

Arrom, Silvia M., and Servando Ortoll, eds. *Riots in the Cities: Popular Politics and the Urban Poor in Latin America, 1765–1910*. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1996. Pp. ix, 248. Index

Richard Boyer

Volume 25, numéro 2, march 1997

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016076ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016076ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Boyer, R. (1997). Compte rendu de [Arrom, Silvia M., and Servando Ortoll, eds. *Riots in the Cities: Popular Politics and the Urban Poor in Latin America, 1765–1910*. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1996. Pp. ix, 248. Index]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 25(2), 67–68. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016076ar>

ence in other less well-developed colonies, until several decades later than Noel posits. Prescription and description of class prerogatives are often mixed in literature devoted to altering behaviours, such as temperance materials, and it is possible that the distinction is less clear than we like to imagine. Regardless, Noel's elastic definition of the middle class in the pre-1850 period is a departure from the current literature.

Even with these caveats, Noel's book makes a major contribution to our understanding of the intersections of religious ethos, class and state formation in pre-Confederation Canada. As a bonus, Jan Noet's fine study is amongst the most literate of Canadian histories written.

Sharon Anne Cook  
Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

---

Arrom, Silvia M., and Servando Ortoll, eds. *Riots in the Cities: Popular Politics and the Urban Poor in Latin America, 1765-1910*. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1996. Pp. ix, 248. Index.

The seven essays in this volume deal with "urban riots in Latin America before the period of populist politics" (p. 1). Yet some of them show nineteenth-century city dwellers engaged in such a politics *avant la lettre*. Rioters were political actors, mobilized by factions of the elite or by issues that affected their lives, and they made a difference in the interplay of power and subordination. Essays by Silvia Arrom, Sandra Lauderdale Graham, and Jeffrey Needell provide examples. Elites sparked the outbreak of the Parián riot in Mexico City (1828), Arrom says, but its "political context" made it different from Mexico City's riot of 1692, for "a new kind of democratic politics" following the independence was fostered a greater *degree* of mobilization of urban populations than ever before (pp. 86-7, my emphasis).

Graham argues that the Vintem riot in Rio de Janeiro (1880) revealed, but "did not directly cause," a shift in Brazilian political culture. The uprising taught elites that politics could not be confined to parliamentary chambers as it spilled into "city squares" where "street violence ... [became] an element in the political equation" (p. 121). And we see this again in a failed riot 25 years later in Rio (1904) as analyzed by Needell.

"*Jacobino* military elements" coordinated their plot to overthrow a traditional oligarchy by aligning themselves with an urban populace revolting against obligatory vaccination (p. 166).

After Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudeé, the essays in *Riots* view rioters, not as irrational "mobs" engaged in random violence, but people with "broadly shared beliefs and attitudes" who "responded to specific provocations," "attacked property rather than people," and "vented their rage on selected targets that symbolized hated figures or policies" (pp. 2-3). 'Reading' attacks on "tax administration buildings, police headquarters,

import merchants' shops, or foreigners' houses" (p. 2) as if the actions and targets of a crowd can be treated as texts implies an interpretation of plebeian actors as working within a 'moral economy'. (Popular race riots — targeting the Chinese in Sonora in 1911, for example, or African Americans in the American South after the Civil War — could be 'read' in much the same way, but would require some tinkering with assumptions about just how perceptive rioters were in targeting their true oppressors rather than convenient scapegoats.)

The most explicit of the moral economy readings is Avital Bloch and Servando Ortoll's study of riots in Guadalajara (1910), the most conventional, Anthony McFarlane's of "urban insurrection in Bourbon Quito" (1765), and the most original, João José Reis's of protests over "funerary reform" in Salvador (1836). Bloch and Avital tell us that "rioters displayed a rational and structured mass behavior" in attacking "wealthy and/or Protestant Americans," which to them means they were protesting "the ostentatious American presence and arrogant dominance" (p. 213). McFarlane characterizes the Quito rebellion as a temporary alliance to "[resist] changes in taxation" (p. 58) through actions that replicated those of Hobsbawm's "European 'city mob'" (p. 52). Reis's fascinating discussion of resistance to public health legislation prohibiting burial in local churches relies on a cultural explanation. In this case, then, the logic of resistance transcends class and economic determinism and rests on shared traditions. As well, he brings women fully into his narrative as actors and agents. David Sowell's study of a riot in Bogotá (1893), on the other hand, places its meaning and dynamics with a single group, artisans, who, in an age of rapid change, "defend[ed] their social standing" and the 'good name of the artisan'" (p. 148) when it had been — so they thought — publicly debased.

The essays in *Riots* are for the most part already known, but having them republished in a single volume allows us to view them from afresh, much as a retrospective of painters invites reassessments. On reading them together, for example, one wonders how early, with what variations, and in what sequence populist politics emerged in Latin America? Is the attribution of moral economy as convincing an explanation for crowd behaviors as it once was and how convincing is "symbolic behavior" as evidence for it? Is anybody else surprised that articles written mostly in the mid-1980s failed to find women among the rioters? These and other musings would make for interesting and rewarding discussions with students and colleagues.

