

economics are prone in their history to elaborate the theme that trade takes place when the differential production costs are not neutralized by transportation costs. Certainly there is truth to that but it leaves a great deal unsaid about how trade actually takes place and who makes it happen. Economic anthropologists, who have done so much to put trade in an alternative perspective and view it from the vantagepoint of economies not so thoroughly commercialized, have seen it in a more complex, textured environment where religion, language, custom, tribute, and politics subtly interrelate. This work is reflected in Curtin's treatment of African and East Indian trade but also in brief but insightful perspectives on Hanse traders in the Steelyard of Medieval London or as an alien merchant community in Medieval Bruges.

Curtin's essay covers, for the most part in chronological order, the development of trade from the earliest times to the nineteenth century when trade diasporas begin to fade away. It is especially forceful in its treatment of non-European trading patterns in history and how these adjusted to and blended with the European patterns. The review of these latter, however, is quite provocative in this new global context. In other instances, for example the chapter on the overland Russian and Canadian fur trade, the juxtaposition of regional development in a global context is exciting. Historical development is blended with rich geographical and ethnographic detail. The text is illustrated with thirty-one maps, and for a valuable study of world trade it is remarkable in not having or needing a single table of trade statistics.

David P. McGinnis
University of Calgary

* * *

MATTHEW EDEL, ELLIOT D. SCLAR, and DANIEL LURIA — *Shaky Palaces: Homeownership and Social Mobility in Boston's Suburbanization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. Pp. xxiv, 459; tables and figures.

Shaky Palaces, an initial volume in the Columbia history of urban life series, is a fascinating, unusual, provocative, doggedly biased, and flawed book. Employing radical treatments of the past, characteristic of the New Left of the late 1960s and early 1970s, it considers critically several aspects of the American dream of home ownership. Essentially a case study of Boston which builds upon and takes issue with the seminal work of Stephen Thernstrom and Sam Bass Warner Jr., *Shaky Palaces* attempts to reach universal conclusions for the American experience. The joint authorship and a lack of chronological meshing of events yield a choppy text resembling a collection of connected research papers and contentious briefs. Unwieldy and, at times, quite technical, *Shaky Palaces* holds together because of its coherent but deficiently supported revisionist argument. For historians interested in historiography, methodology, and shelter, this book by three non-historians nevertheless has a few stimulating qualities.

From the perspective of historiography, Edel, Sclar, and Luria, have marched with banners flying into a demonstration of the traits of the New Left a decade after the parade. The characteristics of that dissenting coterie included a critique of the belief that America had achieved affluence and widely distributed political power. The authors of *Shaky Palaces* make exactly these points with regard to the topics of housing and neighborhoods. Contrary to myth, they argue, homeownership has proven to be a poor investment and a drag on upward mobility. As for political clout, the working class could not achieve real power because homeowner-tenant differences and struggles among neighborhoods helped wreck attempts at class unity. The authors avoid a truly crude Marxist analysis that would make the working class victims of a manipulated property and shelter scene; they seem well aware of the new labour history themes: "Workers, too, develop ideas and organizational power. There are two sides to a class conflict (p. 264)." Therefore what the authors argue is that capitalists and

workers attained a compromise on housing, for technology, financial innovations, and popular culture turned to effecting a suburban answer that gave laboring families substantially more than tenements. Of course, the emphasis on conflict — indeed the model of the Marxist dialectic — implies another New Left feature, namely the attack on consensus history.

The New Left too had affirmed that history should never be treated as a nearly objective science that had to shun the contamination of presentism; rather, partisanship, for the New Left, informed acute analysis. Further, historical exposé could shake the foundations of present policy assumptions. Again, *Shaky Palaces* fits the criteria exactly. The authors first became “concerned with the issues which are the substance of this study ... as political activists in the Boston/Cambridge area of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Preface).” Over the years they have plunged into the past hoping that the American working-class movement could act more effectively — perhaps without sidetracking on racial and neighborhood disputes — if it understood “its past record of strategies, and of gains, losses and compromises (p. 349).” Finally, the New Left paradigm applies because many adherents have rejected political history as elite history and have sought to write accounts from the bottom up. A few turned to routinely generated sources and the computer. Although his conclusions ran counter to new-left sentiments, Stephen Thernstrom was a charter member of this cliometric segment of the New Left, contributing to Barton J. Bernstein’s *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*. His claimed discovery of intergenerational mobility in his Boston data and his rejection of liberal theories to explain the poor mobility of blacks soon made Thernstrom a New Left target rather than a herald. Consequently, it is not surprising to find in *Shaky Palaces* a reworking of a sample of Thernstrom’s data in order to allege that homeownership diverted wealth away from better uses and hurt the prospects of children. The authors retain a methodological link with Thernstrom but turn their argument toward glum conclusions. The critique of homeownership as investment and the association of ownership with an intergenerational mobility lag occupy much of the first half of the book and will come in for nit-picking questions anon. The New Left hallmarks of this book are, in themselves, no reason for objections. Poor execution and an excess of conviction over candor become irksome.

