

The Fixers: Devolution, Development, & Civil Society in Newark, 1960—1990**Julia Rabig****Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2016****333 pages, index****\$45.00 (cloth)****\$10-45.00 (e-book)****ISBN 13: 9780226388311(cloth)****ISBN 13: 9780226388458 (e-book)****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v4i2.136>**

Julia Rabig's *The Fixers: Devolution, Development, & Civil Society in Newark, 1960 — 1990* tells the story of a distressed city and its attempts to recover from the perspective of the work and ideals of local civic, political, and economic experts. Their stories serve as an illustration of how local talent can simultaneously help and hinder the progress of a city and its people. Rabig tackles the evolution of local prejudices and politics of a city as it struggles through three stages: post-World War II decline; 1960s radicalism, dismantling, and dissent; and the era of reconstruction or rebuilding of civic, social, and economic structures.

The Newark Rebellion of 1967 dealt a devastating blow to a city already in crisis. In his 2018 State of the City address, Mayor Raz Baraka reported, “crime is at its lowest level in Newark in 50 years. The city has regained local control of public schools.” Both accomplishments are signs that the 60 year much-hoped for renaissance might have finally arrived. But his was not the first pronouncement of such a renaissance in Newark.

In 1960, Mayor Hugh Addonizio knew he was governing a city in crisis. Former Mayor Gibson claimed his 1970 election was a call for a renaissance. Former Mayor Sharpe James, who assumed power in 1986, felt his administration ushered in the renaissance, and former Mayor Cory Booker claimed to be the renaissance. Each of these men, along with the many “Fixers” discussed in Julia Rabig’s work, had an impact on the development the city is experiencing today. If Newark’s Renaissance is finally a reality, it is because of the many men and women who worked

to fix the inequities that made a renaissance possible. The puzzling path towards attempted autonomy was not easy and Rabig's description of the journey is deftly explained.

It is Rabig's contention that reform would not have been possible without the work of local men and women dedicated to "fixing" the -isms that prohibited local participation in the structures needed to make a city run successfully. The "fixers" role was to improve conditions so that the marginalized Black and Hispanic populations could participate in the civic and business life of Newark. Newark's struggles are not unique and Rabig's work would be of interest to any student of late 20th century urban studies.

The described fixers are not political figures scheming and using semi-legal or illegal means to secure social and political control of their city. As opposed to observing and analyzing from the position of the reigning political structures, Dr. Rabig selects the option of viewing the struggling city's attempt to rebuild through the stories of a group of individuals she refers to as fixers. These fixers are mostly African American, and according to Rabig, those who are functioning as a "conjoined trajectories of the black freedom struggle and late twentieth-century urban history...Fixers' embody the reformist vision, political savvy, and deliberate 'in-betweenness' of people" (p. 3) who have been laboring in the midst of the black struggle for freedom and find their cause and their talents attractive to business leaders, politicians, and others who are looking for ways to fix the city.

I applaud Dr. Rabig's attempt to explain the process of fixing the political and economic conditions necessary for improvement. She focuses on well-known local personalities, including: Gus Heiningberg, Junius Williams, Amina and Imiri Baraka, and Ken Gibson — all major agents of change in pre and post 1967 Rebellion Newark. What is missing is an adequate discussion of the impact the policies and ideas put forth by the fixers had on the severely marginalized

population. We know of their work fighting for the improvement in the standard of living and in the empowerment of the middle and lower middle class black and latinx populations. What is not as clear is how successes and failures of the fixers efforts impact the least of the population. 2018 finds the conditions of the bottom third of the city population little improved. A deeper analysis of how even the fixers could not secure of this group would have strengthened our understanding of the problems of our urban areas.

Rabig's writing is beautifully fluid. She tells a story of the honesty and determination of those greatly influenced by the Civil Rights and Black and Puerto Rican movements as they worked to fashion a better way of living for the urban disenfranchised. Their alliance with businessmen and politicians is deeply explored and appreciated by this reader.

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