

accomplishes its goal, greatly expanding the historical accuracy of and context behind this group's acclaimed legacy of commercial recordings. It represents an indispensable reference for any scholar or enthusiast interested in bluegrass music history and culture.

KEVIN KEHRBERG serves on the music faculty at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina. His current book (in progress) explores the music and career of gospel music composer Albert E. Brumley.



A Nation of Neighborhoods: Imagining Cities, Communities, and Democracy in Postwar America

By Benjamin Looker

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. Pp. 432. Notes, index. Clothbound, \$82.50; paperbound, \$27.50.)

Nations are moral geographies, their identities criss-crossed by spatial divisions. In the United States, a civil war was fought over “Southern” slavery. During the early twentieth century, the burgeoning industrial cities corrupted rural youth, and, through the 1960s, declining cities dragged the now-suburban nation into chaos. The national debates of the time pivoted on place and its meaning. Today, gay residential enclaves, immigrant communities, and the racially-inflected ‘hood undermine a sense that we are “one people,” while muddling what it means to live decently in affluent America.

With *A Nation of Neighborhoods*, Benjamin Looker enters this maelstrom of cultural identity, lived places, and national politics. Mobilizing biographies, government reports, children's books, stage plays, academic studies, and novels, he explores how the idea of neighborhood has been

deployed to negotiate a fluid political, social, and racial landscape. In eleven essays organized chronologically from the 1940s to the 1980s, Looker exposes the reader to the array of rhetorical contrasts—liberalism and conservatism, the individual and the collective, blight and prosperity, upward mobility and group solidarity—that Americans have used to manage their understandings of race relations, the Cold War, religious affiliations, governmental policy, ethnicity, and family. His essays, moreover, are richly illustrated by people (e.g., Clarence Perry, Barbara Mikulski), places (Adams-Morgan in Washington, D.C., the Hill in St. Louis), organizations (American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods, Institute for Policy Studies), and television shows (*Sesame Street*).

For Looker, the tight-knit city neighborhood has been a major symbolic site for debates about national

identity and democratic practices. And although these debates involve a complex and ever-changing interplay of themes, one contrast has persisted. Since the mid-twentieth century, liberals and conservatives have been relentless in recruiting the “neighborhood” for political ends: the former advancing racial integration, middle-class feminism, and egalitarianism, and the latter celebrating ethnic autonomy, hierarchy, and opposition to big government.

The book begins with a chapter describing efforts during World War II to portray the neighborhood as a nurturer of patriotism and a “garden of nations” (p. 11). It concludes with the presidential election campaigns of 1976 and 1980 when, respectively, Jimmy Carter attempted to capture the urban Catholic vote and Ronald Reagan strove to cleave the urban working class from its Democratic affiliations. In between, we read about postwar concerns over neighborhood planning and blight in which planners and policymakers skate lightly over the issue of race; Cold War concerns as to whether urban neighborhoods turn people to communism or strengthen patriotic ties; the transformation of the notion of ‘the ghetto’ into a place of racialized

disorder; the problem of representing neighborhoods in photographs and museums at a time when racial conflict and suburbanization were on the rise; the unstable politics of the quest for neighborhood government, race, and the dissolution of the ethnic Catholic neighborhood; and the split between white middle-class and ethnic working-class women over feminism and upward mobility.

In this always-informative, insightful, and well-written book, Looker deftly manages his way through the tangle of moves and counter-moves of an enduring national discourse. On the issue of what the “neighborhood” is and what role it plays in national life, consensus is not just absent but seemingly impossible. Yet, that fact hardly prevents Looker from giving us an important and necessary glimpse into the nation’s moral geography.

ROBERT BEAUREGARD is Professor of Urban Planning at Columbia University. Prof. Beauregard is author of *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities* (2003) and *When America Became Suburban* (2006) and is currently working on a book project tentatively titled *Cities and the Moral Geographies of Nations*.

