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Social Structure and the Urbanization Process: Perspectives on Nineteenth Century Research

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During the early 1970s, social structural analysis and urban history developed a close relationship in North America. Most major projects which examined social structure focussed on the experience of cities. In Canada, Michael Katz challenged traditional historiography by rigorously describing the lives of both famous and anonymous residents in Hamilton, Canada West during the mid-nineteenth century.¹ This work was the inspiration for the Philadelphia Social History Project under the leadership of Theodore Hershberg. Over the decade, Hershberg attracted a multidisciplinary group of scholars to examine a massive data base and thereby to work toward a synthetic re-interpretation of nineteenth century Philadelphia.² Taken together, the Hamilton and Philadelphia projects had an enormous impact on the discipline of history generally but especially on the field of urban history. Their work helped scholars re-think the nature of urban development and re-evaluate the traditional approaches to city growth.

In the late 1970s, the association of urban history and social structural analysis weakened considerably in both the United States and Canada. However, this weakening has occurred for different reasons in the two countries. In the United States, historians who are interested in social structure are now becoming reluctant to call themselves urban historians even though their work focusses on the city experience. They see the term "urban history" as an inappropriate delimiter of historical attention given the general nature of large-scale social change throughout the landscape. Samuel P. Hays, for example, has recently emphasized that historians should recognize that cities were affected by processes that obtained "throughout the whole society." His own approach is now "first to talk about these

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processes generally and then to have a series of different geographical contexts where they are worked out in more detail: the community, the city, the region, the nation."³ Stephan Thernstrom has completely abandoned the term "urban history" since it has gained an "unfortunate implication . . . that one isn't interested in rural social processes." He now defines himself simply as a social historian, a reflection of his general interest in social change both within and outside cities.⁴

In Canada, there has been no retreat from the label "urban historian." Since the time the Hamilton Project published the first project reports, the field of urban history has developed into a central component of the discipline of Canada. One index of this development is the emergence of the *Urban History Review* as a major scholarly journal. The *U.H.R.* has benefitted from a rapid increase in the number of researchers focussing on the urban experience. Gilbert Stelter reported in 1980 that urban history in Canada was "thriving" with more than 300 researchers actively studying the development of particular cities. Although Stelter observed that about half of these researchers were working in Ontario, he also noted that urban history was underway throughout Canada. The largest component of this activity involved social history, including "everything from institutions such as schools, churches and unions in an urban setting, to systematic analyses of society."⁵

The 1970s witnessed the maturing of social structural analysis in Canada⁶ but developments in urban history have occurred far more rapidly with respect to other approaches. The study of social structure is now a small component of urban history as a field of research. Unlike the United States where historians of "society" have become dominant within both urban and rural research, Canada's major contributions have emphasized other aspects of cities as historical phenomena.⁷ Although Stelter's broad definition of social history captured the largest proportion of urban study, this proportion included only one-third of research activity and "systematic analyses of society" were an even smaller proportion therein.

Analysis of urban social structure has not become widespread in Canada. While scholars remark upon the importance of such analysis, they generally choose more conventional topics and approaches for their own work. Neither the concepts nor methods of the major projects have gained much popularity. For example, Katz' major argument concerning the ongoing social inequality of mid-nineteenth century Hamilton remains an almost isolated finding in the Canadian literature. The central theme of *The People of Hamilton* was the apparent paradox of rapid population turnover and steady structural configuration; the names and faces changed constantly but the city evolved very slowly.⁸ This theme has numerous implications for the ways in which historians view the urban past. Civic leaders become important as a social

group rather than as specific personalities. Urban development is associated with increasing social inequality and, thereby, class consciousness rather than community spirit. A "sense of place" gives way to a hope that economic opportunity is better somewhere else. These redefinitions of city life emerged from historical evidence which previous scholars had considered unimportant or unmanageable. The backbone of the Hamilton Project was the 1851-1871 manuscript census returns and other routinely-generated sources such as assessment rolls. This evidence went beyond the attitudes and perceptions of a small elite to the social experience of the vast majority.

This approach has been less important among urban historians in Canada than the study of municipal policy and major civic leaders. Urban historians have argued that Canadian cities must first be treated as unique places created by specific city-builders. Each city represents a particular convergence of individuals and environment and thus historical analysis must begin at the level of character and circumstances. Alan F.J. Artibise promoted this perspective in his study of Winnipeg, a major contribution to Canadian urban history during the 1970s. He argued forcefully that Winnipeg should be approached "as a special kind of social environment, set in a particular place and time, and with unique internal patterns and organizations." While admitting that variables such as population and technology required consideration, Artibise stressed that Winnipeg was largely the result of the "human and accidental, the contingencies of events and personalities."⁹ The study, itself, pointed out similarities and differences between Winnipeg's experience and developments elsewhere and, in so doing, suggested that the differences outweighed the similarities. Winnipeg was simply Winnipeg and not a representation of a widespread city-building phenomenon. From this perspective, Artibise selected municipal documents such as council minutes and reports as the foundation of his evidence. These documents allowed Artibise to analyse the thoughts and action of the "Big Men" in Winnipeg and thereby to detail the city's development.¹⁰

In his later work on general prairie urban development, Artibise has qualified this perspective by emphasizing that historical period and geographic context are two variables which define the possibilities of individual agency. He argues that individual and group decisions become less important as urban development progresses and that a town or city growing in the 1840s, for example, will face different challenges than one growing in the 1880s. In this sense, the importance of agency is related to the historical moment of the urban process. Similarly, Artibise stresses that regional differences necessitate analytical adjustment. Generalizations about the prairies do not necessarily hold for central Canada just as concepts of

urban industrial development would not apply to Winnipeg or Saskatoon.¹¹ Nonetheless, the emphasis on individual agency and the decision-making of elites within urban development has become the dominant approach of urban historians in Canada. Studies have now portrayed the attitudes and behaviour of civic officials in numerous Canadian cities and municipal documents have become the staple source of research strategies.

