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Right to the City

Photo courtesy of Right To The City

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The Seventh Generation

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

-From the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

Mobilizing Hope and Obama

by Tom Angotti

Many progressive planners continue to be hopeful that the Obama administration will usher in real change that we can believe in. But unless we ratchet up the organizing the prospects for change are not good. Obama can't and won't do it on hope alone. And there are just enough angry white men (and women) out there to scare the Democratic Party's core leaders away from any real reform.

The Importance of Hope

We understood the enormous symbolic change of a black man being elected president in a nation born in slavery and nurtured on Jim Crow. I can't forget that less than fifty years ago black people couldn't enter public facilities in the south, and now, thanks to the success and maturity of the civil rights movement, a black family runs the White House. With the rest of the world we breathed a sigh of relief that eight years of combined incompetence, lying, thievery and thuggery had ended, knowing that things couldn't possibly get any worse.

But after almost a full year of the Obama administration, it hasn't been easy to keep hope alive.

We watched Obama appoint recycled Clinton hacks and promote a few of his own, but we excused him. After all, we said, "He's a politician" even if his organizer's heart is in the right place. He has to be "realistic" or he'll get attacked from the right and in the space of only two years the Republicans could easily win back Congress, leaving Obama out on his own to go down in history as a one-term failure.

Alas, thanks to this kind of pragmatic thinking, the progressive agenda got postponed and perhaps exiled from Washington for another four or eight years. We did see Obama withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq's population centers, but Bush had already decided to do as much. Afghanistan is now all Obama's to plunder and destroy—unless he's willing to pull out and face conservative critics proclaiming that the U.S. is surrendering to "terrorists." On the home front we saw Obama introduce health insurance reform but take off the table from the outset the most effective and progressive option—single payer.

Hope for Cities?

Is there hope for urban policy? We saw Obama bring to the White House as his advisor on urban policy a New York City politician, Adolfo Carrión of the Bronx, who infamously put down neighborhood opposition to a Yankee Stadium project that earned the team huge public subsidies for building on city park land and evoked cries of derision from the 'hood. The new stadium has many more luxury boxes and a lot fewer bleacher seats, and the park land the Yankees promised to the community hasn't been built. Obama also brought in New York City's housing commissioner, Sean Donovan, to clean up the mess at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. But Donovan brings with him the ideology and programs of billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg, whose regime destroyed more affordable housing units than it created. Bloomberg and Donovan advanced programs that provided **cont. on page 11**

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The Right to the City Alliance: *Time to Democratize Urban Governance*

by Jacqueline Leavitt, Tony Roshan Samara and Marnie Brady

In 2007, grassroots organizers in the United States formed the U.S. Right to the City (RTTC) Alliance as a means of taking their cities back from the coalitions of affluence that had formed during the 1980s and reframing the central scale of social struggle from the global to the urban. RTTC is one of the first mass formations to emerge from the previous era of sustained anti-globalization struggle stretching from the end of the Cold War through the election of George Bush, the attacks of 9/11 and the war on Iraq. Although it is a relatively new movement, RTTC holds much potential for re-centering and advancing the struggle for democratic urban governance. Planners Network has joined RTTC as a resource group.

RTTC developed out of dialogue and organizing between the Miami Workers Center, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (Los Angeles) and Tenants and Workers United (Alexandria, VA). Today the alliance is composed of over forty core and allied members spanning seven states, nine major cities and eight metro regions: Boston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Providence, San Francisco/Oakland and Washington D.C. Since 2007, the alliance has developed a national governance structure, regional networks and thematic working groups that collaborate with allied researchers, lawyers, academics, movement strategists and funders. In its own words, Right to the City "is a national alliance of membership-based organizations and allies organizing to build a united response to gentrification and displacement in our cities. Our goal is to build a national urban movement for housing, education, health, racial justice and democracy. We are building our power through strengthening local organizing; cross-regional collaboration; developing a national platform; and supporting community reclamation in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast."

In RTTC's first two years, the volunteer steering committee has hired two staff people and organizational development consultants. A representative from each region is on the steering committee and there is staggered replacement of members. Annual national meetings consist of workshops for members of participating organizations, subcommittee meetings, formal and informal networking activities and debate of organizational objectives, i.e., a campaign in which all members agree to participate. Other national events have included gatherings in Miami, Florida, and Providence, Rhode Island, both planned to take advantage of the U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting in these cities and for the Right to the City-U.S. to issue its own demands and support the regional alliances' ongoing work. Critically, these meetings help regional and local groups press their campaigns as well. In late September of this year, the steering committee, staff and representatives from each region met in order to discuss the visions, goals and objectives of RTTC as an organization. The meeting of twenty people was modeled in such a way that everyone had a voice and time to reflect, learn to trust each other and reach consensus. Such a process is important to sustain as RTTC grows to ensure that it adheres to its ideals of creating a genuinely more democratic form of democracy.

The "right to the city" as a concept has captured the imagination of many involved with urban

Right to the City

Photo by Sam Miller, Picture the Homeless

social struggles but it remains an underdeveloped social movement ideology. Below we provide an introduction to the alliance by briefly discussing some of the campaigns in which members in the Boston and New York City regions are engaged. We then attempt to draw out some of the key principles and issues which underpin these efforts and inform initiatives to develop national expressions and link these groups to others across the country and globe. Our data are drawn from interviews with RTTC members, participant observation and review of movement documents and campaigns.

The City as Battleground

What unites the various RTTC members can be traced to the conditions facing urban communities across the country. Recent decades have seen once abandoned or neglected central cities reemerge as central economic and political nodes in the global economy; as a result, struggles over urban space have intensified. Although member organizations were formed in response to highly specific local events, their struggles are defined by the need to defend urban neighborhoods from encroaching developers and gentrifiers, to confront apathetic, negligent or antagonistic officials and to grapple with the local, national and global forces that govern urban spaces in their interests. In doing so, RTTC organizations, as well as the broader communities from which they come, are engaged in an attempt to radically redefine and reclaim urban democracy. They are guided by a deeply held belief that they have a right to the spaces they call home.

City Life/Vida Urbana, based in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston, was founded in 1973 to fight disinvestment and over time it has expanded its tenant organizing to other parts of Boston. It pioneered the idea of an "Eviction Free Zone" and a "Community-Controlled Housing Zone" to resist evictions, make visible existing ownership patterns and identify where power was situated (see article in this issue, p. 13). Other RTTC organizations were founded in response to more recent neoliberal policies, such as that established by the Los Angeles City Council when it approved "workforce" housing on an ad hoc basis but avoided investing major resources into housing for those of the lowest income. L.A. has exacerbated conditions for the poor by pursuing "glamorous" projects like entertainment complexes that ultimately demolished buildings, displaced tenants and reduced the housing supply for those most in need. In response, RTTC-LA has begun a campaign to develop a community-based housing plan. This involves tenant leaders surveying neighbors to document code enforcement violations based on their lived experiences; in the process, new leaders are emerging and survey findings are expanding the ways in which regulating code enforcement is tied to larger questions about power and the community.

New York City's Right to the City regional formation emerged in 2007 from an existing coalition of anti-gentrification community-based organizing groups. The chapter's membership-based groups are working on individual and interconnected campaigns, all of which share a strong focus on leadership development

Photo by Sam Miller, Picture the Homeless

of their respective and collective membership base. For example, Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment (FIERCE), an LGBTQ youth of color member-group, is organizing for the right to public space by opposing the privatization of NYC's waterfront and campaigning for a youth-led community center on Pier 40 in the West Village. FIERCE has played a key role in organizing youth-led forums to promote and support youth leadership in RTTC at both the local and national levels.

Picture the Homeless is another one of RTTC-NYC's nearly twenty base-building groups. It was founded by homeless people in 1999 in the midst of New York City's war on poor and working-class people of color. Seeking justice and respect, the organization is led by the homeless and intent on stopping the criminalization of homeless people. It organized a series of direct actions in 2009, including the occupation of a vacant building and the orchestration of a tent city on a vacant land parcel in East Harlem owned by JP Morgan Chase—a firm that received billions of dollars in public TARP funding. The organization's "Housing, Not Warehousing" campaign calls for the conversion of vacant buildings to affordable housing for homeless and low-income NYC residents.

This year, RTTC-NYC issued a platform related to the upcoming citywide elections. Through a participatory and unifying process involving member organizations and allies, the local alliance identified key issue areas: federal stimulus funds; community decision-making power; low-income housing; environmental justice & public health; jobs & workforce development; public space. The platform document not only articulates key policy opportunities, it also lays out an historical and political analysis questioning the commodification of basic human needs such as housing. The platform also grounds policy concerns within a set of principles for each issue area and maps out public space accessibility, stimulus funding sources, environmental health indicators and poverty statistics for the city.

Linking Theory and Practice

As a movement and a theory, right to the city remains a work in progress. Within and beyond the RTTC, individuals and organizations are involved in the difficult political work of generating a theory that is both rooted in both the day-to-day struggles and realities of people's lives and capable of creating opportunities for radical, long-lasting, social change. While the debate will continue, looking at RTTC campaigns allows us to begin to identify some emergent principles.

Right to the city at its most elementary concerns the relationship between people and place. It is from here, arguably, that all other rights are derived from and, in turn, grounded in. Drawing from Henri Lefebvre's original work from 1968, *Le Droit a La Ville* (*Right to the City*), right to the city is a political feature of the urban inhabitant, a new form of political belonging not rooted in national citizenship but in urban residency, from which it draws its political power. Issues related to residency have surfaced recently in immigrant

Photo courtesy of Miami Workers Center

Photo courtesy of Miami Workers Center

struggles to get the vote in local and municipal elections and there is a history of undocumented immigrants gaining voting rights in school elections.

