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Zane Miller. *Visions of Place: The City, Neighborhoods, Suburbs, and Cincinnati's Clifton, 1850-2000.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001. 232 pp. $37.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8142-0859-5.

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Planning for Change and Stasis in an American City

Visions of Place: The City, Neighborhoods, Suburbs, and Cincinnati's Clifton, 1850-2000 may well be Zane L. Miller's last monograph, and those who are familiar with his prolific work may be tempted to think it merely a flight of personal interest. Now emeritus at the University if Cincinnati, Miller writes here about the neighborhood in which he has lived for over thirty years, and so doubtless this is a personal work. But it is much more than that. A culmination of twenty-six years of research and contemplation, much of it in conjunction with Henry Shapiro and numerous University of Cincinnati graduate students, "the Clifton book," as Miller has long called it, is more than the history of an outer-city neighborhood. Here Miller uses the visions and "re-visions" of Clifton over the last 150 years as context to explain the intellectual problem that has occupied him for much of his career. In this sense, this little book about a relatively small place is a suitable capstone to a terribly important career in thinking and writing about the city.

Miller's own vision focuses on "taxonomies of social reality," the intellectual constructs and conceptions of reality that are so important to the way people perceive the world around them. Rather than producing a simple narrative of Clifton's changes, which developed as a wealthy suburb north of Cincinnati in the 1840s, incorporated as a village in 1850, and became a part of the city in 1896, Miller traces the changing visions of what Clifton was and should be, particularly in relation to neighboring places and the metropolis as a whole. Miller is most concerned, then, with uncovering how people understood the city in the past and how that understanding changed over time. The best source of information on this score comes from the planning process, in which participants directly articulate their conceptions of current problems as well as physical and social solutions. The intellectual problem that has shaped all of Miller's recent work involves the ways in which conceptions of the city shape (and limit) perceptions.

Miller explores two fundamental shifts in the taxonomy of social reality since the late 1800s. In

the first shift, near the turn of the century, urbanites began to see the metropolis not as a collection of separate places, but as "a system of functionally and structurally differentiated groups and parts" (p. 3). During this era, Cliftonites saw themselves as living not so much outside of the city, but in a distinct part of it, a part with its own particular purpose and form. This new "cosmopolitan" conception of the city accompanied the "spreading and sorting" that took place in all rapidly growing cities in this era. As the city spread, with both populations and city boundaries moving outward from the core, many places within the metropolis performed only specialized functions. Clifton, for example, performed its role as a middle- and upper-class suburb, while neighboring areas industrialized or provided housing for Cincinnati's growing working class. In the second shift, beginning after World War II, visions of the metropolis fell apart, with an emphasis of the individual parts overriding the importance of the whole. In this conception, Cliftonites could envision themselves inhabiting a middle-class island in the metropolitan sea. Perceptions collapsed to the local, and residents could concern themselves little with how Clifton affected the rest of the metropolis or, more important, how the rest of the metropolis affected Clifton.

Miller uses three major planning efforts to trace these two conceptual shifts. In 1925 the city of Cincinnati created one of the nation's first metropolitan plans. With an emphasis on developing transportation systems and the use of zoning as the primary planning tool, this plan assumed continual change within the metropolis, particularly as the city moved outward. This plan provides evidence of cosmopolitan thinking, with neighborhoods functioning as units connected by transportation and other systems. The second metropolitan plan, created in 1948, retained this older conception of the city and assumed the fluidity articulated in the earlier plan. Here, planners assumed that all neighborhoods would change in character, moving through a life cycle as it were. In this plan, Clifton looked incredibly vulnerable to the inevitable degradation that faced all city neighborhoods, much to the chagrin of the still-affluent Cliftonites themselves. The third planning effort, in the 1970s, provides evidence of the second conceptual shift, as the city gave up on planning for the whole and instead allowed neighborhoods to devise their own plans. The city plan, then, would simply be a collection of narrowly conceived ideas about what the various parts should be. Not surprisingly, neighborhoods, Clifton among them, planned for stasis or even a partial return to the past, rather than for some significant change.

