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City: Chicago's Mass News Media, 1833-1898*

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Book Review of: *Becoming the Second City: Chicago's Mass News Media, 1833–1898*, by Richard Junger

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Richard Junger's account of nineteenth-century Chicago will seem warmly familiar to readers who know that city's history, and generally entertaining to those who do not. Junger's book identifies a gap in our knowledge of the press that historians have not adequately filled. Although Chicago's contributions to the American newspaper business are legendary, its press has never attracted the systematic analysis it deserves, in part because of the sheer unruliness and scale of any such project, in part because the Chicago fire of 1871 destroyed so many crucial early records.

The book's title leads readers to expect an analysis of how the daily press contributed to what Junger calls "Chicago's first-city crusade" (p. 192). He notes many examples of Chicago's self-conscious efforts to portray itself as the emerging dominant American city, although the book does not offer much evidence for the press's role in coordinating an ongoing, deliberate crusade. Windy self-promotion was the norm in most western cities of the nineteenth century, as Daniel Boorstin noted years ago in *The Americans: The National Experience* (1965). After the Civil War, Chicago had reasons to take its own dreams more seriously. Even then, however, the crusade seemed more urgent at some moments than others, as when newspaper editors and reporters vigorously promoted the city as a site for the 1893 world's fair or debated the accuracy of census statistics, hoping to gain an edge over New York. In long sections of the book, the Chicago-press-as-first-city-booster theme nearly disappears.

Much of the time, Junger's book feels like a social history of nineteenth-century Chicago, as told through the pages of the daily press. Those not familiar with Chicago history will discover entertaining accounts of the great fire, railroad strikes, the Haymarket riot, and the World's Columbian Exposition, as well as oft-told tales of vice and corruption. Some of these set pieces are crisp and valuable, such as Junger's description of Moses Handy's publicity department at the exposition. Others seem chosen more for their dramatic potential than for their historical significance. Junger argues at length, and with some justification, for the importance of the virulent, syphilitic, Copperhead editor of the *Chicago Times*, Wilbur Storey, but scantily notes the *Daily News*, considered in its time the most successful afternoon daily in the country.

Junger never convincingly synthesizes this vast welter of detail under the rubric he has chosen. He shows an acquaintance with much of the major historiography on the city, although he gives less weight to exceptional works such as Carl Smith's *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief* (1995) and William Cronon's magisterial *Nature's Metropolis* (1991) than they deserve. Nor does he convincingly connect his argument to main themes in journalism history or media theory. His references to social science theorists such as Carl Hovland, George Gerbner, and W. Phillips Davison seem idiosyncratic and dated.

Readers new to Chicago history will enjoy Junger's book; historians more knowledgeable about the city or the American press will wish there had been more.