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Raymond A. Mohl, ed. *The Making of Urban America*. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1997. x + 388 pp. \$28.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8420-2639-0; \$72.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8420-2637-6.

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## The Making of Urban America

For many of us who study urban history, it is the people—their lives, livelihoods, communities, and conflicts—which give cities their essential character. Raymond Mohl continues such an approach to U.S. cities in this second edition of *The Making of Urban America*. Much like the first edition, this volume seeks to provide a “framework for understanding the pattern of American urbanization” through the inclusion of recent essays in urban history. Mohl also provides an assessment of the intellectual scaffolding of the field through three chronological essays, carryovers from the earlier edition, and a final historiographical piece. The essays assembled here, all but two of which are new to this edition, highlight the central issues of social history as applied to the American city. Included are pieces on ethnicity, race, class, violence, culture, political access and accountability, and the meaning of suburbia. Mohl’s own approach to urban history is deeply tied to social history and this collection is very much a reflection of that perspective.

Opening the volume is a discussion of the preindustrial city. Mohl’s introduction takes us through familiar territory in raising arguments for the centrality of cities throughout American history while emphasizing the particular roles urban areas played in the colonial period and the early years of the new republic—supporting frontier settlement, linking regions to world markets, unleashing many of the forces which would spur on the revolution, and providing the fodder for industrialization. Mohl also stresses the presence of many of the problems more commonly associated with cities of more recent eras, those

related to immigration, transients, rapid growth, and ineffectual municipal governments.

Perhaps reflecting the nature of recent urban history for this period, the essays in this early section apply disparate levels of analysis which might send the average undergraduate running for a course on the Civil War. Gary Nash, for example, plunges into historiographical debates using the theoretical constructs of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* to make a case for the heterogeneity and social pluralism of preindustrial cities, while Mary Ryan tackles Jurgen Habermas in order to point out the democratizing effects of parades and similar forms of ritual on this diverse urban environment.

The other articles in this section should be more accessible to undergraduate and theory-weary readers. Timothy Gilfoyle argues that the brothel riots and violence against prostitutes in New York during this period were “emblematic of a new misogynistic attitude toward prostitutes and women in public life” which developed in tandem with the gender ideals encapsulated in the “cult of domesticity” (p. 47). Randall Miller’s essay tackles the old, old notion of “Southern distinctiveness” by looking at immigrant populations in the region’s cities. He finds that “immigration, cultural diversity, urban disorder, and class conflict all posed real threats to the slave holding way of life” in the ante-bellum period, despite the South’s continual denial of their existence (p. 67).

The second section, the strongest of the volume, tackles the industrial city of the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. Mohl's introduction stresses the myriad changes technology, capitalism, and new means of financing brought to urban America. Here readers are confronted with urban sprawl, social and physical segmentation (even fragmentation), and highly diversified economies. Mohl stresses the battles which arise in tandem with rapid changes as urban residents and institutions (especially bosses, reformers, city governments, affluent residents, and business leaders) struggled for political, geographic, and moral control of the city. For all of their impact on the urban environment, the enormous waves of immigration during this period are remarkably absent from Mohl's introduction, dismissed as "those who could not compete" (p. 100). In Mohl's eyes, it was ultimately the business interests who won this war as cities adopted gridiron models for development, despite their "monotonous sameness," and "economic success and individual achievement were valued over human welfare and the idea of community" (p. 100).

Clay McShane and Joel Tarr's essay on role of the horse in the industrial city and Daniel Czitrom's revisionist look at the world of big-city political bosses echo the themes of Mohl's introduction. McShane and Tarr are accomplished social historians, bringing alive in this essay the sights, sounds, and, most vivid, the smells of industrial cities. By tracing the role the horse, the authors are able to focus their attention on the most central urban institutions and systems, including "freight delivery, passenger transportation, food distribution, and police and ambulance services" (p. 106). Horses also provided fertilizer, energy, and, in some cases, even served as (shudder, shudder) raw material; they contributed to the dangerous conditions of cities of this era through accidents and pollution; and they served as a weathervane for the way technology, in replacing the horse function by function, re-worked all corners of urban life by 1920.

