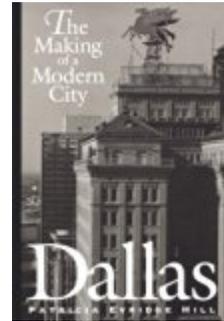


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Patricia Evridge Hill. *Dallas: The Making of a Modern City*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996. xxix + 240 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-292-73103-5; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-292-73104-2.

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The Evolution of Dallas's Political Culture

Patricia Evridge Hill has provided historians a valuable addition to the existing literature on the urban South and Southwest. Although Dallas today is viewed as a bastion of political conservatism, Hill argues that this is a phenomenon of the post-1920s period. Focusing her attention on Dallas' political life between 1880 and 1940, she convincingly argues for the presence of a "radical alternative" in local politics before the Depression which sought to promote "cooperation, education, and the empowerment of producers" (p. xxvii). Both the Populists and Socialists, as well as organized labor, generally received middle-class support for a consensual definition of "fairness," which privileged urban expansion and public services for the residents of all sections of the city.

Yet, by the late 1920s, a new generation of business leaders came to dominate local political affairs, in part because of their ability to minimize intra-group differences and, thus, to present a united front on issues. Divisions between conservative and more radical labor unionists aided their rise to power. Hill argues that this new group sought to control "the politics of competition and cooperation by ignoring those issues which fostered intra-class feuds and by promoting only those on which there was a general consensus among business leaders" (p. xxviii). Their strategy involved the ruthless suppression of organized labor in the 1920s and 1930s. The creation of the Dallas Citizens Council in 1936, which dominated local political life up to the 1970s and is still a political force today, symbolized their ascendance.

Hill relates the setpieces of U.S. history, such as Populism and the Progressive movement, to local events. She notes the spread of Populism from the surrounding countryside to Dallas, and maintains that its greatest legacy was in uniting a diverse coalition of trade unionists, farmers, African Americans, and radicals, who worked for enhanced public services, a better position for producers, and civic fairness even after the collapse of the Populist party. Some former Populists eventually migrated into the Socialist party, although racial hostilities and attitudes toward U.S. participation in World War I divided them. According to Hill, many early Dallas Socialist leaders came from the native-born middle class or from trade unionist backgrounds, and she provides some biographical information on individual leaders, but a more detailed examination of both the leadership and the rank-and-file would have been useful.

Women played important roles in the development of Dallas' political culture. Hill's discussion of the efforts of upper middle-class and wealthy clubwomen to moderate their husbands' devotion to unrestricted growth by promoting the spread of public services to poorer Dallasites adds to previous work by Jacquelyn McElhane and Judith N. McArthur (see essays by Jacquelyn McElhane and Judith N. McArthur in Fane Downs and Nancy Baker Jones (eds.), *Women and Texas History: Selected Essays* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1993)). In addition, Hill provides a gendered account of labor activity in the 1930s, pointing to the prominent role of female unionists and the difficulties they faced convincing

the middle class of the propriety and necessity of working outside the home.

There are a couple of weaknesses in Hill's argument. Although she repeatedly refers to Dallas' "elite," she fails to provide a precise definition of who is included in this group. For example, in her discussion of the evolution of the Citizens Association, formed in the early 1900s by local businessmen committed to the adoption of a commission form of government, a more detailed analysis of their social and geographic backgrounds, as well as their role in the local and regional economy, would have enriched her discussion. It is never clear whether she considers elite status to be a result of individuals' position within the local economy, wealth, family ties, participation in civic affairs, or a mix of the above.

Curiously, although she discusses the 1920s and 1930s as a transformative period in Dallas politics, she does not include an analysis of the effects of the New Deal and business hostility to Franklin D. Roosevelt in helping to usher in these changes. Although she provides graphic descriptions of the difficulties that union organizers faced locally, her failure to address the connection between

national and local events leaves the reader with many unanswered questions. Given the favorable national climate for union activity, for instance, why did Dallas labor leaders not garner more support from the federal government? Why did the NLRB not become more of a potent force locally? Perhaps, the answer lies in FDR's desire to maintain the strength of the Democratic party nationally, even if it meant accommodating more conservative state and local officials on local issues. Hill has missed an important opportunity to further our understanding of the relationship between national and local policymakers.

Despite these shortcomings, Hill has provided a lively and valuable study which will interest historians of many fields, including labor, women, African American, Populism, Progressivism, Socialism, and urban politics and development. It would make a worthy addition to reading lists for undergraduate courses on these topics.

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