

SEARCHING FOR CLASSES IN URBAN NORTH AMERICA

MICHAEL B. KATZ, MICHAEL J. DOUCET, and MARK J. STERN, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982. Pp. xiii + 444, tables, index, \$37.50.

OLIVER ZUNZ, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. Pp. xix + 482, appendices, maps, tables, figures, illustrations, index, \$43.00 hc, \$12.50 pb.

The investigation of urban life in the past has expanded and improved during the past twenty years. Whereas most of the early efforts were narrowly focused on specific issues, such as geographic or social mobility in cities such as Newburyport and Boston, more recent scholarship explores broader themes and employs more sophisticated techniques of analysis. The two studies of Hamilton, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan nicely illustrate some of these advances as well as remind us of some of the continued limitations of investigations of urban life.

The analysis of Hamilton, Ontario really is much more than just another study of urban life as Michael Katz, Michael Doucet, and Mark Stern attempt to trace the development of early industrial capitalism. Although some readers may question the need for still another volume on Hamilton, this analysis not only elaborates but considerably improves upon the earlier effort.¹ Whereas Katz's initial study of Hamilton focused almost entirely on that community, the new book employs some comparative information from Buffalo and Erie County, New York. This is an important step forward, because almost all of urban history consists of a case study of a single community without comparison to other cities or

consideration of the effects of changes in the countryside.² Nevertheless, the bulk of the data and analysis even in this study is still focused on Hamilton in 1851, 1861, and 1871 with only occasional, although very useful, comparisons to Buffalo and its rural surroundings in 1855.

The analysis of Hamilton in the first volume uses simple descriptive statistics. Indeed, in a controversy with other scholars over the interpretation of educational developments in nineteenth-century Ontario, Katz questions even the advisability of using multivariate techniques of analysis.³ In this work, however, Katz and his colleagues employ multivariate techniques such as multiple classification analysis on the individual-level data from the manuscript Canadian and New York censuses.

The most important improvement, according to the authors, is the introduction of a more coherent social theory that ties together what had been seemingly disparate observations in the earlier volume. In particular, they place their greatest emphasis on proving the existence and functioning of two great classes: the business class and the working class. They not only expect that this theoretical orientation will be controversial, but even seem to look forward to the anticipated debates. As they put it, "the object has been to combine reliable empirical evidence with rash speculation; only here in places the speculation, although more theoretically disciplined, is even more bold."⁴

The authors consider a variety of different topics, such as the existence of a two-class society, social stratification, transience, property ownership and usage, social mobility, patterns of crime and characteristics of criminals, youth and early industrialization, family life, and the institutional legacy of early industrial capitalism. Readers familiar with the earlier study of Hamilton will notice considerable overlap in the issues covered in this volume, but even those are usually analyzed from a different perspective than in the first book.

The strengths of this book are considerable. The authors have assembled and skillfully utilized one of the largest and most comprehensive data sets on any community—including information on topics ordinarily not covered in the standard works in the "new" urban history. The analysis of social mobility, for example, from several different perspectives and data sets, allows the authors to explore this issue in more depth than previous studies based only on data from the manuscript censuses. Furthermore, rather than limiting their analysis to only cross-sectional inferences, they have laboriously linked the data on Hamilton from one census to the next in order to analyze them longitudinally. As a result, anyone interested in specific topics of nineteenth-century social or urban history,

such as social mobility or property ownership, will be well advised to consult this undertaking not only for their substantive findings but also for their methodological innovations.

Although many of the individual chapters (some of which have been published previously as articles and essays) are carefully crafted and very useful, others are quite disappointing—especially some of those most important to the authors' overall argument. The weakest chapter in the volume is the discussion of the "two-class model" from both a theoretical and a methodological perspective. Although the authors are to be commended for trying to bring together the more theoretical discussions of class with the empirical data necessary to test these propositions, the results are not convincing. Compared to other analyses of Marxist views of class structure, the theoretical discussions in this chapter is limited and strained. The attempt to demonstrate that mid-nineteenth-century individuals saw the world in terms of two classes not only is unconvincing, but ignores some of the existing literature on this topic. Particularly lacking is an adequate discussion of the popular culture of the workers even though others in this field have made important contributions. Compared to the analysis of skilled workers in Hamilton in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Bryan Palmer, for example, this chapter presents a far too simplistic view of working-class life and experience.⁵ Their empirical tests of the validity of the two-class model are not only limited, but even inappropriate. In fact, throughout the text there are numerous illustrations of why a two-class model is a reductionist and inadequate explanation of the lives and experiences of nineteenth-century Hamiltonians. Furthermore, although the authors proclaim the theoretical and empirical virtues of this two-class approach, they do not use it throughout most of this book—in part because they completed much of the analysis before switching to this new perspective. Thus, rather than presenting us with a comprehensive, consistent, and systematic explanation and use of what they regard as one of their most important contributions, they leave us with an inadequate and short treatment of it in the first chapter and scattered references to the two-class model throughout the rest of the book. As Katz and his colleagues anticipated, though many of us may agree with the value and need of reconsidering the analysis of class, few will be satisfied by their development, discussion, and use of the two-class model.

