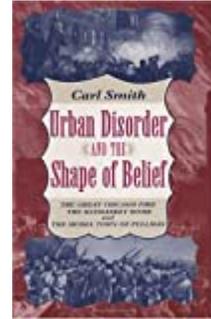




**Carl Smith.** *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995. x + 395 pp. \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-76417-7; \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-76416-0.



**Reviewed by** Grace Palladino (The Samuel Gompers Papers, University of Maryland-College Park)

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## Disturbing Order

The idea of urban disorder is so deeply ingrained that we tend to expect the worst of big cities. Tourists stick to well-traveled paths, residents move out as their children reach school age, and even diehard urbanites (the modern equivalent of pioneers, by some lights) factor in a certain degree of social stress—dirty, overcrowded streets, class and ethnic conflict—as part of the price they naturally pay for cosmopolitan convenience. The idea isn't new, of course: Even Jane Addams linked guns, drink, and drugs to city life in her 1909 book, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*. But as Carl Smith demonstrates in *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief*, it is an idea that owes as much to social imagination as it does historical reality.

A professor of English and American Studies, Smith focuses on three events—the Chicago Fire of 1871, the Haymarket bombing of 1886, and the rise and fall of Pullman, a model town founded in 1880 that was designed to transform (or, depending on one's point of view, repress) working class militancy. Each represented a significant step in the evolution of Chicago's reputation as a major American city. And each, according to Smith, “be-

came the event through which many Americans tried to make sense of the larger patterns of change and conflict that seemed to dominate cultural life” at the turn of the twentieth century (p. 4). Making good use of contemporary reports, illustrations, legal testimony, and public protests and gatherings, Smith illuminates what he calls the “imaginative dimensions” of these events and especially their aftermath—the Relief and Aid Society that assumed the daunting task of organizing social services after the fire, the trial and execution (or imprisonment) of the alleged Haymarket anarchists, and the eruption of serious social conflict in Pullman when the American Railway Union struck in 1894, and employers relied on the U.S. Army to restore social order in Chicago.

There is a lot to learn from this book about the complex intersection of memory, emotion, aspiration, and historical interpretation. And there is a lot to think about particularly when we contemplate the low status of the city—especially the inner-city—today. Yet for all that I appreciate this book less for its theoretical musings (which are best elaborated in the Introduction) than for its straightforward presentation and thoughtful anal-

ysis of both the Haymarket and Pullman episodes and for its clear delineation of class conflicts and concerns in all three cases. (And if I may add a personal aside, I was impressed by Smith's balanced view of Samuel Gompers, who is often portrayed as the villain at Pullman). Smith skillfully evokes the social context, drama, and injustice that shaped public understanding of these traumatic events. But he is less successful at linking these events to any emerging consensus on Chicago's inherent disorder or at demonstrating that Chicago's citizens related their view of the fire to their view of the trial or the strike. The conception that drives the book works better as a historical construct, I think, than as historical analysis. However, in light of the complimentary blurbs that grace the back cover of the paperback edition, and the fact that Smith won an award in 1994 for this work, I will readily admit that mine is a minority opinion.

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 Lex Renda Assistant Professor of History, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Book Review Editor, H-Pol, H-Net Program Organizer, SSHA Politics Network

Mailing address: Department of History University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee P.O. Box 413 Milwaukee, WI. 53201

Mailing address for UPS packages: Department of History University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Holton Hall 342 2442 E. Hartford Street Milwaukee, WI. 53211

Phone: 414/229-5211 Fax: 414/229-2435

E-mail: renlex@uwm.edu Website: <http://www.uwm.edu/People/renlex> \*\*\*\*\*

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