Daniel Czitrom's essay braves the crowded world of political bosses—both the teeming neighborhoods in which these bosses functioned and the well-worn path historians have taken to doing urban history through the study of bosses' machines. Refusing to endorse the conclusion that bosses and progressive reformers were sworn enemies (the argument favored by Mohl in the introduction to this section), Czitrom chooses instead to argue that Big Tim Sullivan of New York was actually a political pioneer. Sullivan combined both the worst elements of political bosses (at least from the perspective of progressives), profiting from vice trades, with social welfare efforts designed to aid immigrants and the city's poor and support for "progressive" reforms such as gun

control and women's suffrage.

The next three essays fill in where Mohl's introduction left off by examining the world of barrooms, shopfloors and dance halls, and working-class neighborhoods. Madelon Powers opens up the male world of the saloonkeeper, emphasizing the unique position this individual held in working-class communities as the middleman between "vote-seeking machine politicians and their liquor-industry allies on the one hand, and the nascent working class with its need for municipal services and assistance on the other" (p. 153). A code of reciprocity based on treating—and the meeting places and financial services offered by the local saloon—bound the barkeepers to their customers, as did similar economic and social backgrounds. Powers' conclusion that saloonkeepers consistently had the best interest of the working-class in mind while progressive reformers were never able to understand the needs of the community seems, in the end, a bit heavy handed, though all in all the article provides a useful glimpse at how many working-class men survived in an era when few city resources were offered to them or their families.

Kathy Peiss, in an article carried over from the first edition, surveys the many changes which transform women's work, drawing in larger numbers of female wage laborers and introducing them to shopfloor and leisure cultures—both of which could mediate the poor conditions and wages under which many women labored. Spliced together from Peiss' book, this essay lacks a coherent conclusion but does maintain the much of the force of her argument.[1] What is perhaps most disappointing is that the only piece which explicitly deals with women, in an anthology of new work in urban history, was originally published eleven years ago! From almost any angle, the inclusion of this essay, despite the intellectual merit of the piece itself, sends a clear message that work on urban women is not holding its own in the field of urban history. As Maureen Flanagan noted in a recent special edition of the *Journal of Urban History*, "women's ideas, actions, organizations, and presence within the city still remain largely unexamined." [2]

Dominic Pacyga's essay on Chicago's bloody riot of 1919 rounds out this section on the industrial city by reminding readers of the very real consequences of competition encouraged by the outrageous pace of growth around the turn of the century: urban violence. Like Czitrom's essay on bosses, this piece revisits familiar territory in an effort to make our understanding of just where and how the battle lines were drawn more complex and

specific. What Pacyga concludes is that the riot cannot be written off as the attack of white immigrants on the only group less powerful than themselves—new African-American arrivals from the South. The white working-class in Chicago was not that coherent. According to Pacyga, only the Irish seriously perceived Blacks and a threat and acted on those fears in summer of 1919. The Poles, who lived in the general vicinity of the riot and have often been mistakenly blamed for the riot, were too new to the city, having much in common with the Blacks and a tradition of solidarity which kept them divided from the Irish. In the end however, the riot changed the position of the Poles by introducing them to “the dominant middle-class racist ideology” of the early twentieth century.

Mohl’s introduction to the last section, the twentieth century city, focuses on the new patterns of growth produced by the post-industrial era. In the years after 1920, urban growth shifted from older industrial centers in the North and Midwest to cities in the sunbelt. Population growth, still rapid in this period, focused on areas outside of the city center, producing the “sprawling metropolitan areas” of today. This massive growth of suburbs started in the post-WWII era when new construction techniques, supportive government programs, the rise of the service sector, and increasing urban congestion encouraged middle-class and some working-class whites to take up residence outside of the city limits. Meanwhile, the inner cities declined rapidly as new waves of migrants, particularly Blacks and Hispanics, crowded into deteriorating urban centers just as the tax base declined dramatically with the loss of more affluent whites. The federal government intervened in the twentieth century as it never had before, but New Deal and Great Society programs had mixed results at best, and the cutbacks of the Reagan years destroyed many these programs altogether.