One of the virtues of this book is its attempt to analyze the broad continuities in the social structure despite the frequent changes in the lives of individuals. Thus, the authors analyze the determinants of individual

wealth differences as well as the stability in the overall pattern of inequality in those communities. Although their own studies of individual and aggregate inequality are useful, they do not adequately relate their findings to those of other scholars. For example, the important work of Peter Lindert and Jeffrey Williamson on trends in American inequality is ignored, even though it addressed many of the same issues.⁶ Furthermore, Katz and his colleagues focus almost exclusively on inequality without paying sufficient attention to any secular trends in wealth or income among individuals or subgroups of the population. Why one should consider almost exclusively the distribution of wealth rather than the extent of it over time is not clear—especially as many nineteenth-century workers probably were as interested in changes in their own well-being over time as how well they fared compared to all of the residents of that community. Consequently, though the authors move beyond the narrow confines characteristic of much of urban history today, they frequently do not interact adequately with the secondary literature on many of these issues or consider the problems from a sufficiently broad and complex perspective.

In general, the chapters in this volume are more satisfactory individually than collectively. Although readers are likely to find any particular chapter clear and useful, they are likely to be frustrated by the lack of comparability among them. In some multivariate analyses occupation and age are combined into an independent variable, whereas in others occupation and ethnicity are put together without a rationale for the different strategies. They also subdivide their measures of wealth distribution into five, six, or eight categories without adequate explanation for the variations. Similarly, in some instances their measures of wealth are based on households, whereas in others they employ a per capita measure. Combined with a dense and often awkward style, individuals reading the entire volume may become discouraged and consider setting aside this volume. Nevertheless, the extra effort to read it is well worthwhile, as embedded in the individual chapters is a wealth of information, insights, and analyses about mid-nineteenth-century urban life.

Whereas the study of Hamilton is concerned with the city as a whole with little or no attention to neighborhood variations or differences, the investigation of Detroit by Olivier Zunz is particularly concerned with the socioeconomic and demographic change occurring within subdivisions of that rapidly growing metropolis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather than randomly or systematically sampling households from the population schedules of the federal manuscript cen-

suses, as most other urban historians have done, Zunz samples randomly selected blocks plus two of the four possible fronts facing them in 1880 and replicates that design in 1900 with a supplemental sample of clusters to represent the geographic expansion of the city. Having selected his cluster of blocks in 1880 and 1900, Zunz uses household and individual data from the manuscript censuses for those areas to analyze the lives of the individuals. He is able to continue his analysis into 1920 (even though the federal manuscript census for that year is still closed to scholars) by having the Bureau of the Census provide him with aggregate block-level data that are roughly comparable to his matched spatial samples from 1880 and 1900.

Zunz analyzes the transformation of Detroit from a primarily commercial center in 1880 to the fourth largest city in 1920 based on large-scale industrial development. He traces not only the general population trends in that community, but also the shift from neighborhoods mainly divided along ethnic lines to ones based on ethnicity and class by the second decade of the twentieth century. Using a wide variety of sources besides the federal manuscript censuses, Zunz analyzes the changes in the spatial organization of the city, how they were brought about, and how this affected the lives of its residents.

The decision to sample clusters of blocks and then to analyze the characteristics of land use, housing, and individuals who resided there was a good one. Although a few studies of urban life in the past attempted to look at spatial patterns by locating their sample of households or individuals on a grid-type map of the city, none has analyzed the interaction of space and socioeconomic development as carefully or as extensively as Zunz. The benefits of this research design are particularly apparent when dealing with a city such as Detroit, which evolved from a relatively low-density and functionally segregated settlement to a congested and complex community. The limitations of previous crude spatial analyses based only on aggregate ward data, for example, are demonstrated by this investigation, as the ward boundaries of Detroit simply do not reflect the socioeconomic or demographic variations present in that community.⁷ Indeed, the surprising thing is that so few previous studies have even tried to analyze the spatial aspects of the cities—especially when studying the individual or household characteristics of the inhabitants.

