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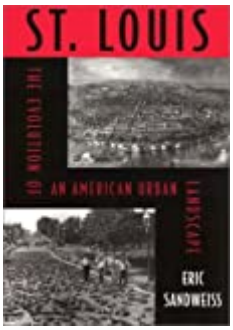

Eric Sandweiss. *St. Louis: The Evolution of the American Urban Landscape.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001. xiii + 282 pp. $74.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56639-885-5.

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Eric Sandweiss's new book, *St. Louis: The Evolution of the American Urban Landscape* considers how the "urban landscape" has influenced the building and shaping of St. Louis, Missouri. Founded in 1764 on high ground a little south of the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, St. Louis, originally a fur trading center and lead shipping point, grew into a commercial metropolis. By 1900, with 575,238 people, it was the fourth biggest city in the United States. At the time of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, the great world's fair of 1904, the "Lion of the Valley" and "Memphis of the American Nile," fully expected to become the largest city in North America, hopes dashed when the United States turned outward and became a world power as the twentieth century progressed. Cities in coastal regions advanced, while many internal ones experienced low growth rates.

St. Louis's boundaries were set in 1876, ostensibly so the city would not have to spend money building an infrastructure in surrounding St. Louis County. The county grew and rejected a consolidation plan in 1949. This was a grievous blow for municipal St. Louis, constricted to a congested 62 square mile area. From 1950 to 2000, the city fell in population from 856,796 to 348,189, representing a loss of 508,607 in fifty years. In 2000, 51 percent of St. Louisans were African Americans. Many others were working class whites. Using 1997 model-based estimates, 25.7 percent of the people in St. Louis lived below the poverty level, compared to 12.2 percent for the country as a whole. Over 1 million people lived in St. Louis County, and municipal St. Louis was the central city of a metropolitan area of 2.6 million.

Despite population losses, St. Louis remained a great corporate and cultural center. But vast bulldozed areas around the city center looked like bombed out European cities following World War Two. As a result of urban renewal projects, many old neighborhoods no longer existed. A large housing project of the 1950s, Pruitt-Igoe, consisting of thirty-three high-rise buildings, was a complete failure, with the first structures imploded in 1972. Americans did not want to live in cramped Soviet-style, poorly built large impersonal apartment buildings. Perhaps, the old neighborhoods were not so obsolete after all.

Sandweiss's social urban history is in the tradition of Lewis Mumford, especially his landmark work, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (1961). Other important studies include Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Urban Growth in Boston* (1870-1920), 1st ed. (1962); and Robin L. Einhorn, *Property Rules: Political Economy in Chicago, 1822-1872* (1991). Warner showed the divided and class-driven nature of Boston and its neighborhoods. Einhorn

indicated how neighborhood ward bosses came together for wider civic purposes, creating the basis for Chicago machine politics. Among other important studies dealing with the aspects of creating cities out of diverse parts are John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1780 to 1845* (1982); Jon C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in the United States, 1870-1900* (1989); and William Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (1989).

Many studies in social urban history tend to be subjective, with evidence used as a basis for making assumptions about urbanization, creating an authoritative sounding package. Sandweiss sees "fenced off corners" as a key element. According to Sandweiss: "The development of this city of 'fenced-off corners' can only be understood as arising from the interlocking roles of three categorical parties in the shaping of urban space: landscape 'producers' (builders, realtors, lenders), landscape 'consumers' (residents), and landscape 'regulators' (public officials whose job it was to balance the interests of producers and consumers)" (p.16). Many elements went into building a city.

Parts needed to come together into a whole. "Drawing from the history of St. Louis, this book will demonstrate the proposition that changing urban form, on one hand, and our changing understanding or expectations of that form on the other, are mutually impressionable and intricately intertwined," Sandweiss writes. He acknowledges that such a proposition is not universally accepted and contends that many contemporary critics and architects see the urban landscape as unchanging products of their "original shapers" intent. Sandweiss believes the shaping of the cityscape is far less predictable than he feels historians and policy-makers might wish: "The difficulty of reorienting ourselves in such a way has been compounded, as I hope to show, by the long historical shadow of the city of fenced-off corners and wider settings, a city that dates roughly from the mid-nineteenth through the early-twentieth centuries. It is upon that city, uncomfortable or unjust as it may have been for many Americans in its time, that we have long depended in our effort to express the differing ways in which Americans can reconcile tensions between individual liberties and civic responsibilities" (p. 9). Decisions made long ago can continue to have an impact in the present day upon an urban landscape.

Sandweiss examines South St. Louis, a roughly 2 by 2 square mile area built-up in the nineteenth century that survived the wrecking ball and ambitious redevelopment plans. In colonial times, the land upon which South St. Louis stood was a commons that looked more orderly on notoriously inaccurate maps than in reality. After the American occupation in 1804, legal controversies over conflicting Spanish land claims stopped the geographical expansion of St. Louis until the 1830s. A public committee on the commons then sold the land, divided into a series of subdivisions.

The south side subdivisions were working class, with commercial establishments along major streets, served by streetcar lines, and factories on the fringes. Interaction with municipal authorities came over various infrastructure problems, especially building and repairing streets. In the Progressive period, supporters of downtown central corridor projects argued that the rest of St. Louis should accept their proposals for magnificent projects, ranging from boulevards to neighborhood social centers, designed to bring St. Louis together into a whole of its parts.

Wider interests produced a 1947 plan, designating as "blighted" mainly African American and "obsolete" districts that initially had included most of South St. Louis. As a matter of course, the great urban renewal projects followed. In the 1990s, the interaction between fenced off and wider interests continued in the county as a replay of what had happened much earlier in the city. Sandweiss observes: "This balkanized pattern of growth, which accelerated just as the city planning agenda came to the fore in the 1920s, is an apt expression-and in many ways a direct outgrowth of the lessons of the city of fenced-off corners and wider settings" (p. 236).

In his well-researched account, Sandweiss uses archival sources, public documents, contemporary newspapers, and a wide variety of secondary materials. *St. Louis: The Evolution of an American Urban Landscape* is a thoughtful and provocative book that affords a new way of looking at the interaction between neighborhoods and city hall. Of special value is the linking of urban and suburban subdivisions. Sandweiss's work is an important addition to the challenging social urban history.

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