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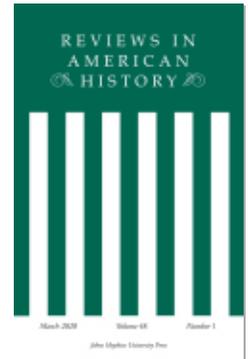
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LADIES WHO LUNCHEd AND THE BATTLES THEY CAUSED

Emily E. LB. Twarog

Emily Remus, *A Shoppers' Paradise: How the Ladies of Chicago Claimed Power and Pleasure in the New Downtown*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019. 304 pp. Photos, maps, notes, and index. \$39.95.

Much has been written about the rise of Chicago from the flames of the Great Fire. Scholars of the natural and built environment, labor, and capitalism have demonstrated that Chicago represented the new American industrial landscape. A space defined by architectural wonder and endless bounty, where a working man could achieve wealth and fame and escape his lack of pedigree and connections to the old-money families that defined the social and cultural order of the Eastern seaboard. Emily Remus's *A Shoppers' Paradise* offers up another layer to the history of Chicago: wealthy, well-heeled, white women, or "Chicago ladies" as Remus refers to them, "...devoted themselves to bringing order, culture, and beauty to the urban environment – the civilizing a capitalist society" (p. 12).

This is a story of how one very specific group of women occupied downtown Chicago and transformed the space from a city "made of man" dedicated to "industrial production ...devoted chiefly to finance, manufacturing, processing, warehousing, and wholesale trade... filled with the institutions and infrastructure that fueled industry" (p. 33). The Chicago Loop was a relatively small area, framed by Lake Michigan to the east, the city's Levee vice district to the south, mansions to the north, and industrial sprawl to the west. It was made famous by Theodore Dreiser's fictional account of a young woman who moves from rural Wisconsin to Chicago to find the American Dream in *Sister Carrie* (1900). Remus uncovers a new perspective on the evolution of Chicago in which the Chicago ladies push the boundaries that defined public and private and, more specifically, "...advance[ed] into public life as both civic actors and consumers..." and how they challenged a patriarchal social and cultural order (p. 7).

A Shoppers' Paradise is a critical contribution to the literature on the culture of capitalism. It brings a much-needed perspective on "the crucial role of gender" (p. 8). Historian Joyce Appleby commented that the "there can be no

capitalism...without a culture of capitalism, and there is no culture of capitalism until the principal forms of traditional society have been challenged and overcome" (p. 8). Remus responds, "Only by taking women and gender into account can historians of capitalism fully understand the evolution of our modern consumer economy and the institutions and environment that support it" (p. 8). *A Shoppers' Paradise* is a fascinating examination of that evolution of the culture of capitalism, and Remus excels at exploring the how and why of the challenges.

Remus's fluid and seemingly effortless writing transports the reader to turn-of-the-twentieth century Chicago as the city flourished after the worldwide success of hosting the World's Fair. The Loop was a defined area with the elevated train system circling the district and a series of streetcars carrying workers, businessmen, and shoppers back and forth from home to downtown. As retailers such as Marshall Field & Co., Carson Pirie Scott & Co., Mandel Brothers, Charles Gossage & Co., and Schlesinger & Mayer established palaces of commerce, the allure of these high-end retailers garnered attention among the city's wealthiest families as well as working-class people who came to window-shop or work. In addition to the larger stores, the streets were peppered with smaller specialty shops, tearooms, soda fountains, theaters, and hotels. Eventually, the city's leading women opened offices downtown for their charitable work, creating even more reason for the Chicago ladies to spend a full day out of the house in the Loop. "The new practices of shopping ladies illuminate how gender ideals constrained and shaped an emergent culture of consumption" (p. 9).

Each chapter explores one way in which the rise of a consumer culture and the subsequent feminization of public space clashed with the decidedly patriarchal culture of Chicago's Loop district. Remus effectively uses diaries, newspaper coverage, travel writing, and public records to illustrate how disruptive this transformation was for businessmen. As the city prepared for the World's Fair, the couture houses of Paris revived the hoopskirt as the latest fashion trend. *The Chicago Tribune's* editorial board warned the city that "a crinoline revival would 'seriously incommode those who attend the Exposition and make it impossible to see any exhibit where women congregate in number'" (p. 35). In short, critics of the re-invented fashion believe that "ladies' consumer impulses" would undermine "civic welfare" (p. 35). While this is hilarious in many ways, the concern was legitimate. With streetcars already filled to the brim and sidewalks between ten and twenty feet, the diameter and inflexibility of the latest haute couture threatened to shrink available space by half. The "Anti-Hoopskirt War" called for collective action on the part of men to resist the latest fashion. Many women also opposed the cage-like fashion, arguing that it was carceral in the way it limited women's ability to function. Yet the hoopskirt was not a new concept, as Remus points out. Thus, it was

not so much the fashion itself that riled critics but the “marked unease with women’s growing presence in urban public life” (p. 49).

