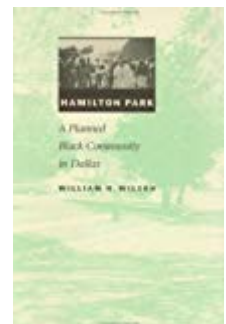
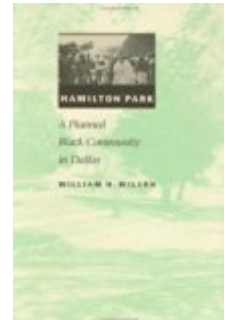


Robert B. Fairbanks. *For the City as a Whole: Planning, Politics, and the Public Interests in Dallas, Texas, 1900-1965.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998. 318 pp. \$47.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8142-0799-4.

William H. Wilson. *Hamilton Park: A Planned Black Community in Dallas.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. 256 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-5766-9.



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Two new books analyze twentieth-century community and urban development planning practice in Dallas, Texas. In *For the City as a Whole*, Robert Fairbanks portrays a city wedded to early comprehensive planning ideals, and in *Hamilton Park*, William Wilson depicts the rocky path faced by whites and blacks alike as they struggled to establish and maintain a Black community in north Dallas. The books are complementary; taken together they reveal many of the planning principals and political ideals that animated Dallas' urban growth patterns for much of the twentieth century. Both authors present strong theses, but Wilson presents a more compelling narrative to support his essential points.

In *For the City as a Whole*, Fairbanks explores the planning concepts embraced by the Dallas civic elite as they struggled with urban management dilemmas in the Progressive Era. Fairbanks contends that these urban problem solvers sought to guide development practice in a way that addressed the unitary "public interest" rather than the collective "various publics' interest;" his text examines the discourse of the city's business-civic leadership that reflects such a refined distinction. Arguing that civic leaders and government officials conceptualized the city as an important physical, social, and cultural unit that affected individual behaviors, Fairbanks assembles pieces of the historical record to support his essential thesis: Because the "city as a whole" conception dom-

inated the thinking of the urban elite, this cadre of decision-makers advanced initiatives and programs that emphasized the "precedence of the needs of the city as a whole over the wants of particular populations, neighborhood groups, or other special interest groups" (p. 3).

Fairbanks is sensitive to the critique that can be leveled against such a unitary conception of "the public interest." In the introduction he defends his work by averring that his book is not a "curious relic of past historical interest;" rather, his examination of the words and actions of the civic elite is necessary because these urban leaders saw themselves as "city builders as well as businessmen and found little conflict between the two roles" (p. 5). Fairbanks asserts that his study establishes an historical context for understanding the actions of this civic elite, and should not be taken as a defense of their actions. I understand the refined distinction that Fairbanks makes, but a close reading of the book leaves one unconvinced that his distinction is one that makes a substantive difference.

For instance, Fairbanks dedicates a full chapter to an examination of planning in the early twentieth century. In both the teens and the twenties, the author asserts that city leaders embraced the comprehensive planning ideal, which established that the city was "a system of systems." Such a systems approach to planning took precedence in the minds of the civic leaders, and they pursued comprehensive planning to revivify their metropolitan area. This perception viewed the dysfunction of the city as the product of haphazard growth and an uncoordinated administrative structure, with few guidelines for managing urban change. Both the City Planning Commission and the Dallas Metropolitan Development Association embraced this holistic conception of the city. Worried about fragmentation and disunity within the civic body, these organizations viewed early attempts at planning, such as the Kessler plan, as good faith efforts to improve the "city as a whole."

Such planning efforts emphasized physical planning improvements, and political efforts to establish a council-manager form of government augured for a forward looking city, one which would act to stem urban decay by using progressive planning techniques.

Leaders of the Citizen's Charter Association and the Dallas Citizen's Council worked diligently to streamline government and augment the economic development capacity of Dallas. Both groups sought to coordinate disparate civic undertakings that advanced the public interest. In this spirit, Harland Bartholomew was hired to draft a comprehensive plan for the city. Fairbanks asserts that Bartholomew treated the city as a "system of systems, needing comprehensive and coordinated treatment" (p. 127). The noted planner's multi-volume draft convinced the civic elite that implementation of such a plan was a necessary condition for moving ahead in a progressive fashion.

