

Holli, Melvin, ed. *Detroit*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1976. Pp. 287. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback

Lubove, Roy, ed. *Pittsburg*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1976. Pp. 284. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback

Troen, Selwyn and Glen Holt, eds. *St. Louis*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1977. Pp. 213. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback

D. R. Farrel

Numéro 2-78, october 1978

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019434ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019434ar>

[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

Farrel, D. R. (1978). Compte rendu de [Holli, Melvin, ed. *Detroit*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1976. Pp. 287. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback / Lubove, Roy, ed. *Pittsburg*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1976. Pp. 284. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback / Troen, Selwyn and Glen Holt, eds. *St. Louis*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1977. Pp. 213. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (2-78), 118–120.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1019434ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1978

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

Oregonians, most of whom came from somewhere else, constructed a city that could have been anywhere else. Although more heavily laden with lost opportunities, their experience was common to the rest of the nation.

W. T. Wooley
Department of History
University of Victoria

* * *

Holli, Melvin, ed. Detroit. New York: New Viewpoints, 1976. Pp. 287. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback.

Lubove, Roy, ed. Pittsburg. New York: New Viewpoints, 1976. Pp. 284. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback.

Troen, Selwyn and Glen Holt, eds. St. Louis. New York: New Viewpoints, 1977. Pp. 213. Tables, appendix, index. \$12.50 hardcover, \$6.50 paperback.

Utilizing documentary materials interlaced with brief comments, Holli's Detroit and Lubove's Pittsburgh offer comprehensive and highly thematic interpretations of their cities' histories. Along with Troen and Holt's St. Louis, the three books are the initial volumes of a projected series entitled a Documentary History of American Cities, under the general editorship of Tamara K. Hareven and Stephen Thernstrom. Of limited appeal to specialists, the series should be most useful for college or secondary school courses dealing with community studies.

While such a series is most desirable, its most immediate deficiency is a lack of introductory comment by the series editors, Hareven and Thernstrom. With no indication of the scope or intent of the series as a whole, it is difficult to identify potential themes or to evaluate the method and criteria used in the selection of particular documents. This deficiency is aggravated by a complete lack of bibliography. The reader (and one suspects the volume editors as well) would benefit from such a statement of purpose.

Common themes are, however, both apparent and persistent in each of these initial volumes. Patterns of economic development, the role of ethnicity, types of social and civic improvement (or the lack thereof), as well as physical growth and planning are all discussed in detail. It is just as interesting to note what is not covered. Although each of these three cities has a common heritage (founded by the French colonial empire in the Eighteenth Century), a similar physical location (on major interior rivers situated between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi), and a related historical background (as resource centers for expanding hinterlands during westward expansion), there is little discussion of this early era and no attempt to develop any concept of an "urban frontier." More welcome is the decision to minimize political

matters, leaving space for lesser-known areas of each city's history.

By far the most effective presentation is made by Holli's Detroit. Indeed, the book is a major tour de force. Even in documentary form, it surpasses any monographic history of Detroit. Holli offers a concise but powerful explanation for the evolution (one might almost say mutation) from the "Dynamic Detroit" of the 1920s to "Disastrous Detroit" of the present by focusing on the deleterious impact of the city's one-industry auto economy. This view is hardly novel, but Holli's ability to relate his theme to every possible aspect of Detroit's life since 1910 is most impressive. One cannot escape the pervasive impact of the "Automobile manufacturing revolution" on the city's politics, its social structure or its economic prospects let alone on the broader themes of race, ethnicity, and the promise of urban revitalization.

Less comprehensive, but equally effective in its synthesis, is Lubove's study of Pittsburgh. Focusing on the all-encompassing impact of the steel industry, Lubove follows a pattern similar to that used by Holli. As in Detroit, a virtual flood of Southern and Eastern European immigrants was drawn to the city's factories. In both cities this influx led directly to congestion and a rapid deterioration of urban services. It also created tension with the dominant ethnic group. In Detroit it was the New England Yankee, who tried to "Americanize" the immigrant through education. In the case of Pittsburgh it was the founding Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who were intolerant of the newcomers' living conditions, work habits and "morals."

Although thoroughly dominating the economy of Pittsburgh, the old Calvinist elite ignored the civic needs of the community in favor of stressing improved production schedules in the mills. Surprisingly little documentary material is included on this group, but there are constant references throughout the study to their overwhelming influence. Before the most recent generation became directly involved in the Renaissance Movement after 1945, it was clear that the Pittsburgh elite expected that everyone should emulate both their work ethic and their economic success. In Detroit, the auto barons had less direct power, but the short-term economic benefits offered by auto production blinded both the business leaders and the steadily rising UAW to the desirability of economic diversification and community development. As a result, both Detroit and Pittsburgh remained wedded to increasingly archaic economic systems.

Of the three books, Troen and Holt's St. Louis is the most balanced historically, giving a larger share to that city's earlier history than the other two volumes do theirs, but it is also the least effective presentation. While Holli devotes the major part of his study to Detroit's auto age and Lubove spends all but 16 pages on Pittsburgh's steel era, there is no similar organizational thread offered for St. Louis. Ethnicity is discussed in the nineteenth century, but the theme is not carried through. Lacking a massive industrial complex, the city's percentage of foreign born residents dropped from the nation's

highest at 60 percent in 1860 to around 25 percent by 1920. After that date, however, there is almost no discussion of ethnicity. By contrast, both Holli and Lubove relate their earlier themes of ethnic growth directly to the contemporary era.

St. Louis is defined as a river city which boasts a well-balanced and diversified manufacturing economy. With a long tradition of civic consciousness (lacking in both Detroit and Pittsburgh) and with no dominate elite to dictate social or economic decisions for the community, St. Louis should have avoided much of the contemporary urban crisis suffered by the other two cities. Yet the editors point to a steadily shrinking population and tax base, growing urban decay, and racial tensions as severe as in the one-industry cities such as Detroit and Pittsburgh.

The only reason offered by the editors for this situation is a decision made in 1876 to halt further annexation. This left St. Louis surrounded by a multitude of residential and industrial suburbs which drained the city's resources. Perhaps, but another explanation might be the city's persistent emphasis on the Mississippi River and its southern outlet at a time when the American economy was shifting to an east-west axis along rail and road lines. Also, the diversified industrial base seen as an advantage might have prevented St. Louis from attracting the investment capital, managerial expertise and worker self-awareness which were so much a part of Holli and Lubove's findings. While Detroit and Pittsburgh may have specialized too much, St. Louis may not have specialized enough.

Much of the frustration with Troen and Holt's work results from their choice of documents. Far too often the material is of the "booster" type which exalts the city but which offers no substance. By way of contrast, both Holli and Lubove constantly use long selections filled with solid data. This gives a sense of thoroughness which the more generalized selections on St. Louis lack. A thorough appendix included by Holli and Lubove as well as impressive selections of maps, charts and other data sprinkled through their volumes add to the effectiveness of the presentations. Again the St. Louis study is deficient in all these areas.

Whether by accident or by design, the series editors Hareven and Thernstrom were wise to avoid the very large east and west coast metropolises in this initial presentation. Indeed, it might be preferable for this series to concentrate on those smaller and lesser known metropolitan centers which offer prospects for creating a unified thematic and interpretive presentation. The addition of a series introduction outlining themes common to all the city studied and a bibliography, particularly noting periodical sources, is essential. But if these three initial volumes may be regarded as series models, then the foundation for a most useful and enlightening project has been established. Above all, it is to be hoped that Melvin Holli's impressive synthesis of Detroit will become the series norm.

D. R. Farrel
Department of History
University of Guelph