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Peter C. Baldwin. *Domesticating the Street: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999. ix + 360 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8142-5026-6; $55.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8142-0824-3.

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Pedestrian History, Without Apologies

In 1980, Francois Bedarida and Anthony Sutcliffe began their article on the history of urban streets with an apology: "The street, it must be admitted, does not cry out for historical attention."[1] Their conclusion that, despite first impressions, the street did indeed require serious analysis has taken some time to catch on among historians. Recently, however, a small but growing number of historians in Europe and Australia as well as the United States have taken up Bedarida and Sutcliffe's challenge to explore the history of the street.[2] Peter C. Baldwin's *Domesticating the Street* is the latest entry in this field, and it contributes new and valuable insights into what might be called "pedestrian history." Yet Baldwin's book deserves a readership beyond this subfield, for through the history of the streets and parks of a mid-sized American city, he touches on the histories of such diverse topics as childhood, vice, zoning, and the nature of Progressive Era reform.

One of the central debates among those who study the history of the streets concerns the degree of continuity or change in the story. Urban jeremiads such as Jane Jacobs's *Death and Life of Great American Cities* and Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* emphasize a change, or, more specifically, a decline that has transformed streets from once-vibrant public spaces to environments devoid of diversity or life.[3] Other authors stress the continuities in the history of the streets. These authors fall into two general camps. Some, such as James Winter and Lynn Lees, insist that streets have never lost the variety and vibrancy of their uses, or that this loss has been exaggerated.[4] Others, such as Susan Davis and Laura Swartzbaugh, argue that streets have always been contested terrains, and that a narrative of decline reflects a nostalgic longing for a golden age that never existed.[5]

Baldwin's argument for a subtle blend of continuity and change does not fit neatly into any of these camps. Although he agrees that some streets were transformed from multi-purpose spaces into automobile-dominated transportation arteries between 1850 and 1930, his story is more complex than a simple narrative of declension would suggest. Rather, he asserts, many of the functions forced out of these streets, such as children's play and food vending, were shunted onto other streets that retained their multi-functional nature in 1930 and be-

yond. Indeed, he contends, the creation of high traffic, auto-dominated "main" streets and low-traffic, multifunctional "side" streets were two sides of a single process of segregation of the city by function.

The automobile was the beneficiary but not the agent of this transformation, Baldwin asserts. In denying a simple technological determinism, he is in the good company of most recent studies of the subject.(p. 6) While Baldwin does not ignore the effects of technological innovations such as the electric trolley and the automobile, his research methodology and interpretive framework emphasize instead the intellectual development of reform and planning. "I argue that ideas have a powerful role in shaping cities, a role comparable to-perhaps even exceeding-the effects of technology," Baldwin writes (p. 7). Baldwin takes issue with those who see reform as merely a cover for conspiratorial class domination or social control. Rather, he believes that most reformers sincerely sought to benefit others, and he argues that many reforms were not unilaterally imposed from above but were worked out as compromises between working-class urbanites and elite reformers. He calls on us to "take their words seriously" (p. 9), and his extensive research succeeds in recovering their words from personal papers, newspapers, organizational records, government documents, transcribed oral histories, and other sources.

The first reformer Baldwin examines, whose shadow looms over the entire story, is the Protestant theologian and reformer Horace Bushnell. Fearing that Hartford in the 1850s was becoming increasingly divided by class and ethnicity, Bushnell proposed a centrally located park for the city. He hoped the park would serve a function in the city analogous to that served in a proper bourgeois home by the parlor: a space dominated by the values of female domesticity, which would unify and ennoble all who passed through it. Bushnell and his park left a "bifurcated legacy" (p. 33) for later Hartford reformers. Bushnell's goal of uplifting the entire population of Hartford influenced some later reformers who wished to promulgate the decorum associated with women's sphere and the middle-class home in all parts of the city and among all its inhabitants. Baldwin calls this strain of reform "purification." But Bushnell's strategy of setting aside a particular space within the city to accomplish his aim became a precedent for a competing reform strategy of "segregation." "Segregationists" sought to divide the spaces of the city into zones; bourgeois behavior would be maintained in some, while others would be left to their own devices.

The bulk of Baldwin's book looks at the "Progressive" reform of the 1890s-1910s to see how this dual legacy played out. The chapters (2 through 9) that deal with this period are arranged topically rather than chronologically, and though there is some inevitable overlap Baldwin handles the organizational challenges well. The heirs of Bushnell's "purification" strategy sought to unify and uplift the whole city through movements to clean the streets of dirt and billboards. These campaigns met with limited success, however, as the working-class immigrant inhabitants of Hartford's East Side resisted efforts to "uplift" them. The purificationists' greatest success came in the suffragist-led 1912 campaign to abolish the city's vice district. Yet their victory in this case also pointed to the limitations of their strategy: while the vice district was abolished, the practice of prostitution dispersed around the city. Complete "purification" of public space appeared an illusory goal.

The decisive defeat for purification came in the protracted struggle over regulating newsgirls, Baldwin argues. Hartford residents who believed urban space could be cleansed and made safe for everyone argued that newsgirls should be allowed to continue to hawk their papers on downtown streets. But others argued that the business district was no place for innocent, vulnerable children, especially girls. The 1914 rape of an 11-year-old newsgirl turned the tide in their favor, and gave a significant victory to those who aimed to segregate the city into separate zones for adults and children, for rich and poor, for the masculine values of aggressive commerce and the feminine values of domestic morality.

