

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Kuklick, Bruce. *To Everything A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. pp. xii, 237. 22 black and white plates, maps, essay on sources, and index. \$19.95 (U.S.)

Stephen Scheinberg

Volume 21, Number 2, March 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016800ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016800ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Scheinberg, S. (1993). Review of [Kuklick, Bruce. *To Everything A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. pp. xii, 237. 22 black and white plates, maps, essay on sources, and index. \$19.95 (U.S.)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 21(2), 122–123. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016800ar>

unavoidable, results from the questionnaire—regrettably not reproduced in the text—that apparently asked standardized, simple-answer questions of a random sample of more than 600 respondents. With this method, the author gleaned a large body of replicable data, but was understandably not able to achieve as much depth as students of Kenya society and politics might wish.

For example, one would like to know more about how urban agriculture is related to the rural agrarian economy, and thus the society as a whole. Do some urban farmers maintain relations with kin elsewhere in the country, and what are the economic dimensions of such relations? To what extent is residence in the city a reaction to intolerable conditions in the rural areas, and what is it that was intolerable? To what extent is the move an attempt to seek a better life in the city? The author speculates on the answers but the survey method necessarily prevented him from finding out his respondents' own answers to those questions.

It would also be interesting to know what role ethnicity plays in the politics of urban agriculture. Is the central city more ethnically mixed than the suburbs because the people there prefer to live near the area where they eventually hope to obtain employment, as the author speculates, or because Kikuyu people and perhaps Wakamba are loath to allow others to encroach on "their" territory?

Another set of questions has to do with Kenya's development strategy. Freeman hints at a problem when he points out that lack of investment in rural agriculture and industry drives rural residents, frustrated by lack of economic opportunity, to the cities. However, rural escapees do not find the golden opportunities they hope for. In the end they often find them-

selves practicing an insecure and usually ill-financed form of peasant agriculture in their back yards and on railroad rights-of-way in the city. Freeman's study reminds us that the failure of many third-world governments to create conditions for the profitable pursuit of small-scale rural agriculture and industry has the perverse side-effect of displacing peasant agriculture from rural areas to cities. However, the study does not address these implications of its findings. There is much scope here for further study.

Obviously, Prof. Freeman could not have been expected to do justice to all these questions in a slender volume. What he has done is a valuable study that provides an excellent base for further investigation of agrarian society and urbanization in Africa and elsewhere in the third world.

CHRISTOPHER LEO
Political Science
University of Winnipeg

Kuklick, Bruce. *To Everything A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. pp. xii, 237. 22 black and white plates, maps, essay on sources, and index. \$19.95 (U.S.).

This is a history of a ball park, the neighbourhood it was a part of, the teams that played in it, and particularly the place of the park in the lives and imaginations of the fans, players, and owners. It was no field of dreams, in the middle of an Iowa corn field. Baseball is, for Bruce Kuklick, a peculiarly urban phenomenon. A Ronald Reagan might reinvent it for his Iowa radio audience in the 1930s, but big league baseball grew with the cities.

Shibe Park (much later renamed Connie Mack Stadium) opened in 1909. It was the first of the privately-financed con-

crete and steel stadiums, the successors to the often dangerous wooden structures of the late 19th century. Three of these ball parks still survive—Wrigley Field in Chicago, Fenway Park in Boston, and New York's Yankee Stadium—Comiskey Park in Chicago closed last year. Shibe survived over sixty-one years as an anchor to North City, a new neighbourhood that developed in the shadow of Philadelphia and persisted into an era of demographic transformation and the harsh politics of urban renewal.

Benjamin Shibe, a sporting goods manufacturer and his partner and field manager of the Philadelphia A's, the legendary Connie Mack, located their new stadium in an area previously referred to as Swampoodle. Cheap open land and its accessibility by the Broad Street trolley, as well as three railway lines, made the site appealing. Opening day fans approached an ornate French renaissance facade, with a tower at its corner containing offices for the partners. Inside there was seating for 23,000 with a theoretical capacity, including standees, for a then incredible 40,000.

Professor Kuklick's emphasis is on the role of this ferro-concrete structure as a part of the connective tissue in "the way sport is instrumental in ordinary people's construction of a meaningful past for themselves." Thus his title may be evocative of past seasons of baseball glory, but it is intended as a commentary on the transient role of a piece of urban architecture in containing or perpetuating the public memory of an important element of popular culture. Shibe Park's season is past, the A's long ago departed for Kansas City and then Oakland and few recall their tie to Philadelphia. The Phillies have played in Veterans Stadium for over twenty years now and Kuklick is not interested in rekindling nostalgia but in understanding Shibe's role as a cultural artifact.

