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Review of Emery N. Castle (editor) *The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places* and Meredith Ramsay, *Community Culture and Economic Development: The Social Roots of Local Action*

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The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places / Community, Cult...
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From the Book Review Editors

In a 1989 *JAPA* article two of us discussed the role that historical analysis could and should play in planning practice (Abbott and Adler 55, 4). We argued that knowledge about context was critical; knowing about historical, as well as political and organizational dimensions of practice would increase the effectiveness of plan-making and implementation efforts. Placing people, organizations, policies, and communities in time and space would help planners to ground their problem definitions, strategies, and tactics in the situation at hand. Placing would also encourage planners to become self-conscious about the analogies that shape their thinking. Such reflectiveness would enhance their capacity to appropriately borrow and tinker with practices developed by colleagues at other times and in other places. Newly minted planners, and professionals new to an agency, to a sector of planning, or to a community would particularly benefit from adopting such an analytic approach to their work.

We think that practitioners should be able to undertake these analyses on their own. But several of the works reviewed in this issue can assist such efforts. In particular, a reader on metropolitan Cleveland is especially useful for newcomers to its region and might serve as a model for replication elsewhere.

Eugenie Ladner Birch describes Alexander Garvin's *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't,* for example, as essentially a treasure trove of borrowing and tinkering possibilities that appears at a critical moment in the evolution of the planning field. Evaluating the applicability of these leading efforts in their own particular contexts ought to occupy many practitioners. And, although David Rusk's *Baltimore Unbound* concentrates on a single metropolitan area, Shirley Byron's review suggests it belongs in the same category as Garvin's book, a policy analytic model that ought to be appropriated for use elsewhere.

Contextualized knowledge can also be used to create and sustain place-specific identities and ecologies, issues that are being widely discussed within the planning community. David Schuyler's review of Mark Luccarelli's *Lewis Mumford and the Ecological Region: The Politics of Planning* makes clear the significance for Mumford and his associates of the importance of place and the continuing relevance of knowledge about the relationship between nature and social life in particular places for planning practice. The case material and analyses in Timothy Beatley's *Habitat Conservation Planning,* reviewed by C. Mirth Walker, provide much grist for planners in this sector to reflect on the experience of colleagues elsewhere. The reviews of Adele Bacow's *Designing the Public City: A Guide for Advocates and Public Officials,* by Elise Bright and Brian Scott, highlight using the action ideas put forward by the author to create and sustain the identity of places.

W. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz, and David Perry's *Cleveland: A Metropolitan Reader,* reviewed by Pierre Clavel, is a book that every planner beginning to practice in that region would find very useful. The contributors do the work of placing that was discussed above; it is the sort of book that ought to be widely replicated. Planning programs at urban and metropolitan universities throughout North America, perhaps in conjunction with state and national planning organizations, should orchestrate the production of comparable volumes for their communities.

A set of such books could play a role here similar to that of a series being published by UCL Press in London, entitled *European Urban Land and Property Markets.* We've received five country studies thus far, covering The Netherlands, Germany, France, United Kingdom, and Sweden. A study of Italy is forthcoming as well. Such a set would greatly facilitate the process of diffusing context-specific knowledge that would enhance planning practice.

Carl Abbott
Sy Adler
Deborah Howe

Rural Development

The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places
Emery N. Castle, editor. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 1995. 563 pp. $45.00, $25.00 (paperback).
Community, Culture, and Economic Development: The Social Roots of Local Action
Meredith Ramsay. SUNY Press, Albany, NY, 1996. 163 pp. $16.95 (paperback).

Rural America often seems like an afterthought in our urban-suburban society. Yet, rural places make up 97 percent of the nation's land and are home to one quarter of the population. Since World War II, rural America has undergone profound changes: the relative decline of agriculture, forestry, and mining in favor of manufacturing and service industries, the rise of retirement and recreation communities, the construction of elaborate transportation and communications networks, and the invasion of the countryside by expanding suburbia.

These changes have made rural America more diverse and more complex. The challenges to planners are many. In the rural-urban fringe areas, growth management is paramount. How can communities accommodate development and yet maintain viable

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farms, open space, affordable public services, social harmony, and environmental quality? In remote rural areas, such as the Great Plains and Deep South, economic development is the top priority. The Plains continue to lose population, and chronic poverty still plagues much of the rural South.

