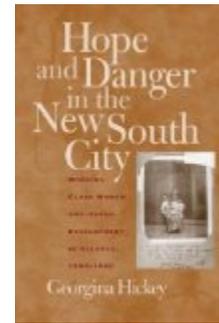


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Whose Hopes and Whose Dangers in New South Atlanta?

Georgina Hickey explores gender and urbanization in early-twentieth-century Atlanta by studying the public texts and hidden transcripts that reveal cultural perceptions of working-class women.[1] Focusing on women, Hickey elevates gender to an equal footing with class and race as an essential organizing principle of society. Hickey demonstrates with abundant examples the expansion and contraction of the forces of urbanization, the tensions caused by these forces, and their mediation by tradition. By analyzing a relatively short period of time, Hickey magnifies cultural change over time and highlights how historical conditions such as the Progressive Era, World War I, and the Great Depression mediated culture.

Hickey sets out to elaborate the “connection between gender and urban development” in Progressive-Era Atlanta by illustrating how women competed for “public space, urban citizenship, and independent identities” (p. 3). She argues that working-class women in Progressive-Era Atlanta symbolized both the hopes of the city and the dangers to it as all Atlantans negotiated the processes of urbanization. Incorporating the impact of boosterism into her analysis, Hickey focuses on images of working-class women and the symbolic significance of such representations to public projections of Atlanta as a vibrant business center and salubrious residential city.

To emphasize how culture changes over time, Hickey organizes her study chronologically and begins by sketching Atlanta’s nineteenth-century background. In

chapters 2 through 6, the strongest and most detailed of the book, Hickey explores the public perceptions, actions, and treatment of working-class women during the first and second decades of the twentieth century with a variety of primary sources, including news reports, cartoons, photos, and court records, as well as organizational and governmental records. Because it is difficult to document the absence of cultural symbols, chapters 7 and 8 are weaker presentations, lacking similarly detailed evidence of the shifts in visibility and public perceptions of working-class women as Atlanta welcomed the end of WWI in 1918 and confronted the challenges of the Depression in the 1930s.

To fully appreciate Hickey’s contribution, it is helpful to review urbanization as one of the constituent processes of modernization, which itself evolves as a complex of forces. Structural differentiation, or fragmentation, is one of the prominent forces of modernization. Emerging tensions create shifting cultural planes, presented by Hickey as the hopes of and dangers to a community played out through specific contests and contestants. With population increases and technological advances, a society experiences fragmentation as members of the population adopt new roles and come to inhabit newly created physical and cultural domains.

Hickey’s work carefully reveals the processes of urbanization that pulled women into a public working world, the integrative mechanisms that pushed them out or punished them, and the traditional values that seemed

to disappear only to reemerge over time. Differentiation occurred between working and non-working women, between working men and women, and between the working class and the middle class. Vertical structures of class were intersected by racial differences that were a prominent feature of southern culture before urbanization but developed different dimensions in an urban setting.

Hickey begins her analysis of gender and urbanization with the July 1897 race strike at the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills, when white women walked off the job as twenty black women joined their ranks. By using the post-Civil War period as her basis for comparison and change over time, Hickey reveals how the processes of industrialization and urbanization altered the physical and cultural terrain of Atlanta. Women had become part of the labor force as a result of post-Civil War industrialization and economic affluence. The presence of large numbers of women in factories and public spaces created an example of the structural differentiation characteristic of urbanization. White working-class women emerged into a new distinct group that carried potential for disruption of the old social order.

Hickey uses the 1897 strike to point out differences between white working-class and white middle-class women and black women, as well as their interactions with dominant males in factory management and labor unions. Although Atlanta's economic leaders promoted the city as a place of harmony among classes, the 1897 strike revealed conflict left unresolved by the Civil War and Reconstruction (p. 15). Distinct racial differences and racially structured public space characterized the earlier social order. By hiring black women for positions similar to those of white women, factory management ruptured established social order. During the 1897 strike, racial solidarity trumped the economic needs of factory management, costing the black women their jobs, and thus providing a clear instance of the reintegration of established social structures. By elaborating the antecedents and consequences of the strike, Hickey establishes the complex matrix of people, conditions, beliefs, and actions that constitute culture generally and the process of urbanization specifically.

Having identified the contours of a public domain penetrated by women in the labor force and labor movements, Hickey turns to images of laboring women constructed by those invested in maintaining social order and a robust working class. These images portrayed the white male worker as the norm and the female worker as temporary, destined ultimately for motherhood and

family (p. 27). Newspapers and magazines portrayed female workers on the one hand as young, beautiful, single, and white, in essence the "hope" of a strong working class that underpinned an affluent economy (p. 28). On the other hand, opposing images represented the female worker as young, sexually available, and working in close proximity to male workers, a "danger" to family and social order.

