

Becoming Penn: The Pragmatic American University, 1950–2000. By JOHN L. PUCKETT and MARK FRAZIER LLOYD. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 447 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$49.95.)

Founded in 1749 by Benjamin Franklin and his associates, the University of Pennsylvania was first located “downtown” at Ninth and Chestnut Streets. In 1872 it moved across the Schuylkill River to Thirty-Fourth and Walnut Streets, then the Philadelphia “suburbs.” However, authors John L. Puckett, a Penn professor, and Mark Frazier Lloyd, a Penn archivist, argue that, by 1950, the university resided in a very urban West Philadelphia. It was the dawn of urban redevelopment.

Becoming Penn documents the university’s participation in this process in great detail. Administrators worked closely with Edmund Bacon’s Planning Department and the City of Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (RDA) to buffer the urban university from outside changes. Penn and the city feared an encroaching blight engendered by deindustrialization and an increasingly impoverished and growing African American population in West Philadelphia. Indeed, spearheaded in the 1960s by Penn, the West Philadelphia Corporation, and plentiful federal renewal dollars, the urban renewal process involved massive “Negro Removal.” These actions not only earned Penn the bitter enmity of its black neighbors but also sparked the fear (and sometimes the reality) that, like its counterpart ninety miles north, Columbia University, Philadelphia’s Ivy League university existed in an urban war zone. The authors contend that in the 1970s a chastened Penn rose to the occasion and launched the West Philadelphia Initiatives, a huge, transformational institutional commitment that undertook large-scale neighborhood revitalization in partnership with the university’s black neighbors. Penn’s new, southern-born president, Sheldon Hackney, led these initiatives.

The book, however, focuses on more than urban redevelopment. It also examines Penn’s postwar presidential leadership, from Harold Stassen to Gaylord Harnwell, Martin Meyerson, Sheldon Hackney, and Judith Rodin. The authors especially highlight the role of Hackney. Following the modernist extravagances of urbanist Meyerson, Penn took steps under Hackney to address the hostile political repercussions caused by the excesses of redevelopment projects. Unit 3, for example, resulted in the demolition of blocks of salvageable “blighted” neighborhood housing. While Rodin was a self-described CEO who brought “corporatization” to Penn’s leadership, she continued the university’s engagement with the community as well. Like Hackney, she heightened the university’s reputation for applied scientific research and seriously elevated undergraduate as well as graduate academic standards.

Nor do the authors fail to chart in great depth the physical transformation of Penn’s campus. Viewing all of West Philadelphia as the canvas for university growth, postwar campus planners magisterially remade the once sleepy, ivy-covered cluster of nineteenth-century Victorian libraries and halls into the historic

core of a sprawling, glittering “University City.” With the support of the City of Philadelphia, trolley track-lined streets were removed, city land was generously deeded to the university, and buildings needed for campus expansion were condemned. West Philadelphia was literally remade into what is today described as a magnificent, monumental corpus of “Eds and Meds.”

To some degree this book could be described as pure panegyric, the saga of how the University of Pennsylvania arose from being a hallowed, but moldering, playground for a student body of rich, preppy, academically slothful “joe college” types into a major, academically distinguished research powerhouse where service education and community involvement are prioritized over fraternity life. In fact, the battle to tame fraternities, whose actions often appeared racist and sexist, occupies a modest, albeit important, subset of the Penn story. Indeed, the taming in part involved the demolition of the school’s historic “fraternity row.”

Despite the panegyric undertone, the authors temper their conclusion. University City, the University City Science Center, and the Penn Medicine (Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania) complex overwhelmed West Philadelphia. The disjunction between the wealth of the university and West Philadelphia’s still-marginalized black neighborhoods continues to breed tension, despite Penn’s heavy involvement in neighborhood education and other partnership activities aimed at social, economic, and physical revitalization. The book is heavily illustrated, clearly written, and accessible. It richly chronicles Penn’s modern history and offers a powerful case study of the power of an urban university to shape the contours of the twentieth-century city.

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Ethnic Renewal in Philadelphia’s Chinatown: Space, Place, and Struggle. By KATHRYN E. WILSON. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015. 278 pp. Tables, illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$84.50; paper, \$29.95.)

The central theme of author Kathryn E. Wilson’s book is “saving Chinatown.” Beyond its descriptive discussions and lively historical documents, the book is one of the first efforts to systematically conceptualize “ethnic renewal.” “Ethnic renewal” is paradoxical. Ethnic indicates legacy; renewal denotes progress. “Ethnic renewal” is a dance between present and past, a negotiation between change and continuity. Those undertaking this process must decide what to save and what to renew. Using Philadelphia’s Chinatown as a case study, this book documents the history of Chinatown’s struggle and survival in the urban warfare against marginalization, objectification, gentrification, and ethnic suburbanization.

This book enhances and complicates the understanding of spatial justice that applies to other marginalized urban space. Chinatown is not just a themed