(p. 10). This, indeed, is the case. On many occasions she breaks off from the discussion of a particular building or site to relate the often abstract formulations of leading sociologists (past and present) such as Robert Park, Manuel Castells, and Saskia Sassen. None of these observers is especially noted for his or her interpretations of the physical city, and Satler's frequent recourse to their commentary rarely amplifies her own descriptions.

Gail Satler's account of recent Chicago physical development, documented as it is by a large number of photographs (evidently taken by the author), would have resulted in a more cogent statement had she placed greater trust in her own eyes and experience as guides to how Chicago's new physical spaces "work" for their residents.

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Irma
A Chicago Woman's Story, 1871-1966
By Ellen FitzSimmons Steinberg

(Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004. Pp. xxi, 231. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, $49.95; paperbound, $19.95.)

Memoirs and autobiographies continue to intrigue historians and general readers. While the lives of famous individuals have always been sought after and Americans remain fascinated with celebrity, the memoir has, since the advent of the new social history in the 1970s, benefited from another trend: interest in the lives of ordinary people. Ellen FitzSimmons Steinberg, author of *Irma: A Chicago Woman's Story*, tells us that "by her own admission, [Irma] was 'nobody famous'" (p. xiii). Steinberg goes to considerable lengths to present the story of Irma in the woman's own words—"the more than half a million words Irma wrote during her adult life" (p. ix)—even though she left no sustained manuscript that reflects her own ordering of her life story. Steinberg spent more than twelve months transcribing Irma's diaries, journals, letters, and other papers. She carried out additional research, spoke with family members, and then "placed Irma's writings within a temporal-social-religious framework to explain what might otherwise be unfamiliar to a reader" (p. ix).

Steinberg's reconstruction verges, in places, on being a new creation, explaining, for example, that "the stories in the early chapters" of *Irma* are "whole cloth woven from various entries and remembrances Irma made

throughout her life about a specific subject or subjects" (p. xii). Yes, these are Irma's words, but it is Steinberg who has arranged them, supplying the dates for each quotation in the appropriate chapter notes. The reader will have to decide whether or not such editorial strategies—which also include using bold type for Steinberg's own editorial voice, plain type for Irma's words, and footnotes to provide historical context and information—work. In either case, Steinberg deserves praise for letting readers see her methodology, and for clearly articulating how she has constructed the narrative, privileging Irma's subjective experience and telling the story in Irma's own words.

Steinberg's reconstruction of Irma's life warrants comparison with other "collaborations" undertaken by biographers and historians who have worked with oral accounts, unpublished and often incomplete manuscripts, and fragments of diaries, journals, and letters. Such autobiographical materials, especially the fragmented voices of women on the margins of the American mainstream, are difficult to decode. The end product of such collaborations varies. The submerged or incomplete autobiographical "voice" and the editorial voice that supplies context and narrative may produce historical fiction, a literary creation, or a work of social history. Two impressive examples come from daughters who dedicated themselves to publishing their mothers' autobiographical manuscripts posthumously: *Crusader for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (1970), edited by her daughter, Alfreda M. Duster; and *I Came A Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl* (1989) by Hilda Satt Polacheck, edited by Dena J. Polacheck Epstein. Both Duster and Epstein heavily sprinkled their edited autobiographies with explanatory footnotes; both editors dealt with inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the original text and provided further information about historical events and people.

A third relevant collaboration, *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant* (1970) by Marie Hall Ets, is based on stories told by the illiterate cleaning woman Rosa Cassattari to Ets, a social worker and writer. Although Ets considered Rosa and herself coauthors, the University of Minnesota Press editor John Ervin Jr. would not agree to a shared credit line for the book, written long after Rosa's death. This confusion suggests the central problem of *Irma*, a "collaboration" that shares some elements of the process in which Duster and Epstein engaged and other aspects more akin to *Rosa*. On balance, however, I would say that the benefits of such collaborative reconstructions far outweigh their problems. Consider, for example, the case of Ella Flagg Young, Irma's language teacher and principal of the Skinner School (a public secondary school in Chicago). "Mrs. Young was a little masculine sort of human," Irma writes. "She had flashing, penetrating eyes. Sarcasm was one of her

weapons" (p. 32). Under Young's tutelage, Irma learned to write "a correct English sentence" (p. 34) and, as the daughter of German Jewish immigrants, responded affirmatively to her teacher's efforts to develop her English fluency. Historians and biographers have already illuminated the life and achievements of Young, the first woman superintendent of a major urban school system and a colleague of John Dewey and Jane Addams, but it is rare that we find out how one of the pupils in her school felt about her. In such details lies the strength of this collaborative effort between two women who never met.

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My Century in History
Memoirs
By Thomas D. Clark
(Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006. Pp. xx, 393. Illustrations, index. $27.95.)

Thomas D. (for Dionysius, to Clark's intense regret) Clark was born in one of the poorest parts of Mississippi on Bastille Day 1902. He died near the date of his 102nd birthday in 2004. He spent his earliest days in the fields, and his youth along the rivers, at the hardest sort of work: on a dredgeboat. Intent on an education of some sort, he did attend high school (a major achievement in Mississippi at that time) and managed to enroll at "Ole Miss," in Oxford, itself not much better than a good high school at the time. He earned a Ph.D. at the new (literally risen from the pineland) Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, and, in 1932, took a position at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, where he remained for most of the rest of his life. In the days of departmental satrapies that preceded the departmental democratization of the mid-1960s, Clark single-handedly created at Kentucky a first-class gathering of scholar-teachers, similar to departments at North Carolina, Yale, Northwestern, and Iowa.

This memoir is the best book I have read in the past ten years, perhaps more. For one thing, it is beautifully written. Any student or teacher wishing to see what tight prose can be should read it for that point alone. Here is evidence of a disciplined mind, nothing less—not a word out of place, no stranded sentences. Even at the end of the book, when Clark was perhaps writing hurriedly, knowing that the bell of time was about to ring for him, one finds not the least sign of looseness.

Clark could make any subject interesting. He includes an entire chapter on the name change of the Mississippi Valley Historical Associ-