



City Trenches

Ira Katznelson

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The urban crisis of the 1960s revived a dormant social activism whose protagonists placed their hopes for radical change and political effectiveness in community action. Ironically, the insurgents chose the local community as their terrain for a political battle that in reality involved a few strictly local issues. They failed to achieve their goals, Ira Katznelson argues, not so much because they had chosen their ground badly but because the deep split of the American political landscape into workplace politics and community politics defeats attempts to address grievances or raise demands that break the rules of bread-and-butter unionism on the one hand or of local politics on the other.

A fascinating record of the encounter between today's reformers—the community activists—and the powers they challenge. *City Trenches* is also a probing analysis of the causes of urban instability. Katznelson anatomizes the unique workings of the American urban system which allow it to contain opposition through “machine” politics and, as a last resort, institutional innovation and co-optation, for example, the authorities' own version of decentralization used in the 1960s as a counter to a “community control.” Washington Heights–Inwood, a multi-ethnic working-class community in northern Manhattan, provides the setting for an absorbing close-up view of the historical evolution of local politics: the challenge to the system in the 1960s and its reconstitution in the 1970s.

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