

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Piva, Michael J., ed. *A History of Ontario: Selected Readings*.
Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988. Pp. 322. Illustrations. \$15.95

Bruce S. Elliott

Volume 17, Number 2, October 1988

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017667ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017667ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Elliott, B. S. (1988). Review of [Piva, Michael J., ed. *A History of Ontario: Selected Readings*. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988. Pp. 322. Illustrations. \$15.95].

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 17(2), 131–132.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1017667ar>

Seagram Building in New York. A short list of "features" for each style completes the taxonomy. The appendix is significant in that it lays bare the technique used throughout the book. The architectural production of Alberta is constantly placed beside its model (usually of European source) in an indefatigable comparison of copy and original. The strategy is "art historical" since it lends dignity and visibility to the various integers of Albertan architectural practice. This approach also aims to find a strictly "regional" residue, which would precipitate as modern architecture in Alberta, and which is also brought into comparative excursus with high European modernism. It comes as no surprise to read in the Postscript that the "most important issues facing contemporary architects have to do not with style, but with the integration of a building into its social, historical, environmental, and cultural setting; in short regionalism." If Boddy uses primarily stylistic tools of analysis and classification, he makes no mystery of the collapse of such logic. The real heroes of Boddy's history are the overt simulacrum of main street architecture: service stations, cinemas, muffler shops, and hamburger chains. Through the procedures of classification we witness what Rosalind Krauss has called "the fall into the implosive condition of the same." As pastiche becomes the universal condition of aesthetic practice, distinctions such as "original" and "copy" dissolve. The Edmonton City Hall of 1957 may be similar to Le Corbusier's Swiss Pavilion or Gropius's decorated diagrams, but no appeal can be made to the purity of "high modernism" — similarities and dissimilarities are weightless.

Boddy's stylistic charting, therefore, cleverly subverts itself. A glance at the index under "Architectural Styles" is revealing. At least 39 styles are listed. Intermeshed with the great categories of Western Art are parodies such as Jazz-Age Baroque, Odeon, Rococo Moderne and Stucco Vernacular. The term Modern Baroque qualifying the work of Douglas Cardinal is the ultimate quartering, a celebration of our consumption of styles that

results in the neutralizing of any possible work of classification: the term Modern Baroque defies definition, it is two opposite elements united in the virtual space of a parodic image.

The regionalism Boddy still feels able to uphold is of a very special kind. Tongue in cheek, he asks himself what future style awaits Alberta: "Whether that style will be the bizarre hybrid which is Post-Modernism, the avant-garde revivalism of the Neo-Modern, or some other variant, it is too early to tell." He ensures that the reader feels no urge to select from his list of 39 available masks. If regionalism is still considered, it is a masquerade for the purpose of local advertisement such as the Alberta Pavilion at Expo 86.

Boddy readily recognizes that his "study treads that dangerous path between architectural history and criticism," a narrow pass where history becomes self-criticism — a dangerous tool in the hands of the Historic Sites Service of Alberta Culture.

Martin Bressani
School of Architecture
Carleton University

Piva, Michael J., ed. *A History of Ontario: Selected Readings*. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988. Pp. 322. Illustrations. \$15.95.

This volume is part of the New Canadian Readings series edited by J. L. Granatstein, which consists of collections of previously published articles focusing on "selected Canadian topics, problems, and issues." The main title is somewhat misleading and might cause the casual buyer to mistake it for one of the new survey histories of the province, whereas the book in fact consists of 14 articles on various aspects of Ontario's history from 1850 to the present.

The chronological representation of the

selections is even, and the thematic coverage is wide, including titles in social, economic, political, labour, educational, and women's history. The only obvious imbalance is the concentration on politics in the post World War II period: Gottlieb on Drew and the Dominion-Provincial Conference on Reconstruction, Oliver on Allan Grossman, Lyon's assessment of the minority government of the 1970s, and Bashevkin's article on women in Ontario politics in the same decade. There is also a clear urban bias, which is more in keeping with the later decade of Ontario's history than with the earlier period. Rural/agricultural history is represented only at the beginning, by Gagan's overstated demographic piece "Families and Land: the Mid-Century Crisis." The volume contains selections as diverse as Kealey's much-reprinted work on the Orange Order in Toronto, Barber on immigrant domestics, Stamp and Oliver on 20th-century education, Weaver's interesting study of suburban development in Hamilton, and Speisman's article on poor relief in Toronto (the title of which contains the second-worst pun to bless Canadian historiography).

