

block innovation. Later, Susskind challenges the deep-seated notion amongst mainstream neoclassical economists that there exists a natural “trade-off” between inequality and growth and that, in fact, reducing inequality will be economically efficient. In these sections, we also get interesting moments in which it becomes clear that Susskind has lost faith in the free market. “The flaw with market fundamentalism,” he notes, “is that there is no reason to think that our current direction of economic travel, dictated by the free market, is the ‘right’ one.” Challenging neoliberal assumptions, Susskind argues that since market prices (and thus GDP figures) do not reflect all the values of society, the government must intervene and not allow the price mechanism alone to allocate resources or set priorities. Susskind is not dismissing the use of markets but rather arguing that policymakers must “use the market in a radical way, making prices a better reflection of what we collectively value.”

Susskind is a gifted writer and is very good at taking complicated concepts (the Solow–Swan growth model, for instance) and distilling them into easy-to-understand nuggets. While historians might find the first half of the book somewhat superficial, there is much to glean from the second half. Nevertheless, even this part lacks a serious analysis of social, economic, and business power. The book often feels a bit naïve, as if the only thing stopping humanity from a better future is convincing well-meaning people of better ideas. Rarely does Susskind mention that for a small group of monopoly corporations and wealthy individuals, there is no dilemma in the Growth Dilemma—since they are usually on the winning side of the ledger. Saving democracy and the planet might, therefore, require a somewhat more forceful political and economic strategy.

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A History of Bicycling in Illinois: 160 Years of Booms and Busts. By *Christopher Sweet*. 3 Fields Books/University of Illinois Press, 2026. 293 pp. + 57 B/W photographs. Paperback, \$27.95. ISBN: 978-0-252-08913-8.
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The title of this historical study about bicycling in the state of Illinois and Chicago in particular does not cover its contents. The book’s focus is mainly on the technology and industrial production of bicycles, as well as wheeling as a competitive sport. Information about utilitarian and recreational biking and the experience of cyclists is scarce. Also, the subtitle’s allusion to a 160-year history is slanted because more than 200 pages out of 250 are about the late nineteenth-century upswing of the bicycle and

the ensuing bust between 1900 and 1920, whereas the much longer period afterwards until today is discussed arbitrarily in less than 50 pages.

Sweet's main claim for the relevance of his regional study is that Illinois, in several ways, was the leading American state with respect to cycling and that other historians, with their focus on the East Coast, have underestimated how much the bike contributed to modern American culture. Apart from the unstated fact that the United States would develop into one of the most bicycle-unfriendly and car-dominated countries in the Western world, this claim is not substantiated. Sweet does not explain which lasting effects of bicycling other American bicycle scholars apparently overlooked. He also asserts that his case study throws light on the egalitarian and democratic potential of the two-wheeler. This perspective is, however, not systematically elaborated, and it remains limited to particular issues such as the link between wheeling and the emancipation of women, the contentious participation of women and Black men in racing, as well as poor labor conditions in bicycle factories at that time.

Sweet's historical interest in the cycling past in connection with democratization is not only fragmentary but also paradoxical. His emphasis is on the relatively brief period in the early Progressive Era when the bicycle was new and sensational. As an icon of modernity, it was, in fact, a fashionable and pricey hobby for privileged upper- and middle-class men. The terms "boom" and "bust," as employed by Sweet, refer to the swelling and waning of public attention, but they tell nothing about the volume of cycle traffic for utilitarian or other purposes. Information about the daily practice of cycling, which would throw light on its changing and broadening social range, is lacking. In fact, the so-called bust after 1900, when mass-produced bicycles became affordable for the lower classes and lost their distinctiveness, was the start of a boom in the actual use of bicycles in daily mobility among broad layers of the population. This social democratization of cycling lasted until motorized vehicles, from the 1930s and 1940s on, began to replace the two-wheeler as a common means of transport, which happened earlier and more radically in the United States than in the rest of the world. Driving a car became the fulfillment of the proverbial American Dream. The bike was socially marginalized and viewed as the vehicle for losers and eccentrics or for youngsters and students who could not yet drive a car.

Sweet also talks about a boom in the 1960s and 1970s when the bicycle gained popularity for reasons such as environmental and health consciousness. He does not, however, specify this boom, which was mainly about sportive and recreational pedaling without affecting the overwhelming dominance of motorized traffic. Despite more or less successful local efforts to promote cycling in some cities, in particular among young and gentrified residents as well as tourists, until this day the bike's modal share in American personal transport is around 1%, much lower than in Europe, where it is on average between 5% and 10% with outliers of 27 in the Netherlands and 18 in Denmark. Sweet does not put American cycling in an international perspective and thus tends to overrate its positive impact. All his self-congratulatory rhetoric about the success of the two-wheeler in Illinois and its alleged wider national influence cannot hide the fact that the United States is far from bicycle-friendly. He ignores that American cycling patterns are exceptional in the Western world. In daily commuting, it is mainly the vehicle for a tiny minority of athletic and extraordinarily motivated middle-class males and for those who cannot afford a car and therefore merely pedal out of sheer necessity.

For the rest, the bike is above all used for exercise, leisure, a trendy lifestyle, or as a toy for children. Wheeling is a fringe activity since barriers and dangers to habitual utilitarian biking abound, not least because of pervasive urban sprawl and car-oriented infrastructures as well as policies that strongly favor motorized traffic.

Apart from such interpretive shortcomings, Sweet's study adds little to existing scholarship. Many pages are filled with detailed and anecdotal information and, at times, tedious enumerative descriptions of the many bicycle manufacturers and brands established in Illinois, their inventions and patents, the numbers of bicycles produced, and their prices, as well as the main races in Chicago and the feats of famous racers from Illinois. On the basis of his partial source material, such as newspapers, periodicals, and company archives, Sweet highlights economic value and media sensation as criteria for success. Endless listings of investments, turnover figures, and profits in bicycle manufacturing, as well as racing records and amounts of prize money, test the reader's patience. In this book, the bicycle appears as an economic asset rather than a vehicle with a variety of pros and cons for its riders and society at large. The regular cyclists and their motives and purposes are largely disregarded. This study has missed the recent cultural turn in transport and mobility studies, emphasizing individual and collective meanings attributed to cycling, its sociocultural and political image, and the interrelated attitudes, perceptions, choices, experiences, and habits—factors that cannot be reduced to rational cost and benefit calculations.

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A Nation Unraveled: Clothing, Culture, and Violence in the American Civil War Era. By Sarah Jones Weicksel. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2026. 352 pp. Paperback \$39.95. ISBN: 978-1-4696-8914-2.
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The University of North Carolina Press has produced an impressive historiography through its Civil War America series, yet few books focus so directly on people's material experiences of waging war on and off the battlefield. For that reason, *A Nation Unraveled* by Sarah Jones Weicksel stands out. Rather than concentrating on notable battles or well-known military figures, Weicksel turns to clothing and textiles to show how men and women outside the political and military elite experienced and shaped the trajectory of the war through their sartorial choices. Even in the absence of the bodies that once wore them, the garments at the center of her study—which she “reads” alongside printed sources—reveal how clothing