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Daniel Eli Burnstein. *Next to Godliness: Confronting Dirt and Despair in Progressive Era New York City.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006. x + 200 pp. $38.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03024-6.

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Published on H-SHGAPE (September, 2007)

The awful and unsanitary state of nineteenth-century city streets is familiar territory not only to urban historians but even to the larger public, thanks to the period novels of Caleb Carr or film director Martin Scorcese's vivid, if inaccurate, *Gangs of New York* (2002). In order to convey what New York must have smelled like prior to the late-century sanitary reforms that are the subject of Daniel Eli Burnstein's *Next to Godliness*, I once dreamed of bringing to class what I came to call The Five Points Bucket, which would be filled with foul substances designed to approximate the noxious odors permeating the most congested parts of the city. It has since become something of a parlor game among friends to periodically add horrible things to the imaginary pail in hopes of replicating the stench. In the classroom I have settled for assigning passages from Alain Corbin's extraordinary *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (1986).

As Burnstein demonstrates so effectively, this was a matter of more than mere olfactory aesthetics. Many physicians of the day believed that a source of disease was "foul air" and "poisonous fumes," which could carry "germ dust," spreading typhoid, typhus, yellow fever, and tuberculosis not just among the poor on the Lower East Side, but throughout Manhattan. In this context, *Next to Godliness* provides a history of Progressive-Era efforts to clean New York City streets and rid them of residential waste; the old fruit, fish, and meat cast off by street peddlers; and of animal excrement. It does so through four separate, overlapping (and sometimes repetitive) chapters.

Burnstein begins with the 1907 strike of some 2,000 garbage collectors and street sweepers of the Department of Street Cleaning (DSC), and offers a description of how city politics and political corruption; law enforcement; workers' demands for relief from capricious enforcement of regulations and the arbitrary imposition of harsh fines; inter-ethic competition for jobs; and fear of disease among the public and the press played out in this urban drama. There are many moving parts in this rich account, although in the end it can be hard to discern which forces and factors mattered more than others, or to understand why the strike finally ended or why it ended when it ended.

Next we encounter the battles over the control and mission of the DSC, and a history of George Waring, its commissioner from 1895-98. Here, too, we get a nicely detailed account, and insight into how Waring managed to extract money from the city to expand his budget for street cleaning and snow removal, and institute a labor arbitration program; as well as his successful, if short-lived, attempts to professionalize the department and weaken the power of Tammany, and even some formative efforts to integrate the DSC.

An examination of efforts to regulate the operation of pushcart peddlers follows, and it is at its best when highlighting how sanitary reform efforts were colored both by pressure from store-front businesses to remove the peddlers as competition, and by the failure by many to consistently and fully appreciate the essential role the pushcarts played in the political economy of the ghetto. As in the previous chapter, Burnstein endeavors to locate these battles within Tammany politics, but because he does not provide the reader with a more coherent overview of that political landscape, it can become difficult, as was also true with the previous chapter, to understand how and why these battles matter.

Finally, Burnstein turns his attention to "juvenile street cleaning leagues," the chapter that does the most to place the events and actors of particular concern to him in the context of other similar reforms. These are ultimately stories about class-based battles over public space–who would control the street, and whose "morals" would guide the regulation of it; examining late-century programs that sought to inculcate middle-class values in immigrant children and to enlist them as enforcers of new norms of cleanliness; this chapter throws these contests into sharpest relief.

Burnstein wants to use these case studies to gain broader insight into the Progressive Era. As he writes, "the progressives fashioned a comprehensive social vision that applied to practically all social problems.... The quest for clean streets serves as a valuable lens for understanding that vision as it applied to the urban experience and social reform" (p. 3). But his failure to make those connections more explicit, or to turn his attention more systematically to other reformers and other reform campaigns, limits the book's opportunities for success on this front. By writing too often of "the progressives" and treating them sometimes (but not always) as an undifferentiated mass, united in method and aspiration, we lose the opportunity to critically examine these reformers in relation to other Progressive efforts. How do they compare to other city-dwellers fighting for parks, playgrounds, and street lights, for building codes and tenement redesign, or against corrupt machine politics; to doctors, social workers, and other professions seeking a foothold in self-regulation; to the women forming and joining an array of private political, social, and cultural reform organizations; to businesses organizing for more power and influence with government and over labor; or to labor fighting for shorter days, better wages and safer working conditions?

