

Timothy J. Gilfoyle. *Millennium Park: Creating a Chicago Landmark*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. xiv + 442 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-29349-3.



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Published on H-Urban (November, 2006)

Once in a Thousand Years?

Timothy J. Gilfoyle's handsome book on Chicago's Millennium Park is a commissioned contemporary history about the creation of the park, a twenty-four-acre addition to the existing Grant Park. He describes his book as an exploration of "the globalization of art, the historical legacy of Richard M. Daley, the influence of corporate philanthropy, the use of culture as an engine of economic expansion, and the nature of political power in Chicago" (p. xiv). These concepts help to frame the process of park creation. But rather than drawing larger lessons from the project for urban parks, Gilfoyle cautions that the process is not likely to be repeated.

One of the first things a reader notices are the lavish illustrations—seven pages of large color architectural photographs come before the title page and the first chapter alone has thirty-four illustrations, many in color. The historic maps and photography illustrating the book are drawn from the collections of the Chicago History Museum (formerly the Chicago Historical Society), a co-publisher in the project. The reader is overwhelmed by the amount and quality of the visual information, which is not arranged with an obvious hierarchy of importance.

Still, as is the case with any built environment, it is difficult for even the most-skilled photographer to convey the experience of being there. (This reviewer has not been to the park.)

Gilfoyle, a professor at Loyola University Chicago, is best known as a historian of nineteenth-century New York City.[1] Gilfoyle's oral history interviews with Chicago's leaders, over the course of a decade, for *Chicago History* magazine, however, suggested his suitability for the Millennium Park story. For his account of Millennium Park, Gilfoyle conducted forty-nine oral history interviews of the participants and the transcripts of those interviews have been deposited with the Chicago History Museum.

Gilfoyle divides his story into three parts—history, politics and culture. History, the briefest section, describes the land that became Grant Park, the creation of the park, and Grant Park events to the 1990s. The most crucial event came in 1836, with the designation of the lakefront—from Randolph Street to Park Row and east of Michigan Avenue—as "Public Ground," which came to be called "Lake Park." When winter storms threatened lake-

front property, the city of Chicago granted a right-of-way to the Illinois Central Railroad in return for the construction of a protective breakwater. Thus the section of Lake Park that would be the site of the future Millennium Park came under the control of the railroads in 1852, where it remained for more than one hundred years. The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 gave rise to many park plans, but it was not until after World War I that the north end of Grant Park was developed. Gilfoyle notes that throughout the twentieth century, Chicago park developers failed to create an appropriate outdoor concert venue. Even when summer concerts drew large crowds in the years from the 1930s to the 1970s, Grant Park lacked a suitable performance space. This issue finally would be addressed by architect Frank Gehry's music pavilion.

Gilfoyle's section on politics focuses on the years from 1997 to 2004. He highlights the roles of Mayor Richard M. Daley, and John Bryan, the CEO of the Sara Lee Corporation and chief fundraiser for the park. The city began with a plan to create a new underground parking garage topped by grass, funded by parking revenues. Daley, known to his supporters as "the green mayor," saw the centrally located project as an appropriate millennium marker for the city and asked architect Adrian Smith of Skidmore, Owens and Merrill to submit plans for the park. The planners, Gilfoyle noted, were "less concerned with the park and various cultural amenities" and more attuned to the infrastructure, notably the garage, "the most expensive public investment" at the site. The park also includes an intermodal transportation center for buses, pedestrians, Metra trains, cars, and bicycles. "At its conception," Gilfoyle notes, "the Lakefront Millennium Project was as much a transportation project as it was a new park space" (p. 88).

As mayor, Daley led the privatization of many Chicago city services and the search for additional sources of city revenue. When he announced the Lakefront Millennium Project in 1998, he declared it would generate convention and tourism jobs. Cultural institutions now promised to serve as new economic engines for the city. The city would pay for the garage, but Daley sought private funding for the park with the assistance of John Bryan, Chicago's most successful cultural fundraiser. Bryan, seeking "to make Millennium Park original and unique to attract potential donors" (p. 107), emphasized public art for the new park, reasoning that the right art could make the park a destination point. Bryan went after big names, landing Frank Gehry to design the music pavilion. He added institutions such as

the Chicago Music and Dance Theater to the park plan. Aided by other Chicago philanthropists (whose money came largely from finance, insurance and real estate), Bryan raised \$125 million, three times what Mayor Daley had originally requested. Gilfoyle points out that the large donors enjoyed global corporate networks and "embodied Chicago's relationship to and dependence upon the global economy" (p. 154). The politics section of the book chronicles the roles of the mayor and Bryan, but includes little about the roles of the city council, the city planning commission, or the city parks commission. The story is more about the politics of fundraising than those of city government, demonstrating how the current lack of sufficient support for public services drives city officials to court private money.

