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## Book Review



**"Women and the City,"** special issue of the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, edited by Michael Harloe, Volume 2, Number 3, 1978, Edward Arnold (Publisher) Ltd., Halford Square, London WC1B 3 DQ.

**"Women and the American City,"** special issue of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and City*, edited by Catherine R. Stimpson, Volume 5, Number 3, Spring 1980, The University of Chicago Press, 5801 Ellis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

If the works in these two volumes represent (as I suspect) the best of work to date on women and urban issues, then they should best be labelled pioneering, rather than radical. While both the British *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research's* "Women and the City" and *Signs'* "Women and the American City" tackle the analysis of problems women encounter in urban environments, neither forms a coherent review of the whole nor offers a well worked-out blueprint for solving the problems. Consequently, taken separately or together, neither of these volumes will realize "the potential of requiring fundamental changes in some of the most basic elements of the modern city." They do, however, demand a change in the way we think about women and cities.

Perhaps the shortcomings of these two volumes are to be expected. They are, after all, exploratory efforts. Generally, at least five to ten years of hard work in a new field are required before substantial, complete analysis can be expected. Both of these volumes have been published within the last three years and offer very recent work by comparatively young scholars.

The first to come out, the *IJURR's* "Women and the City", was produced by the Women's Caucus of the British Sociological Association, and focuses on three countries -- Great Britain, France and the United States. The academic backgrounds of the editorial collective producing the volume explain, to some extent, why its contents fall short of any complete analysis. Most are sociologists, and the focus of the contributors is, for the most part, on feminist issues arising out of sociological concerns which *happen* to occur in cities.

By contrast, the contributors to *Signs'* "Women and the American City", published this past spring (1980), represent a diverse group of professions including, among others, architecture, planning, criminal justice, sociology,

psychology and health. As a result, this volume covers a broader range of topics relating to women and urbanism. However, the piecemeal approach to editing and combining the contributions in the *Signs* volume makes it quite difficult for the reader to determine the underlying themes of the issue as well as the major ills confronting women in urban environments. The introduction to the book does little, if anything, to transcend the editing problems. Less than one and a half pages in length, the introduction purports to identify three hypotheses underlying the contributions. They are: "the American city has both enhanced and constricted women's lives; the experience of men and women is quite significantly different; and, finally, such divergences and effects are original and provocative." To claim that these are hypotheses is pretentious, since in such general form they are neither refutable nor informative. Nor does this list yield a coherent vision of the relationship of women to urban form.

Even though the *IJURR's* "Women and the City" covers a smaller range of subjects, its approach is piecemeal as well. On the other hand, the introduction to the volume by Eva Garmarnikov does a far better job of transcending editorial problems and in identifying a framework of analysis in which to place the contributions. The framework which is identified focuses on women's oppression within the urban system. But because the framework is skeletal and incomplete, only certain aspects of oppression are examined by the articles. These include: "the ideology of the home, state policy in relation to the family, transport and spatial inequality, and sexual segregation and (the) division of labour" (p. 397). As sociologists, the contributors to the *IJURR* volume are highly critical of much of urban sociology which they argue has not adequately dealt with women's issues. E. M. Etorre writes that "the domain of 'the urban' has been reserved for men and

by men" (p. 500). Furthermore, throughout the issue the contributors take a consistent stand on criticizing Manuel Castell's recent contributions to urban sociology because he does not incorporate women into his view of urban practice. Hillary Rose points out that the new urban sociology is theoretically open to the collective actions of such groups as students, squatters and others within the community but omits the collective actions of women (p. 322).

The contents of "Women and the City" are provocative but flawed. The issue is largely theoretical, and provides little direction for those who would like to incorporate its views into their urban practice. To some extent, the volume is becoming outdated (i.e., its discussion of women's lack of access to the mortgage system seems to be almost a moot point, at least in the United States). By way of contrast, however, Miriam David's examination of the contradictory nature of state intervention in regards to women's labor force participation rates is increasingly relevant, as those rates continue to rise. However, what this argument has to do with cities, per se, is hard to discern.

Though published less than three years ago, *IJURR's* "Women and the City" has already become a seminal work. (Its influence on the *Signs* volume is readily apparent.) The *IJURR* collection is not particularly easy reading, but it pioneers the concepts and theories which must continue to be articulated -- louder and more clearly -- in order to allow women greater equality of participation in our urbanized society.

In the *Signs* issue, we find addressed almost all of the issues that the *IJURR* volume covers, as well as a number of other subjects such as health, the movie industry, older women, and the design and use of recreational space. The *Signs* contributors come closer than did those in the *IJURR* issue to answering some of the questions which arise from an examination of urban life through a feminist lens. In particular, the authors, manifesting their pre-occupation with American cities, strongly emphasize the domestic role of women, day care issues, and call for the development of collectivized responsibilities between and within households. There is also a basic consensus that, while neither are adequate, the city offers more to women than does the suburb. For it is in the city that women can find lower-cost housing, greater opportunities for socializing, public transportation, better access to jobs, and easier management of daily time spent on household work, child care and paid employment.