A second approach to urban history is represented by a group of scholars who look at cities as parts of urban systems. These scholars eschew case studies as well as reference to specific individuals or leadership groups. For example, James W. Simmons analyses cities as spatially interdependent elements.¹² He suggests that in Canada the productive power of the surrounding hinterlands often determines urban status since the economy is largely dependent on primary products. The importance of "site resource base" is especially crucial to smaller urban centers which can quickly appear or disappear on the basis of commodities such as grain, wood, pulp or nickel. Simmons argues that specific businessmen and politicians cannot be held responsible for the pace or nature of urban development. He concludes that "It is not industry or entrepreneurial skill but the ability of the hinterland to generate wealth which is essential" in the Canadian context. Cities rise and fall as part of urban systems without regard for the leadership of local elites.¹³

The dependent character of Canadian cities is also stressed by John McCallum who has examined the economic development of Quebec and Ontario during the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴ McCallum argues that rural development in the two provinces had a determining influence on the nature of urban expansion. The crucial rural-urban link was the extent to which agriculture facilitated capital accumulation. McCallum suggests that since Quebec agriculture was in difficulty throughout the decades before the 1860s, industrial development was seriously hindered. In contrast, Ontario's prosperous wheat economy provided a foundation for rapid industrial expansion.

Ontario industry developed on classic lines as the agriculture-based economy grew. The enterprising blacksmith became a founder, the successful tailor began to employ outside labour, and the printer expanded his operation as local demand for newspapers rose. Markets, capital, materials, and labour were overwhelmingly local. Meanwhile, industrial growth in Quebec was based mainly on elements external to the province. Montreal's commercial base was founded on the production and consumption of other regions, while the city's industry depended on external markets and often external raw materials. The same was true of the few large enterprises outside Montreal which emerged alongside the weak local industry. Owned by outsiders, such enterprises operated large-scale plants importing raw materials to produce a product that was sent to external markets on

railways that happened to pass through rural Quebec on their way to the eastern seaboard.¹⁵

McCallum suggests that this situation explains why the focus of economic activity shifted from Montreal to cities such as Toronto and Hamilton by the late 19th century and why urban development progressed differently in Quebec and Ontario. McCallum concludes that

"outside Montreal and Quebec City, little occurred. In contrast to the proliferation of Ontario towns competing with each other by means of roads and railways for the prosperous agricultural hinterland, Quebec towns were few in number, with neither the incentive nor the resources for local transportation developments. Such meagre industrial development as occurred outside the two main cities was of very low productivity, and Quebec's unproductive agriculture offered an unlimited supply of labour at wage rates well below the levels experienced in rural Ontario."¹⁶

In many ways, this argument is a revitalization of the staples approach which for so long dominated Canadian historiography. Unfortunately, most of the claims remain speculative. McCallum represents very little new evidence and he does not attempt to specify the precise ways and extent to which capital was accumulated and invested in industry. The data are generally aggregate and the evidence is circumstantial. However, the emphasis on environmental factors undermines several notions of human agency including those which assume fundamental cultural differences between Anglo-Canadian and French-Canadian economic behaviour. In the end, McCallum bluntly concludes that "nineteenth century Quebec developed along the lines that were beyond the control of merchant and habitant alike."¹⁷

Despite differences among scholars of social structure, "Big Men," and urban systems, their approaches have two important similarities: they support a developmental approach to urban development and they encourage comparative studies of different cities. Michael Katz thought that an industrial city was under study when the Hamilton project began. When the data were examined, however, it became clear that, in the 1851-1861 period, Hamilton was still a commercial centre. By implication, Katz' study suggested a commercial-to-industrial process of urban development in the nineteenth century that could be tested as a general model. Katz employed some specific comparisons of social structure with communities elsewhere but did not attempt a full comparative analysis.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the ultimate ambition of an overall theory was foremost in the study.

Alan Artibise would not pursue the notion that a particular developmental process characterized city growth in the nineteenth century but he strongly encourages a change-over-time perspective. In his urban biography, Artibise

endeavoured "to identify and describe the events, personages, trends, and movements which have played a key role in the development of Winnipeg."¹⁹ This longitudinal perspective did not imply identifiable developmental stages in Winnipeg but rather general periods of urban growth leading to "urban maturity" by World War I. Artibise described the path of development in terms of the goals of civic leaders, and a major question posed in the book concerned the extent to which these goals were shared in other cities. Thus Artibise promoted comparative history and hoped that similar studies would be carried out in different urban areas. However, human agency remained the crucial variable in the urban development process and in this regard, Artibise's perspective differs markedly from the Katz approach. In Artibise's study, Winnipeg's destiny was determined by the energy, competency, and goals of its leaders. With changes in leadership, Winnipeg's development might have been quite different.

Recent emphasis on urban development either in terms of economic stages or "boosterism" raises two specific problems in terms of nineteenth century society. To begin with, the developmental approach has certain pathological underpinnings. Small towns became, by implication at least, failures. Places that do not grow or commercial centers which do not become industrial invite urban analysis in terms of etiology. At one level, such diagnosis would be valid. Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches* captured a mood of great anticipation common to many emerging centers in the nineteenth century. The people of "Mariposa" were convinced that they were on their way to great urban heights despite outside opinion to the contrary.

