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accomplished something else, something that FDR had in mind in that cheerless spring of 1933: that young Americans of different backgrounds and beliefs and locations would assemble to work with pride and care at a task that was larger than themselves and their own difficulties; that they would gather to build and establish something that improved not just themselves but their country as well. Kay Rippelmeier has in *Giant City State Park and the Civilian Conservation Corps* provided a clear and detailed view of how this nationwide experiment worked with exceptional results in a rustic state park located in the rural setting of southern Illinois.


Reviewed by Thomas L. Bell, Western Kentucky University

This is the second book about Chicago public housing in which Dr. D. Bradford Hunt, Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Social Science at Roosevelt University in Chicago has had a role. *Blueprint for Disaster* is a follow-up to a 2005 volume with the much more upbeat title—*When Public Housing was Paradise: Building Community in Chicago*. In the first volume, Hunt assisted the primary author, former Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) research director J. S. Fuerst. The earlier volume was based on taped interviews with 130 residents of Chicago public housing in what would appear in retrospect to be its halcyon days (1947-53).

So if Chicago public housing was once the paragon of the progressive movement, why did it experience such a downward spiral? What happened to the programs of the agency that was once touted to be the most progressive and comprehensive program of public housing in the country? It is a complicated story according to Hunt. No one is above suspicion and all play at least a minor role in the demise of a utopian vision of public housing—land developers, realtors, elected officials, appointed members of the CHA, community activists and scholars and intellectuals. In his account, Hunt relies on every document at hand including minutes of CHA meetings, interviews with some of the principals involved and an extensive and exhaustive number of reference sources and materials. I have no doubt that this is truly the definitive study of public housing in Chicago and it is filled with intrigue, political maneuverings and shenanigans worthy of a story of the Chicago underworld during the era of Prohibition. But make no mistake, as complicated as is the cast of characters in this story, the overriding leitmotif of the story is racial prejudice—pure and simple.

Hunt starts with the progressive vision of the modernist Catherine Bauer, a believer in the notion that better housing will make better people and in the Corbusian notion that a Radiant City will create civility by bringing its residents closer to nature in a shared community of trust and progress. While Bauer and other influential progressive thinkers on housing in the Roosevelt years such as Harold Ickes dominate Hunt’s concern and are contemporary with the actual planning and construction of public housing units on the ground, Hunt might have been advised to go back at least one decade more in providing background to the story in order to examine what the Chicago sociologists (e.g., Park, Burgess, McKenzie, Zorbaugh) had to say about the evolving moral landscape of an increasingly segregated Chicago. Other than Louis Wirth, there is no mention of members of the Chicago school of human ecology as it is referred to in geography textbooks. Given Hunt’s eye for detail and leaving no stone unturned from the late 1930s to the present, this oversight is one of the few flaws of an otherwise sweeping account bordering on the magisterial.

Younger readers might have difficulty comprehending the depth of racial prejudice present in Chicago in the late 1940s that eventually blunted the hard-fought and almost unprecedented control that the CHA had obtained to redevelop both public and private landholdings in the immediate post-war years. The impetus for the downfall of this progressive movement was not an attempt to redevelop a previously all-white working class area located in a large parcel of the nine square mile area designated in the Chicago Plan as a target for slum clearance and redevelopment. Rather the changes that diminished the authority of the CHA were any of several more modest attempts to locate public housing on the periphery of all-white areas of the city.

A good example of a seemingly innocuous project that caused a firestorm of protest and controversy was the felt necessity to provide temporary housing for returning WWII GIs and their families. One such project was the Fernwood Homes area where temporary housing units (e.g., inexpensive Quonset huts left over from the war effort) were located near the edge of a white working-class neighborhood. When the
first black veterans and their families attempted to occupy homes in this development, the situation turned explosive. Not only were there racially charged incidents of white violence against the few black families, indicating just how deeply divided the city's residents were along racial lines, but the situation forced the ouster of progressive mayor Edward Kelly, the diminution of the authority of the CHA, and required a major police action to quell what might have become in 1949 an ugly racial confrontation that was reminiscent of the infamous Chicago race riots of 1919. And what happened at Fernwood is just one seemingly minor event. There were many other instances of burning to the ground housing units occupied by blacks who had the audacity to move into majority white projects. In the 1950s this naked racism was often clothed by McCarthy-style red baiting and inciting the fear of creeping confrontation that was reminiscent of the infamous Chicago race riots of 1919. 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for Urban Studies at the University of Chicago appears to have been overlooked.

But these are minor quibbles. Overall, the volume is excellent and should be on the bookshelves of all serious urban scholars in general and those concerned with public housing in particular.


Reviewed by John A. Jakle, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

How to find one’s way by automobile when roads were largely unmarked as to name and potential destination? That was the problem Homer Sargent Michaels assigned in publishing his 1905 guide for motorists traveling from Chicago to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Included for intersections where a motoring decision was required (as well as for major landmarks passed) was not only written description or instruction, but also—what makes his effort particularly valuable today—a photograph. Reproduced here is the guide inclusive of its verbal and visual information (along with advertising insertions). But, importantly, photographs have been replicated through contemporary photography—an exercise in re-photography. Scene by scene, the reader of today is enabled a kind of time travel—invitation to contemplate changes (minor as well as major) made to the built environment over intervening years. Offered, in consequence, is an extraordinary opportunity to assess changes wrought by automobility along the nation’s roadsides, including the rise of commercial strips.

However, there is little if any interpretation in this book regarding what the paired photographs (displays of before and after) actually mean—what they show, in other words, of changing roadside landscape. The reader is left solely with his or her own explanations. Why is there drastic change evident here, but little if any change evident there? How does change relate geographically along the transect? Are there categories of landscape change evident? What are the implied processes at work? One might wish that a future scholar would take the book and offer in-depth analysis along such lines of thought. Missing also is careful assessment of the re-photographing process. Just what are the most useful strategies for replicating photographic images? What was employed here?

Homer Sargent Michaels produced other illustrated route-guides, detailing, for example, travel between Chicago and Milwaukee, Chicago and Rockford, and between various other cities in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Perhaps, a future scholar might treat the entirety of his output thus to tackle a century and more of roadside change across a sweep of the Midwest?

Of course, such speculation goes well beyond publisher intentions. And The Chicago Map Society should not be faulted for not producing in-depth interpretation of changing landscape. Their goal was merely to call attention to a kind of historical resource (if not one rather unique) with clear scholarly potential for understanding not only landscape change, but change in America’s motoring habits. This they have accomplished through a very attractive (and visually engaging) publication.