

Parkchester: A Bronx Tale of Race and Ethnicity

Jeffrey S. Gurock

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A neighborhood in the East Bronx is the subject of *Parkchester*, a fascinating study by former Parkchesterite Jeffrey S. Gurock.

Built by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in 1940, Parkchester at first served as an idyllic alternative for families who wished to stay in the city rather than move to the suburbs—so long as the family was white. Moving from Parkchester's earliest and segregated days into its present racial and religious diversity, the book follows the unique community's rise, decline, and revival.

Though it is dense with details from Parkchester's early days, including statistics regarding the occupants' occupations and the types of flowers that grew in its much-loved public spaces, the book is more than just a compilation of numbers and facts. Demonstrative and amusing anecdotes about residents, including the camaraderie and resourcefulness of open doors and windows in the face of long days of summer heat, result in a balanced, engaging narrative.

With an eye toward evenhandedness, the book emphasizes Parkchester's positive aspects—residents' willingness to work together, despite religious and ethnic differences—and its negative ones, including its decades-long fall from grace and its many stringent rules. It is a study in contrasts, exploring how a community can be simultaneously welcoming and exclusionary.

Vintage photos of the neighborhood and its people enhance the narrative, and snippets of interviews and conversations with former and current residents emphasize the story's human element. For all of Parkchester's community amenities—or lack thereof—its people, and their devotion to their community, are what make it a place worthy of attention.

Parkchester is a cultural study focused on 129 acres, and 80 years, of American history.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2019)

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