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Mullings, Leith., ed. *Cities of the United States: Studies in Urban Anthropology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. Pp. xii, 342. \$40.00 (US)

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Almost a century ago reformers inaugurated the Progressive Era by attacking the evils of the American city: poverty, pollution, slums, overcrowding, and crime. Today we are still concerned with these same problems. *Cities of the United States* presents a series of articles that examine various topics, including the urban poor, community organization, education, kinship, and gender. According to its editor, Leith Mullings, "this is the first volume of original essays to deal exclusively with the urban United States."

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson tried to stem the dangerous deterioration of urban America in the 1960s by waging a War on Poverty that poured huge sums of money into programs aimed chiefly at inner cities. Whatever success this scheme achieved, it fell short of original expectations. Ronald Reagan drastically cut federal urban aid and transferred much of the responsibility for welfare to state and local communities, most of which could not maintain the previous level of services. Blacks and Hispanics suffered considerably from this new economy drive.

What are the best methods for improving the nation's metropolitan centres? At one time public assistance promised some hope but, as Jagna Sharff points out in her article on the urban poor, many who seek aid today find that assistance levels are "grossly inadequate." In order to survive, the poor are often forced to supplement their income by underground activities such as stealing, pushing drugs, and operating illegal lotteries. In their analysis of "The Welfare Trap," Ida Susser and John Kreniske confirm that Reaganomics has led to a system in which welfare agents pursue long and tedious procedures and enforce excessive and unreasonable rules for the purpose of denying aid to clients. "Welfare regulations

are not designed to assist poor people," the authors conclude, "they are intended to discourage them from requesting relief."

If public assistance has demonstrable weaknesses, how effective is local community action? An alliance between blacks and Italians in Newark, New Jersey, Gwendolyn Mikell reveals, allowed middle-class representatives of these groups to move into the city's power structure, but it accomplished nothing for the urban poor. Delmos Jones discovered that when a grass-roots Community Action Group in New York City tried to operate a Head Start educational program, it fell increasingly under the control of higher level city institutions. Centralized bureaucracy made the rules, controlled the funds, appointed the staff, and overrode the wishes of local citizens.

Has either education or the women's liberation movement exerted a salutary influence on urban affairs? A study by anthropologist John Ogbu reports that children of low-income black and Chicanos in South Stockton, California, consistently performed worse in school than any other group. Neither genetic nor cultural factors explained this phenomenon. Blacks and Chicanos, long subject to racial prejudice, simply saw little evidence that for them better education necessarily led to better economic opportunities. A great increase in the number of women entering the work-force, Helen Safa's essay reveals, has not particularly benefited the urban working woman. Although middle-class women enjoyed a wide range of employment choices, most of which promised upward mobility, women of the labouring class had to settle for low-paying dead-end jobs. Some working women experienced a new sense of independence, but their wages served only to supplement to the incomes of their husbands who remained the main bread-winners and the major household authorities.

Despite its main title, this book does not present a comprehensive view of the

American city. It is a collection of articles loosely connected by a common concern for urban issues. Some essays, while meritorious in themselves, bear only a peripheral relationship to the major topic of the study. Benjamin Miller's examination of the polo club as a status symbol and a weapon of the upper class is fascinating and well written, but it seems anomalous in a volume otherwise devoted to the urban poor. Some articles deal almost exclusively with anthropological research methods and theories. These topics may interest professionals in the field but their place in a work ostensibly dedicated to the American city appears questionable. If both the spending of Kennedy and Johnson and the parsimony of Reagan have failed, how then do we save American cities from becoming nothing more than desperate ghettos for the undereducated, underemployed, homeless, and criminal? Our authors provide no suggestions. Readers are left with a fragmented image tinged with pessimism. Short on solutions, the book nevertheless performs a valuable service by highlighting a major problem in America today.

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Bauman, John F. *Public Housing, Race, and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987. Pp. xvi, 278. Maps, index.

Goering, John M., ed., *Housing Desegregation and Federal Policy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986. Pp. x, 343, Tables, maps, index.

The discovery of an emergent urban "underclass" characterized by minority status, poverty, and an immobility that leaves it stranded in our economically debilitated central cities is grave testimony to the intractability of racial and class inequality in