In point of population, if one must come down to figures the Canadian census puts the numbers every time at something around five thousand. But it is very generally understood in Mariposa that the census is largely the outcome of malicious jealousy. It is usual that after the census the editor of the *Mariposa Newspanet* makes a careful re-estimate (based on the data of relative non-payment of subscriptions), and brings the population up to 6,000. After that the *Mariposa Times-Herald* makes an estimate that runs the figures up to 6,500. Then Mr. Gingham, the undertaker, who collects the vital statistics for the provincial government, makes an estimate from the number of what he calls the "demised" as compared with the less interesting persons who are still alive, and brings the population to 7,000. After that somebody else works it out that it's 7,500; then the man behind the bar of the Mariposa House offers to bet the whole room that there are 9,000 people in Mariposa. That settles it, and the population is well on the way to 10,000, when down swoops the federal census taker on his next round and the town has to begin all over again.²⁰

As it turned out, of course, "Mariposa" never grew dramatically and the great expectations went largely unfulfilled. Orillia lost to Barrie in the battle

for predominance in Simcoe County, and reconciled itself to status as a tourist attraction.²¹ In this sense, Orillia is an urban failure. Katz might suggest causes such as the failure of economic development to move Orillia beyond its service center function while Artibise would probably compare the personalities of the civic leaders in Orillia and Barrie with reference to their ability to attract immigrants and industry.

Theoretically, however, these analyses imply a particular path of urban development on which specific cases can be located at various points in time. A linear rural-to-urban continuum lurks in the background of their studies. Just as Leacock claimed, Mariposa had no real identity of its own; "if you know Canada at all, you are probably well acquainted with a dozen towns just like it."²² Similarly, the studies of Hamilton and Winnipeg imply that, within certain limits, specific cities might have progressed to different points on the path of urban development from those actually attained. Hamilton might have been Toronto and Winnipeg might have been Dauphin. It should be noted that the urban systems approach avoids this kind of analysis by differentiating among various types of Canadian cities on the basis of their hinterlands and their linkages to other urban centers. Thus, a small town is not a failure but rather a necessary link between rural areas and major cities. The researcher's object is to identify and explain this link rather than to interpret unfulfilled ambition. Still, questions remain concerning the nature of the urban system as a whole. Why do primary resources continue to determine the Canadian urban system? Is entrepreneurial skill a determining influence at this level? Is transiency or structural rigidity a factor?

One way of addressing these issues is to confront systematically the need for a "scheme of conceptualization" relating to the urban experience. Recently, Theodore Hershberg has taken up this task by promoting the view that urban history must be approached as a dynamic and complex interconnection of three fundamental forces. "*Urban as process* should be thought of as the dynamic modeling of the interrelationships among environment, behaviour, and group experience — three basic components in the larger urban system." Significantly, Hershberg's perspective includes attention to social structure, city elites, and urban systems; he suggests that we need to understand the "interplay of personalities, political decisions, major events, institutional behaviour, and impersonal, large-scale, socio-economic and demographic forces." In this way, Hershberg promotes a far more integrated approach to urban history than is apparent in the Canadian context thus far. This approach may be far easier to recommend than to implement. Hershberg suggests three research topics: "First, how the urban environment changed over time. Second, what social experience was correlated with different aspects of urban settings; neither relatively simple behaviours such as intermarriage nor complex processes such as assimilation

occurred in a vacuum. Finally, what were the mechanisms through which environmental and social change were effected."²³

These research topics may be legitimate (in fact, research is already well underway on these fronts) but they do not respond to the most important weakness of urban history during the last decade; specifically, that the urban experience has not been addressed within a larger social and environmental context. Hershberg's own project on Philadelphia has examined the city without systematic reference to a regional or national setting.²⁴ Clearly, the work of the project implies that, once Philadelphia is studied, its history can then be placed in a larger context but this approach sidesteps questions about the specific nature of "urban as process." The basic question is whether scholars interested in urban history should only study urban centers. Obviously, each piece of research must draw the boundaries somewhere, but can we understand urban development in particular cities without a more geographically-integrated framework?

The recent work of David Gagan illustrates some of the benefits of approaching the history of urban social structure as a regional phenomenon. Gagan studied the emergence of Brampton as an urban center in Peel County, Ontario. This development is analysed in the context of decades of regional rural history and of general urban growth in south-central Ontario.

In 1851 Peel contained no incorporated places. Its principal hamlets, Brampton, Streetsville, and Port Credit, counted among them fewer than 2,000 inhabitants associated with the primary functions of each place, the grain trade in Brampton, fishing and shipping in Port Credit, and the cloth industry in Streetsville. Twenty years later Streetsville and Port Credit were still hamlets, in fact, declining villages. But Brampton had become an urban centre with all the trappings of mid-Victorian urbanism: the railway, proto-industrialization, vigorous commercial development, high rates of transience, and a rigid, indeed restrictive, social structure. And Brampton's 2,000 inhabitants were urban people, but not merely because they were smugly imperious toward their rural neighbours. After less than a dozen years of separate development the two populations had quite distinct demographic characteristics which set them worlds apart.²⁵