From this central principle, we can see in the actions and analyses of RTTC members and the alliance as a whole a subset of rights that gives a more defined form to the rights to the city. These are neither written in stone nor apply universally to all communities in all places, but they do allow us to move the process of defining the right to the city forward as grounded in actual struggle. Engagement with an ever-widening circle of social movements committed to deep transformation will only strengthen the frame.

RTTC offers planners an opportunity to use their research skills in ways that support social movements. Campaigns about evictions, gentrification, public space and community and neighborhood planning can make use of planning in creative and innovative ways. Ava Bromberg, a UCLA doctoral student in urban planning, and Nicholas Brown, a doctoral student in landscape studies at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, assembled an exhibition and symposium series at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) in the fall of 2007. The work addressed spatial injustices and efforts to make just spaces. The entryway of the exhibition was framed by RTTC principles of unity and projects addressed economic and environmental justice practices, spatial segregation, prisons, borders and indigenous land claims. RTTC-LA held a meeting in the exhibition space, which was intended to be useful to organizers and to bring together geography-informed approaches.

Bromberg also put together a mobile planning lab for South Los Angeles, a project stemming from the exhibit contribution of four Baltimore-based artists who developed drawings. The lab is being activated in conjunction with a grassroots community planning and research project in the neighborhoods surrounding the University of Southern California (USC) being affected by USC's expansion and the rapid transformation of affordable family housing to unaffordable student housing. The lab is modeling a

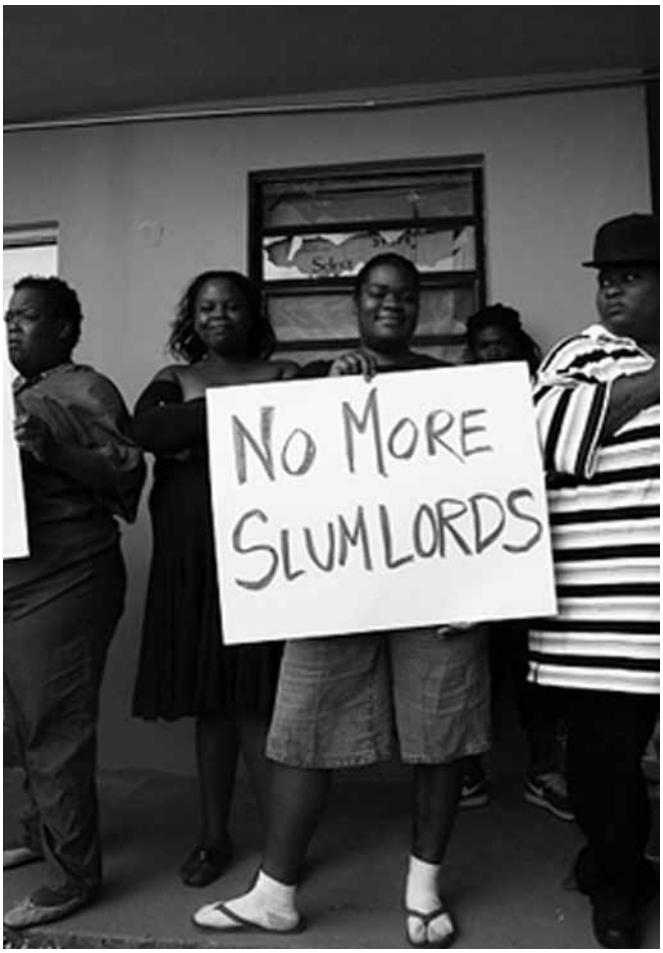

Photo courtesy of Miami Workers Center

Photo courtesy of Miami Workers Center

community engagement and empowerment process for land use planning that can be implemented by other groups.

Planning students from UCLA and USC have served as scribes and translators for conferences on topics that help RTTC and member organizations. A two-quarter class at UCLA on Right to the City was offered where community organizers worked with students to explore the ways that the principles could further organizing in gentrified and gentrifying neighborhoods.

Planners should keep in mind the following principles that can guide their work:

The right to participate. Within the context of a right to stay, perhaps the most important right is the right to participate in all levels of decision-making, including planning regarding the community. Right to the city is deeply implicated in the struggle over how cities will be governed and by whom. Scholars across a range of disciplines have begun to study changing notions of citizenship resulting from transnational migrations, a rescaling of politics and the work of social movements and activists. While national citizenship remains the central frame for membership in a formal political community and rights' claims, this dominance is being challenged by developments on the ground. As a result, we have an opportunity to redraw existing political maps and create new forms of citizenship and new scales of governance through social struggle. This opportunity is central to right to the city, as movement and theory. In this frame, democratic rights, rather than being based on formal political membership in a national community, are based on physical presence in the city and participation in its economic, social and political life.

The right to security. Insecurity marks the lives of many people living in urban areas across the world. Being present in a place and having a right to participate are only meaningful if people are secure. Human security refers to the full spectrum of security, addressing issues ranging from sexual assault and lack of food to armed conflict and environmental destruction. At the level of the city, human security issues are apparent in the terror sown by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and racial profiling by police to the instability resulting from electricity cutoffs and evictions. The right to security, though its content will have to be determined by communities themselves, asserts that in principle people have the right to demand urban policies and practices which support, rather than undermine, the security of people.

The right to resist. Faced with the real threat of community breakdown and displacement—whether by gentrification, foreclosure, systematic discrimination from immigration or criminal justice authorities, malign neglect or any of the other myriad ways in which communities are broken—right to the city means a right to resist. Resistance here has to mean more than permitted marches and other overregulated forms of "free speech" like public hearings. It is a right that can be claimed by people marginalized from formal political processes, or for whom these processes have proven to be ineffective or, at times, weapons of the powerful. It is a right that questions the fundamental legality and morality of existing institutions and practices, and therefore takes as its primary goal their reform or abolition.

Linking Rights, Democracy and Planning

It is impossible to disentangle the discussion of rights from that of democracy, and perhaps right to the city is best understood as one of this generation's attempts to breathe new life into government by the people, as the struggle for radical democracy and what some call deep democracy. At the same time, the movement and theory must be grounded in the lives of real people and the concrete conditions of urban communities. Categories such as citizen and worker, while still relevant, are insufficient to contain and represent the multi-faceted struggles of urban inhabitants who are women, documented and undocumented immigrants, LGBTQ and people of color, many of whom may exist at the peripheries or even outside of the formal economy. New struggles for democracy, inside the city and beyond, will need to create political subjects and agendas that transcend these categories without losing sight of the particularities that shape their lives of urban inhabitants.

Central to RTTC campaigns and analyses is the idea that the struggle for democracy today requires a

return to the concept of rights. Students may study ethics in some programs, but planners need to ask how prevalent this is in most planning programs and practice. What would planning look like if classes and practice began from the frame of rights? Along with academic, policy and other movement allies, RTTC is engaged in the process of revitalizing the rights struggle and re-raising unsettled questions in the context of new political challenges. Questions of inclusion, for example, are far from new, yet the attack on immigrant communities forces us to acknowledge that we still lack a powerful rights movement and institutions that can adequately protect them. Similarly, market-driven displacement, criminalization and unresponsive elected officials reveal the inability of even citizenship to safeguard peoples' civil rights. Finally, existing rights, those guaranteed to citizens and for which many documented and undocumented immigrants strive, fail to even address basic issues of human security, including housing, medical care and employment. In all these instances, communities are once again coming up against the limits of the individualistic and formal political rights that mark the liberal democracies.

RTTC and other movements like it across the globe have their work cut out for them. But there are encouraging signs of momentum. In addition to ongoing regional and national work within the alliance, RTTC recently co-convened the Inter-Alliance Dialogue, a process of discussion and joint activity between Grassroots Global Justice, Jobs with Justice, National Day Laborer Organizing Network, National Domestic Workers Alliance and RTTC. Beyond the U.S. border, the 2010 World Urban Forum V, to be held this coming March in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, has taken as its theme Right to the City. This is certainly encouraging. While much remains to be done, much has also been accomplished. Planners should seize the moment.

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Photo courtesy of Miami Workers Center

Photo courtesy of Miami Workers Center

small numbers of subsidized "affordable" housing units, most of them too expensive for low-income households, as window dressing for huge luxury projects that gentrified neighborhoods and displaced working-class communities of color.

The rhetoric coming out of HUD today suggests more of the same. The agency favors supporting the floundering markets, improving management and greening new development, while programs to help those in greatest need, low-income homeowners and tenants, remain weak and inadequate. It seems that the new regime is preparing to continue HUD's long romance with neoliberal policies that promote private market solutions to urban problems and abandon low-income people with the greatest needs.

Change the System!

Perhaps we are too quick to blame Obama because we as a society are trained to see politics as exclusively personal, and blaming others gets us off the hook. The radical right is already doing a good job of blaming Obama. They spice up their anger with racist innuendos and bizarre conspiracy theories and have absolutely no solutions except cutting taxes for the rich. Above all, this helps draw attention away from the systemic problems that any well-intentioned president would face.

The political system as a whole, including its twin pillars, the Democratic and Republican parties, is dedicated to saving the bankrupt economic system and reestablishing the fortunes of the professional pirates and buccaneers who robbed the banks and started the global depression. Obama seems to understand this all too well. Like a good community organizer, Obama built his campaign from the grassroots to help empower his political base, the only real hope to throw out the rascals and make any systemic changes. After getting elected, he was right to challenge his base to do more. His own space for maneuvering at the top is limited because of the depressed economy, the lobbyist-infested Congress, a government bureaucracy that learned long ago that public and private interests were the same and a Democratic Party weighed down by "moderates" with spines permanently curved from bending over backwards to prevent getting hit by the angry white men (and women) of the right. This is not to suggest that Obama himself isn't deeply embedded in this system, but if you look at his history and rhetoric—well, it engenders hope!

