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## Book Review of Amada Seligman's "Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side"

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“a figure on the bench of nearly biblical proportions” and a “righteous” Article III judge (131, 132). Nelson is also justifiably proud of former Weinfeld law clerks; he attributes their collective success to Weinfeld’s role as a teacher. But again, no point of comparison gives the reader the ability to judge statements such as “no other district judge and few circuit judges have produced an equally notable body of alumni” (182). Nelson remarks that “twenty-eight out of thirty-five former Weinfeld clerks who have spent all or most of their careers in private practice either founded or became partners in major New York City or national law firms” (187). Indeed, a federal clerkship often predicts later successes in both the private and public sphere, and clerkships in the Southern District of New York provide elite entry into the New York legal scene.

These encomiums distract only minimally from Nelson’s search for Weinfeld’s “timeless legacy.” Nelson asks, “Can we, as the Bible suggests, gain wisdom by studying how Weinfeld achieved justice for those who came before him?” (223). If this book does not supply that wisdom, we have certainly learned a great deal more about Edward Weinfeld’s life, ethics, and accomplishments than we knew before.

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Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Pp. 320. \$65 cloth (ISBN 0-226-74663-1); \$25 paper (ISBN 0-226-74665-8).

*Block by Block* is a study of the transition of Chicago’s west side from a white to a black neighborhood. Seligman’s goal in writing the book was to add complexity to the standard tale of whites fleeing from black urban America and moving to the suburbs during the 1950s and 1960s. She argues “that to summarize the behavior of white West Siders as ‘white flight’ is to narrow the breadth of their struggles to preserve their neighborhoods” (4). By the time the neighborhood began its racial transformation, Seligman writes, residents of the west side had “already spent many years losing battles to shore up their deteriorating environs” (5). Their departures for the suburbs was not “‘white flight,’ but a futile struggle against a series of urban crises” (6).

The book is divided into four fairly distinct areas. The opening chapter sets the backdrop by providing a detailed history of the development, ethnic makeup, and businesses that made up Chicago’s west side after World War II. This is followed by the description of three arenas of conflict in which neighborhood efforts to alter city and state policies largely failed—enforcement of housing codes, attempts to make use of urban renewal and conservation funds, and efforts to locate a planned new campus for the University of Illinois in west side’s Garfield Park. In each case, the city’s primary planning goal—the maintenance of a vibrant central core to retain

and attract institutions and people to the city—frustrated efforts of West Siders to improve their neighborhood. Already slim housing code enforcement resources focused on inner neighborhoods. Urban renewal and conservation funds were used around major institutions like the University of Chicago or closer to downtown. And the University of Illinois declined to locate near the western edge of the city. Racial issues dominate the next three chapters on public schools, block busting, and community efforts to convince whites not to move. The desire of most West Siders to maintain their white neighborhoods led to strong opposition to school integration and susceptibility to the scare tactics of real estate agents. The efforts of a few residents to stem the white outflow were unsuccessful. The book ends with an Epilogue containing a brief discussion of the urban riots of the 1960s—a coda arguing that the riots were the final straw to a back that was already broken for the white West Siders of Chicago.

Overall, this is a good urban history that takes a new approach to the lives of lower and middle class whites living in urban America after World War II. By laying out in great detail a variety of ways in which urban policy failed to provide for the needs of West Siders, Seligman succeeds in telling a story of frustration, disappointment, and growing hopelessness. She supports her theory that the white West Siders of Chicago were dismayed with their urban situation well before blacks started moving to the neighborhood. In that sense the pump was primed for them to leave prior to the arrival of blockbusters, fear mongers, and speculators. “Racism,” Seligman writes at the end of her book, “was a central component of West Siders’ departure, but it was hardly the only factor in their decision to leave Chicago” (221).

Perhaps the most telling story in the book is the failed effort to have the new University of Illinois campus located in Garfield Park. Though the park was once and is now considered a major urban resource, it came to be seen as a liability by the West Siders. Whites used incidents of crime, violence, and racial hostility as a reason to use the park as a buffer between black neighborhoods to the east and white neighborhoods to the west. The university, they thought, would serve as a barrier to residential movement and a solid institution for white students. The combination of frustrated ambitions and racial animus that lay behind the efforts to attract the campus to the West Side was symbolic of much that occurred there between 1950 and 1970.

But the effort to obtain the campus is also symbolic of my deepest concern about *Block by Block*. Though Seligman certainly describes many ways that urban policy frustrated non-racist desires of West Siders and supports her claim that flight to the suburbs was the culmination of a long series of events, the underlying racism of the residents is palpable in many of the stories she tells. That behavior is not excused in this book. But it is impossible to know if Chicago’s West Siders behaved any better or worse than those living in other cities who were confronted with the same problems. Comparisons with other urban histories, a crucial aspect of evaluating the force of racial and ethnic divisions in Chicago, is missing.

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