ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

TRAVEL

Biking Through the 'Hoods: Exploring Fifty American Cities By Bicycle
Paul F. Pinsky
CityScape Press
978-0-615-36955-6
Five Stars (out of Five)

Novelist H.G. Wells said, “Every time I see an adult on a bicycle, I no longer despair for the future of the human race.” This kind of idealism permeates Paul F. Pinsky’s travel-memoir *Biking Through the ‘Hoods: Exploring Fifty American Cities by Bicycle*. A native of Washington, DC, Pinsky searches out interesting neighborhoods in fifty cities, choosing to explore a landscape overlooked by most travelers. With a strong focus on local and urban history, Pinsky discusses the transformation of the landscape in non-white neighborhoods and how the locals go about their lives. Though not a guide or travel manual, *Biking Through the ‘Hoods* takes the reader off the beaten (bike) path into places rarely seen.

Readers may find it hard to believe that *Biking Through the ‘Hoods* is Pinsky’s first book. He’s a natural storyteller and effortlessly combines his personal experience with historical detail. For example, as he bikes through the Southwest, Pinsky finds the boundary of the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian community. “I turned from the main highway onto a narrow road through the reservation. Tidy, if plain-looking, stone and concrete homes with a single pick-up parked in front seemed to alternate on the roadway with dilapidated jerry-rigged structures that were surrounded by a half dozen rusted out vehicles.” Every sentence is tightly written, and guides the reader through the cityscapes of Los Angeles, Long Island, Phoenix, and many other metropolises.

Refreshingly, Pinsky makes it clear that he’s not interested in talking about race in a pejorative way; his philosophy seems to be that people are people, and he never once makes assumptions about the neighborhoods he bikes. “At times it wasn’t easy to move around safely. There were many frustrating, even hairy, moments to be sure. And you couldn’t exactly lock your doors when you found yourself in certain neighborhoods. Nonetheless … you could see and hear, and smell, the city like you never could in a motor vehicle.” Pinsky’s no saint, or intrepid explorer. His plain talk about what he sees is the perfect tone for his personal story—just the facts, presented in a fair and colorblind way. “I see the street sign ahead. I know

that if I make a right turn on this next street, I'll soon be out of the 'hood, into the relative safety of downtown. I pedal up to the intersection—and make a left. There's a whole lot more I have to see here." The reader is happy to go along for the ride.

Claire Foster