

Who Cleans the Park? Public Work and Urban Governance in New York City

JOHN KRINSKY ET MAUD SIMONET, THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2017



America's public parks are in a golden age. Hundreds of millions of dollars — both public and private — fund urban jewels like Manhattan's Central Park. Keeping the polish on landmark parks and in neighborhood playgrounds alike means that the trash must be picked up, benches painted, equipment tested, and leaves raked. Bringing this often-invisible work into view, however, raises profound questions for citizens of cities.

In *Who Cleans the Park?* John Krinsky and Maud Simonet explain that the work of maintaining parks has intersected with broader trends in welfare reform, civic engagement, criminal justice, and the rise of public-private partnerships. Welfare-to-work trainees, volunteers, unionized city workers (sometimes working outside their official job descriptions), staff of nonprofit park "conservancies," and people sentenced to community service are just a few of the groups who routinely maintain parks. With public services no longer being provided primarily by public workers, Krinsky and Simonet argue, the nature of public work must be reevaluated. Based on four years of fieldwork in New York City, *Who Cleans the Park?* looks at the transformation of public parks from the ground up. Beginning with studying changes in the workplace, progressing through the public-private partnerships that help maintain the parks, and culminating in an investigation of a park's contribution to urban real-estate values, the book unearths a new urban order based on nonprofit partnerships and a rhetoric of responsible citizenship, which at the same time promotes unpaid work, reinforces workers' domination at the workplace, and increases the value of park-side property. *Who Cleans the Park?* asks difficult questions about who benefits from public work, ultimately forcing us to think anew about the way we govern ourselves, with implications well beyond the five boroughs.

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