

tion produced an identity of interest that over-rode the sectional interest. As Davison points out the large scale of operations and their growing complexity meant a change in social relations and a narrowing of opportunities for social mobility. It was no longer so easy for the young clerk or talented mechanic without contacts or capital to rise in the social scale. They may have felt similar discontents.

It is Davison's argument that any such discontent in Melbourne in the eighties was diffused by the suburbs. They acted as a safety-valve, offering a stake in prosperity, a high level of material comfort, the advantages of being close to the city yet away from urban congestion and pollution. In the eighties suburban building went on at a great pace. Tramways and railways pushed the city to its outer limits. Melbourne had one of the highest home ownership rates in the world. This suburban expansion was related to economic development, to emotional longings (suburbanism was 'the soul's defence against the metropolis', p.137) but also to the demographic structure of Melbourne. The sons and daughters of the gold rush founders of Victoria were coming of age, coming of marriageable age. They had thoroughly imbibed the ideals of a property-owning democracy and wanted property and homes of their own. They provided the dynamic for suburban growth.

Part I of Davison's study focuses, for the most part, on the men of Melbourne. Women worked in industry, mostly as its victims, in sweated piece work; they were invading the offices. However their real place is in Part II—the suburbs. Father and son belong to the public world; mother and daughter to the private world of home and garden. The suburban life of the housewife is sympathetically, if too fleetingly, discussed.

In the early 1890s Melbourne fell from its great height. The property boom was over, the firms allied to construction that had risen so high in the eighties, fell the hardest. Marriage rates declined, the bankruptcy rate increased, people left the city. The social evils of the old world cities were uncovered or revealed themselves. Unemployment, slum housing, poverty provided the Victorian pamphleteers with details as lurid as one could find anywhere in London or New York. Marvellous Melbourne was facing its nemesis. The subsequent reaction against urban life is a partial explanation of the popular legend of the Australian out-back as the real heart of Australian development.

There can be few Ph.Ds which have been turned into books as readable as this one. Davison handles the vignette with ease and point—the Exhibition of 1880 is an extremely effective setting for the entire decade. He writes well, the diagrams and photographs complement the text, and the design and layout of the book make it a splendid presentation.

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Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia. By Michael Stenson. University of Queensland Press, 1980. xii, 234 pp. Aust. price \$15.95.

MICHAEL STENSON won a Commonwealth Scholarship to the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, in 1965. During the tenure of his scholarship he not only

worked in the conventional archival ways that historians do, but he lived with and among the people whose past he was studying much as an anthropologist might, learning their language and their customs, and forging lasting personal bonds in the process.

From that first period of fieldwork Michael Stenson wrote *Industrial Conflict in Malaya: Prelude to the Communist Revolt of 1948* (published by Oxford University Press in London in 1970). A decade later we have this posthumously published *Class, Race and Colonialism in West Malaysia*. Those administering the Michael Stenson Memorial Fund who made the decision to subsidize publication were quite right in assuming this to be the most appropriate and useful memorial to him.

In many ways the book is Michael's intellectual autobiography: it summarizes his journey towards an ever more sophisticated and ideologically-based understanding of Malaysian realities both past and present. His earlier book accepted for the most part the conventional plural society model for analysing Malayan society, but in his present preface he confessed that he had come to the view that the concept of a plural society made up of separate 'communities' begged so many questions, both cultural and political, that it was no longer of any use to him. Instead he proposed to examine the political economy of West Malaysia as a whole, and in particular the ways in which its development had been affected by the evolution of international capitalism. In this approach he was strongly affected by the critiques of third-world under-development of such writers as G.L. Beckford, G. Kay, J.J. Puthuchearu and E.L. Wheelwright.

It is true that he continues to focus particularly on the community he knew best — the Indians — but he uses them as a prism through which to view the workings of the social and economic whole. In this second book he argues that within and between the communal interstices of the plural society of West Malaysia lie the conceptually and analytically more useful realities of class divisions and class solidarities. He acknowledges that the racial category cannot be set aside entirely when one comes to view Malaya's history, but for explanatory purposes he argues that only an exploration of the forces of international capitalism makes any sense of colonial, and indeed post-independence developments.

It is a persuasive argument, carefully and coherently presented. But Mike Stenson was too good an historian and too concerned with particularities and precision to sacrifice detail inordinately to the demands of large-scale generalization or theory-building. We have therefore a most satisfying balance between the demands of a tight theoretical and explanatory framework on the one hand, and all the variety and nuance that the modern history of Malaya provides on the other.

It is too a cumulatively depressing book, for Michael Stenson argues that those in power in independent Malaysia are no more eager to free themselves from their neo-colonial status — militarily, economically, and culturally — than were their timidly nationalistic precursors. Perhaps reading this book might cause them to ponder their ways and to change them.

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