissance facade, with a tower at its corner containing offices for the partners. Inside there was seating for 23,000 with a theoretical capacity, including standees, for a then incredible 40,000.

Professor Kuklick's emphasis is on the role of this ferro-concrete structure as a part of the connective tissue in "the way sport is instrumental in ordinary people's construction of a meaningful past for themselves." Thus his title may be evocative of past seasons of baseball glory, but it is intended as a commentary on the transient role of a piece of urban architecture in containing or perpetuating the public memory of an important element of popular culture. Shibe Park's season is past, the A's long ago departed for Kansas City and then Oakland and few recall their tie to Philadelphia. The Phillies have played in Veterans Stadium for over twenty years now and Kuklick is not interested in rekindling nostalgia but in understanding Shibe's role as a cultural artifact.