

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Ryan, Mary P. *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997. Pp. xii, 376, 44 black and white illustrations, bibliography, index. US\$27.50

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Volume 26, Number 1, October 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016680ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016680ar>

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Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Johnston-Miller, M. M. (1997). Review of [Ryan, Mary P. *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997. Pp. xii, 376, 44 black and white illustrations, bibliography, index. US\$27.50]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 26(1), 66–67. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016680ar>

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nineteenth-century man who, unlike Gerald Tulchinsky's "River Barons", was not solely driven by a devotion to Montreal and its growth and the profits that could be made from that growth. Smith was deeply committed to family, region, nation and empire, to material progress and to the ethic of hard work, and not exclusively for economic reasons.

Well grounded in the primary sources — Scottish, American, British and Canadian — McDonald's study does more than recount the life and times of an individual. Under her pen, questions about the nature of the "English" community in Montreal, the interplay between metropolis and hinterland and the integrity of Canadian business, fuse in a single account.

Smith was one of a small number of Scottish-born elites who dominated the Montreal — and therefore the national — economy until the time of his death in 1914. The Scottish community, in alliance with the Tory politicians in Ottawa through a number of institutions (the HBC, the Bank of Montreal and the CPR) — all of which were Smith-related — managed to make Montreal a "national metropolis". As the prime focus of capital, exchange, enterprise and leadership, Montreal effectively dominated vast economic hinterlands. By establishing a commercial monopoly, centralizing business and expanding the railway east and west, Smith and a handful others — who happened to be located in Montreal — developed the Canadian nation and urban network.

This class of Montrealers had become initially very wealthy by investing in commercial enterprises, specifically in the staple trades. Smith, for instance, had made a good deal of money reinvesting his HBC salary in the fur trade. Yet with the development of new technologies and the modernization of the economy at mid-century, Smith and his associates emerged among the strongest supporters of the growth of manufacturing. During the 1850s Canada's largest bank, the Bank of Montreal — in which Smith had been amassing shares since the late 1840s — began purchasing large amounts of railway stock, signifying a shift from its old commercial business into a new kind of industrial lending. Furthermore, shortly thereafter, the Bank of Montreal began lobbying the government for the establishment of a central bank that would finance manufacturing and provide a fiat currency and a national banking system suited to an industrialized economy. It was not the chartered banks, therefore, that were preventing money from going into manufacturing; indeed, it was the more important commercial bank, Smith's Bank of Montreal, that was spearheading the advance into a different kind of system. Over his lifetime, Smith owned shares in twenty-five manufacturing and power companies, among them, the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company, the Lachine Rapids Hydraulic and Land Company, the Montreal Light, Heat and Power Company and the Pease Foundry.

Beyond its strengths, this book manifests the weaknesses of biography. In her efforts to always keep Smith in view, McDonald limits her work to the upper level of the bourgeoisie. In this way she makes a similar choice to that of Acheson and

Pédalue. This results in entrepreneurs of medium importance being left in the shadows. As Linteau has argued, the group was an important economic force in Montreal and cannot afford to be overlooked. In addition, by keeping Smith in the foreground, McDonald paints a picture of the Montreal business community that is unrealistically homogeneous and harmonious.

Despite its shortcomings, this book, or parts of it, could be read with benefit both by students of business history and urban historians.

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Ryan, Mary P. *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997. Pp. xii, 376, 44 black and white illustrations, bibliography, index. US\$27.50.

Combining a rich array of primary sources such as newspapers, government records, and firsthand accounts with the work of numerous recent historical studies, Mary Ryan's *Civic Wars* presents a fascinating tale of three cities — New York, New Orleans and San Francisco—in the period between 1825 and 1880. Focused, as the subtitle suggests, on people as participants in public and political life, it is also a history of the changing nature of political participation in this period. In charting the tumultuous flow of public life, Ryan focuses not on the urban elite or on "centers of government but on the far more dispersed and elusive habitats of the people(12)," following the people through the various public spaces in which they interacted. In doing so, Ryan also traces the gradual, if highly problematic, expansion of democracy. Cities, rather than "other putative cradles of democracy" such as the frontier or the New England town, Ryan argues, are where "direct confrontation with a particularly heterogeneous and fractious people(10–11)" offered the new "representative institutions" of democracy their strongest test. In seven chapters, divided into three sections, Ryan vividly describes parades, political meetings, riots and other forms of political activity and group identification that took place in public spaces from New York's Bowery to Jackson Square in New Orleans to Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, and closely analysing the interrelations of class, race, ethnicity and gender revealed there. This blend of anecdote and analysis conveys the heterogeneity and fluidity of urban life, and of the shifting, complex meanings of the identities that individuals and groups claimed as they sought their place in the public life of their cities.