Gagan's study of this Canadian "urban frontier" is selective and many questions remain unanswered about the distinctiveness of the rural and urban "worlds" of Peel County. Nonetheless, his comparative approach permits some specification of the process of urbanization itself and includes treatment of the city as both an independent and dependent variable. Gagan does address the question of how Brampton grew and why more and more people were attracted to the community. More importantly, Gagan attempts to indicate what it meant to be "urban" rather than "rural" in Peel County, and thus to consider urbanization as an independent force within his overall

analysis. Gagan compares fertility ratios, age-at-marriage, and persistence rates for Brampton and rural Peel County, and concludes that rural-urban differences were important. "What is significant about the town and its population is that they embodied a demonstrable departure from the forms, structures, and rhythms of life and of individual experience in the countryside."²⁶

A regional approach to analysing the process of urbanization has the advantage of placing specific city development into a context where the meaning of "urban" can be assessed systematically. Recent research suggests that four aspects of social structure would provide an excellent point of departure for this type of assessment: demographic behaviour, transiency, occupational structure, and social mobility. Studies of these topics have been quite numerous, especially during the past decade, and a selective survey of their findings suggests the potential value of undertaking the history of urban social structure in a regional context. No single answer becomes apparent but better questions certainly emerge.

To begin with, research on demographic behaviour in the nineteenth century has strongly challenged traditional assumptions about the meaning of urbanization. The most forceful challenge has focussed on the relationship between declining fertility and urban growth. Conventional wisdom argued that urbanization was the engine of the nineteenth century fertility decline and that rural areas maintained larger families throughout this period. This view was then attacked by scholars such as Y. Yasuba who maintained that rural fertility was also in decline by the first half of the nineteenth century.²⁷ Subsequent studies have pursued the argument that diminishing available farmland inspired rural parents to control their family size in rational response to their changing material environment. This argument considers children as contributors to family economies and assesses their importance in relationship to household requirements. This importance is assumed to decrease as settlements mature and cities grow. In land abundant areas, economic opportunity and labour-intensive production combine to make children valuable contributors to family security and thus fertility rates remain high. Children are less needed in established farm communities, however, and their relative cost inspires parents to begin limiting family size. This process is further advanced in cities where the few productive opportunities for children make parents even more determined to prevent the burden of extensive child care.²⁸

In Canada, R.M. McInnis has examined this perspective by studying census data from mid-nineteenth century Ontario. He found an aggregate relationship at the county level between land availability and fertility but a subsequent household-level analysis failed to support a coherent model of

demographic behaviour based on "old" and "new" agricultural areas. However, McNinnis' conclusions included a tantalizing suggestion about the interrelationships of rural and urban centers.

As was expected, an abundance of nearby, uncultivated land affects the probability of there being young children in the household. However, the magnitude of its influence is small and it does not consistently affect other childbearing variables in the same way. The strongest result obtained is that fertility falls as larger cities develop sufficiently close by for there to be a real influence of urban life and culture. The behavioral basis for that remains insufficiently explored, however.²⁹

The suggestion that "urban life and culture" may have been responsible for the general fertility decline of the nineteenth century indicates that a single theory may explain both rural and urban experience. Thus, research should perhaps focus on the changing *mentalité* of urban residents as the crucial independent variable of nineteenth century patterns. This approach joins a larger challenge to earlier studies which had implied that distinct economic explanations are required to account for urban and non-urban demographic behaviour. In cities, changing modes of production related to industrialization were said to have engendered new perspectives on children and their role in family security. In the countryside, declining land availability, a phenomenon unrelated to industrialization, was claimed to have changed family calculations about labour requirements and therefore to have inspired birth control. In recent years, however, scholars have not been content with the notion of two distinct explanations for a phenomenon which obtained at about the same time in both rural and urban areas. Maris Vinovskis, in particular, has looked for a general social change which influenced fertility in various geographic environments.³⁰ This search has led to revitalization of the old concept of "modernization," which had been largely abandoned after careless use by sociologists during the 1950s and 1960s. Problems of definition and ideological bias are still evident but an increasing number of scholars now suggest that modernization can serve as a general explanation for demographic patterns in both rural and urban areas.³¹ In this perspective, the process of urbanization becomes one aspect of a larger social change which affected residents in both cities and the countryside.

An alternative perspective on parallel rural-urban demographic developments has emerged from the work of Mark J. Stern on fertility in Erie County, New York during the mid-nineteenth century. Stern has examined nominal level data for rural and urban areas and applies a single conceptual framework to explain differentials within and between each context. Stern argues that the crucial independent variable is the "class position of individual families and the economic position associated with that position."

This perspective goes beyond social and economic considerations. Stern claims that class influences "were mediated through a set of cultural perceptions associated with ethnicity which also had an immense effect on the family planning strategies of urban and rural families."³²

In applying this concept to Erie County, Stern perceives class in terms of a two-tiered social structure which obtained in both the city and countryside. Class is defined as a relationship determined by the position of individuals with respect to the means of production. This definition entails different considerations in rural and urban areas but in each setting produces a two-class social structure. In the agricultural context, property represented the basis of production and thus property-ownership divided the population into two classes, owners and tenants. Stern finds a significant difference in fertility between these two classes and explains the difference in terms of rational family strategies. Tenants exhibited a fertility ratio twelve percent higher than that of owners. Although land owners were more materially secure than tenants, they were also more concerned about inheritance possibilities. "Land owners could keep the full reward from their work, but they also had to worry about the disposal of their land and its division among their children. Tenants on the other hand had to pass part of their product to the landlord, but with no land to pass on they may have been less concerned with the partibility of their estate." Thus, owners generally limited their fertility while tenants continued the traditional pattern.³³

Stern's argument is speculative since he does not systematically link inheritance strategies to land-ownership patterns but his perspective has two important implications for research on rural-urban change. The Erie County study suggests that rural and urban experiences can be approached from a unified conceptual framework and that the most appropriate framework is built on class analysis. Thus, researchers should not simply compare rural and urban centers vertically but rather should examine the behaviour of social classes within these centers. Stern's work suggests that scholars must examine the specific interaction of various social groups with various environments. By implication, his study undermines any sense of urbanization as a monolithic phenomenon producing consistent changes throughout the population. Rather, class position remains the crucial determinant of life experience during both rural and urban development.

