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Selma Berrol. *The Empire City: New York and its People, 1624-1996.* Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997. x + 184 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-95795-7.

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A Useful New Survey of New York City History

Within its 173 pages, Selma Berrol has presented a smoothly written narrative history of *The Empire City: New York and Its People, 1624-1996.* The book is divided into six equally spaced, chronological chapters, each followed by endnotes drawn from a wide array of secondary sources. Berrol, who has written previously about education and immigration in New York City, is Professor Emerita at Baruch College of The City University of New York.

Berrol's "unifying theme" for this four hundred year survey is the "symbiosis that has marked New York City's history from its earliest days. New York has been "a promising destination for people seeking a better life" and the city's "growth and physical environment...was stimulated by the needs and strength of newcomers" (pp. ix-x). More simply put, "the variety of people who have settled in New York City improved their lives and in the process, improved the city" (p. 170).

Synthesizing secondary sources, Berrol's emphasis is upon the "cheerful story," but she quickly adds, there "are also dark sides" to New York City's four year history (p. 178). Indeed, the symbiosis was "less apparent between 1945 and 1970" (detailed in Chapter Five) because of dramatic changes in the city's local economy, patterns of employment, and the increased tensions, even hostilities, between the diverse ethnic and racial groups that comprised significant parts if the population. And the following period, between 1970 and 1996 (covered in Chapter Six) only saw "a partial renewal of symbiosis."

Throughout the volume, Berrol has focused tersely, but effectively, on topics such as economic development. "The physical city, at all periods, was closely tied to the economic sector" (p. 178), immigration and migration patterns, transportation and mass transit, housing, schooling, poverty, and ethnic and racial relations. Many of these topics might have been more effectively presented had there been some strategically-placed maps and statistical tables.

If there is a weakness in this brief and selective survey, it is the use of the "symbiosis" unifying theme, since Berrol considers virtually anything during the four hundred years discussed an example of symbiosis.

Some examples:

"The symbolic relationship between the vast numbers of people, who provided the workers and consumers that enabled New York to grow and prosperity itself which attracted still more men and women (who were oppressed and depressed in their native lands) to come to the city that seemed to offer them survival and advancement." (p. 50)

"In another example of immigrant-city symbiosis, Tammany's success in mid-nineteenth century New York was not due to Tweed alone, but also to the huge number of immigrant voters who were wooed with much-needed economic help (including jobs) and reciprocated by voting for the machine's candidates." (p. 65)

"...the loss of some manufacturing plants (in the 1920s) was not a serious blow to the city but does, once more, illustrate the symbiotic nature of European immigration to New York. When few unskilled workers were available to work for low wages, some factories moved away, but the need for laborers in other areas of the economy kept new arrivals employed." (p. 106)

In a four-page bibliographical essay, Berrol surveys the major secondary works, suggesting her use of dozens of monographs, and concludes that there was a need for a more recent brief survey of New York City than *A Brief History of New York City* written by George Lankovich and Howard Furer in 1984. But it is hard to tell for whom this book is intended, since its $49.95 cost makes it unlikely to be used as a text and its academic tone and absence of any illustrative materials limits its general marketability.

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