In a concluding postscript Charles Tilly, a distinguished student of the crowd in European history, writes of his surprise that Latin American historiography is so "thin" (p. 235) on the subject of the urban crowd. It is also dated, he implies, in its attachment to the teleological/evolutionary Marxism of Hobsbawm and Rudeé. Tilly hints that his own shift to the variables social base, culture, and opportunity structure would yield more convincing studies in the future. As an outsider, therefore, he applauds the essays in *Riots* while, at the same time, inviting Latin Americanists to rethink and regroup for a new round of investiga-

tions. The editors of *Riots* should be congratulated for a useful retrospective that manages both to introduce students to a literature and to invite old hands to critically reflect on it.

Richard Boyer  
Department of History  
Simon Fraser University

---

McGreevy, John T. *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996. Pp.vi, 362. Illustrations. \$27.50 (US).

British historian Paul Johnson has observed that more than any other country in history the United States affords a unique opportunity to examine the interaction of religious belief, culture, and politics. However, historians who are now rightly addressing gender, class, race, and ethnicity as factors shaping American society have been slow to include religion, and specifically Roman Catholicism, as equally significant. This omission is all the more glaring for urban history because by the twentieth century Roman Catholics comprised up to 70 per cent of the population of many northern American cities. John McGreevy's *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* is a refreshing and stimulating antidote to this neglect. Utilizing archdiocesan records and Catholic university archives, McGreevy reveals the centrality of the parish to the social and spiritual structure of Catholicism. He contends that the solid and effective parish structures firmly in place by the 1930s fueled racism directed against Afro-Americans and hindered the creation of an integrated community even as the Roman Catholic church spoke against discrimination.

In the interwar years the parish assumed both a geographic and a cultural meaning for its people, many of who were recent immigrants. Within parish parameters, European ethnic and racial identities were sustained by Catholic institutions that were the counterparts of secular organizations and by priests who encouraged home ownership in the parish to keep their flocks under scrutiny and to fortify the Church against state control specially of education. What emerged, in effect, were many urban villages, like Gesu Parish in Philadelphia, with distinct ethnic characteristics and institutions and the Roman Catholic Church as the focus of the community's activities. Residents identified with the parish rather than the city. This fusion of educational, social and religious communities created a barrier to Afro-Americans who began to migrate north in large numbers in the 30s.

Except for the liberal lay people and theologians who were always a minority, there was remarkably little concern within the Catholic church for the new arrivals. Pius XIII urged Catholics generally to show consideration for black Americans but, McGreevy notes, rhetoric and reality rarely coincided. With

increased employment opportunities created by World War Two, migration increased and so did racial tension, partly McGreevy suggests, from a heightened awareness by Euro-American Roman Catholics of their white racial identity. To avoid Afro-American neighbours, many white people left for the suburbs. The exodus created an opportunity for the Roman Catholic priests and nuns to serve Afro-Americans in the now deserted recreational and educational facilities; but in Chicago, Detroit and other northern cities, these new black parishes ironically resembled other ethnically distinct communities. The war itself may arguably have fostered a sense of ecumenicalism rooted in a common cause, but, McGreevy contends, most clergy still directed little energy at interracial harmony largely because they feared alienating one group at the expense of another. Afro-American interests had the lowest priority.

In the 1960s, the nature and influence of the parish began to undergo irrevocable changes that the Church could no longer control. Educated Catholics moved up the social ladder into the middle class; with more marriages among ethnic groups, the parish was less insular and insulated. Furthermore, the earlier generation of European-born pastors who zealously guarded their domains was retiring. The results of this transformation were far from uniform in northern cities; in Chicago the Church supported urban improvement and renewal but many housing projects elsewhere were viewed as detrimental to parish interests. Striving to thwart neighbourhood abandonment without directly condoning segregation, priests often reinforced intolerance. The convergence in the mid 60s of the American civil rights movement and the Second Vatican Council that envisaged a more inclusive global church at last alerted American Catholics to the racial discrimination in their own jurisdictions. Some priests, but perhaps more nuns, who compared their situation as disadvantaged persons to Afro-Americans, marched with other Catholic lay men and women on Washington and at Selma. By the late 60s, two groups had become visible within the Church: theological and social liberals who questioned the roles of the clergy and of women and the traditional function of the parish; and those who resisted and reacted against change. This rift extended to Catholic institutions — schools, seminaries, religious orders — to liturgy, rituals, and to neighbourhoods. In some cities, Philadelphia, for example, Catholic liberals were able to integrate schools but the cost was high with overt hostility directed at the nuns and priests who individually and collectively participated in marches and protests. McGreevy's depiction of a Catholic crowd cheering loudly when a nun was hit by a rock during a 1966 Chicago protest is telling evidence of the degree of racial hatred that abounded. Bussing replaced housing as a focal issue and again many white Catholics opposed efforts at integration. McGreevy argues that the support of Catholic politicians such as Edward Kennedy was probably more detrimental than beneficial to the cause.

Inevitably Afro-Americans questioned the Church's sincerity about universalism. Some accepted traditional forms and ritu-