The theoretical questions about "urban as process" which are raised by research on demographic behaviour have been less directly considered in studies on transiency. Ever since systematic research first undermined traditional assumptions about a geographically stable past, scholars have focussed more on measurement than on motivation.³⁴ We know a great deal about how frequently individuals moved in different environments but much less about why some stayed and others left. Wherever researchers have

looked in the nineteenth century, they have found astounding rates of population turnover. Studies of urban centers gained momentum with the finds of Stephen Thernstrom and Peter Knights who examined mid-nineteenth century Boston.³⁵ Their discovery of rapid population turnover has subsequently been confirmed by numerous studies of other cities. A general conclusion is that new residents replaced about half to three-quarters of urban populations during the course of any ten year period.³⁶

In some ways, the discovery of such high transiency in cities is not surprising. A variety of urban circumstances clearly worked against long-term settlement during the emergence of a wage-labour economy. Seasonal job opportunities, residential insecurity, and the dream of something better are only some of the forces which undoubtedly inspired or forced city dwellers to move on. However, studies have now shown that population turnover is just as apparent in the countryside as in the city during the nineteenth century. These studies challenge the concept that urbanization undermined rural stability and produced a modern mobile population. Rather, they show that rural communities were also in a constant state of flux.³⁷ Gagan found that rural Peel County was in "perpetual motion." The vast majority of mid-nineteenth century residents were only passing through the county. Seventy percent were enumerated in the census just once. Not surprisingly, those who left were often agricultural tenants or unskilled labourers. However, farm ownership was certainly no guarantee of ongoing residence. In fact, Gagan argues that out-migration can sometimes be considered as a family inheritance strategy. He quotes one explanation offered for Ontario in the 1870s. "The farmer whose farm of one hundred acres was at one time sufficient to yield a comfortable living for himself and family now finds himself surrounded by grown up sons for whom he feels it incumbent upon himself to provide. . . and proceeds to Michigan, or some other western state or territory . . . to buy land sufficient for himself and his boys." In this way, established farm families contributed to the perpetual motion of nineteenth century society.³⁸

Gérard Bouchard has applied a similar argument to the Saguenay Valley during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As elsewhere, the small village of Notre-Dame le Laterrière exhibited high rates of transiency and, in order to explain this phenomenon, Bouchard introduces the concept of family strategies. This approach goes beyond a simple model of rational economic behaviour. The strength of the family unit looms especially large. The prospect of material difficulty in the future caused economically secure families to emigrate in order to preserve their own cohesion. As in Peel County, immediate economic crisis was not necessary. "In this perspective, we think that a spirit of caution and sensible foresight, rather than atavistic

carelessness, led to the emigration of families which, however well-established, had many sons to provide land for."³⁹

Taken together, rural and urban studies of transiency further support the need for a geographically-integrated view of urban development. Just as in the case of fertility, the similar rural and urban patterns suggest that an encompassing dynamic was at work. One question concerns the extent to which nineteenth century individuals saw themselves as city or countryside people. Did a rural-urban distinction have meaning with respect to individual residential patterns. The well-known case of Wilson Benson suggests clearly that individuals' lives were not necessarily associated with exclusive rural or urban existence. Benson moved from place to place with steady frequency and without consistent regard for type of environment. Benson's life was spent in major cities such as Kingston and Toronto, frontier areas such as Artemesia Township, and small villages such as Markdale. During his early years in Canada West, his lack of agricultural experience caused him to lose a job as a farm labourer and thereafter to seek employment in a trade. However, learning a trade was not easy and Benson does end up on a farm "scratching out a living." It was only after a near-fatal accident with a threshing machine that he returned to a village for his remaining days.⁴⁰

The representativeness of life histories such as Wilson Benson's can only be assessed through the kind of meticulous research currently being completed by Peter Knights. As an advance on his transiency study of Boston, Knights has attempted to follow out-migrants in order to achieve a sense of the actual migration process. His search has discovered emigrants in all parts of the United States and, in fact, many parts of the world. Although he has not yet published his findings, this approach promises to force re-evaluation of the extent to which nineteenth century individuals viewed themselves as either "rural" or "urban."⁴¹ Just as in the case of Wilson Benson, these out-migrants appear to have viewed the nineteenth century environment as a totality in which survival and security had to be pursued wherever it was perceived.

The Benson example also questions the extent to which nineteenth century city growth should be considered a straightforward result of rural to urban migration. Such movement certainly obtained at an aggregate level but, for individuals, the process may have been far more complicated involving at least several treks between country and city. In this regard, it is important to remember that throughout the nineteenth century land hunger was a compelling force of human activity. By and large, families did not want to be in cities. The ideal of a rural homestead loomed large despite the hype of urban boosters. Urban life was the antithesis of the common aspiration. "Cities, many feared, were serpents in Eden, ensnaring, enfeebling, and

corrupting their inhabitants. They pinned a man down and drained him of the vital energies that he needed to pull up stakes and move on to the greener pastures that lay ahead."⁴² The insecurity and marginal existence offered by a wage labour economy nourished the dream of pastoral autonomy. Although many individuals learned that this dream was not easily fulfilled, research has yet to demonstrate that a willing attachment to urban life paralleled actual city growth in nineteenth century society. City residence may not have engendered "urban" as a state of mind.