The second half of the book is the least taxing, for while it has its share of tables it escapes the heavy cliometric treatment. The arguments rely less on managing the data and more on conventional blends of fact and theory. The arguments here are more obviously vulnerable. Largely consisting of a routine historical account of urban development processes in the important turn-of-the-century era, this section nevertheless proposes two interesting ideas that could provoke more investigation. First, they dispute Warner’s portrayal of suburban development as a product of thousands of separate decisions by small operators. His *Streetcar Suburbs* accented the building industry which undoubtedly consisted of numerous small businesses. *Shaky Palaces* shifts the focus to land development, examining the activities of large scale operators: Harrison Gray Otis (active 1785-1823), Henry M. Whitney (1868-1910); Cabot and Forbes (1945-1971). The deficiency with the methodology is that it simply does not deal with the question of concentration. How large were these developers in relation to the Boston or greater-Boston raw-land market? Furthermore, as the authors admit, their profiles lack information on land improvement costs and interest charges. The references to these three Boston developers and a fleeting mention of other major developers in Boston, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles also stray into the area of commercial property development. In sum, the account of land development is not quite what it purports — proof of the importance of large-scale developers. Michael Doucet’s dissertation on land development in Victorian Hamilton provides a far more complete look at an urban land market.

The second essential point in the latter half of *Shaky Palaces* relates to the concept of a dialectic. The evolution of the American suburb was in the authors’ estimation, a process akin to the British Corn Law reforms earlier in the nineteenth century. Class conflict effected a shift in what amounts to social policy. Research, development, and public policy on mass transportation allegedly occurred to exploit suburban possibilities in order to evade a mounting crisis in public health and high rents which had helped radicalize labour. This is an intriguing notion; it remains a bare hypothesis. The authors do not exercise original research to strengthen their case. They regard — correctly I believe

— the single-tax movement of Henry George as a crucial event in urban America. When the movement collapsed, they argue a number of followers became advocates of public works and cheap urban transit — in short, of suburbanization. The problem with their insight is that they let the model of the dialectic possess their argument rather than using it as a point of departure for framing and investigating interesting questions. Indeed, the dialectic may be entirely inapplicable. Was the suburban home ownership ethos a compromise or — what they deny — a direct expression of sheer consumer demand, stemming from a convergence of cultural factors — North American and European — that equated land ownership with freedom and complete citizenship? Quite likely their preconceived bias against the ethos — admittedly derived from observing Boston's shelter stock and race relations deteriorate in the 1970s — prevented the authors from considering the ethos as radical in relation to the history of land tenure. The appeal of Henry George could repay analysis and potentially result in a discussion of homeownership as something pursued in both practical and near spiritual hope by common men rather than as a second-best solution (social or planned housing is the implied best) founded on a compromise of conflicting social forces.

The major arguments in part one apparently rest on data, but conclusions in cliometrics are built necessarily upon universes of incomplete sets of pertinent variables. "Garbage in; garbage out." That harsh well-known axiom does not fully apply in this instance; however, the phrasing of the conclusions and the absence of potentially important supplementary avenues of inquiry or of several useful variables sound the alarms. Quantification demands more candor than these authors volunteer. But, then, they treat history as a mere vehicle for confirmation rather than as a quest. For example, they contend that between 1870 and 1970 "real estate investments by individual homeowners were not as remunerative as those investments open to larger scale investors (p. 107)." A well-conceived, but narrow, research effort supports the assertion and goes on to discuss minor modifications to the picture of modest capital gains for different periods. Additionally, and approaching candor, the authors tuck in a crucial disclaimer "There are, of course, limits to what can be inferred from this comparison ... (T)he rates of value change ... are capital gains figures, not cumulations of true economic rates of return (p. 131)." Tax benefits are mentioned as further advantages, leaving the impression of returns primarily to those with high incomes. Nowhere are boarding income and food production mentioned, although social historians have broadcast their importance. The United States Commissioner of Labor in his 1891 report mentioned survey results indicating significant food production from labourers' gardens. The freedom of title and acquisition of space had practical benefits — not to mention psychological ones — ignored in *Shaky Palaces* with its preference for developing counterfactual propositions such as demonstrating the superior returns on the Dow Jones basket of stocks. Was stock investment with a better return than house investment a realistic option for the working man? Could he have bought on the margin as readily as he secured a mortgage? The book has no appreciation for context but possesses an overweening fixation on proving its case.