The hard truth is that a very significant proportion of the American public—certainly the moderate and more conservative wings of the Democratic Party, but many independents as well—continue to be wedded to the core values of neoliberal ideology and imperialist politics. They hope for change, but they "of course" understand that change cannot undermine the basic foundations of private enterprise and U.S. interests around the world. While a minority criticizes capitalism and U.S. military adventures around the globe and can see where the problem lies, most Americans are not there, and when they hear the charge that Obama is a socialist they think that puts him somewhere close to hell. Perhaps Michael Moore's new movie "Capitalism: A Love Story" will help to change that. While I don't expect Obama will ever go for socialism, until there is serious debate about replacing the failed capitalist system more progressive alternatives will fall into the system's deep hole of failed reforms.

To effect real change, Obama would have to be much more forceful in repudiating neoliberal policies and using his great communication skills to attack the core values of the right wing. Obama, however, is at the pragmatist center of classical economics, eager to reach back into the neoliberal bag of tricks containing privatization and deregulation and use these whenever it's deemed expedient and not too threatening to the system. He blithely touts public-private partnerships, charter schools, cap-and-trade environmentalism and deep subsidies to the private housing market. The administration's health care reform supports private insurance and requires everyone to buy it. The free market is allowed to reign except when it comes to protecting the largest financial institutions, agribusiness and U.S.-based monopolies. Obama's foreign policy has rolled back the jingoistic rhetoric of the Bush

administration but it remains to be seen whether this will be followed by a real reduction of U.S. imperial pursuits. Muslims will no longer be demonized by the international propaganda machine so long as the U.S. can keep its troops in Muslim countries and continue to make inroads in the Muslim marketplace.

Because the Democratic Party mainstream has staked out ambiguous positions that clearly don't correspond with the "change" we were led to believe in, the public is increasingly confused, upset and open to the rants against change from the radical right. The left and progressives are becoming more isolated as the centrists retreat. As the radical right and its shock troops disrupt town hall meetings and enliven cable television, it's not mainly the left that is cowered but the traditional moderates and liberals. Good old anti-communist hysteria works pretty well on them. All that is needed is a suggestion that Obama is really a "socialist" to find his supporters guilty by association. That's enough to get them to compromise on the big-ticket change items and exhaust every concession in a quixotic pursuit of "bipartisanship." As good patriots, they must insist that the Obama administration clamp down hard on anyone suspected of terrorism, preserve the Patriot Act and keep the Guantanamo prisoners George Bush rounded up under lock and key. All this to show that Obama really isn't a secret terrorist and closet Muslim sent here to destroy our mythical Christian nation.

Playing the Racial Card, Creeping Fascism

Alas, this is the setting for the return of the angry white men (and some angry white women too) to prominent positions in our political life. These aren't simply angry individuals like Rush Limbaugh, who makes the "moderates" cower in the bunkers that conservatives build. These are members of a dying social and political class and a culture in serious crisis—hence the panicked shrieking. In a nation and global marketplace that is increasingly diverse, white men are losing traction. This kind of phenomenon is not new. In the 1920s, the organized working class in Germany and Italy became a major political force and social democratic parties, in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, were winning elections. Fascism, supported by the dominant capitalist groups, developed its own conservative social base in sections of the working class by playing on xenophobic, racist and anti-communist fears. It started with goon squads and thugs, picked up disaffected workers and then won over the middle class. And if fascism is the unfettered rule of finance capital, as we understood it to be in the 1930s, the continuing ability of the financial barons to get the Obama administration to prop up banks and Wall Street at any cost suggests that it is closer to us now than we think.

In this tense environment, where people who have nothing to sell but their labor are forced to compete in a racialized labor market, tensions between races could well increase. Obama, the black president who doesn't make white people uncomfortable because he's not quick to complain when racism shows its ugly face, may well play a stabilizing role. While former president Jimmy Carter pointed out the racist component of South Carolina Senator Joe Wilson's outburst that called Obama a liar, Obama politely accepted an apology. While Cambridge's police department and local government nervously moved away from defending the police officer who arrested noted black scholar Henry Louis Gates, Obama gave in to the angry white men, retracted his charge that the cop's behavior was "stupid" and sat down for a beer. The national conversation about race that Obama promised us (and Clinton before him, with little to show) is now a private discussion, allowing racism to be used more freely as a weapon to divide us.

In sum, now more than ever before it's time for community and social movements to mobilize and build the grassroots foundation for systemic change and stop the return of the angry white men. The Right to the City Alliance (see article this issue) is just one of the many possibilities for building momentum towards real change we can all believe in. Progressive planners have a lot of work to do.

Tom Angotti is an editor of Progressive Planning Magazine *and author of* New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate.

Sticking It to the Banks and Keeping Residents in Their Homes: *City Life/Vida Urbana's Bank Tenant Association*

City Life/Vida Urbana (CLVU), which celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary last year, is a grassroots community organization in Boston committed to fighting for racial, social and economic justice and gender equality by building working-class power through direct action, coalition-building, education and advocacy. Through organizing poor and working-class people of diverse races and nationalities, City Life promotes individual empowerment, develops community leaders and builds collective power to effect systemic change and transform society. As the foreclosure crisis heated up, City Life organized the Bank Tenant Association, successfully fighting post-foreclosure evictions and forcing banks to keep residents in their homes.

In 2008, 2,400 Boston households comprised of four to five thousand people faced forcible eviction from their homes after foreclosure. If this were the result of a natural disaster, it would have elicited international sympathy and attracted state and federal emergency aid. Instead, victims of predatory lending were pictured as irresponsible and undeserving of help.

The Crisis and the Political Moment

The richest and most powerful institutions in the country used their control of the market to try to get even richer at the expense of the majority. They offered millions of individual bad loans, especially directed at communities of color. In order to maximize their profits, financial institutions fueled a real estate bubble, forcing people to pay inflated prices that were by definition too high for their real income. When the bubble burst, it wasn't the people who had profited from it that suffered, it was the millions of small homeowners and their tenants.

The current financial/economic crisis, borne out of predatory loans that capitalized on a national housing crisis, has made clear how exploitation of the majority is made possible through existing inequity and targeting based on race, gender and class. Now is arguably a "political moment"—a time when the common sense of one era doesn't seem to make sense and new possibilities and priorities can be borne of common experience.

One arena of struggle in this political moment is post-foreclosure eviction defense. While most discussion nationally has focused on the need for "workout counseling" and loan modification *before* foreclosure, eviction defense *after* foreclosure has proven to be a more effective arena for improving the likelihood of successfully addressing individual cases and fostering systemic change.

Working with Legal Services, CLVU organized the Bank Tenant Association (BTA) in the summer of 2007 to organize against foreclosure evictions. Since then we have stopped 95 percent of the evictions that have come to us. We are working with hundreds of households. Large move-out settlements have been won. Banks have backed down and accepted rent. In an increasing number of cases, banks are even selling properties to occupants at the real appraised value, sometimes half the old loan value. This "cramdown" of principle is almost unachievable by normal loan modification efforts. It has been made possible, however, by a committed and growing movement of bank tenants who are willing to engage in dramatic protests, including civil disobedience, alongside more standard legal defense.

The Bank Tenant Association

The BTA is primarily composed of occupants of foreclosed buildings, both former owners and tenants. The inclusion of tenants is critically important. The foreclosure crisis is thought of as a problem for homeowners, but 60 percent of Boston households and 47 percent of Massachusetts households evicted after

All photos courtesy of KC Bailey

foreclosure are tenants. Some are tenants of owners facing foreclosure in the same building. Since tenants have relatively greater rights in eviction defense than former owners, engaging the participation of tenants can help the owners win. We stress that after foreclosure *everyone* is a tenant of the bank.

Of course, many tenants are living in absentee-owned buildings facing foreclosure, usually two- or three-family buildings or condos. This is the result of a host of investment schemes gone awry, including condo conversion scams where buildings were converted to condos and sold to straw owners who never moved in. None of the tenants in such buildings will ever be assisted by pre-foreclosure workout counseling. Such condos or absentee-owned buildings probably should be foreclosed, but the occupants, the tenants, should be protected and supported in gaining control of the building.

One of the problems of current workout counseling is that foreclosure is seen as complete failure. This puts ordinary people at a decided disadvantage. In any negotiation, the side that can't walk away is probably going to lose. Therefore, we encourage owners to lose their fear of foreclosure and tenants to understand that they have the power to stay in their homes.

Following are some key features of our BTA that have been replicated in other cities.

Outreach to occupants in buildings to be foreclosed. It's crucial to reach building occupants before foreclosure takes place and before the banks can send representatives to intimidate occupants into moving. We focus canvassing on the list of buildings scheduled for a foreclosure auction, the final step where the bank typically takes control of the building.

Canvassing is labor intensive, but it is also effective. Residents in foreclosed buildings are generally very motivated listeners. Canvassers go door-to-door knowing that the information they bring can make the difference between residents being evicted or allowed to stay in their homes. This work is done by the more than 100 volunteers we have recruited from student groups and religious institutions and including radical activists and bank tenants themselves. Volunteers are

easy to recruit—the effectiveness and dramatic, public nature of the struggle cause many to seek us out.

After obtaining the names and contact information of residents living in foreclosed buildings, canvassers call residents to orient them to our strategy and invite them to the next BTA meeting. This is our main source of new members, but people also find us in other ways (referrals, community meetings, press reports, etc.).