A general conclusion, therefore, is that a rural-urban conceptualization does not adequately reflect the reality of nineteenth century society. These systematic studies suggest continuity rather than dichotomy in individual experience. It should be recognized that this finding directly challenges those studies which suggest that "urban" has significant cultural meaning in terms of norms, values and attitudes. Basic questions concern the ways in which individuals actually become "urban." What was the process? How long did it take? Was it inevitable? What proportion of nineteenth century city dwellers can actually be considered psychologically "urban" at different points in time?

These questions become even more complex if evidence from small towns is brought into the discussion. Similarities in fertility and transiency between rural and urban areas are matched in the case of small towns by remarkable consistency in occupational structure. Katz' study of Hamilton argued that one of the principal distinguishing characteristics of that mid-nineteenth century city was an occupational structure which remained stable despite rapid population turnover. Katz and other scholars joined together to produce a system of occupational classification based on five categories: professional/large proprietor; commercial/small proprietor; skilled; semi-skilled; and unskilled. Between 1851 and 1861, the relative importance of each of these categories remained quite constant. Katz finds that "in each year about one quarter of the adult men worked in commercial occupations, another quarter in laboring jobs, a third quarter in skilled trades, about 15 percent in construction, just under 5 percent in the professions, and the rest in a variety of different capacities." This distribution also obtained in other cities such as Buffalo and Philadelphia and Katz suggests the division of labor in Hamilton may represent the common pattern in nineteenth century commercial cities.⁴³

However, the occupational structure of urban Hamilton was also quite similar to certain rural hamlets. For example, Orillia in 1861 had a distribution of male occupations as follows: professional/proprietor, 14%; commercial/small proprietor, 26.1%; skilled, 29.9%; semi-skilled, 11.5%; and unskilled, 18.5%. These proportions shifted significantly as Orillia developed as a commercial service-center during the 1860s. In particular, the skilled category enlarged to encompass 46.6% of male workers as demand

increased for artisanal activity. It is noteworthy that this development made Orillia's occupational structure look less like urban Hamilton than when the village was a small hamlet.⁴⁴ An important question, then, concerns the relationship of occupational structure to community growth before status as a city is achieved. If urbanization has no direct effect on occupational structure in major commercial centers, what is the impact of rapid population growth on the dimension of labour in smaller communities?

Similar questions are raised by a systematic examination of a small city in Wisconsin during the nineteenth century. William Crozier has examined manuscript census returns for the 1860-1880 period in Winona and he finds important changes in occupational distribution between 1860 and 1870 but not thereafter. In these decades, Winona experienced substantial population increase and the emergence of industrial activity. These developments re-distributed occupational importance during the 1860s but further development in the 1870s had no real effect on the relative proportions of different categories.

In 1860, over a third of the occupations fall within the white collar class; over a quarter of the work force are skilled workers; and slightly over a third are unskilled occupations. The social structure reflects a society with education, skills, or capital that has established itself in a new city where there was opportunity for growth and profit. Almost two-thirds of the work force were in occupations that provided services or skills needed during the early stages of the city. Clerks, carpenters, merchants, teachers, and lawyers dominated the upper three classes of the social structure when the major activities of the city centered on commerce, commissions, and services. Almost half of the unskilled workers were domestics. Industry was in its infancy and the need for a large unskilled labor force did not surface until the transition to an industrial economy began to take place.⁴⁵

This transition began in the 1860s and was evident by 1870 when white collar occupations declined in importance and the unskilled rose to almost one-half of the labour force. Industrial development continued during the 1870s but, surprisingly, Winona's occupational structure remained largely unchanged; only slight shifts are apparent in the 1880 enumeration. Viewed in the context of Katz' study of Hamilton, this pattern suggests that urbanization can be associated with structural rigidity only after a certain point of development has been achieved. Exactly where that point is remains vague but further systematic studies of transitional communities should help clarify this component of the urbanization process.

The importance of systematically studying towns and small cities is similarly suggested by research on social mobility. The central hypothesis which emerged from the early studies of Boston and Hamilton indicated that nineteenth century urbanization engendered a rigid social structure which only tolerated a small amount of vertical movement. This mobility, both

downward and upward, occurred "within three relatively large and stable, hierarchically ordered groups, separated by unstable, transitional strata."⁴⁶ These three groups composed the class structure of mid-nineteenth century Hamilton: entrepreneurs, artisans, and labourers. Mobility between these classes was unlikely and, over time, became even less probable as social inequality increased. Katz concludes that Hamilton supports the possibility that "within nineteenth century North America, industrialization, urban growth, and complexity may have increased the already unequal distribution of wealth."⁴⁷

To what extent was this level of social rigidity limited to urban centers? Were small towns more fluid? A preliminary look at Orillia revealed that as a tiny community in 1861, individual maturity was associated with improved occupational status. The professionals and large proprietors of Orillia were mature men in 1861 with an average age of 45.3 years. In contrast, semi-skilled and unskilled workers represented a younger generation with average ages in their late twenties. After a decade of rapid immigration, however, the age structure of the now established village's occupational structure approximated the pattern of urban Hamilton. Young men no longer dominated the lower status jobs. Rather, an average age in the thirties characterized all occupational categories in 1871. One hypothesis is that social rigidity had come to Orillia much in the way Katz theorized about Hamilton.

