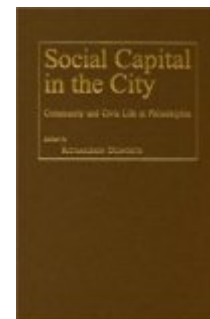


Richardson Dilworth, ed.. *Social Capital in the City: Community and Civic Life in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. xi + 240 pp. \$88.50, cloth, ISBN 978-1-59213-344-4.



Reviewed by John Hepp

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This interesting multidisciplinary volume of ten essays confronts the slippery yet popular concept of "social capital" by looking at civic and voluntary groups in Philadelphia over the last 130 years. As with all collections of essays, this work begs the question whether the book as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts and in this volume's case it is a toss-up. All the individual chapters are well-written and interesting case studies and most would make strong articles (a few, however, lack sufficient scholarly and historical context to stand alone as articles), but each treats and defines social capital differently. In this divergence lies both the work's strength (it clearly illustrates the slipperiness of the concept of social capital for people new to the term) and its weakness (it fails to go beyond problematizing the concept to offer a coherent view of either the city or the value of social capital in understanding the city).

In a collection of essays, it is largely the work of either the introduction or the conclusion to tie the disparate chapters together into a single entity. The introduction (by editor Richardson Dilworth) is fairly short and gives brief summaries

of all the essays along with a short discussion of social capital. The introduction, which includes the only map of the city, helps set the context for the following essays but may not give enough information for people unfamiliar with Philadelphia to understand the chapters fully. The conclusion, written by political scientists Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg, is a fascinating essay on "the declining political value of social capital" in twentieth-century America that makes little use of the preceding chapters (p. 209). All essays are mentioned, but most of the key evidence for the conclusion comes from sources outside the volume. On the one hand, the conclusion does help set the book in a context (albeit a limited one, largely of interest to political scientists and political historians); on the other hand, it fails to adequately engage the disparate stories told in the previous chapters and serves more as an eleventh and final essay than a summation of the work.

What in fact ties most of the ten chapters together is Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), mentioned by all but one author. The one excep-

tion is Jennifer Lee's look at the problems confronting African American entrepreneurs in New York and Philadelphia. Each author, however, deals with Putnam's ideas in a different way. Some chapters, such as those by Jerome Hodos on the Centennial and by Barbara Ferman on Temple University's role in the city, explicitly develop Putnam's work and how it applies to their topics. Others give little more than a nod to Putnam, mentioning the work in a footnote. All told, however, Putnam's concern with the breakdown of social institutions in late twentieth-century America and its effect on community and politics is the framing mechanism for this volume.

For readers interested in the concept of social capital, this book works well as a whole. In particular, advanced undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars new to this idea will find the volume useful in applying the concept to a variety of specific situations in different ways. Those unfamiliar with Philadelphia may struggle a bit, but virtually any general history of the city, like Russell Weigley's *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (1982), can fill in the details. For those who are familiar with the history of the City of Brotherly Love and interested in social capital, this volume is enlightening.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Social Capital in Historical Perspective," consists of three essays, two of which are solely historical in nature (the Centennial and late nineteenth-century politics), while the third examines community involvement in Wissahickon Park from 1895 to the present. The two essays in the second part look at urban universities and the development of social capital. Part 3 consists of five chapters that look at neighborhoods and local institutions, with an emphasis on the late twentieth century. In each part, there are two chapters that examine similar issues from different perspectives, and these juxtapositions help to raise some interesting questions and add to the value of the volume as a whole.

Chapter 1, "The 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia: Elite Networks and Political Culture," is a good opening to both the book and part 1. In it, Jerome Hodos views the Centennial as a locus for cementing Republican Party rule in the city. This essay capably sites social capital in the literature. Mark Brewin links the decline in social capital to the decline in public politics during the late nineteenth century in chapter 2, "Bonfires, Fistfights, and Roaring Cannons: Election Day and the Creation of Social Capital in the City of Philadelphia." Hodos's and Brewin's chapters both look at shifts in late nineteenth-century Philadelphia political culture, but from two different perspectives; both use the concept of social capital to help develop the longer term consequences of their studies. The final chapter in part 1, David R. Contosta and Carol L. Franklin's "Community Advocacy and Volunteerism in Wissahickon Park, 1895-2005," traces the changing composition and leadership in a community organization over time. It serves, in part, as the transition from the first two essays that look at the nineteenth century to the remaining ones that are more focused on the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The two chapters that make up part 2, "Social Capital in Urban Education," use social capital to explore the roles played by the city's two largest universities--Temple and Pennsylvania--in the community. Barbara Ferman's examination of Temple centers largely on the university's viewpoint and sets the case study firmly in the broader literature on social capital. The title of chapter 4 makes clear its focus: "Leveraging Social Capital: The University as Educator and Broker." Chapter 5, Melina Patterson's "Community-Based Education in West Philadelphia: The Promise and Limits of Social Capital Production," is an excellent counterpoise to Ferman. Patterson illustrates the sometimes conflicting interests and goals of members of the Penn and West Philadelphia communities in a more detailed case study. The two essays taken together illustrate both the potential and the problems in university-neighborhood coopera-

tion, as well as different ways to conceptualize social capital.

The five chapters in part 3 provide an eclectic look at social capital in the late twentieth and (very) early twenty-first centuries. Michael Janson's "Credit Unions and Social Capital in Philadelphia" is a detailed investigation of an understudied community-based enterprise. It begins by exploring the need for credit in working-class communities in the early twentieth century and traces the development of federal credit unions in the city for the remainder of that century. It lacks, however, both the national context and an understanding of earlier community attempts to provide credit. In chapter 7, "The Comparative Disadvantage of African American-Owned Enterprises: Ethnic Succession and Social Capital in Black Communities," Jennifer Lee looks at the experiences of black, Korean and Jewish merchants in black communities in Philadelphia and New York. Part of a broader study, it is both fascinating and jarring. It is well written and well researched, but it is the only essay in the book not to use Putnam (it uses other sources for its development of social capital) and the only one to include evidence from non-Philadelphia communities in a significant way. The irony is the New York sources strengthen the chapter as a self-contained essay, but cause it to seem out of place in a volume so otherwise focused on Philadelphia. The next two chapters are the final example of the book juxtaposing two case studies of similar communities. Both deal with Kensington, a working-class neighborhood in lower Northeast Philadelphia that has struggled with de-industrialization for over a half century.

Judith Goode and Robert T. O'Brien consider Kensington on a macro level in their well-conceived and critical look at government and non-profit intervention in the community in chapter 8, "Whose Social Capital? How Economic Development Projects Disrupt Local Social Relations." Patricia Stern Smallacombe's "Rootlessness, Isolation, and Social Capital in an Inner-City White

Neighborhood" looks at a specific subgroup in Kensington in greater detail. The two essays play off each other nicely and each supplements the other in developing the value of social capital in such case studies. The final chapter, Valeria Harvell's "Wellsprings of Social Capital: African American Churchwomen in Philadelphia," is a fitting conclusion to the work. It engages Putnam well and places its late twentieth-century case study nicely within the literature on social capital.

Overall, this is a valuable collection of essays for those interested in exploring the use of social capital in understanding late twentieth-century Philadelphia. Its strength is its diversity of disciplinary perspectives. It is only a first step, however, as this is a multidisciplinary and not an interdisciplinary work in which the different disciplines might engage each other in meaningful ways.

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