Regular mass meetings. Sixty to seventy members of the BTA meet every week at meetings held in both English and Spanish. Each meeting presents the strategy of "the shield and the sword." The "shield" is legal defense. We don't depend on legal defense to win outright, just to hold the bank off while the "sword" takes effect. The "sword" is public pressure and protest. In each meeting, we cover:

- Explanation of eviction rights. You don't have to move just because the bank says so.
- Developing solidarity, ending the isolation of individual foreclosure and eviction cases. This involves a lot of sharing through testimony, panel discussions, etc.
- Building unity between former owners and tenants. Former owners, who are now tenants, have been some of the most aggressive and determined leaders against the banks after foreclosure.
- Political education/discussion about the nature of the crisis. Don't let them individualize the struggle and blame the victim.
- Planning for protests and public actions, summing up those actions.
- Recruiting volunteers.

Case management, the eviction process and the "public letter." CLVU organizers very consciously avoid a "client" relationship with members of the BTA, emphasizing instead organizing, education and peer support. In any event, with a caseload of around 350 at any given time, we couldn't follow each case in a detailed way, although volunteers do call each household every week to remind them of meetings and offer them a chance to provide an update about their situation.

Each foreclosure eviction case has two tracks to follow. One is the "shield" aspect of the eviction process—cash for keys, notices to quit, summons to court, answers, discoveries, etc. Legal education is provided through mass meetings and peer counseling rather than primarily through individual counseling by staff. Sometimes this stage is taken over by attorneys from Legal Services who officially represent bank tenants. We are also able to counsel people to successfully represent themselves in various stages of the eviction process.

The second track is the "sword" aspect. We encourage each building occupant to write a "public letter" to the bank explaining what he or she wants. The arguments made in the letter are not legal but rather ethical and moral. These letters are copied to many local political leaders and get initial publicity for each case. Letters put mortgage companies on notice that they face serious resistance and also help residents stay involved in their own case.

Eviction blockades. When people who are regular members of the BTA run out of legal options, we consider an eviction blockade. In Massachusetts, a constable must give forty-eight hours notice before a truck eviction. In that time, we organize

The Meyers family, consisting of four brothers and sisters and their six children, live in three apartments of a triple-decker in Dorchester not far from the Brewingtons. One sister also runs a licensed day care center in her apartment for six other children. They were all tenants up until the building was foreclosed. The family offered to buy the building from the mortgage holder, U.S. Bank, however, the bank insisted on evicting first.

In April 2008, City Life called an eviction blockade. On two occasions protesters gathered in front of the building. Both times the bank backed down. The second time all the blockaders marched into Codman Square and held a vigil in front of Dorchester District Court. After the second blockade, negotiators began to sell the property directly to the Meyers. In late 2008, the Meyers family purchased their home at less than half the original loan value.

All photos courtesy of KC Bailey

a protest in front of the building at the moment of eviction. Some are willing to resist arrest and chain themselves to the doorway.

We called a blockade fourteen times in 2008. The banks backed down eleven times. We do blockades only where we are making a demand that the occupant can follow through on, like paying rent to the bank or buying back the building at appraised value. Both these demands put focus on the central issue of the foreclosure crisis—the creation and bursting of the housing bubble. These protests are very emotional, garner lots of media attention and give huge visibility to the bank tenant movement, exposing graphically the contradiction between banks getting huge bailouts and their utter disregard for residents of foreclosed buildings.

For many in the BTA, the blockades and civil disobedience connect emotionally with the civil rights movement. We show clips from "Eyes on the Prize" to encourage discussion about this connection. Some have referred to our blockades as "getting across the Pettus Bridge," a reference to Selma, Alabama.

Targeting banks. The blockades are technically defensive but they help expand the movement rapidly. We also have campaigns that target the offices of major banks, in our case Deutsche Bank and Bank of America. We began with Deutsche Bank, which had more foreclosures and evictions in Massachusetts in 2007 than any other bank. Deutsche

Hildreth and Vanita Brewington are brother and sister, both legally blind, who live in the Codman Square section of Boston's Dorchester neighborhood. They paid their mortgage diligently for many years until they got scammed by a relative who refinanced the house and walked away with the cash. Deutsche Bank foreclosed and began eviction proceedings. By the time the Brewingtons reached City Life they had exhausted their legal defense against the bank's eviction.

City Life called an eviction blockade. The Brewington's family offered to buy back the home at appraised value, which was significantly below loan value. Deutsche Bank and its servicer IndyMac were determined to evict anyway. As the eviction day drew near, publicity about the blockade mushroomed. Everyone was asking, "Why evict elderly, blind residents who are willing to buy the building at appraised value?" Deutsche Bank had no answer to this question and backed off. Negotiations began with IndyMac to resell the property to the Brewingtons.

Over a year later, the case is still not resolved. The property has declined in value even further, but the bank is demanding $70,000 more than the latest appraisal. A non-profit intermediary has offered cash, but the bank has refused.

insisted that, as "trustee" for investors, they had no influence and bore no responsibility; their servicers were responsible, even though the servicers have Deutsche power of attorney. As a result of protests in 2007, we got Deutsche to issue a letter to their servicing companies urging them to consider other choices than mass eviction after foreclosure. When this letter had no effect on the servicers, we organized a protest of over 100 people at the Deutsche Bank Championship, a PGA golf tournament held near Boston in August 2008.

The Bank of America offensive campaign emerged from an "unsuccessful" blockade. An eviction and the arrests which followed sparked a mass movement to demand that Bank of America stop evictions after foreclosure and accept the rent. For example, on Valentine's Day 2009, in collaboration with the environmental group Rising Tide, we organized many depositors to "break up" with Bank of America by closing their accounts. We will continue the campaign until Bank of America agrees to do what Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac did—stop post-foreclosure evictions.

Radical Analysis and Narrative

In our BTA organizing we raise issues that are at the center of the political debate around housing and financial capitalism. A popular, radical perspective on these issues is an enormous asset in doing this direct action organizing. By incorporating discussion of political issues along with skill-building, we link our

All photos courtesy of KC Bailey

tenant organizing and understanding of the housing crisis to a host of other issues—wages, trade, health care, war, etc.—thereby creating broader support for our overall program as well as developing new leaders.

The following are some principles we emphasize:

- The financial institutions created the crisis.
- They should pay for it. This means that foreclosing banks should: (1) rewrite loans to appraised, real value at fixed rates; (2) accept rent from occupants; and/or (3) resell foreclosed buildings to occupants or non-profits at the real value. This can solve the crisis without waiting for government bailouts.

As Steve Meacham, CLVU's director of organizing, explained on Bill Moyers Journal last May:

> If Deutsche Bank forecloses on Joe Schmoe, the best they can do is to sell that property at real value. So if Joe Schmoe can afford the property at real value, why not sell it back to him? ...[T]he only reason the banks aren't doing that is because of what they call moral hazard. They say basically that homeowners should be punished because they signed these loan documents. These are the same guys who have run our entire economy into the ground and who have been rewarded with billions in taxpayer bailouts and have used billions of that money to give bonuses to the very executives that drove their companies and the whole economy into the ground. And they are citing moral hazard as the reason why they can't resell that property to the existing homeowners at the real value. That is disgusting and hypocritical in the extreme.

- We want the government to act, to provide money and new regulation, but we have a strategy that allows us to win even if the government does not act.
- The financial crisis is one of speculation, and the tendency of speculation to take over is directly linked to the growing gap between the rich and everyone else. That gap not only impoverishes us, it creates investors with no productive outlet—hence speculation as the outlet.
- We have the right to defend our homes and communities, regardless of what the court says is the legal status of our claim to our homes.
- The communities and people hurt by this crisis are disproportionately people of color. Recognizing this publicly helps organize a resistance that benefits everyone.
- When we emphasize the "sword" and the "shield," the understanding is that we are going into a battle. We have to prepare accordingly.

When Paula Taylor purchased her condo, she said she couldn't afford the monthly payments. Bank of America/Countrywide promised to refinance. They never did. Paula struggled valiantly to pay but eventually fell behind and was foreclosed.

Paula decided to fight her eviction by Bank of America "on principle." Whatever happened to her, she saw no reason why the bank should not simply accept her rent and let her stay, especially given what they had done with her loan.

City Life staged a blockade. A large turnout of protesters chanted and sang while a huge contingent of police looked on. Finally, the constable received word from the bank that they were backing down.

Two months later, the bank tried again. Meanwhile, Paula had offered to buy back her condo at real value. Bank of America ignored this offer and proceeded with the eviction. Four protesters were arrested. Paula's furniture was carried out to chants of "Shame." Interviewed by the press after the eviction, Paula stated, "The bank thinks they have won. They haven't."

Protesters at the eviction site immediately fanned out to two Bank of America branches to deliver letters to branch managers. Since then there has been a steady series of protests at Bank of America branches by City Life and allied groups. Paula was a featured interview on Dateline NBC about predatory loans and was interviewed by *Der Spiegel* magazine about Bank of America. The resistance to her eviction is featured on YouTube and has inspired countless numbers of people. Paula remains a leader of the Bank Tenant Association and is still convinced that even though she was evicted, the bank didn't win.

The Housing Bubble: *Worse Than A Ponzi Scheme?*

by Arthur MacEwan

Dear Dr. Dollar:
What is the difference between a Ponzi scheme and the way the banks and other investors operated during the housing bubble? -- Leela Choiniere, Austin, Texas

As badly as our banking system operated in recent years, the housing bubble was not a Ponzi scheme. In some respects, however, it was even worse than a Ponzi scheme!

A Ponzi scheme is based on fraud. The operators of the scheme deceive the participants, telling them that their money is being used to make real or financial investments that have a high return. In fact, no such investments are made, and the operators of the scheme are simply paying high returns to the early participants with the funds put in by the later participants. A Ponzi scheme has to grow—and grow rapidly—in order to stay viable. When its growth slows, the early participants can no longer be paid the returns they expect. At this point, the operators disappear with what's left of the participants' funds—unless the authorities step in and arrest them, which is what happened with Charles Ponzi in 1920 and Bernard Madoff this year.

