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Preston, Howard L. *Automobile Age Atlanta: The Making of a Southern Metropolis*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979. Pp. xix, 203. Tables, maps, illustrations. \$12.00

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occupations, which are the truest expression of the nature of a city, also will find patents richly rewarding.

At a time when facsimile reprints of this length often sell for \$30.00, The Blue Book is a bargain at \$7.50. The historical profession owes a word of thanks to Gordon Publications, a one-man basement operation run by a professional engineer/patent examiner who believes patents of invention are an important part of the historical record.

Norman R. Ball
Engineering Archivist
Public Archives of Canada

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Urban history in the United States has generally had a sociological focus, the inhabitants of each city more often studied than the city itself. Accordingly there have been few studies of the city-building process in that country, with the automotive era especially neglected. Howard Preston's brief examination of Atlanta's accommodation between 1900 and 1935 to the automobile, thus makes an important contribution to our understanding of American urban development.

As the epitome of the New South, Atlanta in the late 1890s revealed how backward the region yet remained. Victimized by low cotton prices and Northern exploitation, Atlanta lagged far behind cities like Boston and

Philadelphia in population and development. Spatially, Atlanta in 1903 resembled a walking city, with more money budgeted for sidewalks than for streets. The wealthy still lived, as in a pre-industrial city, near downtown, their mansions adorning Peachtree Street, the only asphalted thoroughfare in Atlanta. The city, a metropolis neither functionally nor spatially, had only limited growth prospects, that is, until the advent of the automobile.

Preston, devoting an entire chapter to the 1909 Atlanta automobile show, the first in the South, stresses that the city's boosters early recognized the economic potential of the motor vehicle industry. By making Atlanta the distribution centre for the Southeast for automobiles, parts, and services they sparked the city's "economic awakening" and its transformation over two decades into a regional metropolis. In addition, Atlanta's leadership in the Southern "good roads" movement helped make the city the hub of the regional highway system. Economically, the automobile was, according to Preston, a blessing. "The automobile industry came south to create market demand for its product and not, as other northern enterprises had done in the past, to rob the region of its raw materials." In other words, the automobile contributed to Atlanta's decolonization.

The motor car had an equally dramatic impact on the city spatially. Rapid decentralization ensued, with the economic elite leading the rush to suburbia after 1910. To an unusual degree Preston emphasizes the "push" factors behind their flight. In 1910 auto garages began sprouting up amongst the Peachtree Street mansions, as

the wealthy insisted on ready access to garage and repair facilities. Atlanta's elite through their passion for limousines thus undermined their own neighbourhood as Peachtree Street degenerated into an automotive strip, and the wealthy departed for garden suburbs north of the city core. The expansion of the central business district, induced by the automotive boom, and the motor vehicle itself propelled the white middle class northward in turn after World War I.

Atlanta's blacks were not allowed to follow. Typically they were too poor. As well, restrictive covenants and a municipal segregation ordinance, passed in 1922 in violation of a Supreme Court ruling, kept the northern suburbs white. Most blacks were hived into inner city ghettos, although upper and middle class blacks achieved a semblance of the suburban dream in a west end subdivision built by local black entrepreneurs. The automobile thus made possible greater segregation; it "better equipped white Atlantans," affirms Preston, "to carry out their racial prejudices against blacks."

The deconcentration of business, with food and automotive retailers in the vanguard, during the 1920s accompanied the outward thrust of the population. Meanwhile, traffic congestion, as Preston shows in some detail, eroded the vitality of downtown Atlanta that decade. Downtown interests were unable, in the absence of a viable planning authority, to agree on a solution to either the congestion or the collateral parking problem.

Nor could the city avert the stagnation of the local street

railway in the 1920s. Preston chides the transit company for clinging to fixed rail lines. Had it made a full commitment to motor buses in the 1920s and used them flexibly like a jitney, mass transit, he implies, might have remained more viable in Atlanta. While a useful corrective to the usual laments over the passing of the street railway in North America, Preston's argument verges on anachronism, as his model for public transportation seems more in tune with the more advanced proposals of the 1970s than the wisdom of the 1920s. He also seems to underestimate the extent to which Americans have historically been willing to sacrifice time and money for the privilege of commuting to work in their own automobile.

Wishful thinking crops up in Preston's occasional references to urban planning. He intimates that urban development in Atlanta would have proceeded more smoothly, with less social damage, had the city's planning board been given real power. Yet he himself reveals that the various city plans, none of them fortunately implemented before World War II, were designed to contain and segregate the black population by means of broad parkways lined with trees and cyclone fences. The planners in other words did not escape the norms of the white community, and greater success for them in the 1920s might only have aggravated the city's growing pains.

In general, Preston's book would be improved by an appreciation of *automobility* as a mass, democratic movement. That the majority in Atlanta was racist does not change the fact that the city's transformation after 1910 undoubtedly conformed to their

will. To come to any other conclusion it would be necessary to examine the city's elite more closely than does Preston to determine the extent to which they shaped the Southern urban ethos. Studies of Atlanta after World War II by Floyd Hunter and Kent Jennings have depicted an unusually unified ruling class who presumably played a major role in reshaping Atlanta as an automotive metropolis. They are but shadows in Preston's work. The city-building process is for him largely self-generating, with an occasional boost from the more vocal members of the chamber of commerce and motor clubs.

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Perrot, Jean-Claude. *Genèse d'une ville moderne: Caen au XVIIIe siècle*. 2 vols. Paris: Mouton, 1975. Pp. 1157. Illustrated.

Leguin, Yves. *Les ouvriers de la région lyonnaise, 1848-1914*. 2 vols. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1977. Pp. 500.

Bergeron, Louis. *Banquiers, négociants et manufacturiers parisiens de Directoire à l'Empire*. Paris: Mouton, 1979. Pp. 436.

Tony Judt's attack on that

grandfather of French historical institutions - *les Annales* - gives pause to the Canadian urban or business historian, especially since Judt is both a socialist historian and an historian of French Socialism.¹ An examination of three recent French monographs treating labour, urban, and business history may permit an evaluation of Judt's criticisms.

Leaving aside Judt's particular disdain for the histories of Charles Tilly and Edward Shorter, his criticisms of modern *Annalistes* are fourfold: their over-reliance on the simplistic and unhistorical explanations of anthropologists and sociologists, or what Judt calls their urge to "anthropologize history"²; the well-known French penchant for structural history in which the common people become "passive and stable"; a Braudel-inspired tendency for such a long global view that historical events, the narrative, and the fundamental historical process are ignored in favor of a "glut" of "minute and marginal matters" such as the colour of eyes in the first empire; and, finally, the accusation that the *Annalistes* neglect their founders' admonition to begin with well-defined historical problems. The result of the latter is an ultimate denial of class and ideology.

In his history of the Norman city of Caen, Jean-Claude Perrot

1 Tony Judt, "A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians," *History Workshop*, No. 7 (Spring 1979); and Judt, *Socialism in Provence, 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

2 The importance given by French historians to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Braudel's emphasis on Georges Gurvitch are examples of this tendency.