

**McComb, David G. *Houston: A History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Pp. 288. Illustrations**

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its rise was unprecedented social mobility, if only at night, for even greater numbers of Americans. Another was the breakdown of the physical and psychological distance between entertainer and audience, performer and patron, in so many of these night-time establishments.

And Erenberg is aware of nightlife's psychic dimensions, of its role as a realm of fantasy and of dreaming — of hidden desires realizable, if at all, only in the anonymity of the urban world. He describes the release these activities provided from the daily grind of domestic and business chores alike, of self-discipline and willpower, of formality, and of repressed passion and asceticism. Public display not permitted elsewhere were tolerated, even encouraged, in these institutions. Yet, curiously, Erenberg employs virtually no psychology in his analysis and, indeed, save for a few references to the late Erving Goffman's sociological theories, studiously avoids social scientific findings which might have enhanced his observations.

The absence of comparative data of any kind also weakens the book. We are apparently to accept on faith Erenberg's assertion that New York City's nightlife was representative of (if also superior to) that of other major American cities. One cannot necessarily expect equivalently detailed studies of the next largest metropolises in these pages, but in their absence, at this point in urban scholarship one can as readily assume that New York City was in this as in other respects a unique city.

*Steppin' Out* is amply illustrated and clearly written. Based on entertainers' scrapbooks and memoirs, reformers' accounts, *Variety*, contemporary newspapers and other publications, it is, despite these drawbacks, a significant contribution to urban history.

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McComb, David G. *Houston: A History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Pp. 288. Illustrations.

The fastest growing city in Texas since 1925 and now the fifth largest city in the United States, Houston has drawn its share of scholarly, not to mention popular, attention. McComb's book, first published in 1969 as *Houston, The Bayou City*, is but the most recent of the studies that have attempted to clarify why and how Houston has grown. His approach to the subject however, is distinguished by its application of W.W. Rostow's stages of economic growth as the guiding model. Houston's development is separated into three major chronological periods, the first of these being the frontier years from 1836 to 1875. Set apart as an era of

transition, is the middle period, 1876 to 1930. The first years of the twentieth century which saw the completion of a Houston-centred rail network, the construction of a fifty mile ship channel giving direct access to the Gulf making Houston a port city and the discovery of nearby oil fields, are presented as being of particular importance. In the context of the model, this development established the conditions for "take off" and the "drive to maturity." The final or "post-maturity" phase from 1930 has been characterized by years of almost continuous dramatic growth.

The new edition incorporates into the analysis of the city's development, the roles of blacks, Hispanics and women, as well as an assessment of the most recent decade's frenetic petro-fired expansion. While the raw material up-dates and adds appropriate detail in certain areas, other important dimensions of Houston's urban experience remain less satisfactorily developed. The rich and abundant literature on urban politics is not reflected in McComb's discussion. While there are interesting sidelights on the almost constant rivalry between Houston and other Texas cities, Houston's place in the evolution of State politics is not defined. It similarly is apparent that Houston has gained the material regard of immensely powerful friends in Congress, but the role of this major metropolitan centre in national political affairs is not considered. The careful discussion of Houston's business elite and economic development is not balanced by a substantial analysis of the labour force and working conditions.

Consideration of the ultimate significance of Houston's history is left to the epilogue. "Once and a while" the author explains, "in the history of a civilization, nation, or city, there occurs a moment when all of the dynamic forces of existence flow together to produce extra-ordinary greatness" (p. 191). Such forces, it is alleged, came together in the 1890s to produce in Chicago, the energy and vitality that bestowed on that community a mantle of national leadership in the arts, business and politics. Houston, in 1980, is seen by McComb to be on the verge of such an urban renaissance. But without comparative measure or the supporting backdrop of the contemporary urban scene in America, the verdict on this observation must remain outstanding.