The final section on culture features the built environment of the park and includes chapters on Gehry's music pavilion; the Harris Theater for Music and Dance; Anish Kapoor's sculpture, *Cloud Gate*; Jaume Plensa's Crown Fountain; and the Lurie Garden, as well as other amenities such as an ice-skating rink, Chicago's largest outdoor restaurant, and smaller eating venues. Clearly Millennium Park is a multifaceted entertainment arena. With all these assets, Gilfoyle claims the park "embodies no singular themes; it advertises no consistent cultural message.... [It] does not celebrate progress, stability, or nationalism." Instead, he celebrates it as a "cultural hybrid" (p. 341).

At the end of the book, Gilfoyle examines some of the park's critics who question its supposedly democratic spaces. They complain that bikes and skateboards are banned. Chicago's largest music festivals, the Jazz Festival and the Blues Festival, are too popular for the park's limited concert space. Political rallies are unlikely future events. The privatized planning process involved only those citizens who made significant donations. Gilfoyle counters these criticisms by claiming that Millennium Park "expands the public sphere" by bringing back into public use land that had been in private control, by providing year-round activities, and by offering multicultural programming (p. 348).

Gilfoyle concludes that the project was "a one-time millennial event" and "the result of historical contingency" (p. 352). From a broader perspective, the book adds to our general understanding of the history of urban parks, not just this one park. Chronologically, Gilfoyle picks up the story where Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar left off in their account of New York City's Central Park. The final chapter of their book, *The Park and the*

People: A History of Central Park, is titled “Whose Park Is It Anyway?” They asked whether the “partnership” between the public and the private sector that developed in the 1980s as a means to administer Central Park had begun to limit democratic access to the New York City park. They also discussed Central Park in relation to the rest of the park system in New York City, and lamented that the public-private partnership will be unlikely to assist parks in the poorer neighborhoods. “What was gained in the 1980s,” they said, “was a very tangible improvement in the physical condition of Central Park. What was lost was a very intangible—but still real—sense of commitment to the public provision of recreational resources for all New Yorkers.”[2] Gilfoyle does not spend much time on the Chicago park system, so we do not know if this is also a concern there. But his tone seems to suggest that Chicago had no alternatives to the public-private financing.

Gilfoyle wrote the book he was commissioned to write and that is not a bad thing. But reading his book reminds us that we also need some larger story, one that might incorporate his findings into an account of the complex contemporary urban park movement. If Gilfoyle’s philanthropists formed one kind of public interested in parks, there are others. Some of the organizations concerned with the future of urban parks include the Project for Public Spaces (established in 1975) with its “Parks, Plazas and Squares” program, and the Trust for Public Land (established in 1972) with a “Parks for the People” program.[3] Gilfoyle notes that the Project for Public Spaces criticized Millennium Park, but it would be useful to know more of that organization’s vision for urban parks. The Trust for Public Land has been studying the relationship between cities and parks for more than thirty years. Its “Green Cities Initiative” focused on inner-city parks in the neighborhoods that have the fewest resources. How might this story connect to Millennium Park? How do the new urban federal parks, such as San Francisco’s Presidio of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, compare to new municipal parks?[4] Taking a page from Gilfoyle, one might also want to look at Millennium Park as an example of global trends, looking for similarities in such places as Amsterdam’s Westergasbriek Culture Park, a former brownfield site designed by Kathryn Gustafson, who also designed Millennium Park’s Lurie Garden. Olof Koekebakker, writing of Westergasbriek, notes of contemporary cities: “the new function, often a cultural one, given to disused industrial heritage sites

reflects changes that are affecting cities all over the Western world.”[5] Thus, not only is Chicago’s philanthropic elite a product of changing global capital relations, but Chicago’s response to deindustrialization—creation of a culture park—is part of a global pattern as well.

Philanthropists have long funded parks, perhaps because of some similarity between designed landscapes and cultural institutions such as symphonies, ballets, and art museums. Historians have a long tradition of writing commissioned works. Contemporary history, such as this book, has both benefits (one can often interview participants) and challenges (the participants can read and argue with the story). Gilfoyle says his patrons “listened and disagreed, but never imposed their interpretations” (p. 361). By his own account Gilfoyle began with “only a tangential interest in the project,” but over time became convinced of the importance of the project (p. 360). Even if this particular park was a “one-time millennial event,” as Gilfoyle concludes, what unanswered questions does he have and what advice might Gilfoyle give for future research into the history of urban parks?

Notes

[1]. Gilfoyle’s 1988 dissertation won the Allan Nevins Prize from the Society of American Historians and was published as *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992). This year, in addition to *Millennium Park*, Gilfoyle published *A Pickpocket’s Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006). His review essay, “White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History,” will also be familiar to readers of H-Urban: <http://homepages.luc.edu/~{ }gilfoyle/gilfoyle.htm>.

[2]. Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 524.

[3]. Trust for Public Land (<http://www.tpl.org>); Project for Public Spaces (<http://www.pps.org>).

[4]. Hal K. Rothman, *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004).

[5]. Olof Koekebakker, *Westergasfabriek Culture Park: Transformation of a Former Industrial Site in Amsterdam* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2003), p. 16.

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Citation: Andrea Tuttle Kornbluh. Review of Gilfoyle, Timothy J., *Millenium Park: Creating a Chicago Landmark*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. November, 2006.

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