Fraud certainly was very important in the housing bubble of recent years. But the housing bubble—like bubbles generally—did not depend on fraud, and most of its development was there for everyone to see. With the principal problems out in the open and with the authorities not only ignoring those problems but contributing to their development, one might say that the situation with the housing bubble was worse than a Ponzi scheme. And Madoff bilked his marks out of only $50 billion, while trillions were lost in the housing bubble.

Bubbles involve actual investments in real or financial assets—housing in the years since 2000, high-tech stocks in the 1990s and Dutch tulips in the seventeenth century. People invest believing that the price of the assets will continue to rise; as long as people keep investing, the price does rise. While some early speculators can make out very well, this speculation will not last indefinitely. Once prices start to fall, panic sets in and the later investors lose.

A bubble is similar to a Ponzi scheme: early participants can do well while later ones incur losses; it is based on false expectations; and it ultimately falls apart. But there need be no fraudulent operator at the center of a bubble. Also, while a Ponzi scheme depends on people giving their money to someone else to invest (e.g., Madoff), people made their own housing investments—though mortgage companies and banks made large fees for handling these investments.

Often, government plays a role in bubbles. The housing bubble was in part generated by the Federal Reserve maintaining low interest rates. Easy money meant readily obtainable loans and, at least in the short run, low monthly payments. Also, Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan denied the housing bubble's existence—not fraud exactly, but deception that kept the bubble going. (Greenspan, whose view was ideologically driven, got support in his bubble denial from the academic work of the man who was to be his successor, Ben Bernanke.)

In addition, government regulatory agencies turned a blind eye to the highly risky practices of financial firms, practices that both encouraged the development of the bubble and made the impact all the worse when it burst. Moreover, the private rating agencies (e.g., Moody's and Standard and Poor's) were complicit. Dependent on the financial institutions for their fees, they gave excessively good ratings to these risky investments. Perhaps not fraud in the legal sense, but certainly misleading.

During the 1990s, the government made tax law changes that contributed to the emergence of the housing bubble. With the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, a couple could gain up to $500,000 selling their home without any capital gains tax liability (half that for a single person). Previously, capital gains taxes could be avoided only if the proceeds were used to buy another home or if the seller was over 55 (and a couple could then avoid taxes only on the first $250,000). So buying and then selling houses became a more profitable operation.

And, yes, substantial fraud was involved. For example, mortgage companies and banks used deceit to get people to take on mortgages when there was no possibility that the borrowers would be able to meet the payments. Not only was this fraud, but this fraud depended on government authorities ignoring their regulatory responsibilities.

So, no, a bubble and a Ponzi scheme are not the same. But they have elements in common. Usually, however, the losers in a Ponzi scheme are simply the direct investors, the schemer's marks. A bubble like the housing bubble can wreak havoc on all of us.

Reprinted with permission from the July/August 2009 issue of Dollars & Sense *magazine. Arthur MacEwan is professor emeritus of economics at the University of Massachusetts Boston and a* Dollars & Sense *associate.*

Columbia University's Expansion and the Struggle for the Future of Harlem

by Brian Paul

In 2003 Columbia University announced its plan for a new campus in West Harlem and promised a collaborative partnership with the local community. Looking back at Columbia's troubled and racially charged relations with Harlem, Columbia University President Lee Bollinger proudly proclaimed that "Columbia is a different neighbor now…We want to stay here and be a great world university and be part of building the community."

But when Columbia rolled out the details of its plan for a $6.38 billion research campus spanning seventeen acres, the West Harlem community was outraged at the scale of the project and the university's duplicity in cloaking a top-down, self-serving and discriminatory expansion in the false rhetoric of community partnership. In response to this criticism, Columbia claimed that it must expand on a grand scale in order to remain a competitive world-class Ivy League research university and that the development would revive a "blighted" area and create thousands of new jobs for Harlem residents.

The Community Plan versus Zoning

At first glance the conflict appears to be the typical fight between local community and big developer, or town and gown. But instead of just protesting against Columbia, the community attempted to develop an alternative vision for a more contextual and balanced university expansion. In collaboration with the Pratt Center for Community Development (PCCD), Community Board 9 (CB9), a body representing West Harlem in the city's land use review process, completed an alternative plan in 2007. The community plan calls for Columbia to work with the community to expand without displacing any businesses or residents who wish to remain and to preserve the well-paying industrial and artisan businesses that were growing in the neighborhood before Columbia began to acquire real estate for its expansion project.

Columbia has had a history of segregating itself from the Harlem community. CB9's attempt to develop a collaborative, contextual compromise offered an invaluable opportunity for Columbia to right its past wrongs and pursue a new future of integration and social justice. Unfortunately, the university instead continued to pursue its unilateral plan, exercising its potent economic power by hording property in the area and hiring political insiders and public relations experts to win city approval for a zoning change that would allow the expansion to proceed with or without community support. Columbia's strategy worked. On December 19, 2007, the City Council took the unprecedented step of approving *both* Columbia's zoning plan and CB9's community plan—effectively invalidating the CB9 plan without officially rejecting it since passage of the community plan did not obligate the city or Columbia to do anything.

Columbia's Legacy of Inequitable Racist Development

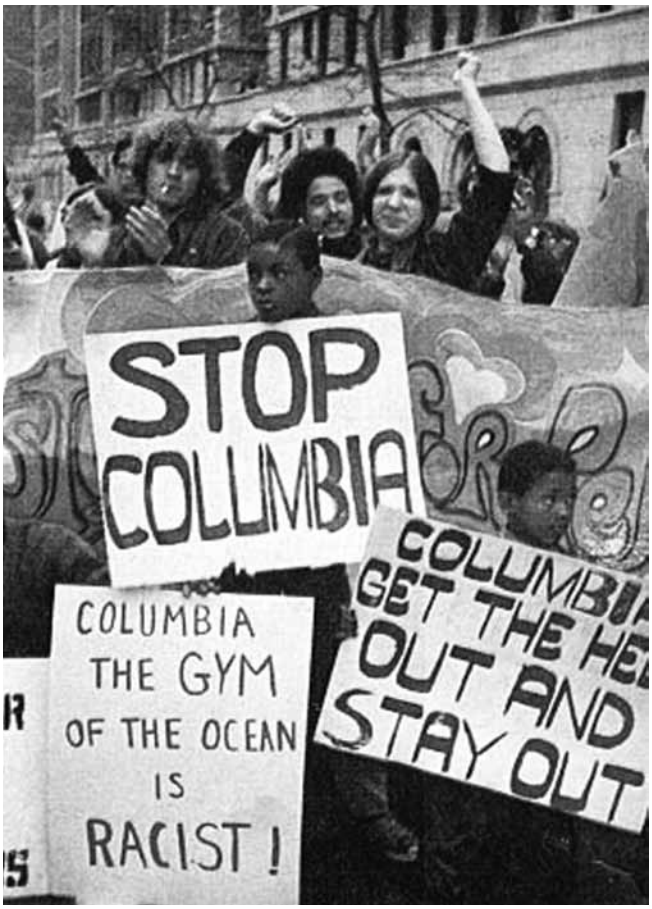
Columbia's behavior follows a long contentious history with its neighbors in Harlem. Columbia moved to Morningside Heights in 1896 seeking a bucolic environment for the development of its new master-planned campus. The school's vision was quickly challenged, however, by the rapid urbanization of Upper Manhattan that began with the completion of the city's first subway line in 1904. While the university was initially able to adapt to its newly urbanized setting, Columbia saw the growth of the neighboring black community in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s as a major threat to its elite Ivy League status.

On the eve of his retirement in 1945, Columbia President Nicholas Murray Butler wrote a letter to his trustees advocating that the university urgently act to "unify Morningside…and protect ourselves against invasion from the north…[for] at any time we might

find an apartment house on Morningside Heights has been purchased to be occupied by Harlem tenants." Butler's solution to this impending disaster lay in "owning the title to all of this property" in order to "achieve the unity of Morningside Heights which I have had in mind for a half century." To remain an elite Ivy League university, Columbia required an elite Ivy League environment—in which working-class minorities could have no place. The university pursued Butler's vision with zeal, acquiring 108 new buildings in Morningside between 1940 and 1966 and forcibly evicting more than 7,000 residents, 85 percent of which were African American or Puerto Rican. Columbia thus maintained its ideal campus environment in Morningside Heights by conducting a virtual ethnic cleansing of the neighborhood.

In conjunction with this mass purchase of real estate in Morningside Heights and eviction of non-university-affiliated tenants, a plan to complete the "fortressing" of Morningside Heights from Harlem was also initiated. "Morningside Heights Inc." was formed in 1947 by Columbia and neighboring institutions to lobby for construction of urban renewal super-block housing projects at the neighborhood's northern border with Harlem. Morningside Gardens, a middle-income development, and the General Grant public housing towers were completed by 1957. As Larry Orton, then head of the New York City Planning Commission noted, these super-block projects provided "a physical stabilization of conditions to the north." In other words, they effectively acted as barriers to the further intrusion of low-income minorities into Morningside Heights.