This finding is somewhat ironic in light of the early aspiration that Orillia would someday rival southern Ontario's established centers. During the mid-nineteenth century civic leaders enthusiastically welcomed their town's economic growth and development. They expected that the arrival of the railroad would further facilitate population growth and enhance Orillia's strategic position as a service center for northwest Simcoe County. If we are justified in applying Katz' theory, the partial fulfillment of this expectation may have brought a general rise in the standard of living but it also led to more clearly-defined social boundaries and to an increasingly uneven distribution of wealth.⁴⁸

Although this evidence is fragmentary, the potential implications should stimulate further research. The process of class formation is at the heart of the issue. Although recent studies in working-class history have questioned the traditional connection of urbanization and class action, the focus of research has remained on the large cities especially in recent major studies. Bryan Palmer has examined the emergence of industrial capitalism in Hamilton during the late nineteenth century while Gregory Kealey has analysed the experience of Toronto in the same period.⁴⁹ Recent work has begun to uncover the parallel histories of towns and small cities but the evolution of urban centers remains far more familiar. Similarly, class formation is generally viewed only in manufacturing and industrial contexts.

For example, scholars have carefully examined the ways in which technology diluted artisanal skills and thereby proletarianized an educated and articulate group. It was this group that became the leadership of the labour movement in the major cities of Ontario as well as elsewhere.⁵⁰ But what happened in small towns where productive activity was increasingly limited to service center functions? Was there less class conflict? Or has an urban research focus simply distorted the true generality of this phenomenon?

In sum, the writing of urban history during the 1970s has left unresolved a series of issues related to both theory and method. Conceptual headway appears most promising in the direction of a regional approach which could incorporate the strengths of the established perspectives on urban social structure, city elites and urban systems. Scholars who wish to understand "urban as process" cannot focus exclusively on the urban experience. The rural and small town context of city development must also be appreciated if "urban" is to be recognized and studied. Researchers must view urbanization not only in terms of residence but, more importantly, with reference to behaviour and *mentalité*. The central questions surround the impact of urban development on the experiences and thoughts of nineteenth century individuals. A comparative and geographically-integrated perspective promises to advance understanding of this impact.

Recent research suggests that four specific topics remain at the heart of the history of urban social structure: demographic behaviour, transiency, occupational structure, and social mobility. Although other concerns remain important, further pursuit of these topics promises to add significantly to an understanding of the process of urbanization. The available findings indicate that urban case studies will not be sufficient to reach this understanding. Rather, researchers must examine social structure in the broad geographic context which characterized nineteenth century experience. This strategy will produce a richer appreciation of "urban" as an historical process which may have been as much a state of mind as a sense of place.

NOTES:

1. The Hamilton Project has produced a long list of publications including two major books: Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), and Michael B. Katz, Michael B. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).
2. The major work of the Philadelphia Social History Project is Theodore Hershberg, ed., *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century. Essays Toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

3. "Conversation with Samuel P. Hays," in Bruce M. Stave, *The Making of Urban History: Historiography Through Oral History* (Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1977), p. 302.
4. "Conversation with Stephen Thernstrom," in *ibid.*, p. 230.
5. Gilbert A. Stelter, "Current Research in Canadian Urban History," *Urban History Review*, Vol. IX (June 1980), p. 112.
6. Two examples of this maturity are the rapid development of the journal *Histoire sociale/Social History*, and the types of articles that have recently been selected for the annual volume of the Canadian Historical Association's *Historical Papers*.
7. For an indication of the interests of Canadian urban historians, see two volumes edited by Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter: *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979) and *Shaping the Canadian Urban Landscape: Essays on the City-Building Process, 1821-1921* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982). Also useful is the introductory essay in Artibise and Stelter, *Canada's Urban Past: A Bibliography to 1980 and Guide to Canadian Urban Studies* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), pp. xiii-xxxii.
8. Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, "Introduction."
9. Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1975), p. 1.
10. The title of Part Two of Artibise, *Winnipeg*, is "Big Men, Come Together with a Big Purpose."
11. See, for example, "Continuity and Change: Elites and Prairie Urban Development, 1914-1950," in Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, eds., *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 130-154; "The Urban West: The Evolution of Prairie Towns and Cities to 1930," *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 4 (1979), pp. 237-262; "Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities, 1871-1913," in Alan F.J. Artibise, ed., *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981), pp. 209-235.
12. James W. Simmons, "The Evolution of the Canadian Urban System," in Artibise and Stelter, eds., *The Usable Urban Past*, pp. 9-33.
13. For other examples of this approach, see Paul Phillips, "The Prairie Urban System, 1911-1961: Specialization and Change," in Artibise, ed., *Town and City*, pp. 7-30; and Derek Hum and Paul Phillips, "Growth, Trade and Urban Development of Staple Regions," *Urban History Review*, Vol. X (October 1981), pp. 13-24.
14. John McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
18. In several instances, Katz compared his Hamilton data with the findings of Michael Anderson in *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1971), and Bernard Farber in *Guardians of Virtue: Salen Families in 1800* (New York: Basic Books 1972). A systematic comparison of occupational structure was offered by Stuart Blumin, Laurence Glasco, Clyde Griffen, Theodore Hershberg, and Michael Katz, "Occupation and Ethnicity in Five Nineteenth Century Cities: A Collaborative Inquiry" *Historical Methods Newsletter*, Vol. 7 (June 1974), pp. 174-216.
19. Artibise, *Winnipeg*, p. 1.
20. Stephen Leacock, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1948), pp. 7-8.
21. E.J. Noble, "Entrepreneurship and Nineteenth Century Urban Growth: A Case Study of Orillia, Ontario, 1867-1898," *Urban History Review*, Vol. IX (June 1980), pp. 64-89.
22. Leacock, *Sunshine Sketches*, p. 3.