The diverse contributions to the *Signs* journal address many important issues of

women and urbanism. However, the breadth is problematic in that 1) the coverage is spotty, and 2) some of the articles seem out of place. The second problem arises because, although all the articles focus on women, some relate minimally -- if at all -- to urban issues. In this latter category belong the two articles which focus singularly on the subjects of health and of the rise of the movies (see Ewen, and Hurst and Zambrana, respectively). In contrast, another article which focuses singularly on older women clearly relates this group's problems to issues of the city (see Markusen and Hess).

Although there are recurring themes in the *Signs* contributions, there is little dialogue among them. This becomes obvious when one reads Hayden's proposal to eliminate the isolation and inefficient time utilization women experience living in America's single family housing stock. Hayden focuses on the redesigning of existing *suburban* stock while most of the articles in the volume emphasize that the city is a more supportive and accessible living environment for women. Further, the greatest need for new urban design is exhibited by women found more frequently in the city: the low-income, elderly, and single parents. Apparently, the question of where urban redesign energies should go, to remaking the city or revitalizing the suburb, has not been considered.

The articles on urban policy by Markusen and Freeman illustrate that this is an area of concern for women; they argue that urban policy -- or lack of urban policy -- has profoundly shaped women's opportunities. Explicit in these articles is the message that many urban problems, especially as they relate to women, are caused or exacerbated by sexism. The failure to take this into account has often meant that the solutions of urban policy makers have, in fact, compounded the problems of women *and* cities. Also included in the volume is an excellent review essay by Gerde Wekerle on the scholarship to date on women in the urban environment.

The two volumes together offer a glimpse of the evolution of work on women's life in urban space, sometimes in a single woman's research. Two articles by Dolores Hayden provide the most direct example of this. In "Women and the City", Hayden examines the cooperative house-keeping movement led by Melusina Fay Pierce in the United States during the early 1900s. Then, in "Women and the American City", she examines the development during this century resulting in our present housing stock; reviews the experimental approaches of other countries to meet the housing needs of employed women; and finally, attempts to design a housing program and cooperative to meet the needs of today's

families with employed women and/or single heads of households. (Thus, from a study of Utopias, she has moved on to exercise a Utopian mind herself.)

"Women and the American City" has also followed some of the recommendations made by "Women and the City" for future work, such as addressing the issues of sexual division in the urban labor market and women's access to housing. However, there are important questions which neither volume has attempted to answer. For example: In what ways does the issue of urban energy affect women? Furthermore, what are the consequences to women of the environmental hazards resulting from increased urbanization and industrialization? This latter question addresses an issue which is surfacing with increasing frequency, and which is particularly important in light of such recent controversies as Love Canal.

Another question unanswered: What have past and present economic development and urban renewal strategies done for women? With the United States and the world facing major economic problems, and a movement gaining momentum which calls for a "reindustrialization" of America and revitalization of cities, the timeliness of such an analysis is all too clear. Furthermore, without such an analysis, women will not likely have greater participation in economic development than they did in the past.

Besides these questions, there is a major task which must be tackled by those claiming to examine the issues of women and urbanism. We have yet to truly gain an understanding of how spatial form not only *affects* women but reflects and is created by sexism. Looking only at the ways spatial form affects women does not answer the question: Can cities through change in spatial form become non-sexist without society first changing? Ann Markusen's article in "Women and the American City" does try to examine city spatial structure, but it is by no means the definitive work.

The contents of the two special volumes on women and urban issues reviewed here will stimulate, as well as disappoint, planners. One would hope that the women urban practitioners writing in the two volumes could offer blueprints for restructuring the city and urban environment to be more supportive for women. However, with the exception of Hayden's article in "Women and the American City", these works primarily focus on the consequences

of sexism in the city. But perhaps we should bear in mind the conditions under which women scholars have had to work. In general, analysis of women's issues have not been given fair shrift in academic circles -- they are not considered scholarly material. Since the academy treats women's issues as secondary, women have had to first gain acceptance for themselves by working on more traditional issues and analyses. Jacqueline Leavitt's research notes in *Signs* reveal the reasons women have had so little impact on the development of the planning profession. She points out that planning was almost exclusively a male profession until the 1970s. And when the percentages of practicing women planners finally began to increase, their graduate training provided little-to-no preparation for analyzing planning issues from a feminist perspective -- women's planning issues were simply not taught.

Despite their flaws, "Women and the City" and "Women and the American City" can be starting points for incorporating women's concerns into analyses of planning issues for students and practitioners of planning. The discrimination against treating women's issues in planning is tragic because these two volumes do demonstrate that the issues are extensive and momentous. Moreover, because women are comprising an increasingly greater percentage of the urban population, as well as a growing proportion of such planning client groups as the elderly, the low-income and unemployed, these two volumes are relevant reading for all planners and not just those with a feminist outlook.

The research found in these two volumes on the links between women and the city raises serious doubts about some of the basic approaches to planning the city, and the suburb, in the areas of land use, transportation, housing, unemployment, and health. We need more and better research of women and urban issues. But most importantly, the fruits of these efforts and women's concerns must be incorporated into all planning activities. For, without this incorporation, the planning problems of one of its largest -- if not the largest -- client groups.

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