

Adam Mack. *Sensing Chicago: Noisemakers, Strikebreakers, and Muckrakers.* Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015. xi + 161 pp. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-08075-3.



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Historian Adam Mack has written a stimulating work of sensory history that explores the experiences of late-1800s and early-1900s Chicagoans. In *Sensing Chicago: Noisemakers, Strikebreakers, and Muckrakers*, a volume in the University of Illinois Press's Studies in Sensory History series, Mack shows how historians gain a greater understanding of the prototypical "shock city" by examining accounts relating to the five senses: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and haptic (touch). Mack argues that "the sensations [Chicagoans] encountered on city streets, workplaces, and leisure spots helped people think through the perils and prospects of Chicago's growth and the metropolitan age more generally" (p. 2).

Each chapter focuses on a well-known episode in Gilded Age and Progressive Era Chicago. The first chapter analyzes the stench of the Chicago River in the mid-1800s, which prompted a "civic health" crusade to prevent the putrid waters of this "Chicago Styx" from contaminating Lake Michigan, source of the city's drinking wa-

ter. Chapter 2 portrays the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 as a chaotic, "multisensory experience," which "threw up an array of strange sensations that mocked the civic elite's attempts to control Chicago's sensory landscape" (p. 35).

The next two chapters place special emphasis on social class. Chapter 3 focuses on the 1894 Pullman Strike. After the labor unrest of the 1870s, sleeping-car baron George Pullman sought to impose his own elite sense of order by crafting a visually appealing company town in which the stench and clamor of working-class life might be muted in favor of a more refined mode of living. The strike, ultimately, showed that workers rebelled against their employer's overbearing nature. In the particularly fascinating fourth chapter, Mack shows how Upton Sinclair portrayed modern industry as alienating workers from their senses. Sinclair—who virtually banished sensory enjoyment from his own middle-class life—tended to characterize working-class immigrants as "animalistic sensory beings" whose "coarse senses embod[ied] their class, ethnic, and racial identi-

ties" (p. 73). Yet his solution was a starkly sensation-less socialist utopia of the mind. As Mack astutely notes, Sinclair ended his 1906 muckraking novel *The Jungle* "by describing an oddly disembodied socialist revolution ... limited to the intellectual terrain on which he was most comfortable" (p. 73). Sinclair's "broad and sterile picture of the socialist future" (p. 93) may have been calculated to foment an intellectual revolution, but his sickeningly vivid portrait of the meatpacking plants ended up inspiring consumer reform instead.

The final chapter unearths the story of the Coney Island-style attraction that blended the disorderly pop-culture pleasures of the 1893 Columbian Exposition's Midway Plaisance with the refined, calibrated style of Daniel Burnham's "White City." Chicago's White City amusement park, which opened in 1905, demonstrated how "architects of mass consumer culture provoked the senses to further their own financial and political agendas" (p. 97). Patrons were not just "spectators" at such amusement parks; they became immersed in what Mack calls "a multisensory 'landscape of modernity'" (p. 103).

Sensing Chicago is well written and researched, peppered with quotations from the *Chicago Tribune* and other daily newspapers. Primary sources include archival collections from the Chicago History Museum; national periodicals like *Outlook* and *The Independent*; and contemporaneous books by Jane Addams and Theodore Dreiser, among others. He builds his argument on a solid base of studies about urban, cultural, sensory, and labor history. A gallery of turn-of-the-century images includes several full-color illustrations.

Mack successfully makes his case that by paying attention to the senses—or at least the accounts they inspired—historians gain a more textured understanding of a turn-of-the-century industrial city. For instance, he debunks those historians who argue that the Chicago River must not

have played a major role in perceptions of the city since it was not featured as prominently as Lake Michigan in visual images; Mack, though, clearly demonstrates that attention to olfaction shows that the river held a prominent place in narratives and critiques of late-1800s Chicago (p. 3). Of course, sensory history has its limits. Historians still have to rely on textual sources, since actual smells and tastes of the past no longer exist—and even if they did, present-day scholars could not experience them the same way that historical actors would have. Nevertheless, our understanding of late-1800s and early-1900s Chicago is enhanced through such analysis.

Mack admirably pays significant attention to class, showing that "urban elites" frequently "cast working-class immigrants as loud, dirty, and malodorous" (p. 5)—and imagined their own refined actions, tastes, sounds, and smells as the proper ones. Many of the primary sources that lead to this interpretation, however, were created by middle-class observers like Sinclair, which limits our understanding of how the working classes apprehended or expressed their own sensory lives. Attention to race is also limited, mainly to the chapter on White City.

Sensing Chicago will appeal to historians of the urban Midwest. The book's focus on Chicago is rather tight, which is understandable yet somewhat unfortunate. For example, chapter 2 ends with the 1871 reversal of the Chicago River's flow, which redirected the city's pollution and sewage toward the Mississippi by way of the Illinois River. One wonders how olfactory senses downstream reacted: did noses in Peoria or Pekin suddenly sense their new, less than savory, place within the hinterland of America's most quickly growing metropolis? Future studies could answer such questions for a broader Midwest.

Sensing Chicago is a carefully crafted book that enlivens our understanding of Gilded Age and Progressive Era Chicago. Mack's book will be appealing to historians of the Midwest, and will

hopefully prompt scholars to pay closer attention to sensory history and to ask new questions about the region's peoples and culture. To use a visual metaphor, such analyses may help us to see the turn-of-the-century Midwestern metropolis in a new light.

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