Segregation also won out, as Baldwin argues, in a number of other cases. One was the creation of a park system for Hartford that reserved certain spaces for the "active" recreation, such as baseball, popular with the working class while leaving other areas for the quiet contemplation favored by elites. Another was the establishment of playgrounds, vacation schools, and other institutions aimed at removing children from the streets. Baldwin also cites the removal of the expressmen's (delivery drivers') stand from the downtown's central square and the regulations that restricted food peddling to a few streets in the immigrant-dominated slums as evidence for the abiding influence of segregation as a strategy.

The segregation of the city's public spaces was not necessarily a bad thing, in Baldwin's view. In some cases, such as the division of the parks, segregation minimized conflict in a pluralistic urban society. In other cases, such as the playgrounds, Baldwin argues that segregation was

less the result of reformers' desire for social control than the product of a genuine wish to improve the lives of city children. Baldwin is less sanguine about the traffic engineers and real estate speculators who appropriated segregation for non-reformist ends in the 1910s and 1920s. Asphalt paving, trolleys, and snowplowing were used in the 1890s to concentrate traffic along certain main arteries. When automobiles began to inflict high casualties on pedestrians in the 1910s, the city's solution was to further segregate the streets by confining pedestrians to sidewalks and crosswalks along major avenues, leaving these main streets to automobiles. The reformist aspects of segregation were finally subordinated to economic utilitarianism and more sinister impulses in Hartford's 1926 zoning law, which divided the city in order to stabilize property values and maintain class-based residential segregation.

Ultimately, then, Baldwin's narrative is a story of decline, not from live streets to dead ones, but from the reformist tendencies of Horace Bushnell and his Progressive-Era heirs to the cynical, economistic segregationism of the 1920s. If reformers are blameworthy at all in Baldwin's account, it is merely for the unintended consequences of their actions. Perhaps Baldwin is too soft on these reformers. For example, George A. Parker, Hartford's Superintendent of Parks from 1906 to 1926, appears early in Baldwin's book (chapters 5 and 6) as a generally benign reformer who favored segregation to serve the parks' diverse constituencies and to create a more wholesome atmosphere for the city's poor children. Only in chapter 9 do we learn that, prior to 1906, Parker had travelled extensively in the South, wrote approvingly (in private correspondence) of Jim Crow segregation, and even carried on a "fawning correspondence" with staunchly racist South Carolina senator Benjamin Tillman (p. 251). It may be possible to be both sympathetic to racists and genuinely concerned for the welfare of street urchins. But I wish Baldwin had devoted some consideration to the relationship between these aspects of Parker's thought rather than, well, segregating them into separate chapters.

Such minor questions of interpretation do not detract significantly from the admirable aspects of Baldwin's study. His attention to the role of gender ideology in city planning and to the importance of metaphor (city as home vs. city as machine) in framing reform debates are two that stand out. A third is Baldwin's clear, balanced prose. Now an assistant professor of history at DePaul, Baldwin was, prior to his graduate studies at Brown, a reporter for the *Hartford Courant*. His journalistic experience shines through in both his direct and witty writing and his deep knowledge of the city. Yet one important question raised by Baldwin's work is the inevitable: how typical was Hartford? Baldwin makes little effort to justify his choice of the city, except obliquely to point out that most other studies of street life have focused on "metropolitan centers" (p. 4). With the presence of the state capital and the dominance of the insurance industry, Hartford was probably not a "typical" city, but then, what city is? Additional case studies may help to sort out the idiosyncratic from the normative, and provide a clearer picture of that most pedestrian of urban spaces, the street.

Notes

[1]. Francois Bedarida and Anthony Sutcliffe, "The Street in the Structure and Life of the City: Reflections on Nineteenth-Century London and Paris," *Journal of Urban History* 6 (August 1980): 379.

[2]. James Winter, London's Teeming Streets, 1830-1914 (London: Routledge, 1993); Andrew Brown-May, " 'The Itinerary of Our Days': The Historical Experience of the Street in Melbourne, 1837-1923" (Ph.D. diss., University of Melbourne, 1994); Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[3]. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). For other accounts of the decline or death of the streets, see Steven Flusty, *Building Paranoia: The Proliferation of Interdictory Space and the Erosion of Spatial Justice* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design, 1994); Sam Bass Warner Jr., "The Public Invasion of Private Space and the Private Engrossment of Public Space," *Growth and Transformation of the Modern City: The Stockholm Conference* (Stockholm: Swedish Council for Building Research, 1979): 171-177; and the essays in Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

[4]. James Winter, "London's Teeming Streets"; Lynn Hollen Lees, "Urban Public Space and Imagined Communities in the 1980s and 1990s," *Journal of Urban History* 20 (August 1994): 443-465.

[5]. Susan Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988); Laura

Swartzbaugh, "Public / Private Geographies: Constructing Order in Chicago's City Streets, 1893-1922" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1997).

[6]. Especially McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path* and Brown-May, " 'The Itinerary of Our Days.' "

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