

Barth, Gunther. *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980. Pp. viii, 289. Index, bibliographic essay, notes, pictures. \$19.95.

Gunther Barth is a professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author of several books, most notably *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver*. In this ambitious new work, Barth argues that in the nineteenth century there developed an urban culture which was common to all city folk, regardless of their points of origin. Central to this culture were various new institutions with a broad appeal which were important socializing agents. These institutions were the apartment building, the metropolitan press, the department store, the ballpark, and vaudeville. The author asserts that their invention resulted out of the ability of newcomers to devise new ways of cooperating and securing necessary services.

Barth believes that the American innovation of the apartment house provided private space in the congested city. The press supplied elements of an urban identity and a language for communication. The department store reputedly assured women a place in city life, encouraging their presence downtown. The sporting world was dominated by men who were exposed at the ballpark to the meaning of rules for a society undergoing vast changes. Finally, the vaudeville stage was viewed as an integrating agent which provided its audiences with social skills and cultural values that helped them cope with the nuances of metropolitan life.

These conclusions are plausible, but are not all proven. Part of the author's problem lies with definition, or rather the lack of definition. Barth never explains what a city actually is, why he selected the institutions he focused on, or even which urbanites he is discussing, for everyone did not partake of these institutions. His focus is exclusively on metropolises, primarily those in the Northeast, although he does discuss Chicago and San Francisco. In addition, there are certain problems with Barth's evidence and his arguments. One wonders, for example, exactly how extensive apartment construction was in American cities. Barth provides no statistics for this. Certainly the apartment building was very prominent in New York City, but not in Brooklyn just across the river. There was considerable construction of apartment buildings in Chicago by the 1890s and thereafter along the lakefront. However, for most families the detached single-unit dwelling remained the ideal.

Barth's discussion of the rise of the metropolitan press is quite comprehensive, although one would like to know more about its audience. He indicates the importance of such factors as innovative management, technological developments, the rise of the editor as an opinion maker, and the emphasis on city life itself as news in the development of papers like the *New York Sun*. Penny and two-cent papers increased their circulation because of popular features like the sports page, and made their profits from advertising revenue. Publishers sought to accommodate to the work cycles of readers by emphasizing evening and Sunday editions.

Barth's discussion of women and popular culture is particularly unconvincing. Barth stresses the democratic experience of shopping at a department store. However, there was quite a difference between shopping at Wanamaker's and Marshall Field's. Women like Sister Carrie would probably not be treated courteously at Field's and would be told to go to the bargain basement. Barth regarded sales clerking as a good job for women, but they were underpaid and overworked. Barth's analysis of vaudeville also focused on women. He argues that a full range of city folk attended vaudeville without recognizing the great difference from the elegant downtown theaters to the cheap entertainment at neighborhood shows. The author asserts that vaude-

ville was a unique urban form which brought together urbanites and enabled them to show off to others. He believes that the presence of women on stage foreshadowed their presence in audiences and influenced women's attitudes and behavior. However, there is no evidence at all to support this contention.

The section of *City People* of greatest interest to readers of this journal is the lengthy essay on ballparks. This chapter focuses primarily on baseball, although it does discuss other sports as well. Barth read various popular magazines as well as the *Spirit of the Times*, the *National Police Gazette*, and the *New York Clipper*. He relied heavily on Harold Seymour's *Baseball: The Early Years* as well as less reliable secondary works of a more popular character.

Barth's discussion of sport is marred by a poor research design, dubious assumptions, questionable conclusions, and countless errors. He generally accepts most traditional perceptions of nineteenth century baseball without critically examining the conventional wisdom. Some of his assumptions are a bit naive, such as "Basic to baseball's attraction was man's fascination with throwing and catching a ball." (p. 182). More importantly, central to the author's thesis that spectatorship provided a sense of community is the following unproven assumption: "The immigrants' age and poverty marked them as the chief supporters of spectator sports. When only privileged youngsters had the time to play sandlot baseball, . . . poor men *automatically* belonged in the stands . . ." (my emphasis) (pp. 186-87). The social composition of the ballpark crowds is a crucial question for the author's analysis of baseball's social functions, but it is not adequately explored.

Part of Barth's problems can be recognized from the following two sentences: "In the 1870's, game statistics and baseball gossip were the mainstay of the Philadelphia *Sporting Life* and of the St. Louis *Sporting News*. However, from 1877 on, the proverbial man on the street received much of his information about the game from the New York *National Police Gazette*." (p. 163). The *Gazette* was actually a poor source on the national pastime, devoting most of its space to crime, the stage, and prize fighting. This is a minor flaw compared to Barth's gross error in the previous sentence, since neither *Sporting Life* nor *Sporting News* were even published until the 1880s! Barth did not read either of these weeklies which is essential for a serious study of baseball.

Barth's knowledge of the history of sport is somewhat lacking, and the result is an incredible number of factual errors. They are too numerous to mention, but a few examples can suffice. The author asserts that horse racing was the most popular spectator sport until the rise of professional baseball (p. 154), but it was harness racing. The introduction of pari-mutuel betting in the first decade of the century did not remove clouds of suspicion from horse racing.

(p. 157) John L. Sullivan's last championship fight was not with bare knuckles. (p. 158) An 1858 amateur baseball game reported as a championship game (p. 167) was actually an all-star game. Al Reach was not the first professional ballplayer (p. 168), a distinction usually credited to James Creighton. The American Association did not fail in 1890 (p. 170) because it was in business in 1891. The American League was founded in 1900, but was not a major league until 1901. (p. 170) In sum, it would not be unfair to state, as one wag once put it, "Nothing new, except the mistakes."

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