

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Kaplan, Harold. *Reform, Planning, and City Politics: Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982. Pp. xi, 775. \$47.50 (cloth)

Andrew Sancton

Volume 12, numéro 2, octobre 1983

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018967ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018967ar>

[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

Sancton, A. (1983). Compte rendu de [Kaplan, Harold. *Reform, Planning, and City Politics: Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982. Pp. xi, 775. \$47.50 (cloth)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 12(2), 144–145. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018967ar>

McPherson on page 148). The prose is too often inert, even apathetic (I particularly dislike Chapters 4 and 6, on "More Sports: Lacrosse to Basketball" and "Rock and Roll" respectively). There are many bright spots, but *Maple Leaf Gardens* is just too uneven in quality to justify the price that the publishers are asking for it.

To summarize, this volume will be of little scholarly value to academics, but they and others may well find it entertaining and even heart-warming — especially if they wait and manage to purchase remaindered copies.

Morris Mott
Department of History
University of Manitoba

Kaplan, Harold. *Reform, Planning, and City Politics: Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982. Pp. xi, 775. \$47.50 (cloth).

Deciding where to begin is the first problem facing the reader of this gigantic book. Fortunately, the author provides some advice in his mercifully brief preface: "Readers more interested in the substance of city politics than in systems theory . . . may wish to begin with chapter 7, on Montreal, and later refer back to the three city context spelled out in earlier chapters" (p. xi). This was all the encouragement I needed to turn immediately to page 312.

Frustration set in on page 313. Referring to the period in mid-nineteenth century after francophones regained their majority status in Montreal, Kaplan writes: "To restore an English majority in the city, Anglophones pressed for annexation of west-lying suburbs . . ." Which anglophones? Which suburbs? Perhaps the footnotes will help. Where are they?

All that is to be found is a brief "Essay on Sources" on pages 747-53. In the middle of page 748 is this weak excuse for the absence of more detailed documentation: "The findings on the three cities are presented in highly condensed form emphasizing what is pertinent to my theoretical concerns. Because the text is more a theoretical analysis and summary than a detailed account, the citation of all the primary sources on which this analysis is based would take as many pages as the text itself." For Montreal, we are given two pages of books, articles, reports, and library collections. The result: I still have no idea on what basis Kaplan made his claim about the proposed annexation of anglophone suburbs.

Having adjusted one's academic sensibilities to the absence of proper documentation, the reading of much of the material on "The Montreal Tradition" is quite fascinat-

ing. Kaplan's writing is full of valuable insights and provocative assertions. His characterization of pre-Drapeau Montreal politics — "a noisy, meaningless spectacle, a ruthless battle of ins vs. outs, with 'the issues' serving as mere camouflage" (p. 325) — is a characteristic example.

As one reads on, however, the problems resulting from the lack of footnotes simply cannot be ignored. On page 338 Kaplan discusses the complexities of the municipal franchise and ends up claiming that it was not until 1944 that tenants in Montreal received the vote. Where did this information come from? Certainly not from section 2, chapter 72 of the 1860 Statutes of the Province of Canada in which Montreal tenants renting a dwelling with an assessed value of \$300 or a yearly rental value of \$30 appear to have been granted the franchise. Anyway, if tenants did not vote until 1944, how did a populist mayor such as Médéric Martin ever get elected?

Subsequent pages are littered with inaccuracies. The name of Roland Chagnon (first chairman of the Montreal Metropolitan Corporation) comes out as 'Gagnon' (p. 395); the claim that 1965 provincial legislation exempted suburbs from contributing to the capital cost of the subway system is wrong (p. 438); Saraguay is mistakenly located in east-end Montreal (p. 433); the discussion of Montreal's annexations in the 1960s omits the most important case, that of Saint-Michel (p. 433); the creation of the Montreal Urban Community is described without a single mention of the decisive city police strike in October 1969 (p. 443); and the description of the voting arrangements within the M.U.C. council refers to the need to obtain one-third city and suburban votes for a motion to pass instead of the correct figure which is one-half (p. 444).

There are still more inaccuracies concerning Montreal. How much faith, then, can we have in Kaplan's treatment of Winnipeg and Toronto? When he tells us that Toronto was incorporated in 1817 (pp. 65 and 613) we have cause to worry. In fact, of course, the date was 1834.

Another puzzling feature of the book is that the description of events stops dead at the end of 1970. Nowhere in this book, published in 1982, is there any explanation for this arbitrary cut-off point. For Winnipeg, there is nothing about Unicity. For Toronto, we get a hint of what Kaplan calls 'neoreform' but no mention of David Crombie or John Sewell. Not only does the narrative end in 1970, there is not even any attempt to use knowledge of subsequent events in the 1970s to add a sense of perspective to the discussion of the 1960s.

