

Left in the Midwest: St. Louis Progressive Activism in the 1960s and 1970s. Edited by Amanda L. Izzo and Benjamin Looker (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2022). xiii + 539 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Index. \$50.00, cloth; \$35.00, paper; \$33.25, ebook.

Left in the Midwest brings together essays by a diverse range of scholars to demonstrate the myriad ways in which progressive activism percolated through St. Louis in the 1960s and 1970s, years in which the city's many problems seemed to leave it behind the rest of the nation, ill-equipped and unprepared for the future. Consisting of fifteen chapters and an editors' introduction, the anthology complicates the familiar declension narrative about St. Louis that emphasizes population loss, deindustrialization, failed urban renewal schemes, and lackluster leadership from a politically and culturally conservative white elite. Instead, the essays offer what Ian Darnell profitably calls "an important countercurrent" in which the challenges of the era propelled activist campaigns as well as created new spaces for marginalized residents to assert their citizenship (p. 89).

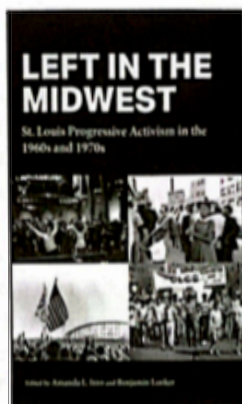
The essays treat a broad array of topics, including the battle of St. Louis's Blacks for civil rights and economic justice, campaigns for women's liberation, drives for environmental justice, and efforts to secure safe spaces for LGBTQ+ citizens. The essays highlight the persistence of progressive efforts over time. Luke Ritter's incisive essay, for instance, shows how anti-nuclear activism by St. Louis women in the 1950s fused with women's liberation and environmental movements a decade later. The essays also demonstrate that activists endured consistent opposition from the established order. For example, Nancy Gilden Seavey's revealing chapter shows how the FBI, St. Louis police, and federal prosecutors surveilled, harassed, and persecuted anti-Vietnam War activists.

The importance of locality, of space and place, unites many of the essays, and together

they make visible a geography of progressive resistance in the city. These localities range from sites of Black Power organizing on the north side and in midtown described by Clarence Lang to the Central West End's Metropolitan Community Church that is Rodney C. Wilson's focus to the neighborhood organizing campaigns in the Skinker, DeBaliviere, and Soulard communities about which Susanne Cowan writes. Sometimes these spaces were figurative, such as the newsletters and journals that lesbians created, Mary Maxfield explains, to sustain social networks and forge bonds of community. Helpfully, the volume concludes with Monica Duwel and Elizabeth Eikmann's visual essay mapping the sites of activism discussed in the book.

The essays reveal that activists frequently had multiple concerns. As such, many essays transcend disciplinary boundaries. Gretchen Arnold and Ilene Ordower, for instance, show how a profound sense of intersectionality informed the activism of radical feminists, while Keona K. Ervin examines how labor rights and criminal justice reform were among the issues to galvanize the especially vibrant local chapter of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression.

In its challenge to the declension narrative, the essays pointedly insist that the urban crisis in St. Louis was not the result of unstoppable forces or abstract power but reflected the policy choices, political priorities, and exclusionary racial preferences of individuals and businesses. Ezelle Sanford III brilliantly makes this point in his dissection of the ultimately unsuccessful campaign to prevent the closure of Homer G. Phillips Hospital, an anchor of public health and municipal employment in North St. Louis. Sanford shows that officials elided their own role in the decision to close the hospital by blaming market forces for its demise. Similarly, Rob Gioielli's essay on activist Ivory Perry's campaign to force the city to confront a lead-poisoning epidemic among children in public housing units persuasively argues that the city's blame-the-victim response was an effort to shift the focus



away from its underinvestment in public housing and social services, thereby obscuring the policy choices that precipitated the crisis.

The anthology exhibits weaknesses typical of edited volumes, such as repetition and uneven essay quality. Moreover, while the inclusion of several previously published essays gives new exposure to what, in some cases, were pathbreaking studies, the historiography on which they draw is dated. And the suggestion that St. Louis is a forgotten city among scholars is overstated; monographs by several contributors, including Clarence Lang, Keona K. Ervin, and editor Benjamin Looker, as well as books by Colin Gordon and Walter Johnson, have refocused scholarly attention on the city. *Left in the Midwest* will deservedly join these works on the bookshelf of essential studies of St. Louis.

Gregg L. Michel
University of Texas at San Antonio