Ryan's work reflects the fragmented, somewhat elusive nature of both the history and the recent historiography of places populated by an almost impossible diversity of characters and cultures, anxieties and ambitions. To those who see such diversity

and fluidity as the most compelling characteristics of the historical record, Ryan's kaleidoscopic account might seem satisfyingly apt. Ryan herself, however, is not one of those people. Or not entirely. Ryan welcomes the "elaboration and diversification of our history" and the "larger, infinitely improved ... picture of the past(3)" it has encouraged. But Ryan also regrets that it has also brought a "more splintered" picture while generating "unease" and "disarray" among historians.

Rejecting traditional narratives of American development, and skeptical of many recent syntheses that often reject the richness of the new history in favor of finding "the easiest point of unity among the powerful and the prominent," Ryan conducted her own "search" for "some way of bringing America's diverse peoples together on one plane of analysis, but without subjecting them to the brute authority of a central government or the cultural tyranny of national character(4)." Her search brought her to "the idea of the public(4)." Thus Ryan sees "the public" not only as a variety of locations in which social and political change can be observed in the interaction of the people, but also a conceptual framework capable of advancing the necessary and desirable work of allying the fluctuating, fragmented world of nineteenth century urban life to a coherent narrative of the nation's democratic development. Nor is this just an "academic" quest for Ryan. *Civic Wars* was "[u]ndertaken as both a historian's project and a citizen's mission(3)," in the belief that the public life of the past has much to teach about democracy and citizenship in contemporary America. In particular, Ryan rightly insists that diversity and conflict do not represent declension from a better world of peace and consensus. On the contrary, such "civic warfare" needs to be understood and "embraced" as an intrinsic component of modern democracy.

Ryan herself largely assumes the validity and value of the two debatable premises underpinning her book: the desirability of writing as both historian and citizen, and the need to find new forms of "narrative coherence" that will accommodate multiple American stories. Perhaps the idea is that the narrative itself will do the talking as to their wisdom and desirability. Ryan's narrative, however, is often characterized less by the coming together of detailed diversity and big-picture coherence than by an uneasy co-habitation of language and metaphors drawn from both recent historiography and traditional explorations of American development. Constant metaphorical reminders of the kaleidoscopic, contingent nature of a multitudinous and multifarious public world, sit uneasily beside (or beneath) teleologically-loaded terms like "Infant democracy", "the democratic experiment," and the "democratic project." Rather than providing a larger narrative framework for the street-level practice of democracy that Ryan describes, such ideas and assumptions are in fact strikingly at odds with the rich evidence Ryan offers to show that groups seldom saw their own drive for participatory power as another successful step towards "democracy." Nor did they view the exclusion of others as a "lack" or "flaw" in definitions of democracy. As Ryan presents

them, the nineteenth-century urban "public" came to understand that the pursuit or denial of power could be as effectively, even more effectively, achieved through control of the fluid, partial, supposedly inclusive identity of "citizen" as through appeals to more explicitly particular identities rooted in past countries or present occupations. On one level, therefore, Ryan's work vividly reveals democracy's character as an historically directionless weapon in the practical pursuit of power. On another, she seeks to accommodate democracy as practice to the language and assumptions of democracy as providence.

That an historian as careful and inclusive as Ryan so readily lapses into the language and assumptions of the master narratives she seeks to supersede suggests that it is not only the inevitability of "civic warfare" that the modern citizen should recognize. He or she might also take from Ryan's account the understanding that terms such as "public" and "citizen" remain as loaded and as potentially dangerous today as they were in the nineteenth-century city. As such, they and their users deserve the kinds of close scrutiny that Ryan gives to her civic predecessors. There is also, perhaps a possible, if unintended, lesson to be drawn by historians from this particular account of what Mary Ryan tellingly describes, in another phrase redolent of traditional "nationalist" narratives, as "our history." Contrary to her hopes and assumptions as a citizen-historian, maybe historians should not be so quick to wrap all those recently uncovered historical fragments in the citizen's comfort blanket of narrative coherence.

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**Burley, David G. *A Particular Condition in Life: Self-Employment in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994. Pp.309. Tables. \$39.95 cloth.**

For some time now social historians have focused on the formation of a Canadian working class during the industrialisation era of the mid and late nineteenth century. In this clever and well-researched study historian David Burley changes this focus to explore the "making of the middle class" — surprisingly, a rather under-studied topic in Canadian history — in the urban setting of Brantford, Ontario. Concentrating his inquiry on one segment of the middle class, Burley explores how the economic restructuring brought about by industrialisation affected Brantford's self-employed in both structural and subjective terms. The result is a successful book, rich both in evidence and analysis about the process of middle class formation during Canada's industrialisation era.

The author makes excellent use of census data from the 1830–81 period to chart the rise and fall of a golden era of self-employment in Brantford. Until the late 1850s self-employment