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Schneider, Eric C. *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. Pages 408. 3 line illustrations, 5 maps, 11 half tone illustrations, index. US\$29.99 (cloth)

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justed for the late start in data collection, its share jumped to 61.3 per cent (121).

Perhaps of the greatest interest to urban historians is Chapter 6, which looks at the individual records for the ten largest cities in the study, and then examines in some detail the cities in the North American region, and in the British Isles. At this point, the statistical analysis was augmented by contemporary epidemiological and other literature providing descriptions of conditions in these cities, that to some extent can put a human face on the numbers. Each one of the mortality figures, after all, represents a man, woman, or child who died of a nasty disease. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this information was examined for what it can contribute to an understanding of modern epidemic diseases, and in the last chapter, the authors discuss twentieth-century experiences and speculate on possible applications of their analyses.

The value of this study to modern public health officials, I am not qualified to comment upon. From the perspective of a historian, however, the book presents some frustrating problems — those related to the fact that the work was not intended to be a historical study, and which therefore leaves a large number of questions unaddressed or only briefly examined. The mortality tables do not tell us the race, sex, age, ethnicity, or social stratum of the dead, all of which information is crucial to understanding the social and political responses to these diseases. What percentage of white colonials died in Singapore, compared to natives? Did New York City deaths claim more immigrants than non-immigrants? What effect did local politics play? It is a pity that no Canadian cities were included. It would have been interesting, for example, to compare Detroit to Toronto, where the principal variable might have been public health measures, not climate or population size. Such information, however, did not appear in the *Abstract*, and at any rate, would not have been suitable for statistical analysis. Statistics are of course the heart of *Deciphering Global Epidemics* and are both its strength and its weakness. At its best, the work demonstrates the fallacies in long-standing assumptions (such as the “big-city” hypothesis) and alerts us to the hazards of accepting “the obvious.” In most cases, the statistics cautiously confirm expectations (death rates declined after sanitary measures became widespread, and *probably* as a result of them), but many of the conclusions are fairly banal, and in some sense do not seem to justify the effort that went into producing them. With so much effort devoted to method, results that are expressed so succinctly seem to be a rather insufficient reward. This is in my view especially apparent in the sections on mortality decline, where the authors, in fact, appear surprised by the inability of statistics to clarify historical experience. The past is far too messy and there are simply too many variables to end up with neat and tidy results. And, not being historians, they have missed a few things. In their discussion of the decline in diphtheria deaths, for instance, they do not mention the introduction of diphtheria antitoxin in the 1890s, and therefore are puzzled by the reduction in mortality in advance of immunization techniques, available after 1923 (321).

What this book needs, in my opinion, is an overview or summary chapter for the benefit of the statistically ignorant, that states the general gist of the conclusions and their implications. It would go a long way to making *Deciphering Global Epidemics* more “user-friendly” to the average historian. But this was not part of the authors’ intentions (speculation must perforce be muted in a statistical study). Further commentary on the results is left for others to attempt. For historians, therefore, this work will prove useful mostly as a thorough data resource for urban mortality in a particular twenty-five-year period. In addition, there is an excellent bibliography, and appendices that identify important sources of mortality, morbidity, and population figures for the countries whose cities appear in the book.

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Schneider, Eric C. *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. Pages 408. 3 line illustrations, 5 maps, 11 half tone illustrations, index. US\$29.99 (cloth).

In the summer of 1959 unchecked violence of New York City youth gangs catapulted these previously obscure adolescent male cliques to the status of newsmakers. Among the numerous boys and bystanders murdered that summer were two “American” boys slain one night in a Hell’s Kitchen park at the hands of an odd assortment of Puerto Rican gang members, including a knife-wielding, caped Vampire. University of Pennsylvania historian Eric Schneider uses this case to explore “the issues of ethnic and class marginalization and the problem in defining masculinity that led adolescent males to confront each other on city streets.” (5) Schneider’s well-written, absorbing treatment of postwar youth gangs, engages them as historical subjects, and helps to filter out commonly-held and enduring myths (à la *West Side Story*) and prejudice regarding these youths.

Youth gangs of the postwar period were defined by very specific characteristics: comprised entirely of adolescent males, they embraced names that glorified toughness, wore distinctive uniforms (colours), organized along ethnic lines in defense of “their” neighbourhoods, planned rumbles with other gangs, formed complex alliances when it suited them and, at times, allowed community workers to negotiate truces. They were not, for the most part, involved in the drug trade or the underground economy, and did not often use guns, relying instead on bare fists and knives. Schneider does not ignore the postwar media, public policy and social science obsession with delinquency and rebellious youth, but rejects the contemporary assumption that the rise in adolescent male gangs was a product of youth culture. Rather, he suggests that the social and economic conditions that gripped working-class New York from the 1940s were directly responsible for youth gang formation and proliferation. More than an investigation into structures at work in this history, Schneider continues his earlier work

— *In the Web of Class: Delinquents and Reformers in Boston, 1810s–1930s* (1992)— regarding human agency.

