

Compte rendu

Ouvrage recensé :

Green, Adam. *Selling the Race: Culture, Community and Black Chicago, 1940–1955*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 280 pp.

par Nancy Rebelo

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, vol. 37, n° 1, 2008, p. 66-67.

Pour citer ce compte rendu, utiliser l'adresse suivante :

URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/019349ar>

DOI: 10.7202/019349ar

Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter à l'URI <https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. Érudit offre des services d'édition numérique de documents scientifiques depuis 1998.

Pour communiquer avec les responsables d'Érudit : info@erudit.org

la fondation, les déménagements, les modes de gestion, le rôle des Filles de la Sagesse, les liens avec l'Université de Montréal, etc. Les six autres portent chacun sur un thème particulier. Il s'agit, dans l'ordre, du financement, des patients, du rôle des bénévoles, du personnel médical (médecins et infirmières), du personnel paramédical, et des employés de soutien. L'accent est donc mis avant tout sur les groupes qui ont été au cœur de la vie de cet hôpital. Au départ, l'auteure a donc fait des choix; mais ceux-ci ne sont pas expliqués dans l'introduction; le titre, lui non plus, ne laisse pas présumer du contenu du livre. En somme, il s'agit d'une étude qui porte surtout sur l'histoire sociale de l'hôpital. D'ailleurs, la plupart des encadrés portent sur des groupes et des personnalités; ces encadrés sont nombreux, intéressants et bien faits.

Ce livre aborde ainsi un aspect peu connu de l'histoire de cet hôpital et il constitue un complément aux études de Madeleine des Rivières et de Nicole Forget sur Justine Lacoste-Beaubien, à celle d'Aline Charles sur le bénévolat à Sainte-Justine, ainsi qu'à la thèse de doctorat de Rita Desjardins sur l'évolution de la pédiatrie à Sainte-Justine.

L'auteure a eu accès à toutes les sources disponibles sauf les procès-verbaux du Bureau médical et du Conseil médical (p.14). Les faits rapportés sont nombreux; par contre, il est parfois difficile d'en voir la pertinence ou le sens. En fait, le livre n'a pas vraiment de fil conducteur; il consiste plutôt en une collection de faits sur les différents thèmes étudiés. La mise en contexte n'aide pas, elle non plus, à saisir l'importance de plusieurs de ces faits, car elle a été faite d'une façon rapide, trop sommaire. Par exemple, il aurait fallu faire état de l'évolution du réseau hospitalier de Montréal au XXe siècle. Sainte-Justine n'était pas, durant ces années, le seul établissement de Montréal où on admettait les enfants catholiques francophones. D'autres en recevaient aussi, bien que probablement en moins grand nombre : l'hôpital Notre-Dame, l'hôpital Pasteur, l'hôpital Saint-Luc, et peut-être d'autres. On s'attendrait donc à avoir des informations plus précises sur l'importance de Sainte-Justine dans ce réseau et à ce que l'auteure explique plus précisément en quoi il « se distinguait nettement des autres institutions hospitalières » (p. 314).

Si l'ouvrage montre bien comment certains facteurs ont influencé l'histoire de cet hôpital, comme la laïcisation du personnel, la syndicalisation des employés et l'intervention de l'État, d'autres, par contre, sont absents ou sont évoqués de façon trop rapide. On sait par exemple que les développements de la bactériologie, de l'hygiène, de l'obstétrique, de la diététique, etc., ont transformé considérablement les structures et la vie des hôpitaux au cours du XXe siècle. L'auteure s'en tient sur ces points à des considérations très générales de sorte qu'il est difficile, à partir de son texte, de se faire une idée relativement précise au sujet de quand et comment ces changements ont eu lieu à Sainte-Justine. Ont-ils été vécus difficilement? Ont-ils eu lieu plus tôt qu'ailleurs? De façon différente?

En somme, l'étude montre peu comment l'histoire de cet hôpital s'inscrit dans celle de la ville de Montréal, dans celle du réseau

hospitalier québécois et dans celle de la médecine au XXe siècle. Le lecteur est plutôt laissé à lui-même sur ce plan.

Par ailleurs, diverses affirmations auraient pu être plus étoffées. À plusieurs reprises, l'auteure insiste sur le fait que l'hôpital Sainte-Justine a toujours voulu être un lieu d'excellence (p. 13), « à la fine pointe des développements de la médecine » (p. 305), et qu'il a été « à l'avant-garde des établissements pédiatriques » (p. 314). Cela correspond probablement à la réalité, mais l'auteure ne commente pas assez les faits qui lui permettent de faire ces affirmations. Il aurait d'ailleurs été intéressant de trouver dans ce livre un tableau rappelant les grandes dates de l'histoire de Sainte-Justine.

Le livre se lit bien; on y trouve de nombreuses photos, des encadrés, une chronologie, une bibliographie et un index. Il intéressera surtout les spécialistes de l'histoire des hôpitaux et ceux qui ont un intérêt particulier pour l'histoire de cet hôpital.

Jacques Bernier
Université Laval

Green, Adam. *Selling the Race: Culture, Community and Black Chicago, 1940–1955*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 280 pp.

