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Andrew R. Highsmith. *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan and the Fate of the American Metropolis.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 398 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-05005-8.

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After General Motors (GM) announced plant closures in the late 1990s, placards hanging outside the shuttered factories read, "Demolition Means Progress." Andrew R. Highsmith found the signs an apt metaphor for more than seven decades of tortuous efforts to revitalize Flint, Michigan, the Vehicle City. Spanning the Great Depression to the present, Highsmith delivers a wide-ranging exploration of the Herculean efforts to create a prosperous, thriving metropolis—and the inequalities produced by these efforts. At the heart of *Demolition Means Progress* is Highsmith's contention that urban renewal consistently created or hardened segregation and inequality. Pushing back against the popular narrative of urban decay and despair, Highsmith writes, "the driving forces in Flint's past … have always been renewal and reinvention more than decline and abandonment" (p. 6). Chapters explore familiar topics in post-World War II urban history, including Jim Crow on the shop floor and in the streets, residential segregation, educational inequalities, and discriminatory housing policies, but Highsmith weaves these familiar components together under the rubric of urban renewal, in the process creating an original and groundbreaking interpretation of metropolitan development and inequality.

Every renewal effort in the city and suburbs entailed a redistribution of resources—opportunities for segregation to shape the contours of the metropolis. Some of the first renewal efforts aimed at modernizing the ramshackle and unsanitary working-class suburbs, areas which had been redlined and excluded from Federal Housing Authority loans. General Motors engaged in many renewal efforts, creating new production facilities and shaping urban policy. Known by black activists as "GM Crow," the company created racial inequalities on the shop floor and failed to intervene in patterns of residential segregation (p. 101). GM's decision to locate new facilities in the suburbs during the 1950s marked not an abandonment of Flint, but an act of confidence that the company could leverage its political power to create metropolitan governance through incorporation of suburbs into the central city in the "Flint Plan." It was to be put before voters in 1958, yet the Michigan Supreme Court rejected the legality of the ballot proposal, signaling an end of the "metropolitan moment" and marking a significant turning point toward metropolitan fragmentation. In this and other examples, Highsmith challenges the regional models of corporate abandonment and capital flight from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt familiar from many histories of Midwestern cities.

Highsmith explores the consequences of housing policies, school administration, the development of pro-growth "suburban capitalism," highway development, and GM's renewal efforts in creating a greatly unequal and fractured metropolis. Efforts to revitalize the central city had destructive outcomes for the black residents of the city. Despite initially supporting the lofty promises of regeneration for the city, African Americans shouldered the burden of the bulldozer and its unfulfilled promises of slum clearance and highway development. Such destructive strategies destroyed black wealth in the city and left them vulnerable to the whims of a discriminatory housing market and predatory loans. Suburbanites organized to stop the development of affordable housing as "part of a much broader campaign for complete secession from Flint and its problems" and effectively relegated integrated housing to small pockets of the suburbs (p. 221). GM's financial struggles in the 1970s and beyond further fractured the metropolis, as the company sought renewal through tax breaks, which would lead the Flint's first black mayor to declare, "We are not going to balance GM's budget on the backs of our school children" (p. 251). Well-intentioned but misguided efforts like the AutoWorld shopping center and theme park, opened in 1984, failed to deliver tourists to the Vehicle City, yet one more example of the failed promise of urban renewal. Despite the overwhelming challenges, Highsmith shows the resilience of ordinary Flint residents who continued to work for the renewal of their homes and neighborhoods.

Throughout the analysis, Highsmith demonstrates the manifestation of segregationist policies, laws, and attitudes in virtually every facet of urban renewal. Matthew Lassiter and other urban historians have urged scholars to abandon the misleading terms *de facto* and *de jure* segregation for their mischaracterization of the way segregation operates.[1] Highsmith replaces the old lexicon by proposing new categories for understanding and interpreting the phenomena: legal segregation, administrative segregation, and popular segregation. Legal refers to segregation resulting from laws and judicial mandates; administrative refers to segregation related to the state's programs, policies, and application of bureaucratic powers; and popular refers to the segregation deriving from "nonstatist forces and actors" (p. 9). Of course, overlap and mutual reinforcement of the different types were the norm, and Highsmith unravels their development in Flint.

A central achievement of *Demolition Means Progress* is Highsmith's deft analysis of the educational system in Flint as a primary driver of residential segregation. Where most urban historians have blamed residential segregation primarily on federal housing policies, the racist block-busting practices of real estate agents, and the hostile treatment of African Americans by (often highly organized) white neighborhood residents, Highsmith includes these factors while simultaneously shifting the focus to the role of school officials and philanthropic institutions like the local Mott Foundation. Educational gerrymandering ensured both class and racial homogeneity in the schools, a pattern repeated in the neighborhoods of the Flint region. Segregated schools were not merely a *consequen*ce of residential segregation, but rather were an important contributor.

Highsmith has little to say about policing and its relationship to urban renewal, missing an opportunity to examine the extent to which law and order policies figured into efforts to "clean up" and revitalize neighborhoods. In many cities, like New York and Detroit, a criminal justice approach was never far removed from renewal efforts, but any analysis of this dimension is absent from the book. I mention this not to criticize *Demolition Means Progress* but to indicate an opportunity for further scholarship that Highsmith's work has opened.

Historians of Midwestern cities will find much of value in *Demolition Means Progress.* Cities large and small surely demonstrate many of

the same processes at work as those in Flint, particularly faith in urban renewal and overlapping modes of segregation. The recent Flint water crisis is yet one more manifestation of a renewal effort gone disastrously awry. ***Demolition Means Progress*** suggests that it likely will not be the last, and Highsmith provides an essential framework for better understanding the roots of metropolitan crises.

Note

[1]. See especially Matthew D. Lassiter, "De Jure/De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth," in ***The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism***, ed. Mathew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25-48.