As a broad treatment of youth gangs in New York City from the 1940s to the mid-1960s, this study introduces us to neighbourhoods where gangs proliferated, elucidating rituals and behaviour of gang members, including the relationship of gangs to bop culture, and explaining how boys eventually left the fold. He further examines the racism and liberalism in the reaction of authorities to the young men and their menacing presence. Finally he discusses the decline of postwar youth gangs in the 1960s and the resurgence of a different kind of youth gang in the 1970s.

The most important contribution is an analysis of what caused youth gang formation in the early postwar period and what defined youth gangs. In Chapter I, "Remaking New York," Schneider introduces us to the transformations affecting New York City in the 1940s and 1950s. Four key socio-economic factors coalesced to disadvantage working-class New Yorkers. The first was the shrinking of the city's manufacturing sector, which might have absorbed the city's youth in these years. In NYC's racial and ethnically based economy the loss of manufacturing jobs and the economic shift toward the service sector hit African American and Puerto Rican youth hardest. The second factor, the migration of African Americans and Puerto Ricans to NYC, was important because of the youthfulness of these migrants. Overcrowding in poor areas of the city and limited recreational resources, coupled with poor employment prospects for young people, contributed to gang development as adolescent boys fought to maintain control of recreational centres and to defend their neighbourhoods which they perceived as threatened by newcomers. The third factor was urban renewal, which produced new highways and public housing and redevelopment projects, but aggravated conditions for the poor and rewrote ethnic boundaries to produce tension among urban youth in racially segregated areas. Lastly, suburbanization drew the middle class out of the city, leaving behind housing problems that were not politically important enough for policy makers and politicians. Suburbanization or "white flight" led to rapid ethnic succession in several Manhattan neighbourhoods in the early postwar period. The impact of these transformations was further racial and class marginalization, especially for Puerto Ricans and African Americans. While such changes affected all age groups of the poor, according to Schneider, the ramifications for young men were particularly serious.

Schneider explores race, ethnicity and defense of territory in Chapters II–IV, showing that ethnic or racial identity and neighbourhood alone did not explain why young men formed gangs or fought each other. As he illustrates in "Defending Place," ethnicity held symbolic meaning for these youths when they employed a language of ethnic exclusivity, even though gangs were not ethnically homogeneous and gangs of similar ethnic or racial makeup fought each other. Beyond race and ethnicity, Schneider would like us to consider the role of masculinity in the formation and behaviour of gangs.

In the context of postwar New York, poor Puerto Rican, African- and European-American adolescent males had restricted means of creating a masculine identity. It is here that Schneider illustrates the agency of impoverished adolescent boys. As products of mid-twentieth-century economic and social conditions that closed off legitimate avenues for manhood, this generation of adolescents sought out gangs as a way to forge a masculine identity and gain "power, prestige and female adulation." (107) Using gang members' autobiographies, interviews with former members, and gang workers' notes, Schneider is able to explore the central role that masculinity played in these gangs. Schneider is undoubtedly correct in asserting the importance of masculinity; however, as an analytical tool masculinity here is under-utilized, leaving the impression that masculinity is simply an explanation for and description of young men acting tough. As an explanation for rape and murder, masculinity is unsatisfactory. Schneider might have shown us how masculinity, like other identities, is historically specific and relational. We also need to know more about the girls associated with gangs; Schneider might have found Anne Campbell's *The Girls in the Gang* especially helpful.

In writing a book that looks across youth gangs, Schneider has emphasized the common elements of these groups of adolescent males. In doing so he is able to argue convincingly the importance of social class and race/ethnicity in facilitating the formation of a disaffected generation of youth. He then adds onto this commonality of class the pursuit of a masculine identity as an explanation for gang origins and appeal. In trying to deal with youth gangs in this overarching way, however, we lose sight of the variations of what masculinity and poverty meant to adolescents for whom being Puerto Rican, African- or Euro-American was fundamental to their experience. This criticism aside, Schneider has provided us with an enormous contribution to the literature on gangs and also to the history of American youth in the postwar era.

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Wall, Cynthia. *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Pp. xviii, 277. 28 halftone illustrations. US\$59.95 (cloth)

"All that had been familiar, settled, phenomenologically given was suddenly and entirely swept away. ..." Cynthia Wall's description of London after the Great Fire of 1666 could equally apply to those who think they know the world of Restoration literature. Upon reading this book, literary and cultural historians will be moved to reconsider the influence of physical change on literature, while material and urban historians may wish to explore the literary avenues which are constructed in the wake of catastrophic events.

Within three days, the Great Fire of 1666 destroyed four-fifths of London. Londoners, challenged to adequately express the enormity of their loss, turned to the familiar: the biblical and classical vocabulary used in sermons, for example. Walls argues they also invented new forms when faced with allusions which "are sud-