Much literature exists regarding the role played by Martin Luther King Jr. and the tragic death in 1955 of Emmett Till in the creation of a black cultural identity. Adam Green, however, argues that the framework for a self-conscious single black culture on a national level actually took shape in the 1940s. Focusing on Chicago's African American community between 1940 and 1955, Green presents blacks as actors as opposed to simply victims. This is done by presenting a more complex urban experience whereby a cultural identity was used to overcome racial discrimination. By engaging with and embracing modernity, African Americans combined culture and commerce in post-migration Chicago to transform their collective identity. As Green states: blacks during this period "engendered a unique sense of group life and imagination, restructuring ideas of racial identity and politics that remain influential today" (1).

Each chapter focuses on cultural forces and events in Chicago that places this city at the core of an emerging black national identity. Green begins with a chapter revealing the desires, successes, and failures of the most ambitious African American national exposition, the American Negro Exposition of 1940. While the intent was to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, the exposition was characterised as a cultural and financial failure and has been almost erased from twentieth century America history. Nevertheless, Green argues that as the first attempt to foster interest and efforts at cultural self-awareness, it laid the groundwork for what was to come in the following decade and a half.

Green then moves on to trace the development of Chicago's black music scene and reveals that it became a form of

expression used to emphasize common lived experiences. While musicians like Mahalia Jackson, Louis Jordan, and Muddy Waters were initially heard in Chicago night clubs, their music was soon heard on radios across the country. These musicians not only became popular and wealthy but their engagement in the commercialization of their music led to a commercialization of black culture. Music was the “original black culture industry in the city and perhaps in the country as well” (13) and it was where a connection between cultural entrepreneurship and collective racial imagination emerged.

The following two chapters that deal with print media are where Green’s argument is most explicit and convincing. Claude Barnett’s Associated Negro Press succeeded in broadening the impact of local news stories onto the national scene and vice versa, therefore tightening the connection between the local and the national. Barnett believed that this tightening of relations would generate a more empowered black public consciousness. But where Barnett failed due to his old ambassadorial style, John Johnson’s publishing company succeeded because of its more open and varied staff. Johnson’s *Ebony* magazine featured celebrities and high-end consumer goods so as to appeal to a more financially successful class of African Americans and has consequently been characterised as elitist. *Jet* magazine, sister magazine and edgier version of *Ebony*, has historically received much credit for uniting African Americans against racial discrimination because of its publication of a photo of Emmett Till’s brutalized body. Green argues that ultimately, however, it was *Ebony* more than *Jet* or ANP that transformed black American consciousness and created a homogenous national African American identity. It led to a transformation in “notions of race within the collective imagination of blacks at the time” and therefore pushed new notions of community based on race and nation (143). Through a detailed discussion of the magazine’s writers, editors and content, Green identifies *Ebony* as a source promoting a mission of activism. What is lacking in this discussion is the issue of class relations among blacks since much of the content and images presented in *Ebony* were undeniably out of reach of many African Americans.

The fifth chapter deals with the mid-1950s integration of blacks into white public housing in Chicago and the African American response to the brutal murder of a Chicago boy, Emmett Till, while visiting family in Mississippi in 1955. While many historians perceive the death of Emmett Till as initiating an African American consciousness and launching the civil rights movement, Green argues that it marked a transition between the two since a national African American identity had already been created through music and print media prior to his death. The incident emphasised the connection between black in Chicago and across the country. It thus became, for Barnett, Johnson and others, a means by which to raise awareness and consciousness about the conditions and discrimination they experienced and it served as a platform on which to fight for improvements on both the local and national front. Rather than remain silent in the face of violence, the negative experience and the availability

of national communication networks were used to fight for better conditions.

In this last chapter Green presents a strong and convincing argument for the power of images as he discusses how Till’s open casket photo served to evoke a sense of anger at the conditions of African Americans. Yet he does not apply this same analytical rigour to the many other powerful images that are presented throughout the book. If analysed closely, many images could have served as significant sources to corroborate his argument. An example of this is a photo in chapter five where the caption reads: “Police officer watches an unidentified white child throw rocks at Donnie Howard.” Although Green examines the difficulties encountered by the Howard family when they moved into a white public housing sector, the image is a powerful example of not only adult discrimination but also the extent to which whites were being socialized from a very young age to view blacks as inferior. Knowing that it came from the Claude Barnett papers, one is also left wondering who took the picture, why it was taken and for what was it used?

Overall, however, Green adds greatly to our understanding of twentieth century black Chicago, music, press, and most importantly he offers a strongly convincing argument of the important role played by Chicago’s black community in the emergence of a national African American identity through a redefined definition of community in the 1940s and early 1950s. In emphasising that Chicago’s urban environment served as a site of creativity for its black community, Green reveals the various dynamics within local communities that help shape group identities. However his focus on Chicago does not in any way render this a community bound study, rather it is a study of the connections that were drawn between communities and the impact they had on one another.

Nancy Rebelo
Concordia University

Joshua M. Zeitz, *White Ethnic New York: Jews, Catholics, and the Shaping of Postwar Politics*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. 296 pp.

Joshua Zeitz’s lucid and provocative book about the centrality of ethnicity in post World War II New York promises to serve as a starting-point for significant further research. After a generation of scholarship that emphasized the whitening and weakening of European ethnicity in the middle decades of the twentieth century, Zeitz revives the earlier notion that (as stated by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan): “the point about the melting pot . . . is that it did not happen. At least not in New York.” Zeitz positions ethnicity as a counter-balance to scholarship that has productively, but sometimes reductively, emphasized race. As Zeitz puts it: “Race explains a good deal about postwar politics, but not everything” (7). “Whiteness,” he asserts, “did not equal sameness” (5). Divisions among white ethnics—and particularly the “highly salient cultural differences”