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Stansell, Christine. *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986. Pp. xiv, 301. Tables, index.

A complex and fascinating discussion of the interaction between urban growth, industrialization, and class formation, *City of Women* is an important book — one, however, with several significant flaws. Stansell analyzes the development of New York City industry, the emergence of a class society there, and the position women had in that new order. Although the author is concerned with the larger culture that emerged between 1789 and 1860, working-class women form her primary focus. Working-class men, middle-class men, and middle-class women are discussed largely in relationship to this group. According to Stansell, lower-class women faced difficult economic circumstances as household production declined and the wage economy emerged. They were forced to accept work either in factories, in home production work, on the streets, or in domestic service. Their work, leisure activities, daily routines, and personal and intimate relationships increasingly became played out in the public sphere. Stansell argues that “by 1860, both class struggle and conflicts between sexes had created a different political economy of gender in New York.”

The subtitle of the book, “Sex and Class in New York,” is especially apt. Sexuality pervades her discussion to the point of salaciousness, and at times, seems inappropriate. When developing an argument, she often cites the most extreme examples, and leaves the impression that this was how women behaved, what men thought of women, and what women thought of themselves. Her use of such evidence occurs early in the work. In her discussion of the attitudes men held toward women in the early Republic she cites Lord Chesterfield, a man known to hold antagonistic and harsh views of women. Evidence from an especially brutal rape trial is also mentioned.

From this and similar evidence, she concludes that men held women in contempt, that this “was probably a bond that men shared across class lines in a ‘plebeian’ culture where sporting gentlemen might consort with workingmen at bawdy houses and cockfighting rings and in political affrays. Images of women as bawds and tricksters were a staple in the conversations of labouring people, and the lusty moll of sailors’ ballads and journeymen’s jokes was close kin to the greedy whore of gentlemen’s lore.” After several pages of such evidence and arguments, she finally mentions that “not all men detested their wives.” This type of emotive discussion, followed by a brief and partial disclaimer, occurs throughout the book. And while the author discusses some extremely important aspects of working class life such as violence, the neighbourhood, the implications of outside work on the family, street life, and new leisure activities, the reader is left to ponder the accuracy of her statements. Is her discussion of working class culture in New York representative of the vast number of people at the low end of the economic spectrum, or is it representative of only a small segment of that group? Was working-class New York and women’s position in that world more diverse than she describes? How did ethnicity effect behavior and choices? Did working class women view prostitution as a viable means to secure a basic income or extra money? Furthermore, most of her discussion of working class women is seen through the prism of men: male labour organizations, male dominated charity societies, male literature, and a male court system. How women viewed themselves still remains a question.

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Baldwin, Douglas, and Spira, Thomas, eds. *Gaslights, Epidemics and Vagabond Cows: Charlottetown in the Victorian Era*. Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1988. Pp. vii, 207. Illustrations. \$15.95 (paper).

This is an interesting, informed, and important collection of essays. We know far too little about sewers, lighting, markets, and vagabond cows in the 19th-century Canadian city. For this reason alone, we are much in debt to Douglas Baldwin and Thomas Spira and their colleagues for writing about these much-neglected subjects.

In a short preface the editors state the major themes of the essays: the problems of private versus public ownership of essential services, the dilemma of balancing budgets and neglecting the provision of better public health facilities, and, finally, the struggle of city officials to wrench themselves free of constricting political and economic provincial controls. Charlottetown was ultimately successful in winning these battles, but not without encountering some petty set-backs. To demonstrate these themes, Charlottetown’s historical character is introduced in a context-setting chapter by Peter Rider. For readers wishing a general introduction to the early development of this provincial capital, it is a useful essay. To provide a bench-mark for the major thematic chapters, Alan MacEachern has written a creative (that is, fictitious) account of Charlottetown social life in 1855, the year of the city’s incorporation. Based on solid empirical research, it is an attempt to evoke the temper of the times through a series of imaginary letters. While indeed creative, the letters often tend towards the parochial and do not place the city in larger context. In fact, this is the major problem of the volume: the failure of the authors to connect consistently with a larger world.

The next chapter explores how the elite of Charlottetown were not terribly involved in local politics. The city had little ability to create taxes, hence to exercise power, and