Culturally constructed images can function as differentiating or integrative mechanisms, as illustrated by the murder of Mary Phagan in 1913. With her death, Phagan personified many of the fears surrounding young female workers and became a "potent symbol for the dangers of the urban environment" (p. 32). Her trial was an extended public event during which working women joined spectators at the trial and outside the courthouse. Hickey argues that women attended the trial for a complex set of reasons, including prurient interest, civic duty, and concern for jobs and respectability (p. 35). Phagan was portrayed by turns as saintly and promiscuous, illustrating the symbolic oppositions under which working-class women labored. In the end, Phagan's accused white, Jewish murderer, Leo Frank, was lynched, stilling some of the social arousal provoked by the crime and trial. The trial validated the anxiety over women working in public spaces, but resulted in no change in working conditions for women.

Women working in public spaces led naturally to their enjoyment of leisure time in public, both because their work brought them money to spend and because consumerism was a prominent aspect of urbanization. As she addresses the contested uses of public space in early-twentieth-century Atlanta, Hickey asserts that the race riot of 1906 was the "pivotal event in race relations" for the first half of the twentieth century. Hickey attributes the violence to a professed need for defense of white women, efforts to close drinking establishments serving African Americans, and an inflammatory political campaign that served to exclude African Americans from the political process (p. 54). Four days of rioting and murderous attacks on black men and women led to initiatives to "restore the city's reputation." After the riot, Hickey argues, middle-class Atlantans of both races sought to "mute racial conflict over public space" (p. 55). The riot itself was an integrative mechanism brought on by the tensions of changing social conditions, in this case a violent and forced reintegration of African Americans into the traditional social order.

In the reparative atmosphere following the riot, con-

cern over young women in public spaces replaced race concerns. Women in public spaces were so discomfiting to the middle class that reformers sought to regulate public venues. Several factors contributed to the visibility of working-class women in Atlanta as urbanization encouraged the use of public space for entertainment. First, the population and the city boundaries were expanding. Second, economic expansion and civic development included the construction of public entertainment venues frequented by both sexes. Middle-class reformers looked askance at women in public entertainment venues such as dance halls, amusement parks, and theaters. Police intervention became a strategy designed to restrict working women's access to public space by criminalizing women's behavior with capricious arrests for "immoral conduct, indecent dress," or lewdness (p. 74). Public morality became the focus of Atlanta's self-image, as working-class women frequented cheap entertainments promoted by civic entrepreneurs.

Increasing population led to a large pool of transients who contributed to the escalating numbers of Atlanta's economically disadvantaged citizens (p. 80). In the same context, a powerful middle class emerged, adding to increasingly distinct social boundaries. A welfare system developed as middle-class reformers created assistance organizations whose missions included a vision of strong families built around a competent, moral, and nurturing mother through whom aid to families was administered, with the home visit as the first step (pp. 81, 84, 86). A network of private and public agencies cooperated by sharing case files and management. Police and courts became part of the relief system as "mounted police investigated relief applicants" and brought women accused of vagrancy, lewdness, or immorality into court as a first step in the relief process, a process that was different for men (p. 83).

Reformers worked to maintain a strong working class that functioned with middle-class values. Unwilling to recognize divergent value systems, reformers pulled working-class women and families into compliance or punished them. At the same time, they maintained economic and social class boundaries. On the one hand, reformers directed working-class women toward gender- and class-appropriate work options; on the other hand, they advanced the professionalization of social work, a tactic that fortified their own middle-class status and transformed volunteer reformers into professional experts (p. 103-104).

Benevolent associations established by middle-class

African Americans promoted standards similar to those of white organizations, and behaviors and images that earned respect from the white community were important as a means to achieve racial uplift (p. 96). African-American aid organizations, such as the Neighborhood Union, insisted that recipients acquire house-keeping skills and viewed black women as conduits to improved African-American neighborhoods (p. 97). Hickey reports a Neighborhood Union fundraising event that opened homes of working-class women so their hygienic efficiency could be viewed by the community (p. 98). Female reformers promoted community responsibility and used their social activism to achieve political leadership along with black men. A major goal of welfare assistance within the black community was improved race relations through community responsibility and female respectability (p. 102).

In the area of public health, civic leaders viewed women both as caretakers and agents of contagion. Disease posed a threat to Progressive-Era Atlanta's image of health and success. Soot, smoke, and the lack of city services could be ignored, but women as potential carriers of disease could not. Hickey deals specifically with the threats of tuberculosis and venereal disease as manifested in "cultural associations of women with disease" (p. 110). In the campaign to fight the spread of tuberculosis, city officials and reformers directed attention toward African-American domestic workers because of their intimate contact with white families and the obscurity of their personal lives, but efforts to regulate domestic workers failed.