This bizarre book contains a seven-page conclusion (pp. 740-46). The final chapter, entitled 'Systemic Thinking', points out that "The problem we all face is one of doing justice to the complexity of our specific situations without being overwhelmed by and immobilized by the details" (p.

743). Kaplan suggests that systems theory helps. In his concluding sentence, however, he candidly admits that "If a theory cannot convince people that its way of looking at familiar events is better than the prior, commonsensical way, the theory doesn't deserve to take hold" (p. 746). Systems theory has not "taken hold" and it is most unlikely that this book, notwithstanding its bulk, will change things.

There are at least two major problems in taking a systems approach to Canadian urban politics. First, this approach — at least as it is articulated by Kaplan — takes scant account of provincial governments. Although Kaplan is quick to acknowledge that municipal political systems are affected by all kinds of external factors in their environment, he provides no special analysis of the provincial role. Provincial premiers, ministers, legislatures and regulatory bodies appear from time to time, but the reader is given no comprehensive account of their pervasive presence. Sorting out the autonomy of municipal politics in relation to provincial politics would seem to be the first step in any successful systemic approach. If the two levels are inextricably intertwined, then the theory must be structured accordingly.

The second problem is more serious. As with other studies using the systems approach, this one tells us little about who wins and who loses in urban politics. We learn how municipal systems persist, develop, and adapt over time, but there is little enlightenment as to how these systems connect with the major political and economic forces in society or how they act to advance or hinder the particular interests of such forces. It is this kind of issue which is once again pre-occupying political science and that is why the systems approach is not "taking hold."

Students of city politics in Montreal, Winnipeg, and Toronto will not be able to ignore this book. There is enough new information and insightful comment to reward the persistent reader. Unfortunately, however, the factual material needs to be double checked. Without footnotes, this is no easy task.

Andrew Sancton
Department of Political Science
University of Western Ontario

Stelter, Gilbert A. and Artibise, Alan F.J., eds. *Shaping The Urban Landscape: Aspects of the Canadian City-Building Process*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982. Pp. 436. Tables, maps, illustrations. \$15.95 (paper).

The fifteen essays in this latest of "S and A/A and S"¹ enterprises forms a collection generously organized around a central though intellectually diffusive theme. Among and between essays, the concepts "Landscape" and "City-build-

ing process" are variously accorded the broadest of interpretations, the narrowest or widest of methodological approaches and a wide spectrum of historical periods. Whether justifiably or not will not be argued here; suffice to say, a collection of this design and variability defies review by conventional criteria. There is also the problem of whom to address: architects and planners? historical geographers? students of social history? of economic or political history? scholars and researchers of Canadian urbanism? In the face of these many considerations, your reviewer might be forgiven the device of going his own way.

Whether or not, as Stelter and Artibise assert, this is a collection of the "best work available," it deserves to be warmly welcomed by students and teachers. There are definitely elements of originality in it; in a number of instances, the courage of synthesis; and a good deal of plainly interesting history. It is a sorely needed publication in Canadian urban studies. Not all of the essays, however, ought to be taken as models for research into, or interpretive approach to what is, in final account, a multi-dimensional subject. Nor are the essays of uniformly high calibre. Some of the essays exceed the textual economies warranted by their essential substance (for example McCann, Artibise, Ganton and MacDonald). These reservations notwithstanding, the book offers ample opportunity for worthwhile reference, be it on a specific locality, on illustrative method, or in the interest of finding building blocks or inspiration to more comprehensive studies.

In a prefatory essay, Stelter discusses how the study of city can be approached — as "entity," "process" or "setting" — and suggests a classification of the relevant historical periods in Canadian urbanism as "mercantile," "commercial" and "new industrialism." It has been, of course, largely via setting and industrialism that cities (more accurately, urbanization) have been made known to most Canadian students; that is, by treating the city as locus for economic and political "forces," but whose localized physical environmental impacts, influences, designed form and internal patterning were matters of indifference. As Stelter claims, Canadian studies have been developing in a more cross-disciplinary fashion than the traditional American scholarly model by drawing unto them physical development disciplines. If so, the effect of this may be that "urban as entity" could be emerging in Canada as an engaging subject with a legitimacy of its own, and in which the treatment of city is freed from the a-historical strictures of (Parsonian) social science or the preoccupations of (Innesian) economic geography. The set of essays assembled for the book "usually represent *urban as entity*." Had they done so *exclusively*, and with more consideration given to architectural, environment design and institutionalized city-building aspects, the whole book would, I believe, have had greater vitality and possibly a little more charm and strength of coherency. In addition to inciting our interest in understanding Canadian urban history in terms of entity, Stelter has provided in his essay a valuable short