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The Cincinnati Anthology ed. by Zan McQuade (review)

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pendium of how Popular Front Leftism died and why a New Left had to be formed which expressed little concern, at least initially, with the old debates over labor and foreign policy, addressing instead “new” concerns like racism and poverty. Devine shatters a lot of the myths surrounding the campaign and Wallace and appropriately paints his campaign as the last gasp of the CP in American politics.

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Zan McQuade, ed., *The Cincinnati Anthology*. Cleveland:
Rust Belt Chic Press, 2014. 264 pp. \$20.00.

From the Ohio River basin that defines its urban core to its rural reaches in neighboring counties, Cincinnati encompasses a complex range of cultures, economies, and perspectives. *The Cincinnati Anthology*, edited by Zan McQuade, scratches the surface of some of those complexities with a new collection of articles, essays, and art that starts with a geology lesson and ends with a cartoon. The twenty-three disparate pieces in the book reflect many faces of the city, some famous and some rarely glimpsed, much less exposed. Of course there are the hillsides and bridges and big brand corporations, the disgraced baseball legend and elegant arts czar. But there’s also an alienated poet and a dissatisfied transplant and a stunning set of photo portraits that illuminate relationships in the neighborhood of Price Hill by cutting through stereotypes, one frame at a time.

The opening article, “Geology is Destiny” by Polk Laffoon IV, begins and ends, literally, with the writer’s personal views of the city’s hilly terrain. That is when the piece is at its most appealing. Though long and at times more descriptive than analytical, Laffoon details glaciers and mudslides and explains the inevitable conflict between development and nature that has shaped and reshaped both the city’s landscape and its history.

After “Geology,” an exuberant essay filled with raw passion, the essay “Love Letter to Cincinnati” reads like a breath of fresh air. Penned by local chef David Falk, the playful “letter” introduces the city’s chronic shyness and conservatism as parts of an endearing, and evolving, whole. “You are no longer that embarrassing girlfriend I don’t tell my friends about, insecure and self-conscious,” the prodigal chef concludes after returning

to open restaurants in his hometown. “You’re alive and breathing in gasps of energy and I scream my love for you from the Italianate rooftops.”

Two strong pieces about Cincinnati icons—Jack Heffron’s conflicted ode, “Pete Rose,” and Katie Laur’s salaciously satisfying “Conversations with Irma”—which details the life and times of benefactress Irma Lazarus—are more than just skillfully constructed. They offer insights into community identity—the value of hard work and importance of giving back—as much as they do into their individual subjects.

For example, the piece on Rose, the “King Arthur of our local mythology,” concludes that despite his betrayal of baseball, Rose is forgiven by Cincinnatians because “When you were a winner, we were too. . . . You did it your way, and that’s our way—nothing fancy, just grit and drive and sacrifice and teamwork, and the will to succeed.”

The different voices McQuade tapped for the anthology express their feelings about that grit and sense of connectedness in vastly different ways. Aside from Falk’s “Love Letter,” few pieces gloss over the ugly glow of racism and geographic protectionism that runs deep in the midwestern city where longtime residents do not greet newcomers so much as endure them. That feeling of dissonance reverberates in both “Pushing the Racial Dialogue in Cincinnati,” by Tifanei Ressler-Moyer, and “This Triste Little Town,” by Rebecca Morgan Frank. Though their stories are different, their themes echo the sense of isolation and frustration both felt when they moved to the ‘Nati. Not surprisingly, neither author lives in Cincinnati today.

The breadth of contributors to the anthology is impressive. They include Cincinnati native and award-winning author Curtis Sittenfeld writing about a local food bank; local iconic band Afghan Whigs’ member John Curley photographing Great American Ball Park; Polish and Brooklyn bred artist Maya Drozd’s spread showcasing “ghost signs”; Cincinnati Reds’ relief pitcher Sam LeCure’s “#5things” he loves about the city; the Cincinnati-born duo Over-the-Rhine’s lyrics to their song “Called Home”; and Cedric Michael Cox, whose drawings “Cityscape/Polyphonic Monuments” combine the sharp and soft edges of the city’s skyline into a geometric panorama of angles and shadows.

Photography offers another highlight in the collection, though its reproduction quality in print copies has disappointed some early readers. In addition to “Spans,” Nick Dewald’s haunting tribute to the city’s bridges and views, Cincinnati native Michael Wilson, go-to photographer for musicians like Lyle Lovett, Emmylou Harris, and B. B. King, offers six pages

of portraits of people in the Price Hill neighborhood. Simple and powerful, the images show a refreshing diversity in age, ethnicity, and culture. Wilson's style and familiarity with the neighborhood allow him a level of intimacy with his subjects, whose tenderness and humanity he manages to capture in a single, fleeting moment.

If the strength in these collected narratives is their differences, then their weakness is a byproduct of their similarities. In a city of fifty-two neighborhoods and endless suburbs, the collection focuses extensively on Over-the-Rhine and its development successes and struggles. Because of that, many essays cover similar ground and similar history, which leads to inevitable repetitiveness, and, even more, a reinforcement that stories from the city's urban core dominate city life. While downtown and Over-the-Rhine, in particular, offer abundant avenues for thoughtful examination and reflection about Cincinnati, reading slightly differing accounts of the same events—as the essays were written and originally published at different times—makes the collection less cohesive as well as less comprehensive.

Most all of the pieces in the anthology have been published elsewhere first, some in print and many online, which makes them feel at times disjointed despite their common threads. It is not a neat and tidy collection, but it doesn't set out to be. Instead, it is a celebration and an admonition. It is a history lesson and a piece of art. McQuade describes Cincinnati as "beautiful and sometimes troubled." The phrase applies just as well to this ambitious compendium of creative endeavors as it does the city itself.

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John B. Jentz and Richard Schneirov, *Chicago in the Age of Capital: Class, Politics, and Democracy during the Civil War and Reconstruction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012. 310 pp. \$55.00.

Historians have traditionally centered much of the discussion of antebellum, wartime, and especially Reconstruction America on southern themes and questions. John Jentz and Richard Schneirov, though, hope to reposition our focus to the North, and more specifically the urban Midwest. During the period from the 1850s to the 1870s, in what Eric Hobsbawm dubbed "The Age of Capital," Chicago, like much of the nation, typified