No sooner did the “Anti-Hoopskirt War” come to a close than another fashion battle broke out over tall hats in the theater. The regulation of women’s clothing and thus their bodies “illuminates the evolving relationship between consumption and citizenship...The ability to enjoy public accommodations... became entwined with definitions of freedom and equality” (p. 73). Hats topped with bows, ribbons, silk flowers, feathers, and other bits and bobs became the latest style, and women spending more time downtown were more likely to attend the theater. Chicago ladies used male responses to this increased visibility to highlight the control men exerted over women’s lives. Remus cites several women who argued that they would forgo their high hats in exchange for full suffrage, one warning, “This weapon has been placed at our disposal to do battle with those who seek to deprive us of that which is of far greater importance” (pp. 105–6). These types of threats, according to Remus, “revealed the hostility many Chicago women felt toward those who would infringe on their personal freedom” (p. 106).

Like some consumers today, Chicago ladies found that shopping often sparked the urge to imbibe. In candy shops, tearooms, and the lavish Pompeian Room, “Chicago ladies savored alcohol, leisure, and sociability” (p. 117). Yet, public drinking was clearly crossing a gendered boundary that threatened to destroy the reputations of the city’s most notable women. “The conflict over tipping illuminates a crucial moment in the making of consumer society: when public space and public culture accommodated the female pleasure seeker” (p. 118). To be clear, women were not sidling up to men in saloons. Rather, high-end department stores and hotels welcomed shoppers into female spaces, such as Marshall Fields’ ladies’ fur department opening a tearoom that offered rose punch, “a blend of rose cordial and vanilla ice cream, served with a rose on the side” (p. 121). The trend caught on quickly, and a variety of business owners opened their doors to women seeking refreshments beyond a strong cup of tea. These establishments helped to create an atmosphere perfect for the expansion of women’s clubs where women “blended leisure and sociability with education, politics, and reform,” with almost thirty such clubs located downtown (p. 139).

By the early twentieth century, Chicago’s downtown Loop was an overcrowded shopping mecca where wealthy men and women filled the streets in search of the next opportunity and experience. For the working classes, it was a place to find employment in beautiful department stores and hotels away from dangerous and unhealthy sweatshops and factories. The one thing all white women shared regardless of class was “mashing,” typically performed by well-dressed dandies who verbally harassed, stalked, and physically assaulted women. Few women escaped the masher. He followed victims into shops, theaters, and hotels. “The ‘torment’ of mashers, initially confined to the

vicinity of the theaters, soon spread to nearly every corner of the downtown" (p. 153). And while lawmakers and the police were vigilant in their regulation of women's dresses, hats, and alcohol consumption, they ignored the violence perpetrated by mashers. Ultimately, business leaders took on the role of regulator in their efforts to keep women as customers. But between the crowds and the increasing number of mashers, it was virtually impossible to stop the behavior. Instead, Mayor Harrison "admonished women 'to stop flirting on the streets'" (p. 161). In this all-too-familiar narrative of victim-blaming, it became the task of women to establish strategies to avoid mashers.

Remus has written an accomplished first book. Using newspapers, diaries, and public records, the author situates the reader in the crowded streets of Chicago and the tearooms and soda fountains of the Chicago ladies. There were times, however, that I found myself wishing Remus had dug into additional archives, including the papers of various businesses, to get another perspective on how businesses dealt with issues such as mashing, tipping, and the design of public spaces. For example, the first two chapters, on the development of downtown Chicago as a social space and the Hoopskirt War, benefited greatly from the diary of Frances Glessner, a "public-spirited" woman who helped establish Chicago's first permanent symphony and was a member of two of the leading women's clubs (p. 14). In later chapters, though, the heavy reliance on newspaper coverage left me wanting more substance at times. I was also surprised at the absence of discussion of how the Loop's transformation into a consumer wonder intersected with the less-prosperous areas of the city brimming with worker unrest during marches and strikes for the eight-hour work day, after which journalists were tried and hanged as a result of the Haymarket protest, and railroad workers shut down the thousands of miles of rail on the far southern tip of Chicago at the Pullman Palace Car Works.

The themes running throughout *A Shoppers' Paradise* are particularly poignant today as marginalized people continue to struggle to have equal access to and safety in public spaces. While *A Shoppers' Paradise* primarily examines the well-heeled white women of wealthy Chicago, the very real issues of harassment and exclusion that these women faced continue to resonate and impact women and people of color today. Scholars of the body will also find this book an asset to the study of both perception and control of women's bodies in public spaces. In the recent surge in literature on the history of consumption and capitalism, this is an excellent addition to the shelf.

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