Bartholomew did warn that the problem of negro housing was a serious problem in segregated Dallas, and one that merited the full attention of the civic elite. However, as Fairbanks maintains, efforts to improve Black housing conditions were taken because the "city as a whole" benefited by such actions, not because Blacks deserved better housing conditions to improve their collective lot. Bad housing promoted sickness and criminality, both of which threatened urban stability. It was this thought process that drove efforts to improve conditions in African American enclaves. Fairbanks also documents how the "city as a whole" concept caused the civic elite to attack organized labor as it attempted to make inroads in Dallas.

Importantly, planning efforts were not solely concentrated in the CBD. Chief among the concerns of the municipal elite was neighborhood succession. Dallas was highly segregated, and Fairbanks tells us of Dallas' early experiments with racial zoning. In the 1930s and 1940s white

neighborhood residents quaked at the prospect of black encroachment on their territory. So heart-felt were the concerns that bombings against blacks took place in the 1940s and early 1950s. Whites also sought to reinforce patterns of residential segregation through public housing. Again, Fairbanks asserts that the civic elite pursued efforts to maintain a segregated landscape not because blacks deserved access to better housing, but because neighborhood transition issues threatened the future of the entire metropolitan area.

Fairbanks contends that this unitary conception of the public interest breaks down in the 1950s and 1960s. He asserts that urban renewal and community planning efforts of this era sought to accommodate individual group needs rather than the "city as a whole." After 1955, "the needs and aspirations of the city's citizens . . . had emerged as the priority of the day" (p. 249). Dallas leaders de-emphasized physical planning and centralized administration, moving toward social planning initiatives and administrative structures that served individual constituencies in a programmatic way.

After reading this Dallas history, it seems to me that Fairbank's "City as a Whole" conception is little more than an idea that encompasses urban initiatives and programs, all of which are cloaked in the language of comprehensive planning. For the first half of the twentieth century, city leaders throughout the country embraced comprehensive planning as the answer to dysfunctional urban areas. The "system of systems" approach dominated this way of thinking, not only in Dallas, but in Richmond, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and a plethora of other cities. The unitary conception of the public good is critiqued in the late 1950s and 1960s, as a more robust notion of the public interest emerges; many have argued that this multifaceted conception of the public good more closely resembles reality.

Fairbanks provides us with a wonderful historical narrative that documents how this unitary concept of the public interest rules in the first half of the twentieth century and then is transformed in the 1950s and 1960s. The main objection I have to Fairbank's thesis is that I see the early discourse of the comprehensive planning ideal as a shell for the perpetuation of inequality using the unitary conception of the public good as an excuse for maintaining the status quo. Fairbanks tries to get into the minds of early civic leaders to show us how their primary concern centered on the entire city. After reading Fairbank's book I remain unconvinced. There is no doubt that the language of unitary public interest politics and planning dominates the early twentieth century discourse, but I don't see the shift in programs and initiatives that takes place in the 1950s and 1960s as a sea change in civic leaders perceptions. What I do see is the language of comprehensive planning falling away, revealing an enduring multifaceted conception of the public interest, but one in which the developmental policies of the civic elite no longer rule the day. All that happens in the 1950s and 1960s is that planning cedes much of its responsibility in the physical realm and begins to center on social programming, which seeks to redress the inequalities perpetuated by planners in the era of comprehensive planning.

In *Hamilton Park*, Wilson presents an historical narrative that examines the establishment of a black community in north Dallas. He contends that Hamilton Park was a "worthwhile if inadequate response to the serious problem of housing middle-income Dallas blacks" (p. viii). Indeed, reading this story one is struck by how blacks organized and were supported by whites in their collective efforts to improve housing conditions for African-Americans in Dallas.

Hamilton Park was established in the 1950s, the product of a difficult search for black homesteads. Beginning in the 1930s, Dallas' civic elite had recognized the need for black housing in non-

public housing settings. Wilson begins his analysis by describing those early searches for black homestead sites. Pressure mounted throughout the 1940s as whites pressured urban leaders to prevent residential succession in white neighborhoods. The pressure grew intense in the late 1940s, culminating in a series of bombings in 1950. As municipal leaders surveyed the landscape, they focused on a parcel of land in north Dallas. This tract would eventually be developed as Hamilton Park.