The Changing American Countryside is a collection of essays that provide a good overview of the geography, economy, and sociology of rural America. The book grew out of the National Rural Studies Committee, founded in 1987 through a grant from the Kellogg Foundation. Editor Emery Castle has strong credentials as an eminent agricultural economist and former president of a Washington, DC think-tank, Resources for the Future. He has assembled leading scholars in rural sociology and geography, but a planning perspective is not represented.

The book is intended to serve two purposes: (1) as a college-level text for rural studies courses; and (2) to stimulate debate about rural America. The book is more successful in achieving the first objective. It effectively serves as an update of the popular reader, *Rural Society in the USA: Issues for the 1980s* (Westview, 1982), and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report, *Rural Economic Development in the 1980s* (USDA, 1988). But *The Changing American Countryside* lacks a rural planning emphasis. Students may benefit from looking at *Rural Planning and Development in the United States* (Guilford, 1988) and *The Small Town Planning Handbook* (APA Planners Press, 1995).

The essays by two geographers, Peirce Lewis on "The Urban Invasion of Rural America" and John Fraser Hart on "Rural and Farm No Longer Mean the Same," are the most relevant for planning students. Two economists, Mark Drabenstott and Tim Smith, present a useful overview of economic winners and losers in "Finding Rural Success." But three chapters each on rural poverty and education are a bit much to get across the ideas that rural areas have lower incomes, higher unemployment, and lower skill levels than urban areas do. The rural Southwest, Midwest, and South are all adequately explained, as are the locations of, and conditions among rural Latinos, Indians, and Blacks.

Most of the essays present sound but conventional descriptions of the diverse places and people found in rural America. Unfortunately, some of the most hotly debated issues in rural America are ignored. For example, Wal-Mart and other chain stores have altered the economic geography of the rural Midwest and South. Frank and Deborah Poppers' controversial, yet stimulating proposal of a "Buffalo Commons" suggests a way to replace the struggling communities of the Great Plains. And farmland protection is a major concern in many rural-urban fringe areas.

Federal rural policy, as several authors note, has for too long allowed farm policy to dominate rural spending programs. But the recommendation by William Browne and Louis Swanson that the federal government should cut regulations and simply give money to rural communities is only partly convincing. This idea recalls federal revenue-sharing to communities, which ended in 1987. But what federal and state governments need to do is to implement a rural settlement policy. By putting money into regional growth centers of 10,000 to 25,000 people rather than spreading money to hundreds of small towns, sustainable communities can be created and nurtured. The book misses the point that if rural Americans cannot earn a decent living in the countryside, they will continue to migrate to the nation's already overcrowded cities and suburbs.

Whereas *The Changing American Countryside* is short on case studies, Meredith Ramsay presents an insightful analysis of two communities in Somerset County on Maryland's lower Eastern Shore. Each community is dominated by a different "regime." In Princess Anne, a town of 1,600, the white landowning elite controls the community and keeps blacks and other whites in check through intimidation. As local agriculture continues to decline, the white "planters" want to develop their land and reap the benefits.

Crisfield, population 2,800, was once a thriving oyster port, but is now an economic backwater. A subsistence regime consisting of a loose coalition of the seafood packing companies and the poor directs the community. Both of these interests actively oppose economic change. The packers want to maintain a surplus of cheap, and mostly black, labor; the poor are afraid of gentrification and higher living costs.

The challenge of the case study approach is to extract what is transferable to other places and situations. Ramsay succeeds by testing three theories that purport to explain the economic development process: the market model, the growth machine, and social embeddedness. The market model assumes that people attempt to maximize their net financial worth. Ramsay finds the market model unsatisfactory because quality of life concerns also can influence attitudes toward economic development. The growth machine sees the community as controlled by real estate developers who stand to gain from economic growth. Ramsay unveils the interconnection of the landed elite in Princess Anne who push for development even if it means conflicts of interest, political intimidation, and violation of pollution laws.