23. Theodore Hershberg, "The New Urban History: Toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 5 (November 1978), pp. 3-40.
24. For a listing of completed research at the Philadelphia Social History Project, see Appendix I in Hershberg, ed., *Philadelphia*, pp. 496-502.
25. David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 126.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.
27. Y. Yasuba, *Birth Rates of the White Population in the United States, 1800-1860: An Economic Study* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1961).
28. The major promoter of the economic theory of fertility has been R.R. Easterlin who offers his theoretical perspective in "Does Human Fertility Adjust to the Environment?" *The American Economic Review*, Vol. LXI, pp. 399-407. For examples of recent work in historical demography, see Maris A. Vinovskis, ed., *Studies in American Historical Demography* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); Ronald Demos Lee, ed., *Population Patterns in the Past* (New York: Academic Press, 1977); and Charles Tilly, ed., *Historical Studies of Changing Fertility* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).
29. R.M. McInnis, "Childbearing and Land Availability: Some Evidence from Individual Household Data," in Lee, ed., *Population Patterns*, pp. 201-227.
30. Maris Vinovskis, "Recent Trends in American Historical Demography: Some Methodological and Conceptual Considerations," *Annual Reviews in Sociology*, Vol. 4, pp. 603-627.
31. Vinovskis, himself, is the strongest supporter of the usefulness of modernization as an explanatory concept. His major work is *Fertility Decline in Antebellum Massachusetts* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).
32. Mark J. Stern, "Differential Fertility in Rural Erie County, New York, 1855," mimeo. This paper is based on Stern's dissertation, "The Demography of Capitalism: Industry, Class, and Fertility in Erie County, New York, 1855-1915," Ph.D. Thesis, York University, 1979.
33. Stern, "Differential Fertility," p. 25.
34. Important exceptions to this generalization include the recent articles by Michael Katz, Michael J. Doucet and Mark J. Stern, "Migration and Social Order in Erie County, N.Y.: 1855," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 8, pp. 669-702; and A. Gordon Darroch, "Migrants in the Nineteenth Century: Fugitives or Families in Motion?" *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 6 (Fall 1981), pp. 257-277.
35. Stephen Thernstrom and Peter R. Knights, "Men in Motion: Some Data and Speculations about Urban Population Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. I (1970).
36. An example of recent work is Lawrence Glasco, "Migration and Adjustment in the Nineteenth-Century City: Occupation, Property and Household Structure of Native-born Whites, Buffalo, New York, 1855," in Tamara K. Hareven and Maris A. Vinovskis, eds., *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 154-178.
37. One of the first studies to emphasize this point was Anders Norberg and Sune Åkerman, "Migration and the Building of Families: Studies on the Rise of the Lumber Industry in Sweden," in Kurt Agren, David Gaunt, Ingrid Eriksson, John Rogers, Anders Norberg, and Sune Åkerman, *Aristocrats, Farmers, Proletarians: Essays in Swedish Demographic History* (Uppsala: Studia Historica Upsaliensia, 1973).
38. United States Department of State, Consular Reports, RG 59, Reel T488-2, Trade and Commerce Report for Samia, 17 July 1879, as quoted in David Gagan, "Land, Population, and Social Change: The 'Critical Years' in Rural Canada West," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. LIX (September 1978), p. 315.
39. Gérard Bouchard, "Family Structures and Geographic Mobility at Laterrière, 1851-1935," *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 2 (Winter 1977), p. 367. Bouchard's project has now

published numerous articles concerning both methodology and preliminary conclusions. These articles include Gérard Bouchard, "Introduction à l'étude de la société Saguenayenne aux XIXe et XXe siècles," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française*, Vol. 31 (juin 1977); and "Démographie et société rurale au Saguenay, 1851-1935," *Recherches Sociographiques*, Vol. XIX (Jan.-Aug. 1978).

40. Wilson Benson, *Life and Adventures of Wilson Benson, Written by Himself* (Toronto, 1876). This autobiography was used extensively by Michael Katz in *The People of Hamilton*, Chapter 3.
41. Some initial conclusions are presented in Peter Knights, "The Facts of Lives, or Whatever Happened to 2808 Nineteenth-Century Bostonians?" Paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, June 1982.
42. Thernstrom and Knights, "Men in Motion," pp. 17-18.
43. Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, pp. 52-53.
44. Chad M. Gaffield and David Levine, "Dependency and Adolescence on the Canadian Frontier: Orillia, Ontario in the Nineteenth Century," *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 18 (Spring 1978).
45. William L. Crozier and Chad Gaffield, "Small Towns, Cities, and the Urbanization Process in North America: Orillia, Ontario and Winona, Minnesota." Paper presented at the Northern Great Plains History Conference, University of Minnesota, Duluth, 1980, p. 7.
46. Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, p. 208.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 30. For a more recent view, see Michael B. Katz, "Social Class in North American Urban History," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. XI (Spring 1981), pp. 579-605.
48. Gaffield and Levine, "Orillia," p. 44.
49. Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), and Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).
50. For an excellent sampling of recent works in the field, see the journal *Labour/Le Travailleur* which has quickly emerged as a leading publication in Canadian History.