

MacColl, E. Kimbark, *The Shaping of a City — Business and Politics in Portland, Oregon 1885 to 1915*. Portland, Oregon: The Georgian Press Co., 1976. Pp. 535. \$8.95

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During the late nineteenth century, Portland, Oregon, was in many ways a favoured city. Beautifully located, blessed with pure air and water, relatively prosperous, and generally free of ethnic strife, the City of Roses stood in sharp contrast to the dark, crowded, industrial areas of the American northeast. Appreciating the difference, many Americans moved to Portland, causing the city to grow 300% in population and 150% in physical size during the period from 1885 to 1915. Surely here, if anywhere in North America, people could live in a livable community.

But it was not to be. For, as Kimbark MacColl explains, while the city of Portland was in some ways different, the men who ran it were strikingly similar to their political colleagues back east. Portland's political life was long dominated by the local business elite who consistently confused their personal interests with the community's welfare. The purpose of city government was essentially to serve economic development, and the religion of government was growth - growth unencumbered by any annoying restrictions on the sacred rights of private property. Thus Portland was a corrupt city that suffered from the usual late nineteenth century problems of conflict of interest, influence peddling, and governmental incompetence. Public services were neglected, and the only planning that occurred originated in the banks, real estate offices, and exclusive private clubs. Portland grew by chance rather than design - the main chance of the speculator and the entrepreneur.

MacColl devotes most of his pages to describing and decrying the activities of Portland's businessmen-politicians around the turn-of-the-century. He ably demonstrates how they used the power of government on behalf of their own narrow concerns, how they frustrated most reform efforts, and how they steadily accumulated problems for future generations to solve. The book becomes a catalog of urban sins.

Perhaps too much a catalog. Lengthy descriptions of paving contracts and utility franchises crowd out a thorough treatment of such important themes as absentee ownership and the changing composition of Portland's business elite. MacColl mentions these subjects, but chooses not to fathom their depths. Analysis gives place to the local historian's common fascination with description for its own sake.

The Shaping of a City, however, is not a trivial book. Well written and richly illustrated with relevant maps and photographs, it offers an excellent case study of how private interests affected the course of urban development and of how difficult it was for reformers to challenge the economic elites and their monopoly of conventional wisdom. MacColl's book is useful because basically Portland was not unique.

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.

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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