In the 1940s, blacks began to make inroads into white residential enclaves. Violent demonstrations caused municipal leaders to intervene; they were concerned that the high profile protests would threaten the business elite's "carefully cultivated view of Dallas as a city of harmony, contentment, and industriousness" (p. 11). The Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce and the Dallas Citizen's Council formed a joint committee to quell community fears while hoping to offer real residential options to blacks. The joint committee issued the Aston-Mitchell report, which noted the "acute and critical" housing shortage for blacks in Dallas. The report recognized the legitimacy of segregation so long as it did not result in "discrimination." One of the means of reducing the housing shortage was to build more public housing; the report recommended the construction of 1500 additional public housing units. But the committee also recommended that market rate housing be built in Dallas. The provision of housing for blacks that might choose to live in white neighborhoods could stem the problem of residential succession. So it was that the municipal elite took a material interest in the future of blacks and housing in Dallas. With the formation of the Dallas Interracial Committee, a biracial body began a systematic analysis of the housing problem in this southern city.

White leaders such as Jerome Crossman emerged out of this process. The president of a petroleum company, Crossman helped guide the dif-

ficult community planning process that resulted in the establishment of Hamilton Park in north Dallas. Wilson details the nuances of this search for a middle-class housing site for Dallas blacks, giving us detail on almost every aspect of the process: from the development deal to the naming of the streets. Hamilton Park was hailed as a real means of alleviating pressure on white neighborhoods, as well being a community in which families could benefit from improved environmental conditions.

Interest in the community was high, but few qualified homebuyers had been found after six months of marketing the new subdivision. Still, the local school opened in 1955, and at once became "a source of community pride and concern" (p. 60). Slowly the development began to fill out, and as the 1960s approached, the 173 acre segregated community was doing well. But as Wilson points out, given *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the Alabama bus boycott in 1956, and the Kennedy administration's efforts on behalf of minorities, Hamilton Park was the "the creation of a dying era" (p. 65).

In the 1960s, Hamilton Park was not the only place for middle-class Blacks to live. Wilson documents the features of these other communities, and he discusses the assets and liabilities of the Hamilton Park setting. He notes that as Hamilton Parks evolved in the 1960s the community began to make additional service demands. For instance, the community had poor bus service and residents had a long way to travel for shopping needs. To validate this contention, Wilson begins to use ethnographic accounts to support his assertions. Interviews with long-term residents pepper the balance of the book; these recollections enhance the text and are one of its principal contributions.

During the late 1950s, residents of Hamilton Park created several community organizations. One of the most prominent was the Interorganizational Council (IOC); this group reflected the dominance of the Black Church in this community set-

ting. A secular group, the Civic League, was also established. Both of these organizations became active in the late 1950s, and they continued their community roles into the 1980s. Of particular importance in Wilson's mind is the entrance of the IOC into the political arena. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Hamilton Park residents forged a close alliance with the Democratic Party. The IOC distributed endorsement lists to neighborhood residents, and unabashedly supported those candidates that took Hamilton Park concerns to heart.

One of the chief areas in which major transformations took place over the years was in the local school system. Wilson spends two chapters analyzing the ways in which the school system reflected national trends. The difficulties of desegregation were a central feature of educational services in Hamilton Park. While two chapters on the evolution of the community's educational needs—beginning with *Brown v. Board of Education* through the 1970s—seems inordinate for this study, Wilson makes it clear that this community was an excellent example of a local residential enclave being influenced by broader social trends.

Hamilton Park was built in the 1960s, and as metropolitan Dallas grew throughout the 1970s, the community became surrounded by major transportation arteries and commercial development. As a consequence, land in Hamilton Park became very valuable. Wilson dedicates his next to last chapter investigating the intricacies of a major "buyout" attempt in which an unnamed developer offered \$35 a square foot to all of the 733 property owners in the community. Wilson documents the potentially divisive effects that such a buyout offer had on the community's social network, again using extensive ethnographic accounts. Although a potentially fruitful offer, the proposal fell through in 1986, despite the community hiring an attorney to represent them in the negotiations.

Wilson concludes the Hamilton Park story by documenting the contemporary conditions in the

community. Pioneer residents deplore many of the transformations within Hamilton Park, such as "problems involving property deterioration, a decline in standards of behavior and political interest, and crime" (p. 191). These problems are perhaps harbingers of Hamilton Park's fate. And, as the "buyout" envisaged, commercial development now encroaches on every front of the community.

Wilson's text is a well-written and researched piece of local urban history. The community's transformation throughout the twentieth century has reflected broader national trends, and yet Hamilton Park is the unique product of local circumstance as well. The history gives us unique insight into the nature of race relations in Dallas, as well as into the politics and planning that undergirded the creation of Hamilton Park in the 1950s. Together with Fairbanks volume, we are presented with a rich Dallas history, one which reveals the political attitudes and planning ideals of Whites and Blacks alike as they confronted the challenge of living together throughout much of the twentieth century.

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