The bold revisionist assault next challenges the idea of inner-city entrapment or its obverse, suburban success, by advancing the proposition of "the reality of suburban entrapment." "Reality" is chiseled in a chapter title. Again, the quantification is elegant. First, the authors demonstrate that homeownership "acted as a drag on owners' career prospects (p. 145)." The data implies an association between the variables. That does not mean a cause and effect connection. Second, they make the same case for the sons of owners. Here they let slip two declarations that raise mistrust in their enterprise because of the disembodied precision they convey. "A homeownership father ... 'robbed' his son of 0.1819 units of class score.... Homeowning fathers on average denied their sons 0.96 units of occupation — about one on a scale of one to eight — or the difference between a craftsman and a machine operator or between a clerk and a street peddler (p. 147)." I shall thank my parents for having provided me with 0.96 of leg up on the disadvantaged homeownership world! My sarcasm is directed toward the reverential attitude bestowed upon a limited set of data and not toward the attempt to upset conventional wisdom. Too much obvious material is missing. For example, family size might have been a significant variable helping to explain an association between ownership and a check on inter-generational occupational mobility. Biases in the rental market could have forced larger-than-average families to risk the costs of suburban accommodation and to finance the expenses with

multiple employment. Education thus could have been impeded. Also, the age of fathers receives no consideration, although homeownership as well as occupational classification tend to be associated with age. One can frame an age-related hypothesis that undercuts the simple claim of suburban entrapment. Young fathers picked up in the sample may not have realized their maximum occupational status or homeownership; naturally their sons seem to have gained ground over sons of fathers who entered the sample at a greater age and thus at a higher status and as homeowners. The improved occupational or class ranking of sons (in 1910) relative to fathers (1880-1910?) may reflect partly the incompleteness of cross-sectional analysis. The broader point is that ownership and economic or occupational fortunes may be associated coincidentally. Real explanatory confidence can emerge only through the analysis of many more variables. No one can do everything perfectly. Yet that affords no excuse in this instance. The authors owed their readers frankness and fewer assertive claims about their arguments constituting reality.

The publishers tout the book as sophisticated, compelling, and exhaustive. Like the authors they have exaggerated. *Shaky Palaces* is exasperating, unwieldy, and incomplete.

John C. Weaver
McMaster University

* * *

MICHAEL GROSSBERG — *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985. Pp. xiv, 417.

Governing the Hearth is a study of the history of family law (or the law of domestic relations, to use the contemporary term) in nineteenth-century United States. It is based primarily on an exhaustive study of the reported decisions from all states and on the considerable amount of legal writing in the period.

Michael Grossberg argues that in the early 1800s the American judiciary created an extensive body of law in defence of the "Republican Family". The American Revolutionary attack on patriarchy and the parallel quest for self-government and individual liberty fuelled a domestic revolution regarding family law. This legal revolution, Grossberg asserts, was led and controlled by a judiciary that self-consciously set out to define and protect the Republican Family and that sternly resisted most efforts of legislatures to influence developments in this area.

To develop these ideas, the author employs six case studies; he does not claim to have examined all areas of family law, but the issues he selects for investigation are both interesting and revealing. Three issues involve matrimonial subjects, and three deal with parenting. These individual studies are presented in a particularly able manner. Grossberg's selection of a few leading cases that capture the essence of the law and the judicial attitudes save the reader from becoming mired in a mass of material, but with no apparent loss of insight or effectiveness.

A chapter on courtship focuses on suits for breach-of-promise. After firmly securing this judicial scrutiny of courtship early in the nineteenth century, American jurists refined the law over the century to reflect the prescriptive gender roles and the contemporary expectations related to social class. Societal and legislative attempts to weaken the suit in the interest of more stable marriages were largely resisted.

The judicial regulation of weddings is discussed primarily in terms of the judicially-created idea of 'common-law marriage'. Viewed in terms of the private law of contract, self-regulated marriage was upheld as part of the Republican ideal, involving individual liberty, self-government and freedom from state control. Such state regulatory mechanisms as licensing were undermined by the forceful adoption and application of the common-law presumption of marriage. Later nine-