Although the research design of this study is innovative and useful, Zunz has not entirely convinced me of its validity and utility throughout the volume. For example, if the neighborhoods are as diverse as he claims and documents, what is the justification for studying the concen-

tric development of the city? Although this crude approach may fit the specifics of Detroit, the danger is that organizing data along this line may mask significant differences. Indeed, one wonders if a grid-type approach at this point may not be more revealing and useful. Similarly, how much confidence should we have that the characteristics of any single block cluster are the same as those of the adjoining blocks—thus raising the possibility that there may be more of a mosaic pattern of neighborhoods than suggested by looking at these geographically isolated sets of data? Furthermore, Zunz concentrates on the residential pattern of the neighborhoods without adequately exploring the availability and role of other institutions, such as ethnic churches or stores. If Polish immigrants were so intensely involved with their churches, as evidenced by their large personal sacrifices to build them, how important was it that Poles actually predominated in certain clusters of blocks? In other words, is ethnic dominance in an area as important as Zunz depicts, or merely the presence of large enough aggregates of like-minded individuals who will create, sustain, and attend the type of ethnic institutions likely to reinforce cultural and religious ties? In general, the discussions of the presence and functioning of ethnic or class institutions is slighted, even though their role probably was crucial in the changes in Detroit society during these years.

One of the most significant findings in this volume for the social historian is that the behavior of individuals may be substantially altered by the neighborhood in which they live. Zunz nicely illustrates this by showing how the fertility of Germans in Detroit in 1880 was significantly lower if they resided in low-fertility Yankee neighborhoods.⁸ If this analysis is valid, it has major implications for the way in which other social historians should gather and analyze their data—especially as the other social sciences are now pointing to the need for the contextual setting in which to analyze the life course of individuals. Yet one wonders if these findings are the result of the adjustment of the fertility of German immigrants moving to those neighborhoods or may in part reflect a concentration of the lower fertility white-collar German families in those areas? Do other types of immigrant behavior, such as school attendance, also reflect an adjustment to living in different neighborhoods? Thus, although Zunz's research design points to an important set of questions and provides the appropriate data sets to test them, Zunz himself has not always gone as far as possible in exploring them. Fortunately, Zunz is one of those rare historians who is immediately making his data available to other scholars, so that these issues easily can be further investigated.⁹

Zunz's analysis also raises some fundamental questions about the overall approach by Katz and his colleagues in their analysis of class relations in Hamilton. Zunz argues that the tendency of everyone to be living together in ethnic neighborhoods in Detroit in 1880 and 1900 minimized any class conflicts or consciousness because individuals judged their own situation against those of their immediate neighbors rather than the overall inequality in the city and because upward mobility often was dictated by local opportunities rather than entirely dependent upon a citywide economy or controlled by a native-born elite. Only in 1920 does Zunz find the growing occupation segregation of even ethnic neighborhoods as well as the disintegration of older ethnic areas leading to more class-oriented behavior. Thus, Zunz's analysis suggests that Katz and his co-workers should have considered more carefully the role of ethnicity and neighborhood differences in their analysis of Hamilton before concluding that a two-class system existed by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Whether Zunz's interpretation of the dynamics of ethnicity and class at the neighborhood level will prove to be an accurate portrayal of the situation in late nineteenth-century North America remains to be seen; but his highly innovative and suggestive analysis of Detroit points the way for a more complex and sophisticated study of urban life than has hitherto been available.

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NOTES

1. Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, MA, 1975).
2. For a critique of this practice, see Maris A. Vinovskis, "Community Studies in Urban Educational History: Some Methodological and Conceptual Observations," in Ronald K. Goodenow and Diane Ravitch, eds., *Schools in Cities: Consensus and Conflict in American Educational History* (New York, 1983), 287-304.
3. Frank T. Denton and Peter J. George, "Socio-Economic Influences on School Attendance: A Study of a Canadian County in 1871," *History of Education Quarterly* 14(1974), 223-232; Michael B. Katz, "Reply," *Ibid.*, 233-234; Frank T. Denton and Peter J. George, "Socio-Economic Influences on School Attendance: A Response to Professor Katz," *Ibid.*, 367-369.
4. Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), ix.

5. Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal, 1979). For a useful discussion of these issues in an American context, see Fredrich Lenger, "Class, Culture and Class Consciousness in Ante-Bellum Lynn: A Critique of Alan Dawley and Paul Faler," *Social History* 6(1981), 317-332.

6. Jeffrey G. Williamson and Peter H. Lindert, *American Inequality: A Macroeconomic History* (New York, 1980).

7. For an example of a study that incorrectly utilizes Detroit's ward boundaries, see John C. Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order, 1830-1880: A Geography of Crime, Riot, and Policing* (Lincoln, 1980).

8. Similar variations in ethnic fertility within subdivisions of a city were found in Boston. Tamara K. Hareven and Maris A. Vinovskis, "Marital Fertility, Ethnicity, and Occupation in Urban Families: An Analysis of South Boston and the South End in 1880," *Journal of Social History* 9 (1975), 69-93.

9. The Detroit data are now available from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan.