

Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago, 1890–1919. By Robin F. Bachin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. ix + 434 pp. Index, notes, illustrations, maps. Cloth, \$35.00. ISBN: 0-226-03393-7.

Reviewed by Timothy B. Spears

In *Building the South Side*, Robin Bachin focuses on several urban spaces that were critical to Chicago's development and identity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the University of Chicago; the city's neighborhood park system; the city envisioned in Daniel Burnham's *Plan of Chicago*; Comiskey Park; and the Black Belt's commercial and leisure districts. It is essential to Bachin's purposes that these spaces were both real and imagined places, for while *Building the South Side* is a useful guide to Chicago's built environment at the turn of the century, it deals especially with how these landscapes became "arenas of discursive interaction" (the term is political scientist Nancy Fraser's) and prompted dialogue, conflict, and negotiation among Chicago's principal stakeholders. Bachin does not downplay the power inequities that animated these spaces, but she does emphasize the potential these sites had to "create a shared sense of civic unity" (p. 6). Ending the book on an optimistic note, she calls for a reinterpretation of Progressivism that acknowledges the necessity and importance of coalition building in cities like Chicago. Progressivism, Bachin concludes, "was not the property of one group or another," but rather "laid the foundation for a new kind of political culture that joined the state with reform organizations, labor leaders, women's groups, and mass culture entrepreneurs to challenge the parochialism of partisan politics and promote public interest in civic engagement" (p. 306).

As Bachin moves through the principal cultural landscapes covered in her book—"The University and the City," "Parks and Public Space," and "Commercial Leisure and Civic Culture"—she highlights three different modes of civic engagement. One, associated with elite Chicagoans like Burnham and University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper, aimed to instill civic order by centralizing and consolidating resources and expertise. Another, exemplified by community leaders like Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, stressed the importance of local concerns and sought to

decentralize the process of governance. A third mode, allied with commercial entrepreneurship, was by definition opposed to progressive reform efforts, yet, in Bachin's account, proves a powerful force in the creation of a resilient and diverse civic order.

Indeed, the chapter on Charles Comiskey, the brick-hauler-turned-ballplayer and then baseball mogul, departs from the familiar picture of the tight-fisted boss of the White Sox to portray a businessman who, recognizing the city's need for safe and "respectable" forms of amusement, built a baseball stadium in 1910 for all Chicagoans. Comiskey Park served as a model for civic unity, creating a social space "where codes of decorum were observed even as different classes and ethnicities, men and women, mixed with one another" (p. 206). As Bachin notes, even African Americans were drawn to the park and enjoyed watching the White Sox—a remarkable fact given the city's racially segregated neighborhoods. These achievements were not simply a matter of luck, Bachin argues, but were the result of Comiskey's shrewd assessment of the public's desire for wholesome entertainment and his calculated selection of the building site and the stadium's architecture. Located near the working-class neighborhood of Armour Square and streetcar lines that ran downtown, Comiskey Park was well positioned to attract a good mix of fans. Designed in a monumental style, the stadium echoed the classical architecture of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and the University of Chicago, and hence brought grandeur and dignity to a sport that, if presented differently, might have been associated with the seemingly tawdry pleasures of the nickelodeon and vaudeville. Fittingly, when the enterprise took a dive during the Black Sox gambling scandal of 1919, it was tainted with the very influences Comiskey had worked so hard to avoid.

The book's last chapter underscores the disciplining force—and implicit racism—of municipal reform efforts by describing how city officials pushed the vice district south of the Loop and into the Black Belt while simultaneously maintaining segregated neighborhoods. The effect of these moves was to diminish the physical and figurative distance between licentiousness and decorum, so that along the "Stroll"—the southern section of State Street and the commercial heart of the district—"the respectable and 'illicit' elements of cultural life in the Black Belt rubbed up against one another" (p. 281).

Here Bachin notes the challenges that middle-class African Americans (particularly women) faced in keeping their community safe and respectable. But, in perhaps the most provocative claim in the book, she also suggests that segregation spun a demiworld of commercialized leisure and creativity that in turn fostered the development of some of black Chicago's most distinctive cultural contributions—in particular, jazz.

Comprehensively researched and clearly written, *Building the South Side* contributes in important ways to our understanding of Chicago's history and should expand the terms by which scholars evaluate Progressivism. Bachin's analyses of the relation between space and culture will also be of interest to urban historians. That said, the extensive background included in some of the chapters occasionally weighs down the argument; further trimming would bring the book's contributions into sharper focus. Finally, I would call the title of the book misleading, or at least point out that it draws a geographic distinction that the study as a whole refutes. *Building the South Side* is about Chicago in the period of its most dramatic growth, and any implication that its contents deal only with an isolated section of the city is a distraction.

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