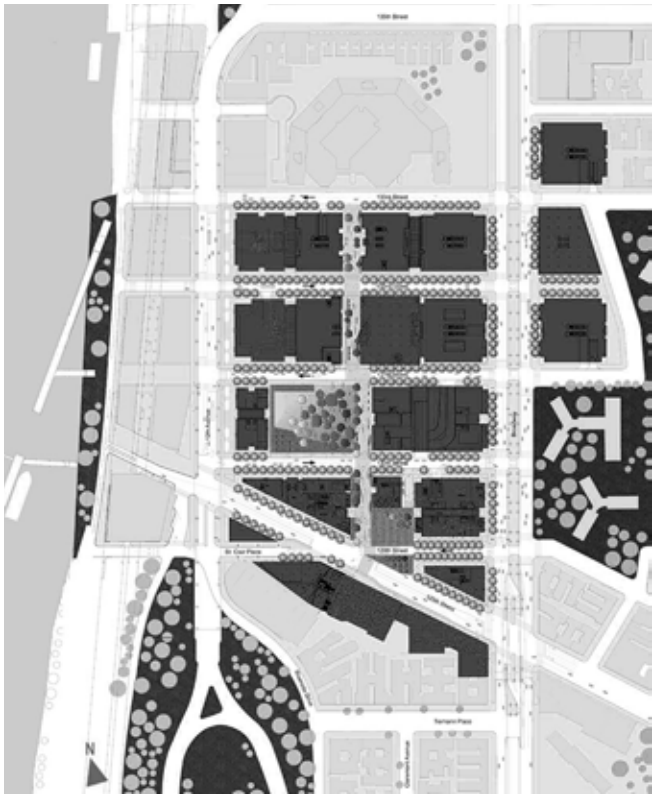
By the 1960s, Morningside Heights and Harlem were clearly defined as separate (and unequal) communities with borders at Morningside Park to the east and 123rd Street to the north. Needing more real estate for expansion, however, in 1966 Columbia began construction of a university gym in Morningside Park with an entrance at the upper Morningside Heights side of the ridge. The simmering tensions between Harlem and Columbia exploded in the 1968 protests at the university. Labeling the project "Gym Crow" for its taking of public space used by the black community



for the overwhelmingly white Columbia student body, the Students' Afro-American Society brought Harlem community leaders to join the students in condemning the gym. Fearing a race riot, the Columbia administration reluctantly agreed to cancel the gym project.

The experience of the 1968 protests thoroughly discouraged Columbia officials from pursuing any efforts at expansion into Harlem for more than thirty years, and the university instead continued to expand in piecemeal fashion within Morningside Heights.

http://atlanticyardsreport.blogspot.com/2007/08/for-columbia-expansion-in-w-harlem.html



http://www.neighbors.columbia.edu/pages/manplanning/index.html

The Columbia Plan and Community Alternative

Columbia's history of inequitable racist development shows that community concern over the new expansion is not just parochial NIMBYism (Not-In-My-Backyard). When President Lee Bollinger asserts his desire for a campus expansion with a definite "Columbia identity," this history of racial exclusion and aggressive unilateralism invokes legitimate distrust and fear among residents of West Harlem for the future of their community.

Columbia's plan for Manhattanville was revealed as a complete tabletop model in 2004 following no community participation. Property owners and community activists were aghast when they saw their neighborhood vanish from the map of this Columbia-constructed future. Presenting the completed plan as a *fait accompli* helped Columbia successfully acquire more than 80 percent of the property in the 17-acre footprint. Numerous business owners who would have preferred to remain in the community were intimidated into selling by Columbia's threats of condemnation and seizure through eminent domain. Columbia is now following through on this threat and is working with the Empire State Development

PREVIOUS PAGE, LEFT: Columbia's current campus and proposed Manhattanville expansion

PREVIOUS PAGE, RIGHT: Students and Harlem activists unite to protest Columbia's Morningside Park Gym in 1968

LEFT, TOP: Columbia President Lee Bollinger with Former Mayor David Dinkins at the August 2007 CB9 Public Hearing

LEFT, BOTTOM: Columbia Plan for the Manhattanville Campus

OPPOSITE: View of the Manhattanville Site from above. A largely industrial area bounded by the Riverside Drive viaduct on the west, Manhattanville Houses on the east, and 3333 Broadway--a complex removed from the Mitchell-Lama affordable housing program in 2005—to the north.

Corporation (a New York State authority) to remove the final two landowners, clearing the way for construction to start.

Columbia never intended to come to a compromise with the community on its vision for a twenty-first century research campus. During the more than three years between the plan's presentation in 2004 and its approval in December 2007, Columbia officials never made a serious attempt to engage with the West Harlem community. At public hearings, officials interacted with the community in a top-down and paternalistic manner, all the while extolling the benefits of the plan. Behind the scenes, Columbia has spent nearly $1.2 million to enlist some of the city's most powerful lobbying firms to push for the rezoning and eminent domain powers necessary for the Manhattanville plan to become a reality. These firms targeted the city's most influential elected officials and power brokers, including former Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Daniel Doctoroff, Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and Councilman Robert Jackson (who represents Manhattanville and Hamilton Heights). Throughout the process, former Mayor David Dinkins—now on Columbia's payroll as a professor of public policy—has leveraged his credibility and influence on behalf of Bollinger and could often be found at the president's side during public hearings.

Columbia's refusal to engage the Harlem community is especially disappointing considering it had a willing partner in CB9. The product of more than four years of intensive community engagement, CB9's plan called for Columbia to retrofit the current building stock—or selectively demolish and construct new buildings for academic use—and for the city to encourage a diversity of development through the creation of a customized zoning district that balances production/light manufacturing, retail and community facilities. This kind of contextual campus expansion would accomplish much towards breaking down the socio-spatial and economic barriers that have historically divided Columbia's Morningside Heights from the Harlem community. CB9 also sought to proscribe the use of eminent domain in the area, voting unanimously against this option in 2004 and again in 2009.

The most profound difference between Columbia's plan and CB9's is that the community plan tries to make Columbia's expansion fit within the community context, which includes a traditionally industrial area surrounded by thousands of low-income minority residents. Indeed, the community plan's primary goal is to promote growth "in a manner that promotes a diversity of incomes without displacement of existing residents." The plan places a major emphasis on ensuring the preservation of industrial jobs, which currently provide 15 percent of local employment in the area and on average pay wages that are far higher than in the service industry.

http://www.morningside-heights.net/manhattanville.htm

The community plan points out that 90 percent of households in West Harlem are renters and that more than 40 percent of households earn less than $20,000 per annum, making rents over $1,000 a month completely unaffordable. Already squeezed by gentrification pressures and the decline of area industrial jobs (due in great part to Columbia's warehousing of the Manhattanville district), the risk of massive displacement is a real concern if Columbia's plan is allowed to proceed. Columbia proudly proclaims that the expansion will create as many as 6,000 new jobs for the community, but for a community with low educational attainment, these jobs will be service sector positions that will not pay enough to cover the rising cost of living in West Harlem. Thousands of people will be forced to relocate to peripheral areas in New York's outer boroughs and inner suburbs where there are fewer social services and economic opportunities, and less public transportation.

Columbia did not even attempt to meet CB9 halfway in any kind of compromise. In both process and outcome, Columbia's Manhattanville expansion plan continues the university's legacy of racist and inequitable development in Upper Manhattan.

Columbia is moving forward on initial infrastructure construction for the Manhattanville expansion despite an ongoing lawsuit filed by property owner Nicholas Sprayregen challenging the validity of the city's environmental impact review and the Empire State Development Corporation's right to seize his property through eminent domain on behalf of Columbia.

The Need for Reform in New York City Planning

New York City's land use regime, where undemocratic appointed bodies like the City Planning Commission and Empire State Development Corporation are endowed with extraordinary powers while community boards are mere advisory bodies, has long been susceptible to manipulation by well-connected developers like Columbia University. The lack of accountability and transparency effectively filters democracy out of the decision-making process to the advantage of those with economic and political power.

As Councilman Tony Avella pointed out, by the time Columbia's proposal arrived for debate at the City Council, "the fix" already appeared to be in. Despite seven hours of public testimony and the concurrent submission of CB9's plan, "Columbia's idea to utterly change forever seventeen acres in West Harlem was not amended in any way, shape or form at the City Council level." As long as community planning continues to lack legal authority, these participatory processes will remain dependent on the goodwill of city government and powerful developers to recognize the value of community "advice," an especially dubious proposition when the constituency in question is a historically disadvantaged minority community like West Harlem.

Columbia's justification for the expansion is that the university must grow in order to be able to compete as an elite research institution in the twenty-first century global economy. This is consistent with New York City government's strategy of developing Manhattan as an elite "command and control" center in the global economy. The singular focus on this approach to economic development has led to a bifurcated labor market of very high wage and very low wage service jobs. As real estate has become more valuable for high-end commercial and residential uses, manufacturing and the working class are being pushed out.

A holistic approach to development is long overdue. CB9's plan for Manhattanville demonstrates that a development alternative that integrates people and place and produces solutions that can balance the growth of the city as a global center with the realities of local society is not a mere pipe dream. Yet until community planning is legally empowered with a role in the process, powerful corporations and institutions like Columbia will continue to decide the fate of millions of New Yorkers and pursue inequitable and racist development cloaked in phony community partnerships and narrow conceptions of short-term economic growth.

Brian Paul is pursuing a master's degree in urban planning at Hunter College.

Urban Rehabilitation in Budapest

by János Ladányi

It all began with *reorganizations* under state socialism. In the course of "urban renewal, bulldozer style" in the 1970s and 1980s, certain neighborhoods were leveled and replaced by what were then called "new modern housing developments." The areas that typically fell victim to such schemes were old inner-city areas with a relatively high proportion of old state-owned apartments and poor Roma and non-Roma residents as well as relatively few valuable owner-occupied dwellings. There were only a few "industrial premises" there because, irrespective of their quality, these were not to be demolished at that time. In addition to a few old and important landmarks that the rather inefficient Historic Buildings Authorities (HBA) could save, churches were also spared as mementoes in accordance with an agreement with the Church.