Two of the essays in this last section examine shifts in the ethnic/racial composition and their relation changes in the urban environment of the twentieth century city. George Sanchez examines the cultural trends within the Mexican-American community in Los Angeles during the 1920s, concluding that a rich music and radio consumer culture developed which catered to and was in turn shaped by this new ethnic market. Unlike the Harlem Renaissance, this outpouring of culture was a hybrid of ethnic and mainstream values supported almost completely by the Mexican-American community alone. Raymond Mohl picks up the thread of Hispanic immigration to U.S. cities in his examination of the relationship between two of Miami’s most important racial/ethnic

groups. Mohl traces the evidence which has fed the perception that Cuban immigrants to Miami have “won out” over African-Americans in the crucial arenas of economics, politics, geography, and even governmental support, and contributed to the several incidents of urban violence (p. 288). Ultimately, Mohl concludes that Miami remains a multicultural city with no melting pot in sight, experiencing many of the challenges of “diversity, tension, and change” fostered by the twentieth century’s new waves of immigration (p. 302).

Roger Biles and Arnold Hirsch tackle the complex world of urban politics in twentieth century cities. Roger Biles’ case study of Dallas during the Depression clearly endorses scholarship which stresses that there was little “new” in the New Deal. He also refutes recent theories that the New Deal aided the urban South in catching up to cities in other regions by stressing that federal programs which were administered locally left the pre-1930s political constituency and racial order largely in place. In the end, this article tells us more about the political and economic landscape of Dallas than the role of the federal government in battling the Depression, but that is, after all, his major point. Hirsch’s study compares Black mayors from Chicago and New Orleans in order to assess whether the ascendancy of racial minorities to the highest levels of municipal government, a phenomenon unique to the twentieth century, made any substantial difference in the battles against inner city decline. Despite the very different circumstances and personal styles of “Dutch” Morial and Harold Washington, Hirsch concludes that the only substantive changes introduced by these Black mayors were better access of Blacks to municipal resources and a tempering of police policies toward racial minorities.

In the final essay for this section, non-historians William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock take to task the recent obsession with “edge cities.” This provocative piece chides observers of suburbia for excusing the racial and economic hegemony of “contemporary suburbs” and instead “stressing the urbanized character of entire regions and their multi-nucleated form” (p. 311). Sharpe and Wallock argue that suburbs are, in the end, more flash than substance with a culture based around consumerism, a new “double-duty” ethic for women, and politics which “bear a superficial likeness to cities” but are mostly focused on maintaining the homogeneous nature of suburbs (p. 317). Not surprisingly, the authors conclude that, for all their growth in the last fifty years, suburbs have not become cities unto themselves. Whatever your take on their theories, most will agree Mohl

has wisely chosen a debate-sparking article to round out the anthology.

Raymond Mohl's historiographical essay at the end of the volume traces the genesis of urban history as a distinct subfield, giving a gracious nod to the new social history of the 1960s. He then goes on to provide copious descriptions of the history of a dozen or so divergent paths in urban history which have developed in recent years, providing citations for the research he has included in the earlier chronological pieces. This is essentially a re-run of the historiographical essay at the end of the first edition, with citations for research done since the mid-1980s added into the appropriate categories. Mohl has not, at least for the purposes of this volume, revised his conception of the various components of urban history and, in this regard, perhaps falls short of his goal to convey the state of field today.

Despite the few shortcomings noted, this volume should serve many of us well in the classroom. It is a testament to the diversity of topics, theories, and researchers who find a home in the field of urban history

today. The essays, by highlighting the lives of urban residents, convey the dynamism of American cities throughout each period and will complement readings on urban planning, architecture, and geography nicely. In the end, the essays written by Mohl show how the research of historians and other urbanists over the last forty years can flow together to form a coherent story of America's development and urbanization.

Notes:

[1]. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

[2]. Maureen A. Flanagan, "Women in the City, Women of the City," *Journal of Urban History* 23 (March 1997): 251-259.

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