The author is far more successful in giving us a sense of how the players and the owners thought about the stadium than he is in conveying the ordinary citizen's feelings. Kuklick has uncovered the anti-nostalgic reactions of old ballplayers. Most memorable was the comment of Amos Strunk who was in the A's lineup for the 1909 opening game. Strunk, who had been a hard hitting outfielder for the A's, was invited to appear at the 1970 closing ceremony but refused since "I hold no sentimental value about the closing of this property and it means nothing to me at all." Satchel Paige, the great black pitcher who was not welcomed to the major leagues until long after his prime said only "well...they wouldn't let me and my boys play there." Such gems are not complemented by the voices of ordinary fans.

Interviews were an important part of the research for the book, but the voices of the fans seem muted. Kuklick never fully presents these ordinary Philadelphians, and does not reveal enough of his interviews with them to provide the access required to allow us to grasp the popular imagination. Perhaps a Studs Terkel could tap and bring alive the imagination of the baseball fan. The intersection of popular culture and social history may require more than the historian's conventional methodology can uncover.

Shibe Park had its few seasons of triumph with the A's and their \$100,000 infield from 1910-14, the 1927-32 team with stars such as Jimmy Faux, Al Simmons, Mickey Cochrane and Lefty Grove, and the 1950 Philly whiz kids. These were only interludes for Philadelphia fans who were victims of Connie Mack's penchant to break up winning teams, and the inability of the Phillies management to build a winner.

Mack was forced to retire from field management after a tenure of fifty years. His sons were caught up in a family rivalry that finally resulted in the sale of the A's and their move to Kansas City in 1954. The football Eagles moved to Franklin Field for the 1958 season, where they had not only many more seats but also parking space.

Kuklick gives us a picture of the ball park's steady, seemingly inexorable, decline. Perhaps, he observes, if Mr. Mack had overcome his racist prejudices to sign black stars such as Roy Campanella, Orestes Minoso, or Henry Aaron, the A's might have triumphed and stayed on in Philadelphia and even at Shibe. Yet, the Yankees and the Red Sox were similarly delinquent in signing black stars, and so perhaps we ought to consign this conjecture to the Cleopatra's nose file that also holds the note on Mr. Mack's failure to buy Babe Ruth from the minor league Orioles.

Shibe's 1970 demise is attributed by Kuklick to persistently poor teams, technical limitations on the expansion of seating beyond 33,000, inadequate parking facilities in a crowded neighbourhood, and its situation in a changing and increasingly more dangerous area. Some, or all of these factors may have contributed but they were not unique to Philadelphia. Wrigley Field in Chicago was and is not known for winning baseball, has limited parking in its environs and has a small seating capacity. Comiskey which only closed last year is in the heart of the South Side ghetto and the Yankee Stadium neighbourhood, recently vividly described in *Bonfire of the Vanities*, is no safer. This is only to suggest that Professor Kuklick's failure to invoke any comparisons leaves us with a narrowly focused picture and no means of weighing the analysis.

Kuklick's failures may be the result of pressing too hard to knock one out of the park. In this slim book, the urban historian may lament the absence of a comparative framework, the historian of popular culture will perhaps desire a fuller treatment of the fans, and the fan will certainly want more colour on players and important games. Yet, these are not three strikes on the author. He has, to leave the metaphor, opened up some interesting new areas in sports history which should prove inspirational for future scholars.

STEPHEN SCHEINBERG
Department of History
Concordia University, Montreal

Hamilton, Kenneth Marvin. *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. index. illustrations. Pp. 152, appendices. \$29.95 (U.S.).

Professor Hamilton of the Department of History, Southern Methodist University, has presented an important account of the founding of black towns in the Trans-Appalachian West. His work, broken into five chapters, chronicles the development of Nicodemus, Kansas; Mound Bayou, Mississippi; Langston City, Oklahoma; Boley, Oklahoma; and Allensworth, California. Hamilton poses a challenge to existing scholarship and its emphasis on blacks seeking refuge from racial oppression as the major impetus for establishing all black towns in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He does not reject the racial haven thesis but does assert that an essential element is missing. Hamilton reveals that an entrepreneurial profit motive drove black founders as it did their white counterparts engaged in the enterprise of town founding.

To illustrate the cogency of his observations, Hamilton relates the promotional activities of black agents like Edwin Mc-