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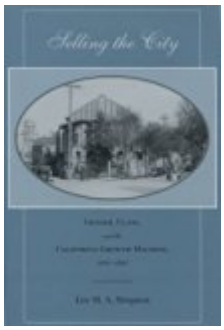
Lee M. A. Simpson. *Selling the City: Gender, Class, and the California Growth Machine, 1880-1940.* Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004. ix + 215 pp. $49.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-4875-9.



Reviewed by Sarah Schrank

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Lee Simpson, an assistant professor of history at California State University, Sacramento, does the field of California urban history a great service by investigating the role of women in turn-of the-century civic boosterism and city planning. Focusing on secondary cities like Riverside, Redlands, and Oakland, Simpson argues that women were active participants in urban growth coalitions and that California women were uniquely able to participate in municipal politics because of the high degree of female property ownership in the state. Paying attention to these women's publicly addressed language, Simpson shows how these women initially deployed a "vocabulary of Victorian womanhood" to promote their cities, shifting to a "vocabulary of capitalism" to more aggressively protect their investments and property values. Simpson exhaustively researched individual women, such as Elizabeth Eddy and Pearl Chase, through local archives and diaries, analyzed women's motives and language by examining the records of dozens of major women's clubs, and traced booster and planning campaigns through newspapers and Chamber of Commerce materials. The result of this painstaking work is a well-supported portrait of elite women's civic participation in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century California.

The strongest chapter of *Selling the City* is the fourth, titled "Apprenticeship in Politics." Here, Simpson makes the point that participation in city government afforded women the opportunity to cut their political teeth before they were extended the right to vote. Elite women, as members of a land-holding class, understood the power of their property tax dollars and leaned on it when negotiating urban improvements, from tree-planting to waste-water run-off, with city trustees. A particularly interesting section is that in which the author contrasts the approaches of the Redlands and Oakland elite to the challenges of industrial expansion. Whereas the Redlands planners were dismissive of the needs of working-class residents, Oakland sought to protect the right of working people to maintain their neighborhoods and home ownership in the face of railroad construction. While the role of women in this particular urban negotiation is left somewhat unclear, it represents one of the few places in this study of city

building where California's working class is granted agency.

Simpson's project is an important corrective to California urban history for its investigative research into elite women's property-holding culture and rhetoric. By examining the connections between booster interests, women's improvement societies, and women urban planners, readers are allowed entry into an upper-class culture detailed with names, places, and group memberships. This research adds weight to a historical arena that has been flattened out or overlooked in other California history texts that tend to reference only the most famous power brokers of the major cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco.

This said, ***Selling the City*** can be a frustrating book for its lack of attention to previous work on the Progressive Era and Simpson's ineffective critique of Harvey Molotch's work on urban growth machines, a critique which ignores the largely critical literature on American and California urbanism. Simpson's bibliography lists many of the major women's history works on the Progressive Era, including those of Maureen Flanagan, Dolores Hayden, Robyn Muncie, and Karen Blair, yet ***Selling the City*** sidesteps many of the conclusions drawn by these authors, particularly that of Flanagan who convincingly has argued that Progressive Era clubwomen in Chicago were very interested in social issues such as child welfare, economic equality, and centralized municipal social services such as sanitation and road repair. While hardly political radicals, Progressive women did harbor visions of social justice and deployed a language of "municipal housekeeping" because it was the only means for women in a sexist culture to have their voices heard on the American political stage. Dolores Hayden has pushed the argument to suggest that Progressive Era urban reformer movements had women participants like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who held true socialist visions of re-organized domestic labor and nonsexist homes, taking the notion of municipal housekeeping that much further. Seeming to ignore these significant observations of early-twentieth-century women's political culture, Simpson overlooks the strategic ambiguity of "municipal housekeeping" and argues instead that California clubwomen deployed the rhetoric of the "Cult of Domesticity. Women thus used social stereotypes to their ends of creating highly successful public careers. As the culture as a whole began to reevaluate theories of women's proper role, women themselves began to augment acceptable and traditional duties and responsibilities by forcing the duties of motherhood into the public eye" (p. 41). This is a staid perspective on a historical period when women were pushing for suffrage, the rights of working people, and, in the case of Ida B. Wells, the end of lynching. In the mid-nineteenth century, perhaps, the rhetoric of the Cult of Domesticity was deployed to such political ends as "forcing the duties of motherhood into the public eye" but given the amount of complex historical study of Progressive women across the United Sates, it seems a peculiar perspective when talking about urban California women between 1880 and 1940. Perhaps California's elite women were much more conservative than other Progressive Era urban reformers but, if so, Simpson ought to make the point that a political rhetoric deployed for socially progressive causes in major American cities was used to undergird the moral certitude of women actively engaged in money-making enterprises in Californian cities.

Instead, ***Selling the City*** focuses on California women's desire to grow their cities and to profit from increased property values, policies of conservative taxation, and the growth of tourism which, Simpson concludes, created a "'group consciousness' among both the middle class and the elite and the spread of a 'we feeling' among ***all*** [italics mine] citizens that fostered a sense of community solidarity" (p. 3). This statement follows the assertion that "indeed, the continued growth of West Coast cities throughout the twentieth century suggest that growth ***does*** benefit the majority

of people" (p. 2). The six chapters to follow, then, intend to prove growth machines good and to argue that Harvey Molotch's seminal 1970s work on the human costs of unfettered growth is misguided. Given that the working-class and even lower-middle-class residents of California's secondary cities are given virtually no voice in ***Selling the City*** , it is hard to accept at face value Simpson's optimistic assertions about the overall goodness of growth. In another, similar, analysis, Simpson reads the self-interested goal of well-off women property owners to increase their civic power and, by extension, personal wealth, as creating a sense of "community" because these property owners see their future as bound to the "to the development of an ever-expanding area" (p. 14). It is somewhat unsettling to read that the obvious capitalist reification of class privilege is somehow mutually beneficial for all of a city's residents. Perhaps some definitions of community would make this argument more convincing.

Simpson is at her best when discussing women's civic participation in urban planning as an "apprenticeship in property and public activism" (p. 64). Here, she argues effectively that women's participation did not mean that politics had become "domesticated" or, by extension, "feminized." Rather, women's participation in growth politics "represented a reaction to the encroachment of the public sphere into the domestic concerns of women who owned their own homes and businesses" (p. 64). This is a trenchant point that would be ever more powerful if the author would explore the historic and dynamic interplay of gender and class rather than reify them as two seemingly separate and distinct categories.

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