

My perhaps overly square-minded objections aside, Mary Hilson has managed to write a highly commendable book for anyone interested in labour history as well as in more general party history, democratic transition history and urban history. Moreover, Hilson's work corroborates earlier research views on how comparatively slow but gradually developing steps towards democracy contribute to a stable democratic transition. Even during hard times of hunger riots these roots of democracy held their ground. Hilson helps us understand why.

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**Evelyn Gonzalez**, *The Bronx*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. ix + 263pp. 29 illustrations. 20 maps. 30 tables. Bibliography. £23.50 hbk; £13.95 pbk.

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In the opening pages of this monograph, Evelyn Gonzalez writes, 'I have read everything I could find on the Bronx.' By the text's end, she has provided ample evidence to support this bold claim. Of the handful of studies on Bronx history, none approaches the level of painstaking research and meticulous use of print sources that Gonzalez has achieved in this surprisingly brief, but nonetheless sweeping narrative, which covers over 150 years and traces the borough's social and economic hope-filled rise, devastating fall and slow resurgence.

In *The Bronx*, Gonzalez makes a compelling argument for why New York's northernmost borough's social fabric unravelled during the post-war 'urban crisis' that rocked American cities during the 1960s and 1970s. 'The very process of urban growth and community creation', Gonzalez contends, 'engendered the conditions that resulted in the extreme neighborhood deterioration of the borough ... The devastation of the Bronx was influenced by the economic transactions, political decisions, and human choices that created the city and its ethnic and racial neighborhoods ... and then continuously re-created them' (pp. 1–2). Borrowing from the work of urban planner Roy Lubove, Gonzalez narrates this story of the Bronx's history through 'the process of city-building over time', a technique that illuminates how the borough developed its infrastructure, its varied housing stock and its business districts, but does little to highlight the human element that breathed life into this rapidly developing urban space.

In *The Bronx*, readers will gain wonderful insight into how the borough's different neighbourhoods developed economically and spatially from the mid-nineteenth century. Gonzalez masterfully traces the politics of local boosterism and its impact on the location of transportation conduits, such as trolley and rail-lines, subways and major highways like the notorious Cross Bronx Expressway. She gives the same treatment to the ways the Bronx developed manufacturing and industrial space, as well as its vast parklands. Gonzalez's analysis is sharpest when she discusses the Bronx's rapid housing booms and its dense collection of tenements. Gonzalez pays close attention to how realtors and developers hastily constructed swathes of five- and six-storey tenements to accommodate hordes of Manhattan transplants, mainly working-class Italians, Irish, British, Scandinavians, Germans, Estonians and Jews, with a sprinkling of African-Americans and Puerto Ricans in the early years of the twentieth century. But, aside from the shadowy

representation provided in statistic and demographic data, there is very little attention given to the neighbourhood's residents. Who were these Bronxites? And how did their everyday lives shape the character and social history of this important place? Gonzalez's analyses and arguments concerning Bronx neighbourhoods are driven by the belief that 'real estate operations created the city neighborhood by neighborhood' (p. 59). She provides discussions of the Bronx's intergroup tensions, especially during and after the Great Depression, and the rise of Black and Hispanic communities, but her choice to narrate these important subjects through accounts of the borough's 'social geography' provides very little information through anecdotes on human experience. Chock-full of numbers and percentages that bolster broad generalizations about the ways people related to one another and their communities, *The Bronx* nonetheless provides little information of how people interpreted their lived experiences. It is an excellent account of a place and its people, but it is almost devoid of stories about those people's lives.

This undoubtedly reflects a lack of sources. A sad reality that affects many urban histories is that scholars lack the records to place people's voices into a detailed analysis of where they lived and how it changed over time. The result is a genre of urban history that Gonzalez's text exemplifies: a close study of a place and how it changed over time, but a place that seems empty of people and their stories.

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**Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.),** *Capital Cities at War. Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919. Volume II: A Cultural History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xiii + 545pp. 15 figures. Bibliography. £60.00.

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In 1997 Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert published the first volume of their edited collection on Paris, London and Berlin during World War I, with focus on the social and economic history of capital cities at war and including chapters on the idea of sacrifice, on labour relations and the distribution of income, the changing patterns of consumption and demography.<sup>1</sup> Ten years have passed and they have published a second volume of this unique and important comparative study, concentrating on the cultural history of the war in the three capital cities. For anybody interested in the history of the Great War from a non-military perspective, for historians of modernity and modernism, or urban historians of the early twentieth century, these two volumes will constitute a major work of reference for many years to come.

The results of any comparative history project are determined principally by the choice of the case studies. The logic behind the comparison of Paris, London and Berlin is obvious and the wide-ranging empirical material explored by the authors enables us to identify the semantic specificity of responses to the conflict among the different cities' cultural actors. Different cases would have generated different results. For instance, Luzzatto's recent book on Padre Pio demonstrates the extent to which Italy perceived the Great War as a Catholic fight against Protestant

<sup>1</sup> Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital Cities at War. London, Paris, Berlin* (Cambridge, 1997).