Today everyone deplores what happened. They do so not only because many a valuable building was destroyed, not only because large areas of the city were wiped out and not only because the buildings and neighborhoods that were constructed in their place at great expense are of very poor quality. The damage done to the more or less organic local society was at least as serious as any of the aforementioned reasons. Solidarity-based links among the local poor were severed, replaced by neither modern nor sustainable developments. The families that moved into these new low-quality and ill-constructed apartments were selected from various places by some haphazard logic and they had nothing in common in terms of background. The newly-built small substandard apartments were expensive to maintain and became increasingly so as state subsidies declined. As a consequence, residents were rendered especially defenseless against the crisis that evolved after the collapse of the state socialist system. The city quarters built in the wake of bulldozer-style reconstructions were to present serious problems to municipal authorities for decades to come, and the problem of families who got stuck in them, together with those who were compelled to move out—many out of the capital city altogether—because of high maintenance costs, were to burden the state budget for decades to come.

Then came the brief intermezzo of the *rehabilitation of apartment buildings* in the late 1980s, in the course of which some tenements on the semi-outskirts of Pest were renovated. This rehabilitation strategy proved impossible to finance—even under state socialist circumstances; not only was it costly, the multiplying effect of the enormous amount of money spent on it was minimal. Though the groups of buildings selected were entirely renewed, they had minimum gentrifying effects on neighboring buildings. With the onset of economic recession and the transition to a market economy and privatization, the rehabilitation of apartment buildings quickly sank into oblivion.

Promoted suddenly to the status of owners after the transition to a market economy around 1990, local governments at first did not know what to do with the huge stock of apartments entrusted to them. They hurried to sell the apartments they owned and, although the law obliged them to do so, they did not refurbish the housing stock. Worse, before long, they got entangled in messy property deals. They were eager to sell to investors who were interested in nothing but vacant plots. The shortcut to a "solution" was compensating residents with token sums and vacating apartments in the buildings on sought-after plots. And that is when the rude awakening came: often by the time an apartment house was razed, the investor had vanished. Note that the economy was in recession at the time and the investors just indicated their "interest" but stopped short of committing themselves legally. After a time, resourceful local governments had the buildings demolished on plots they picked for sale even without investors in sight, "lest the potential

buyer changes his mind before the residents are rid of." As a consequence, there were more demolished houses than local government plots sold.

Another problem was that many apartments in local government ownership stood vacant. Although most were substandard dwellings—temporary lodgings, laundries or cellars—they were readily occupied by all kinds of hapless people who had lost their jobs or their homes. The local governments that had neither maintained nor demolished those buildings and sometimes even forgot about them soon became champions of private property opposed to squatters. Like today, no law forced them to provide an acceptable minimum standard of housing and welfare for residents. They abruptly evicted the squatters, often families with children who, left without other alternatives, carried on squatting elsewhere. One district after another used strong-arm tactics to remove squatters and the occasional consequence was a Budapest-wide "cops and robbers" game.

From roughly the mid-1990s onwards, these spontaneous and haphazard techniques were further developed and institutionalized as *rehabilitation projects*, primarily in the inner districts of Pest. These projects, Budapest style, brought neither physical nor social renewal. The rehabilitation projects of the last fifteen or so years were communication ploys to hide amateurish efforts to gentrify neighborhoods. The projects varied depending on their start date, neighborhood location, local government and size of private capital involved. I wish to stress the shared characteristics. A common feature of these projects was that all structures were marked out for demolition unless the HBA (which mistakenly focused on single buildings rather than streets and cityscapes) listed them as protected. One and two-storey buildings were especially in danger of being torn down, almost irrespective of their age, architectural value or condition. Fewer residents? Less demand for compensation. And more apartments could be built on the same site if a permit for a high-rise was in hand.

Local governments rushed to get rid of buildings inhabited by poor Roma and non-Roma families, partly because those apartments were of inferior quality. Some modernity-obsessed mayors and district architects still go for quick and dirty solutions—the replacement of old structures with purportedly trendy ones—rather than taking cautious steps towards renewal. Decrepit structures no doubt have to be razed, but the surviving ones should be upgraded gradually, and wherever this is happening spontaneously it should be encouraged.

In Budapest, as is typical throughout the world, the first victims of the rehabilitation projects were buildings and neighborhoods inhabited mostly by the poor. Given the regulations of the time, it was inevitable that local governments try and rid themselves of the poorest residents, most of who were unemployed or without a permanent or registered workplace and who paid no taxes

but "had many children and kept asking for relief and day nursery." Overall, "they were a pain in the neck." The poorest of them lived in rundown apartments still under local government ownership, and the rent they paid did not even cover property maintenance. No law obliged (or obliges today) local governments to provide an acceptable minimum standard of housing and welfare. The "rehabilitation" of Pest's inner districts (where certain neighborhoods are degenerating into slums) has brought no real rehabilitation. There was an influx of new residents, while only a fraction of the original residents stayed. Massive numbers of the poorest residents in the most valuable inner and middle areas of Pest's semi-outskirts have been compelled to resettle elsewhere. In certain areas the "local government rehabilitation projects" amounted to ethnic cleansing—entire districts freed of Roma inhabitants.

Though not much talked of, it is worth considering the fate of the families forced to leave. Some of the residents removed from the rehabilitation areas were compelled to move to slums and Roma sections of Budapest, which has increased social and ethnic segregation and ghettoization. Many of those forced to leave the rehabilitation areas have had to leave Budapest altogether. Since the money they received in compensation for their homes was far too little, many of them could purchase houses only in ghettoized villages with dwindling populations and far from job opportunities. Finally, many families who lost their chance to live in the rehabilitation areas have became homeless either because they quickly spent the money they received for their homes or because relatives or casual acquaintances fleeced them (they could not handle such a "huge" sum). Probably the gravest of the mistakes committed by local governments was that they strengthened rather than weakened the impact of the crisis in a period of social shocks. For decades to come the cost of externalized welfare problems will be paid by other local governments, the state budget and, eventually, all taxpayers.

Another mistake was that during the rehabilitation projects local governments used up a considerable part of their real assets. They failed to act as "prudent managers" or "genuine owners" in the sense that any sensible and circumspect owner is aware that in times of crisis it is best to play for survival. They should have avoided non-transparent and extremely risky transactions. I reject the allegation that local governments were left without any alternative to increase their revenues. From the mid-1990s onwards, they "marketed" their real estate assets at minimum prices or for nothing. In return for getting valuable real estate, investors only had to ensure alternative accommodation for the residents.

But that is not the end of the mistakes. Valuable buildings and even whole neighborhoods fell victim to ill-considered transactions, some of which smacked of corruption or tricks to channel revenues to party coffers. The new buildings erected in place

All photos by Béla Pörös

of the old ones are neither modern nor of a high quality. This occurred during a period in which the population of Budapest steadily decreased and residential areas sprawled towards primeval green areas and into the now dysfunctional brownfields. Some advocates of the rehabilitation scheme state that what happened was dictated by the market. But in my interpretation this is just a semblance of a housing market. State subsidies are still a factor, transactions teem with corruption and those in office can still convert their power to market advantage.

These are not rare and random irregularities but rather consequences of the market behavior of the local governments that became quasi-owners of the housing stock. No market-compatible behavior can be expected from players that have just a quasi role. Local governments were created to help rectify the damage done by market forces, among other reasons. The problem is that since the transition from socialism these non-market-compatible institutions were forced to play the market game. The consequence? Corruption and inefficiency.

The regulations controlling the operation of local governments need to be radically changed throughout Hungary but especially in Budapest. If that does not happen, the damage done to the housing stock and Budapest's socio-spatial pattern will remain a huge drag on Hungary's economic progress for a long time to come.

János Ladányi is a professor of sociology at the Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary. He has written several books and many articles on socio-spatial consequences of urban planning and changing patterns of residential segregation in Budapest. He is co-author with Iván Szelényi of Patterns of Exclusion: Constructing Gypsy Ethnicity and the Making of an Underclass in Transitional Societies of Europe.

Photo by János Ladányi

Progressive Planning Profile: *Ann Forsyth*

by Norma Rantisi

As Ann Forsyth steps down as co-editor of *Progressive Planning Magazine* (*PPM*), we celebrate her many contributions to Planners Network (PN) and look forward to her continuing leadership in PN and in the urban planning field.

Perhaps best known by PN members for her work on *Progressive Planning*, Ann's involvement predates and extends beyond her role as editor. Ann first learned about PN in the 1980s when working with one of the few PN members in Australia. She formally joined—or to use her words, moved beyond having an "affiliation of ideas" to "paying up and supporting the organization"—in 1987. She was then a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where PN members included both students and faculty, such as Jackie Leavitt (see profile in winter 2008 *PPM*). When asked what first drew her to the organization while she was in Australia, she mentions the critical role of the PN newsletter:

> "The newsletter was important as a way to meet other people with similar ideas to oneself, particularly for people who weren't in New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco. It gave a sense of connection to others who had similar ideas about planning. So in a way, it is more important for people in smaller cities. That is probably a little less so now with the internet, but certainly back in the '80s, the newsletter was an important source of connection."

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, while she was a graduate student at UCLA and then Cornell, Ann's link to PN was mainly through the newsletter. Then, in 1993, a couple of events triggered some soul-searching within the organization and a new platform for involvement. First, a late 1991 newsletter issue printed comments by John Friedmann, Michael Brown and Pat Morrissey in response to a recent reminder note about contributions. With their checks these

Photo by Sarah Smith

members wrote questioning the necessity of keeping PN going and whether there was another way of bringing people together. Over the next year, what became known as the "whither/wither" PN debate was taken up in the newsletter. A survey of members indicated interest in continuing but demonstrated support for meeting in a conference format. PNer Peter Marcuse (helped by Troy West) hosted a meeting in Rhode Island to start planning the conference and invited interested members to attend. Ann had just been hired as an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and was able to attend the meeting. Along with Ken Reardon, Teresa Cordova and Peg Seip, Ann joined the committee to organize a 1994 PN conference in Washington D.C.