More attention to such complexity could add depth to his accounts. For example, Burstein's narrative suggests that the garbage workers who walked off the job in 1907, and the public that supported their cause, had less concern about airborne disease than did their more distant, middle-class brethren. These notions of sanitation and health that Burnstein attends to differed in significant ways among the inhabitants of the city, and the perspective of the poorest residents–the objects of reform–might give us new insight into how and why New Yorkers were divided by geography, race, and ethnicity. I am sympathetic to Burnstein's belief that these New York City clean-streets campaigns can offer insight into the period, but remain unconvinced that there is, as he claims, a "comprehensive social vision" generalizable across such diverse actors (p. 3). I am not complaining that Burstein should have written a history of all reform efforts of the period, but an introductory or concluding chapter that explicitly places his campaigns in a broader context would help the reader better understand the connections Burstein has in mind. It is this absence, perhaps, of a theoretical or historiographic framework that often makes it difficult to know what to make of each chapter and the well-told stories that constitute them.

While Burnstein nicely draws attention to the difficulty in separating out reformers' genuine concern for public health (and their real, if unfounded, fear of foul-air-borne illness) from the more generalized fear of immigrants and their strange, unfamiliar ways, there is something defensive about his repeated efforts to ensure that we understand Progressive Era reformers as complex and ambivalent men and women, and that we move beyond mere claims of social control. Historians of the period have, of course, moved away from facile portraits of urban reformers, as Burnstein himself acknowledges (p. 120). But although he concedes that "within the past two decades" scholars have adopted more ambivalent and nuanced readings of reform and reformers, he then writes that, "nevertheless, many historians in the past forty years have conceptualized Progressive Era reformers as acting in ways consonant with the social control model." Too much of the book seems to ignore the more recent scholarship, and to argue against a historiographic straw man.

In his final chapter, Burstein asks us to consider the lessons that might be drawn from these campaigns by contemporary "progressives," and it is here where the book is least successful. Among Burstein's claims is that, "a revival of concern among today's progressives for moral issues and for 'the stability of the social order"' (p. 145) would shield them from political attack. He recommends that more attention be paid to programs that would help "individuals make wiser moral decisions (for example, with regard to such issues as teen pregnancy)" (p. 146). He calls explicitly for a new kind of "Social Gospel," as well as a revival of "municipal housekeeping" approaches that connect physical decay with social disorder (p. 148). Such programs, he concludes, "need not degenerate into a tool for stigmatizing the poor or merely policing their behaviors" but could legitimize government social programs in furtherance of "fostering a self-disciplined population" (p. 148). It is here where his repeated insistence that we see more than mere social control at work in turn-of-the-twentieth-century reformers begins to make some sense, since he argues for something we might identify with that moralistic and individualistic approach to poverty and urban reform. But whatever the merits of such approaches, Burnstein misses the fact that this is precisely how one might describe the past decades of social policy. At least since Charles Murray's *Losing Ground* (1984), we have often, as a matter of national policy, adopted the moral approach Burnstein yearns for, most clearly evident in the welfare reforms of 1996. It is evident in debates about issues Burnstein would have us attend to, like teen pregnancy, with the consequence that teen pregnancy is treated as a moral and political crisis despite the fact that rates have been

declining for nearly two decades. What are "zero tolerance" and "broken windows" approaches to community policing if not renewed efforts at municipal housekeeping? And there is little evidence that the Clinton administration's adoption of such "centrist" approaches shielded them from political attack. It is a muddled chapter, and one that takes away from the more thoughtful work that precedes it.

If this book is to have a chapter that attempts to draw lessons for today (and we could argue over whether it should), there would seem more profitable areas of inquiry. To take one example, as Burnstein notes, street peddlers were often essential components of poor neighborhoods' survival strategies, providing a better range of goods, more cheaply and more easily accessible. They continue to be, and the battles he describes over peddler licensing, and efforts to concentrate them in isolated markets, echo more recent struggles over the New York City street vendors who have been facing similar battles with merchants, the police, and city government. Such an examination of the manner in which public space and the regulation of it has (and has not) changed since the Progressives would seem more consistent with the focus of the book.

Nonetheless, there is still much to recommend *Next to Godliness*. Any of the four substantive case studies could be useful in courses that touch upon late nineteenth-century urban reform movements, and the book raises good questions in those contexts about the challenges contemporary historians continue to face in making sense of the dual nature of reformers and reform movements.

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Citation: Stephen Pimpare. Review of Burnstein, Daniel Eli, *Next to Godliness: Confronting Dirt and Despair in Progressive Era New York City*. H-SHGAPE, H-Net Reviews. September, 2007.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13573

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