

Tangires, Helen. *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. Pp. xx, 265. Black-and-white illustrations, bibliography, index. US\$45.00 (hardcover)

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[See table of contents](#)

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At a time when genetic modification, BSE, and avian influenza threaten the food supply and haunt the collective imagination, Helen Tangires's study of American public markets reminds readers that similar worries preoccupied our 19th-century counterparts. As a monograph in the series *Creating the North American Landscape*, Tangires's study discusses the development and regulation of public markets in American urban centres during the 19th century while paying close attention to the relationships among public interest, private enterprise, civic culture, and urban space. Although the work touches upon markets throughout the United States, her study highlights New York City and Philadelphia in particular, with significant material on Boston, Baltimore, Washington, DC, Chicago, and New Orleans. This work will appeal to a wide range of scholars specializing in urban studies despite its focus on American municipally regulated markets.

As administrator of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, Tangires seems an unlikely, although well-qualified, candidate to write a study of public markets. Her education in art history, business management, and American studies provides an appropriate background for her work. In fact the book is based on her doctoral dissertation from George Washington University completed in 1999. Since two generations of her family were self-employed food vendors in Baltimore, Tangires's interest in urban foodways goes beyond an academic curiosity. This personal history made Tangires aware of the "territorial nature of urban food retailing" but also that such businesses formed "part of a large network of social and economic relationships" (xi).

Although she planned to study the rise and decline of public markets, Tangires soon realized that municipally regulated markets did not become obsolete and that marketplaces served a greater function than distributing food. Accordingly Tangires argues that "public markets were civic spaces—the common ground where citizens and government struggled to define the shared values of the community" (xvi). Emphasizing the importance of the moral economy, she believes that local governments established and regulated markets to protect "the social and political health" of their communities (xvii). Even the public helped maintain the moral economy by monitoring the progress of city markets.

Tangires organizes *Public Markets and Civic Culture* both chronologically and thematically. Part 1, "Building the Common Ground," provides an introduction to public markets covering the late 1700s and early 1800s, including the establishment of markets, the construction of market houses, and existence of a marketplace culture. These early markets were based on European traditions and American values popularized by

the eighteenth-century revolution—hard work, honesty, and good citizenship. Municipal regulations ensured that communities had access to inexpensive and healthy food, kept unfair competition in check, and provided an outlet for farmers to sell their products. The construction of market houses, whether they were sheds or mixed-use structures, represented a government's greatest commitment to the moral economy. Part 2, "Cracks in the Market Walls," presents case studies of deregulation during the mid-19th century. These studies, including that of a meat shop controversy in New York and the "market house company mania" in Philadelphia, reveal the tension between private and public enterprise. Here the moral economy, as well as the public market, faltered in the face of capitalism. Part 3, "Regaining a Share of the Marketplace," examines how federal agencies (for a brief period) and municipal governments in the late 1800s and early 1900s strengthened their control over city markets and the distribution of food with the support of progressive reformers. Supporters of the public market strived to guarantee efficient, affordable, and hygienic food distribution for middle- and working-class populations. Tangires concludes that although some aspects of food distribution changed over the years, the public market as an institution survived the disruptions of capitalism. The public market "was as much an idea (or ideal) as an architectural form. It remained the principal place where society could evaluate its success or failure at organizing urban life" (205).

Public Markets and Civic Culture is a timely monograph and an admirable attempt to produce a balanced picture of urban food distribution sometimes lacking in market historiography. Tangires's use of political, economic, social, and cultural history is commendable. Her examination of both consensus and conflict is wise, despite her emphasis on the moral economy. Documents consulted at national and regional institutions include both written and visual records. The inclusion of drawings, photographs, and architectural plans especially aids the reader in imagining public markets and their place in the urban environment. Furthermore her monograph is well placed within the historiography of markets in the United States and Europe, and to a lesser degree Canada. Unfortunately Tangires sometimes loses sight of individuals shaping the marketplace. Although she discusses the market culture of the early republic era, she fails to examine its manifestation in later years and how this culture was affected by industrial transformations and regulatory changes. Tangires also misses the opportunity to explore the composition of municipal councils to better evaluate their members' motivations for regulation or deregulation. Despite these problems, Tangires's monograph will appeal to researchers interested in markets, food distribution, local governments, or progressive reform movements. One hopes that the work will promote further historical interest in urban foodways as well as providing "food for thought" on the benefits of restoring and maintaining public markets in the present.

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