

COMMENTS

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Dr. Seth M. Scheiner, Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University, is the author of a number of articles and books including *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865-1920*; *Reconstruction: A Tragic Era?*; and *The Black American: Interpretive Readings*.

HISTORIANS have frequently been criticized for their reluctance to use models. Some historians argue that the nature of historical study and its data makes the use of models difficult if not inappropriate. Whatever the merits of both sides of the argument, more historians are employing models in their work. Here Ronald Foresta, a geographer, and Charles Stephenson, a historian, present papers dealing with models.

Models do present certain dangers. This is no argument against their use, but a warning to scholars to be aware of the pitfalls that models may present. One danger is that after successfully challenging a particular model, a researcher is left with little else. Ronald Foresta has raised serious reservations regarding the utility of David Ward's model for his subject, but he does not provide us with a clear alternative. His substitution of "a fine-grained transformation of the residential community" of the downtown for Ward's "residential evacuation of the city's core" is not very clear and it does not present a model.

There is a second pitfall. Too often preoccupied with testing a particular model, the researcher may limit his perspective. To put it another way, the author may let the model's creator lay out the rules of the game. In his determination to test the Ward thesis, Foresta has neglected some recent studies of nineteenth-century cities that maintain that place of work provides the single best explanation for residential patterns. William Yancey and a number of researchers using the data compiled by the Philadelphia Social History Project argue that most workers lived within one-half mile of their places of employment.¹ They assert that place of work tells us more about residential patterns than ethnicity. Margaret Marsh in her study of West Philadelphia—an area of the city separated from the Central Business District by the Schuylkill River—reports that West Philadelphia working-class residents were drawn to that area by employment opportunities, not the cheaper rents or the unavailability of housing in the inner city. Many of the Irish residents, for example, worked in the stockyards and brickyards located in West Philadelphia.²

My point is not so much to agree with the findings of Yancey and Marsh, but to propose an additional perspective for examining the residential patterns of boardinghouse residents. For Foresta makes only brief mention of the relationship between occupation and place of residence. He fails to develop his assertion that occupational changes "were

creating the population the boardinghouse was now serving." This brings us to another problem. Early in his paper, Foresta notes that Newark "was almost purely a child of the industrial revolution" and "had no mercantile phase to speak of." Yet he mentions neither a single industry nor the location of a single manufacturing shop. He does once mention "mechanical employment," a rather vague term, but the specific occupations he refers to are of the artisan or sales and services variety. Nor is it adequate to speak of white- or blue-collar employment. Is it possible that the residents of a single boardinghouse all worked in the same plant or industry? Were the boardinghouses very close to places of employment? If so, what are the implications? If the guest population of a boardinghouse worked in a single industry, did this have an effect on union activity? Was there a relationship between the boardinghouse population and associational activity in Newark? Or was the boardinghouse a substitute for such activities? In short: What was life like in the boardinghouse?

While Foresta's paper deals primarily with spatial aspects, he does touch on other aspects of boardinghouse life. Let me comment on some points that he mentions briefly, for they are worthy of further development.

Foresta argues that boarders made up a substantial segment of those moving from city to city—the so-called geographically mobile. Since it appears from other studies that boarders were young adults, his study of the boardinghouse may add weight to the contention that young, single males accounted for a substantial portion of those persons moving from city to city. The high rate of geographic mobility, then, may be quite common for unattached young males but far less important for married males over thirty and especially those over forty. By studying the boardinghouse and its relation to urban migration as part of the life cycle, we may gain greater insight into the entire question of geographic mobility.

On the subject of the life cycle, it would be fruitful to examine the age patterns of boardinghouse residents and operators. According to John Model and Tamara Hareven, lodging was a function of the life cycle. They found that about two-thirds of the boarders were under thirty, and that the majority of boarders lived in households headed by persons in their forties and fifties. In the end, they hypothesized that between one-third and one-half of all urban residents were likely to have either resided in or operated a boardinghouse at some point in their lives.

It should be pointed out that Model and Hareven studied lodgers, not just boardinghouses. As a result their group may be quite different

from that studied by Foresta. Still it would appear that their study raises questions that would be useful for the study of the boarding-house.³

There are also problems with the ethnic classifications used in the paper. Foresta divides the population of Newark into two broad categories—American-born and foreign-born. Then he divides the latter into subcategories according to place of birth. Given census classifications he had little choice in 1860; however, the 1880 census recorded the place of birth not only of each individual but of his or her parents. Foresta does not use this data. He appears to have placed the native-born boarders whose parents were foreign-born into his category of the American-born. As a result, his claim that German- and Irish-occupied boardinghouses had disappeared by 1880 offers a limited view of the makeup of the guest population. Since younger people were the majority of boarders, it may well be that in 1880 the sons of the German- and Irish-born boarders of the 1860s replaced their fathers. (This once again raises the question of the life cycle.) By 1880 second-generation immigrants accounted for a substantial portion of the urban population. In New Brunswick, for example, the children of Irish immigrants outnumbered persons of Irish birth by a three-to-two ratio. Placing the children of the foreign-born into a separate category could lead Foresta to find that his type-two boardinghouse, an enclave of “familiarity for immigrant boarders,” served a similar function for the young adult children of the foreign-born.

Charles Stephenson, in the text of his paper, deals with the historical and social-science literature of the community process; in the tables he shows that he has gathered a mass of data for Newark. Unfortunately, he does not adequately relate the Newark material to his theoretical and historiographical discussion. We learn little about Newark. More important, his paper does not show where Newark fits into the larger questions of class, culture, and ethnicity. Given the data Stephenson has collected on Newark and his knowledge of the secondary literature, one looks forward to a study where he will bring the two together.

Notes

1. William L. Yancey et al., "Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation," *American Sociological Review* 41 (June 1976): 391-403, and Stephanie W. Greenberg, "Industrial Location and Ethnic Residential Patterns in an Industrializing City: Philadelphia, 1880," paper presented at the First Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association, 1976.
2. Margaret Marsh, "The Transformation of Community: Suburbanization and Urbanization in Northern West Philadelphia, 1880-1930," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1974).
3. John Model and Tamara Hareven, "Urbanization and the Malleable Household: An Examination of Boarding and Lodging in American Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (August 1973): 467-79. This leads me to a question regarding Foresta's definition of a boardinghouse—"at least four adults who appeared to be unrelated to the family." Under this definition, he may be mixing people who happen to be lodgers or to take in boarders with inhabitants and operators of boardinghouses. The fact that a person told the census enumerator that he or she ran a boardinghouse may indicate an important difference from one who did not so declare. No doubt a man working as a carpenter as well as operating a boardinghouse would tell the census taker that he was a carpenter. Still under his definition Foresta may be loading the dice in one direction or another.

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