At the 1994 conference, the steering committee decided it was time to add some new members. Ann and Ken Reardon were elected and immediately made co-chairs of the organization. The following year, Tom Angotti joined Ann and Ken and the three

formed a "troika," taking on a number of organizing tasks as the offices of the organization moved from Washington to New York and PN held sessions and events at the American Planning Association and Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. Ann stayed on as co-chair of PN until 1997.

Ann joined the editorial board of the PN bi-monthly newsletter in 2000, while she was teaching at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. In 2002, she and co-editor Tom Angotti transformed the newsletter into the quarterly magazine that we know today. Ann coordinated the first issue of *PPM* with the theme of "youth and planning."

In 2002, Ann moved from Harvard to the University of Minnesota to head the Metropolitan Design Center, which marked yet another chapter in her involvement with PN. With access to resources, she took on the job of overseeing the PN office, formerly based at Pratt Institute in New York. This was a major undertaking given that office activities include maintaining and updating the directory of PN members, coordinating the distribution of *PPM* and responsibility for PN finances. Ann has served as the PN treasurer and office manager ever since. In addition to office activities and editorial responsibilities, Ann organized and chaired the PN conference, "Just by Design," held in Minnesota in 2005.

In 2007, when Ann moved from Minneapolis to Ithaca, New York, to begin her new position as professor of city planning at Cornell University, she moved the entire PN office with her. This move included the relocation of a large collection of past issues of PN publications and other PN-related documents, all of which are now part of the official PN Archives housed at Cornell and maintained by Ann's colleague, Pierre Clavel. Ann is also a member of the PN steering committee, a position she has held on and off over the years (1994-1997, 2001-2004, 2007-present). And although she has recently stepped down as co-editor of *PPM*, she remains an active member of the editorial board.

In addition to her direct involvement with PN, Ann has contributed to the broader planning community through her professional activities and research. She has been an active member of the Association of Community Design, the American Planning Association and the Faculty Women's Interest Group of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. Ann also maintains a monthly blog on the Planetizen website that offers a wealth of advice to students, with topics ranging from the practicalities of research and publishing to finding a job or selecting the right planning school (http://www.planetizen.com/blog/10386).

Ann trained in architecture and planning, earning a B.S. in Architecture from the University of Sydney, a M.A. in Urban Planning from UCLA and a Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from Cornell University. Her research and professional experience has centered on the social aspects of physical planning, on how to make more sustainable and healthy cities. She has authored numerous journal articles on this subject and three books (*Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia and The Woodlands* (2005, University of California Press); *Designing Small Parks: A Manual Addressing Social and Ecological Concerns* (2005, Wiley, with Laura Musacchio); and *Constructing Suburbs: Competing Voices in a Debate over Urban Growth* (1999, Routledge/Gordon and Breach).

Ann balances her academic teaching and research with applied work, often through organizations/institutions in which she has played a leading role, such as the Urban Places Project at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the Metropolitan Design Center at the University of Minnesota and her current Design for Health Project. Throughout the years, she has conducted studies and provided technical assistance on topics such as pedestrian access, high-density housing and the social aspects of open space. The fall 2003 special issue of *Progressive Planning Magazine* that she edited, "Planning for the Active City," highlights many of these concerns.

In short, Ann is a model PN member, teacher and planning practitioner—a scholar-practitioner who will continue to make major contributions to PN as well as the planning profession at large. We look forward to our ongoing collaboration.

Cities and Gender:
A Review from the Point of View of an Activist

by Regula Modlich

Cities and Gender
Helen Jarvis with Paula Kantor and Jonathan Cloke
Critical Introductions to Urbanism and the City series
Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009
364 pages, $34.94
Simultaneously published in UK, USA and Canada

Why couldn't I, an aging activist, put down this rather academic book? The cover, which depicts artist Birgit Deubner symbolically struggling under the weight of a pair of lead wings, intrigued me, but it was the skilful interweaving of urban and gender studies within a global context that captivated me and kept me reading. How refreshing to see sexual diversity, the global north *and* south and the interplay of both male and female realities treated together, acknowledging the too often ignored realities of the vast majority of humankind! The authors strongly reject traditional binary thinking and accept an intersectional, interdependent, "multiscalar" and often contradictory reality—reminiscent of Marx's criticism of formal logic.

Essentially a textbook, *Cities and Gender* uses devices such as boxed case studies and concepts, definitions, illustrations, suggested learning activities, summaries and extensive bibliographies, and an at-one-glance chronology of parallel developments in urban and gender studies in relation to global scientific and socio-political events, which contributes to making it understandable for those of us more based in praxis than theory. By including the male corollary of the gender analysis, the book is especially helpful for feminist activists as it will assist us in developing goals, strategies and tactics based in the full spectrum of human realities.

The three parts of *Cities and Gender*, Approaching the City, Gender and the Built Environment and Representation and Regulation, seem unusual divisions.

Yet, through the gender lens, they fall into place. Approaching the City lays the basis, both historically and theoretically, for analyzing gendered realities within cities. Gender and the Built Environment brings out gendered realities in buildings and both hard and soft infrastructures (e.g., utilities and transportation in the case of the former and social services such as child, elder and health care in the case of the latter). It shows how these components, especially "automobility," have shaped lived experiences in the ever more globalizing cities, south and north, polarizing and atomizing them and culminating in the feminization of poverty and vulnerability. Finally, Representation and

Regulation analyzes the effects of gendered political and bureaucratic power structures. Throughout, international case studies highlight inequalities not only within societies, but between the global north and south.

The section on gender mainstreaming is of particular interest to me as a feminist urban activist. After Canadian neoliberal governments at all levels pulled the rug out from under hard won concessions for women, we realized we needed commitments toward bringing about systemic change. Toronto Women's City Alliance, is now fighting for a Women's Equalities Office in City Hall, essentially to achieve gender mainstreaming. We realize this requires the predominantly male- and wealth-driven power structure to admit to existing gender imbalances and commit to rectifying these.

Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke draw on the 1998 Council of Europe definition of gender mainstreaming as

> "the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking and in practice" (221).

They go on to suggest:

> "…the way forward for gender mainstreamed cities of the future lies in processes that seek to devolve power-through-planning to the lowest feasible level while at the same time constantly re-examining processes and mechanisms by which that power-through-planning might be realized in a participatory, horizontally active, vertically challenging micro-democracy."(243)

A very fundamental, even revolutionary, approach, indeed.

With all the trailblazing contributions of *Cities and Gender,* there are a few minor corrections and gaps the authors might want to consider before the second edition. There is the obvious mistake of ascribing the Bolivarian Revolution and Hugo Chavez to Bolivia instead of Venezuela. More importantly, while *Cities and Gender* adopts the reality of sexual diversity as part of its rejection of binary thought, the authors fail to consistently apply this analysis to the many complex intersectionalities of urban reality. Then again, it may well be that further research and documentation are still needed.

The authors carefully define most concepts they introduce, but fail to do so for their key notion of "(care-less) competitiveness," which they see as threat to gender equity:

> "…improving gender equality depends less upon gender-conscious policies than upon a transformation of the dominant structures of representation and regulation which prioritize competitiveness over an ethic of care and concerns for inclusiveness."(285)

Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke expose the neoliberal trend of the shifting of health and elder care to the "community" as an opting out of the state and a downloading of the burden on ill-defined communities and gendered homes. Unless the

ethical values of "competitiveness" and "care" are defined and related to for-profit economies, the impact of the terms is lost.

Sometimes the authors' objective and factual presentations seem to understate the magnitude of humiliation and, far too often, deadly brutality in so many women's realities. Yet, this is what propels activists. The struggle for gender equity needs to turn nurturing and domestic work into a public, non-gendered "caregiving" issue, removing it from the emotional, vulnerable and violence-charged context of individual and individualized households. There, most of the much touted "labor saving" household appliances impose for-profit market- and media-driven standards for cleanliness, domesticity and social status while requiring space, care, human and electric energy and lots of money without ever saving meaningful time.

Appropriately for a textbook, the authors analyze rather than advocate, and are rather cautious about the future for gender equity. But, *Cities and Gender* can strengthen advocacy efforts as it will greatly assist activists to get their bearings through the paradoxes and complexities of a globalizing and urbanizing world. For this reason, I highly recommend the book to other activists. In fact, if *Cities and Gender* gets broad use, the goals the authors lay out in their introduction will likely be achieved:

> "This book has a three-fold rationale: to bring about the systematic intertwining of urban studies and gender studies; to expose persistent inequalities in the everyday lived realities of men and women in both the global north and the global south, through the analytic lens of gender; and to influence (and ultimately transform) the tone and substance of classroom debate as well as practitioner and civic engagement." (1)

Regula Modlich, now retired, turned urban planner, then feminist activist, after a year volunteering in India. Swept up by the anti-Vietnam War and socialist movements and the second wave of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, she helped found Women Plan Toronto and its successor, Toronto Women's City Alliance (www.twca.ca), and was managing editor of Women & Environments International Magazine.

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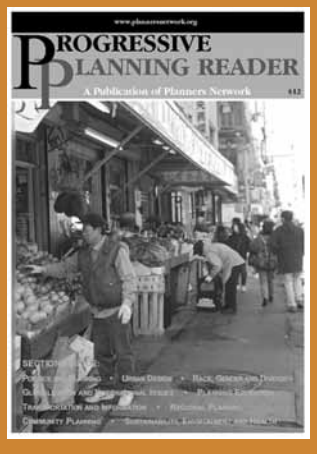

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