If, in places, the focus of this study may seem too narrow, there is nonetheless much here to engage anyone interested in comparative urban history. Canadian readers of the Houston biography cannot help but be drawn to think of Canada's fifth metropolitan centre — Calgary. The common cattle ranching and oil based economies of their respective hinterlands has for example, in a profound and similar way shaped the development of both cities. Moreover, the international oil business has meant much direct interchange between the two communities. At the same time key structural differences are apparent. In contrast to mineral title resting originally with the individual surface title holder in Texas, all rights in Alberta mainly reside with the Crown. This, with Canada's centralized and eastern domi-

nated banking system, assured the less prominent role for the local entrepreneurial elite and that Calgary would be much less the master of its own destiny. In the same vein, McComb's chapter 'Conservatism and Culture' is of particular interest, for Calgary as much as Houston is the most conservative city within its national orbit. Yet for reasons that beg analysis, Calgary's conservatism is at once the same and undeniably different. Such parallels and contrasts are intriguing. A serious study of the two cities, one as the measure of the other, would seem to promise attractive rewards.

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Leavitt, Judith Walzer. *The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982. Pp. vii, 279. Tables, maps, illustrations. \$25.00 (U.S.)

Prior to World War II, public responsibility for the provision of social services in North America rested primarily with municipal government. Yet Canadian and American historians have given little attention to the pioneering role assumed by local authorities in developing social policies which would ultimately become the backbone of the so-called welfare state. Fortunately, Judith Leavitt offers a much needed local perspective in her book, *The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform*.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin is representative of many mid-sized North American cities which had to confront the problems that accompanied dynamic urban growth and social and economic change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the economic centre of the region, Milwaukee grew from roughly 20,000 in 1850 to 373,000 in 1910. Much of this increase occurred as a result of immigration and by 1890, 20 per cent of the inhabitants did not speak English as their mother tongue. Germans and Poles were the dominant ethnic groups, and their concentrated presence in specific wards added an important dimension to the process and progress of health reform. In addition, Milwaukee's municipal politics contributed to the evolution of preventive health measures primarily due to the presence of a firmly-committed Socialist party with substantial middle class support. By examining Milwaukee's development from a dirty, disease-ridden and over-crowded city in the late nineteenth century to a healthy, sanitary centre which consistently won the National Health Conservation contests in the twentieth, Leavitt has presented a thought-provoking introduction to the politics of health reform and made a solid contribution to the slowly-growing literature in the field of municipal welfare policy.

*The Healthiest City* rests on a firm foundation of research. Leavitt has consulted the annual reports of Milwaukee's health department, the Wisconsin board of health's reports, a wide-ranging spectrum of daily papers including the ethnic press, the local medical society's records and the papers and publications of civic welfare groups. Consequently she is able to trace not only the administrative history of public health services in Milwaukee but also the efforts of lay and medical reformers to achieve change. To present her material, Leavitt has chosen a thematic rather than a narrative structure. In her opening chapter, she supplies a brief history of Milwaukee's demographic and territorial expansion between 1840 and 1912. She pays close attention to the changing ethnic composition of the city and quantitatively proves that ethnicity was a factor in mortality from specific diseases such as diphtheria. Her statistical profile of disease and death in the city also lends credence to the hypothesis of the British scholar, Thomas McKeown, that public health measures and changing attitudes towards personal hygiene contributed to improvements in health and longevity. Next, she discusses in general terms the appointments and policies of the health commissioners active between 1867 when the Health Department was established and 1912 when the health-oriented Socialist government was defeated. Leavitt's major contention is that civic governments responded to specific disease threats with prodding from health commissioners and concerned laymen during the nineteenth century, but that political, economic, and cultural factors more often determined the evolution of health policies.

To validate her thesis, Leavitt offers three case studies of important health concerns. In her chapter on smallpox, she describes graphically the way in which the threat of epidemic disease galvanized politicians and health officers into action. She points out that cultural influences such as Polish opposition to isolation and quarantine were equally potent factors in limiting the success of preventive endeavours in the nineteenth century. Moreover, she uses the medical controversy over the efficacy of vaccination to indicate how medical knowledge and professional cohesiveness (or lack of it) aided or hampered the health department in its efforts. In the two succeeding chapters on garbage disposal and milk purification, Leavitt again highlights the political and economic interests which were able to dominate discussions about the best methods of dealing with these environmental issues. Each of the case studies provides a probing analysis of the reform process and demonstrates how the politics of confrontation which characterized the health department in its early years was gradually replaced by the politics of cooperation as the health commissioners and their staffs became more accustomed to health department procedures, and the medical profession became more united and supportive of preventive services.

In chapter six, "The Volunteers," Leavitt adds a further dimension to her study by demonstrating the way in which female-dominated voluntary groups and philanthropic indi-