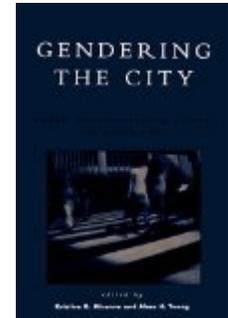




Kristine Miranne, Alma Young, ed.. *Gendering the City: Women, Boundaries, and Visions of Urban Life*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. ix + 229 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8476-9451-8.



Reviewed by Ann Forsyth

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Women and Boundaries

Gendering the City is a useful new collection presenting work from empirical studies of women and urban areas in both the United States and Canada. From an interdisciplinary area of urban studies, the book comes out of a series of panels at the 1994 Urban Affairs Association conference. In the interest of full disclosure, I was asked to write an endorsement for the book and was happy to do so.

While it is always possible to quibble with aspects of a book, overall this is an interesting and useful work that makes a number of interesting contributions. In this review, I focus on four strengths of the book.

First, *Gendering the City* makes a significant step beyond the women and environments/gender and planning books of the last two and a half decades by dealing in a fairly seamless manner with the diversity of women's experiences. Having several chapters that deal with African American women is extremely useful, especially with the emphasis on their leadership and city building roles. I also appreciated the Canadian-based

"First Nations Women and the City" chapter by Evelyn Peters, frequently mentioned. In addition, some important issues are omitted or only glanced upon—for example, women's activities around nature/environmental issues and (to a certain extent) economic development and transportation. However, the book does cover a wide range of issues and in a single volume, it is hard to deal with every sub-population of women and every issue of concern. The book also focuses largely, though not exclusively on women—although the editors' introduction and Beth Moore Milroy's epilogue make quite effective arguments for focusing a gender analysis on women. Overall, women are treated in a variety of roles—suffering discrimination but also actively creating cities and neighborhoods.

As work using both Canadian and US material, the book has a wider audience than if it only focused on one country. This includes its use in third countries. As so much scholarly production is from the United States, it can lead to a situation where theories and cases from the United States are used to interpret situations that are not quite

comparable in countries with very different histories. The three chapters and epilogue written by Canadians help undo some of this cultural dominance in the scholarly construction of problems. The implicit, and sometimes explicit, comparison is a real strength.

The work also deals with some complex theoretical issues in a readable style. Unlike some contemporary work in the areas of gender and multiculturalism and critical race studies, *Gendering the City* is written accessibly. The editors' introduction, Judith Garber's very interesting chapter on anonymity, Melissa Gilbert's on identity and difference, Sue Hendler's on Canadian planning history, and Beth Moore Milroy's epilogue all deal with quite difficult theoretical issues in relatively ordinary language.

Finally, there are a number of useful empirical contributions that are also theoretically grounded. All the chapters have an empirical base, but I was particularly struck by the critical assessment of safety audits (Carolyn Andrew), and Daphne Spain's work on black women's organizations.

Keeping a collection like this "on theme" is quite hard. Initially, I was not completely sold on "boundaries" as an organizing principle--it is a core concept in the introduction--but as I continued to read, it did seem to make sense in the various chapters (and that made me look at the introduction more positively).

This book is pitched somewhere between the basic text and a very specialized collection. As such, it will be most appropriate as a supplementary text for an introductory course say, on social issues and the city--or as a core text for a more advanced seminar.

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