The diversity of the material dictates that the book cannot be greater than the sum of its parts; it cannot pretend to be "A History of Ontario." Some of the contributions are very specialized and stand on their own only with difficulty. Dewar's article on the electrical utilities' campaign against municipal competition in the 1890s, for example, would be easier for the uninitiated if it was set in a wider context. As Piva notes, Dewar covers only "the first stage of a decade-long debate." These chunks of professional scholarship remain too specialized for the general reader despite the editor's attempt to tie them together in an evolutionary introductory essay of just over four pages.

Although the bibliography contains some popular works as well as academic titles, this volume is clearly intended for

undergraduates enrolled in courses in Ontario history. As an adjunct to a course, the book will be useful if the lecturer agrees with Piva about what is important. To me it seems a useful selection. The book is sensibly in paperback. Such volumes help to relieve pressure on library periodical collections, and they should become increasingly popular if changes in the copyright law impose user fees for photocopying.

Bruce S. Elliott
City of Nepean

Lane, Roger. *Roots of Violence In Black Philadelphia 1860-1900*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. Pp.v, 174. Index. \$25.00.

Roots of Violence In Black Philadelphia 1860-1900 is only 174 pages long but it is the best book written in the last decade about the urban experience of black Americans. Containing a number of provocative ideas that have broader applications for the study of black American history, Lane's study makes explicit what was implicit in earlier studies of black urbanization — the structural basis of American racism. Using an approach to the problem of racial inequality in 19th century America that is both unique and exciting, Lane examines the question of black subordination by focusing on crime in Philadelphia during the last four decades of the century. "The history of crime," he writes, "has ignored almost wholly the Afro-American population of the United States." Lane looks to the peculiar circumstances of Negro life in ante bellum America to explain why blacks were more likely than whites to be criminals after the civil war. The 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments made blacks the equals of whites in theory, but not in reality. When viewed from this perspective, the Civil War and Reconstruction constitute a hiatus, not a revolution, in American racial sensibilities.

In Philadelphia between 1860 and 1900 blacks did not share in the city's expanded economic opportunities. "The experience of American blacks is unique in part precisely because they were not merely bypassed but systematically excluded from the urban-industrial revolution, and this exclusion had important effects not only on criminal behavior but also, through criminal behavior on family life, racial leadership, and urban culture in general." Forced to live on the economic margins of society, Philadelphia blacks turned to crime. The criminal subculture blacks were forced to live in because of social and economic discrimination undermined family structure, bred violence, alienated the black middle class from the lower class, and further poisoned race relations. Black crime, in short, reinforced the racism of which it was a product.

Blacks were usually not successful as criminals. Racism prevented them from entering the more lucrative areas of criminal endeavour. White-collar crimes, such as fraud, embezzlement, and forgery, were closed to blacks. For them, Lane says, this "was a direct analogue of the problem of breaking into white collar employment more generally." The petty theft and burglaries black men engaged in were not profitable. Black women, on the other hand, working as domestics or prostitutes were able to steal substantial amounts of cash and other valuables. Whether working legitimately or illegitimately, black women were able to earn more than their men. This state of affairs did nothing for black male self-esteem and most certainly contributed nothing to family stability.

Late 19th century black Philadelphians lived in a violent community. Homicide rates were higher than for any other group in the city of brotherly love. The roots of this violence lay in the political, economic, and social subordination that dominated and shaped black life. In focusing on the origins of black violence and crime, Lane has made a major

contribution to black history. His book criticizes the cultural paradigm that has dominated black history for the past 20 years, arguing that the "emphasis on a distinctive Afro-American tradition has had important results." This mode of analysis has given blacks agency in history, something an earlier generation of American historians denied them. But the importance that many American historians have placed on the strength, resilience, and adaptability of black American culture has caused them to ignore certain problems inherent in this conceptualization of the black past. One of these problems is the corrosive effect that criminal violence had on black culture. Violence in the 19th century vitiated other parts of the black American cultural tradition. In noting this fact, Professor Lane has vindicated the earlier work of W. E. B. Dubois in *The Philadelphia Negro*.

Clarence E. Walker
Professor of History
University of California, Davis

Hudson, James R. *The Unanticipated City: Loft Conversions in Lower Manhattan*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987. Pp.xvi, 160. 15 black and white photographs, 2 maps. \$28.95.

Hudson's book on loft conversions in New York City does two things. First, it tells a good story in readable prose about the unofficial transformation of Manhattan's declining manufacturing district - SoHo (South of Houston) district - into an enclave of avant-garde artists in the 1960s and, later, into a trendy haven for the fashionably eccentric. Second, it serves as a useful addition to the field of human ecology in cities.

Artists began occupying the industrial lofts of SoHo as early as the 1940s, and by the early 1970s they had virtually taken over the area. The lofts had many advantages over conventional apartments. The load-bearing