Hickey describes how venereal disease emerged as an urgent public health issue during World War I. Agreements between Atlanta's economic leaders and the federal government brought an increased military presence with a promise of a vice-free environment (p. 121). As the prevalence of venereal disease increased, both the military and the city placed the onus of responsibility on women, prostitutes in particular. Once again, implementation of public policy involved criminalizing non-traditional female behavior. As authorities cracked down on prostitutes, they held any woman in public space under suspicion. Those who had to commute to work risked arrest simply by traversing public space. Control strategies included challenging the mental capabilities of women, arresting them, and subjecting them to medical exams while they awaited prosecution, even when they were charged with offenses other than prostitution (p. 123).

In addition to the issues of labor, welfare, and public health during the Progressive Era, Hickey addresses women's political efforts in the suffrage movement, displays of independence in court cases (particularly divorce), and efforts to participate in local politics. By the 1920s, the public focus on women had begun to shift, and efficiency and politics replaced morality as a primary concern. Technology, in the form of Hollywood movies that promoted the rewards of domestic love, had collaborated with morality initiatives to encourage women to embrace home and family (p. 76). Hickey describes the 1920s as a period of transition in which there was no potent symbol for the concerns of the city. The Great Depression then generated a new symbol of hope and danger: the unemployed working-class man. The New Deal brought federal money for work programs directed largely at men. Images of women as caretakers of or threats to moral order mostly disappeared from public discourse, and men without work became "the icon of imperiled economic order" (p. 215).

Hickey's study offers several important conclusions. In Atlanta, during the period between 1900 and 1918, working-class women represented the hopes of a newly emerging industrial city, both as workers and as the mothers of working-class families who would reproduce a stolid and industrious working class that would ensure continued economic and social dominance of city elites. The same women endangered the city's hopes with their potential for political disruption, their sexuality, and their explorations of personal independence. Inversely, working-class women entered the laboring classes with hope for economic opportunity, meaningful participation in civic life, and greater personal freedom. The women were in turn endangered by the integrative mechanisms of a community that made women vulnerable in public spaces and penalized women who engaged in non-traditional behavior.

While diachronic analysis is an important aspect of Hickey's analysis, her work also demonstrates the ultimate stability of culture. Before industrialization, women operated primarily within the domestic domain, at least symbolically. As urbanization changed Atlanta and the number of women increased in the work force, their visibility challenged traditional understandings of the appropriate roles for women. More women filled public spaces and worked outside the home during the first twenty years of the twentieth century, but their overall social status remained remarkably stable. When the Great Depression focused debate on unemployed men, the white male again became the normative symbol of the work-

ing class, proof that culture, though often dynamic in the micro view, is slow to change in broader perspective.

Hickey's work is strong in its emphasis on individual voices and the complexities of social structures and mechanisms. *Hope and Danger in the New South City* provides powerful evidence of gender as one of the primary organizing principles of society. The sudden and short-lived visibility of Atlanta's working-class women, however, could be better explained by contextualization within the larger tradition of public debate over women's roles. The public contestation of women's bodies and the binary opposition of female symbols have a long historical tradition. Also, city elites promoted Atlanta as unique, but many southern cities experienced similar growth and conflict—Houston, for example, promoted itself as a stellar city of ideal climate, prodigious business opportunities, and graceful southern ambience, yet it shared the same complexities, racial differences, and class distinctions that Hickey describes in Atlanta. It would be interesting to isolate the particulars by which Atlanta was unique among southern cities. The book's general weakness, then, is a systemic lack of attention to contextualization of issues, although Hickey acknowledges broader contexts with intermittent brief analyses.

Hope and Danger in the New South City offers a unique contribution to the literature on urban women. Susan Glenn's work followed laboring immigrants from eastern Europe to urban ghettos in the United States. Christine Stansell explored the dynamics of class, sex, and work in New York neighborhoods before the Civil War. Maureen Flanagan examined the dynamics between the middle class and the working class, with emphasis on middle-class club women in Chicago. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore studied middle-class black women in North Carolina and their relationships with middle-class white women during the Progressive Era.[2] Hickey's focus is working-class women, but her approach provides cogent insights into the pressures of urbanization in a southern city over a relatively short period of time. Hickey's explicit and detailed analysis of the dynamics of gender, class, and race in the context of urbanization enhances the existing literature.

Notes

[1]. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[2]. Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell Uni-

versity Press, 1990); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1986); Maureen Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

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