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Maureen A. Flanagan. *Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002. xiv + 319 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-09539-4.

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Battle of the Sexes

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Focusing on the work of Chicago activist women between 1871 and 1933, author Maureen A. Flanagan sheds new light on aspects of progressive-era reformism. Mining the papers of clubwomen and other female activists' organizations, Flanagan reveals Chicago women's "alternative vision of the good city" (p. 10). Chicago's activist women, Flanagan argues, believed that the municipality had a responsibility for the common welfare and their ideal city would have been one in which the city served the needs of all its people. Male activists, on the other hand, saw the ideal city through the lens of business interests and profitability. Women's vision usually lost out to the men's vision, Flanagan says, for various reasons. Early on, women did not have a role in the political process, and even when they did get the vote, for example, they were shut out by entrenched policies and practices of the political parties. Although women did not achieve their vision of the "good city," this is not a depressing story. In Flanagan's hands, this story makes the reader admire the courage and tenacity of the women activists and respect what they did achieve.

Starting with the contrasting responses of male and female charity efforts after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, Flanagan demonstrates that women were not content to follow the lead of men when it came to helping the less fortunate. Male-run relief organizations based their aid on strict definitions of what constituted the "deserving poor." Many women bypassed these organizations in order to help those in need who did not meet the formal organizations' definitions of "worthy." In the years after the fire, Chicago women became more active in women's groups. The founders of the Chicago Woman's Club, for example, specifically wanted their club to carry on civic work unrestricted by men. This club took up the cause of female teachers and improvement of the public schools as some of its first causes.

Over the course of the study, Flanagan points out differences between male and female reformers' approaches, looking at specific groups and their causes. Women's groups advocated various urban reforms throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including affordable housing, better wages for female teachers, municipal responsibility for public utilities, and improved public safety agencies. Most male civic groups, Flanagan says, viewed these issues from a business perspective, focusing on costs to the city or weighing the benefits to business interests. Significantly, Flanagan contends that this contrast between a public welfare focus and an economic focus was not based on class.

She challenges notions that middle class clubwomen's attitudes had more in common with men of their same class than with women of lower classes. She points out cross-class cooperative efforts of various clubs and organizations including the Illinois Women's Alliance of the 1880s, and the Women's Trade Union League. Flanagan points out many cases in which Chicago women activists also promoted a pro-labor, antiracist policy, in contrast to male civic leaders who did not seem concerned with racial issues and spoke against organized labor. The attitudes and experiences of Chicago's Women's City Club also demonstrate how men and women of the same class often had different ideas and approaches toward urban issues. Although many club members were wives of male City Club members, they did not mimic that club. Rather than hiring outside experts as the men did, for instance, women did research themselves. Flanagan contends that this difference was not caused solely by lack of finances, but also by the women's more hands-on, personal approach to city problems in general. Flanagan also finds that, contrary to the popular conception that suffrage was a middle-class white woman's cause, Chicago suffragists often worked across class and race lines.

Flanagan shows the significant political involvement

of women reformers both before and after they obtained the vote. And she reveals many of the challenges they faced when trying to engage in the electoral process. Before being enfranchised, women actively lobbied for causes close to their hearts. As they secured the right to vote, they increasingly ran for office and tried to influence the mainstream political process. Despite great efforts, however, entrenched political party practices made it virtually impossible for women candidates to be elected in Chicago. Their progressive positions on issues and male control of the parties meant they simply could not make it past the party primary in most cases. Significantly, Flanagan looks at female voting behavior in primary elections to demonstrate that women tended to vote for candidates (often female) most closely in line with their vision of the good city. She suggests that looking more closely at primary elections would demonstrate that women did not necessarily vote in the same way their husbands did. Often the most progressive candidates (which the activist women supported) would be weeded out in the primary process, leaving the women with little choice between candidates by the time of the general election.

Overall, this is a well-written and illuminating study of women reformers in Chicago. Flanagan's dichotomy between male reformers and female reformers, however, seems a bit simple at times. One wonders if there were not some men who favored similar goals to the women's. Many items on women's agendas, including municipal ownership of utilities, and educational and housing reform, certainly may have been favored by socialist men, for example, as well as by non-socialist activist women. To her credit, Flanagan does point out that union men favored municipal ownership of public utilities but quickly dismisses them as having a male agenda on other issues (p. 117). Socialist aldermanic candidate Josephine Conger Kaneko is portrayed by Flanagan as being stuck with an agenda determined by male socialists (p. 134). It would have been interesting to see this point developed further. The reader wonders if there were men outside the City Club and Chamber of Commerce-type organizations that could have been looked at. That task may be for another study, however. That aside, the author does demonstrate what she sets out to do. Comparable male and female civic organizations did appear to have decidedly different visions of what the modern city and the role of its government should be.

Flanagan clearly has done extensive work with often under-utilized sources, bringing to light the world of activist women in the early twentieth-century city. Her two appendices helpfully list many of the women who figure in this study and show their professions and group memberships. Some names in the study and appendices will be well known to students of the era (such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Jane Addams, and Margaret Dreier Robins), while others are previously unsung reformers. Historians for years now have been challenging the notion of a monolithic "progressive era." This study adds nicely to this literature by pointing out an important area of diversity within progressive reform threads in late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Historians of women, urban politics, and the progressive era will find this a valuable study.

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