Miller pays considerable attention to the Clifton Town Meeting (CTM), created in 1964 by several residents interested in preventing Clifton's seemingly inevitable decline. As highway construction and urban renewal projects in the city's basin displaced thousands of African-Americans, Cincinnati's second ghetto moved inexorably along Clifton's eastern border, and CTM hoped to facilitate an orderly integration of the neighborhood, avoiding the rapid and destructive turnover that had compromised neighboring Avondale. Through the remainder of the twentieth century, CTM worked to protect Clifton, and it gradually gained influence and the power to prevent unwanted change, such as the construction of fast food restaurants in the business district and large apartment complexes along its finest streets. In 1992 CTM erected signs reading, "Welcome to Clifton Village, Incorporated 1850." Clearly Clifton's distinct history weighed heavily on CTM's vision of the neighborhood, and as Miller concludes, the sign "reinforced the idea of neighborhood autonomy and the dissociation of CTM with any concept of the public interest that embraced a local entity larger than Clifton" (p. 158). In this regard, Clifton resembles so many other suburbs, mostly outside the city boundaries, that errantly see themselves as truly separate from the city and its myriad problems. It is this individualistic, isolationist "taxonomy of social reality" that so trou-

bles Miller, and ought to trouble anyone concerned with the fate of American cities.

Clearly, this work will have interest outside of Clifton and Cincinnati, for it articulates a method of historical inquiry that should influence urban historians generally. This articulation is particularly clear in a brief appendix, "Methodological Note on 'Liberation' History." Still, the work is not without its troubles. Most important, Miller pays too little attention to the origins of the taxonomies of social reality, leaving readers to question whether or not urbanites more readily change their conceptions to fit their changing perceptions, rather than vice-versa, as Miller would have us believe. In addition, Miller says little about the relative strengths of the taxonomies, or even who would hold such conceptions and who would not. Certainly taxonomies of social reality have the power to shape perceptions, as, for example, when twentieth-century observers describe suburbs as universally wealthy and ghettos as universally Black. In both cases, the ideas of what these locations were prevented observers from seeing a much more complicated reality, one that includes, for example, poor and working-class whites in both places. Miller leaves too much of this unsaid or understated.

Visions of Place can be read as a very useful companion piece to Miller's earlier work, Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities: Cincinnati's Over-the Rhine and Twentieth-Century Urbanism (Ohio State University Press, 1998), written with Bruce Tucker. Here Miller and Tucker trace the changing plans for one of Cincinnati's oldest, and as it turns out, most static ghettos. Although Clifton and Over-the-Rhine could hardly be more dissimilar, the degree of stability that develops in both neighborhoods in the second half of the twentieth century is remarkable. Clifton remains a largely white, in-city suburb, while Over-the-Rhine's predominantly Black population remains mired in isolating poverty. That planners and politicians had very different visions about change in these neighborhoods seems to have mattered little. City planners consistently envisioned a different Over-the-Rhine, one revitalized and reintegrated into the city as a whole. Simultaneously, planners envisioned a static Clifton, where both valued historic architecture and a middle-class white population could be preserved. Ironically, the two neighborhoods have more in common than this history suggests, for in both places local voices screamed for stasis--activists in Clifton fearing displacement through degradation, and activists in Over-the-Rhine fearing displacement through gentrification.

This may be the most startling lesson from Miller's recent work. As the city steadily declined in the postwar decades, losing population, wealth, and status, calls for reform and revitalization became a hallmark of urban politics. But few people, and as it turns out, few neighborhoods, saw themselves as requiring the dramatic change most Americans assume cities require. Far too few people have visions that extend beyond themselves and their neighborhoods, too few think of a public interest. Indeed, so important is the idea of the public interest to Miller that he concludes his work with a recitation of the Golden Rule, as articulated in the great religions of the world. In this sense, local control of planning has failed - as continued white sprawl and Black segregation give witness. Neighborhoods, we should not be surprised to find out, plan for their often-misperceived self-interest, rather than in the interest of the metropolis as a whole.

Today Clifton is one of Cincinnati's thriving neighborhoods and arguably its most successful. (As a current resident of Clifton, I do write with some bias.) Though not truly racially integrated, Clifton remains a place where different kinds of people can and do mingle, where wealth and poverty have at least some understanding of one another. Over-the-Rhine, however, remains Cincinnati's most difficult problem, and despite some significant efforts to revitalize this historic

neighborhood, as the epicenter of Cincinnati's April 2001 riots, it is emblematic of American urban failure. While one cannot dismiss the importance of urban planning in these two neighborhoods, that neither has been significantly recreated in recent decades suggests the limits to visions of place.