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I have heard it said by my peers that Chicago is an “overanalyzed” city. It served as the prototypical Fordist city for early post-war geographers, and it still frequently serves as a case study and laboratory for social scientists, even well after the days of the Chicago School of Sociology. *Neoliberal Chicago*, however, is as much of an intervention into the city’s political discourse as it is an academic study of politics in Chicago. Its subject matter—Chicago’s city hall, changing neighborhoods, and institutions that are increasingly governed according to economically conservative market logic—resembles academic collections about Chicago from the 2000s, such as *The New Chicago*,1 *Chicago’s Geographies*,2 and *Global Chicago*.3 However, this collection distinguishes itself in its focus on the dynamics of political exclusion and the concentration of economic power in Chicago as it plays out in several different arenas, such as city finance, real estate, sports, ethnic politics, and law enforcement.

In the introduction, Hague, Corr, and Sternberg establish a working definition of “neoliberalism,” drawing heavily from David Harvey’s well-known treatment of the topic, and provide some relevant history for understanding it as a widespread phenomenon in urban governance. After that, *Neoliberal Chicago* gets to work. Without too much else in the way of high-level social theory, the different essays illustrate Chicago’s own brand of neoliberal governance in its actually-existing diversity, and the consequences of the city’s many neoliberal

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projects carried out by both private and state actors. The result is a collection that serves as an academic assessment of governance, both public and private, in post-recessionary Chicago and as a guide to the practical consequences of neoliberal governance, accessible to civic-minded laypeople. On both accounts, *Neoliberal Chicago* performs well.

The opening essays help to make *Neoliberal Chicago* as strong of a collection as it is. The introduction begins by connecting the controversies surrounding the Emmanuel administration’s fiscal and development policies, and their direct connection to Chicago’s Tax-Increment Financing (TIF)-anchored neoliberal fiscal structure. The social and cultural components of Chicago neoliberalism are also treated in the introduction, but the up-front treatment of neoliberalism’s deep influence on twenty-first-century Chicago’s fiscal structure, and consequent economic development policies, helps to ground the other essays and their common relevance to Chicago neoliberalism.

The first essay, by Garner, Hancock, and Fidel, presents a history of the relationship between racial formation and the rise of Chicago’s neoliberal governance practices. The authors demonstrate that not only does neoliberalism cement “racial isolation” in Chicago, but that the politics of race were a constitutive motivator of Chicago neoliberalism’s formation. Spirou and Bennett’s second chapter helps to further clarify this topic through a spatial lens. Of the early chapters of *Neoliberal Chicago*, Larry Bennett’s “Contemporary Chicago Politics: Myth, Reality, and Neoliberalism” might be the most distinctive. It is an attempt to demystify the infamous “Chicago machine.” Often hidden behind an exaggerated image of the Chicago political machine, Chicago’s mayoral administration, county government, and aldermanic alliances are often spoken of in the media as if little has changed since the first Daley administration, when precinct captains shepherded voters to the “correct” machine candidates. Bennett argues that not only have these arrangements changed, but that the Chicago machine has declined in terms of absolute power to a degree that is often unacknowledged. Some remnants of the old political machinery still exist in the West Side, while a powerful South Side bloc maintains its power through campaign donation flows rather than luring voters. But otherwise, the machine is a shadow of its former self. Bennett terms the predominant technics of Chicago’s twenty-first-century politics as “machine politics.” Many factions attempt to use various strategies to secure government seats, but the coherence and discipline of the old regime are long gone. Clarifying Chicago’s electoral and mayoral politics’ relationship with neoliberal governance goes a long way in maximizing the
political usefulness of Neoliberal Chicago. Many sociologists, historians, and geographers have expounded on the neoliberal ideology articulated out of Chicago’s city hall, but rarer are those explanations connected to the ways in which neoliberal governance actually helps Chicago politicians to stay in power.

The essays that make up most of the book’s content are oriented around treating Chicago neoliberalism in multiple contexts, including law enforcement, sports, sustainability, and neighborhood development. The quality of the essays is consistent across the board, but their widely varying subject matter will likely result in some appealing to certain readers more than others. Some, such as Dinces and Lamberti on the class politics of Chicago sports, Papadopoulos on LGBT neighborhood identity, and Shah and McQuade on law enforcement surveillance, represent novel avenues of investigation into Chicago’s neoliberal projects. Others, such as Martinez on Chicago neighborhoods and the foreclosure crisis’s consequences for neighborhood ownership structures, and Breitbach on attempts to push gentrification into southeast Chicago, show how the post-recession context has had a significant impact on how neoliberal projects are conducted in Chicago.

Bennett, Garner, and Hague’s conclusion also sets this collection apart. I can’t think of many other academic essay collections that call upon their readership to intervene in a specific city’s political discourse and bring their work to the streets, so to say. Many collections end on a call to arms to change academic discourse on a topic or undertake a new research program, but Neoliberal Chicago’s editors directly implore their audiences to aid in chartering a progressive alternative to Chicago neoliberalism, listing a preliminary program for such a project.

This leaves the question of where social scientists concerned with the “Third City” should go next. Many of the pieces in Neoliberal Chicago allude to the increasing regionalization of Chicago’s social and economic contradictions. Perhaps it is time “Chicagoland” received a treatment. More in line with the editors’ conclusion though, Chicago’s diverse array of activists, as well as their often-complicated relationship with neoliberal political projects, could easily fill an academic collection.

Despite its admirable breadth and depth, Neoliberal Chicago does suffer from some select blind spots. Chicago’s role as a logistics and transit hub perhaps best embodies not only Chicago’s material incorporation into post-Fordist production, but the city and region’s privileged role in globalization and flexible production systems. An acknowledgement of Chicago’s unique place within the
hard infrastructure of neoliberalism and post-Fordist production/consumption, even just in the space of a box, could have lent weight to the idea of a particularly strong relationship between Chicago and neoliberalism. Also, while Saskia Sassen is acknowledged as an authority on urban political economy throughout the collection, some of her most important insights specifically about Chicago could have helped to situate Chicago’s status in the global economy: despite its fiscal problems and deep-seated social issues, it still holds steady as the Midwest’s command-and-control module for business services. This is a markedly different situation than most other Rust Belt cities experience, and one that helps to explain the pernicious character of Chicago’s drastic socio-economic inequality and the character of its brand of neoliberal machine politics.

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4. Sassen’s contributions to Chicago’s Geographies and Global Chicago explore this topic.