But Ramsay hits home with the conclusion that history, culture, and social relations best explain the lack of economic progress in Maryland's poorest county. The good old boy planters of Princess Anne have long dominated the economy and politics of the community, and they vigorously resist challenges to their authority. The watermen culture of Crisfield is remarkably communitarian, xenophobic, and strangely contented with its poverty.

Community, Culture, and Economic Development is adapted from Ramsay's doctoral dissertation, and should be read by PhD students in rural sociology, planning, and political science as an example of how to test theory through tenacious field work. Planning students at the master's degree level who are in need of a reality check would do well to read Chapters 3 and 4, which compare Crisfield and Princess Anne. Could good comprehensive planning and land use controls help these communities? Probably, but any change would threaten the subsistence regime of Crisfield; and community planning would jeopardize the control of the

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good old boys as real estate developers in Princess Anne.

Political economy describes how wealth and power are created and exercised in a community, a region, or a country. Given America's growing disparity between rich and poor and between the well-being of metropolitan and of rural areas, political economy deserves wider analysis and debate. Communities planning for economic development must be sensitive to who benefits and who stands to lose from economic and political change.

Thomas L. Daniels

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Paired Reviews

Designing the City: A Guide for Advocates and Public Officials
Adele Fleet Bacow. Island Press, Washington, DC, 1995. 193 pp. $45.00, $27.50 (paperback).

As a longtime practitioner who never expected to end up in academia and still cannot resist regular visits to the trenches of real-world planning, I like the idea of a book that aims to be "a practical manual for citizens, policymakers, and activists who want to improve the way their communities are planned, designed, and built" (xiii). In general, this book achieves that aim.

Clearly, this is not a scholarly work. The bibliography is missing several classics in the design field, including Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (MIT Press, 1960) (which is, however, listed in a reference list for Appendix B) and Gordon Cullen's *Townscape* (Reinhold, 1961); and only 18 footnotes pepper its 174 pages of text and appendices. But the author, who is a practitioner (consultant) rather than an academic researcher, makes it clear that the book is not intended to be a presentation of scholarly research or an exhaustive review of practice. "It is based in large part on my experience as a city planner and design advocate ... (and) provides an approach to design decision making and ways to influence those decisions" (xiii).

Bacow writes in a readable, personal style; she addresses the reader directly and writes in the first person. The layout, mix of typefaces, cartoons, photos, and graphics all serve to get the author's message across painlessly, and the index and appendices—one containing a summary of state design arts programs, and the other a glossary—are useful. There are some minor glitches in presentation. For example, the glossary includes definitions of districts, edges, landmarks, and nodes, but not of paths (the fifth term in the group Lynch uses to analyze the image conveyed by a place). The video bibliography, although a good idea, does not give enough information to allow the reader to actually obtain the listed tapes. Most bothersome is Bacow's use of a black-and-white photo (45) to illustrate a discussion of paint color in bridge design, an error much compounded by the selection of this photo for the book's cover.

There seems to be some confusion in the author's presentation of the difference between planning and design. I think the key terms should be reversed in this definition: "Design may be defined as a process of problem solving and creating which results in a plan, product, idea, or place. Design creates a solution to a particular objective or need. The result can be an object, a building, a place, a plan, or a process" (3). Without this reversal of terms, it seems that one could have the design before the process.

But these are minor flaws in a worthwhile effort. Any participant in the design process could benefit from the author's suggestions about how to ask the right questions (and the consequences of asking the wrong ones) and how to look for opportunities to capitalize on existing activity, as well as from her emphasis on the importance of carefully establishing ground rules, paying attention to the problem's details, involving residents and agencies deeply in the process, paying attention to the project's users (customers, future residents, etc.), and getting agreements in writing.

Chapter Two, "Convincing Arguments for Design," was especially relevant. I am often faced with the challenge of convincing laypersons that design can be critical to the success or failure of a project; and over the years I have used many of Bacow's strategies to make people more aware of its importance. For example, she quotes the mayor of New Bedford as saying, "Challenge anyone to name his or her favorite places and then ask why. Many of the reasons that attractive places are attractive have to do with design. Without these design elements, a specific place becomes just anywhere. Design of a city communicates what it is. It is as much a frill as your face is" (20). This line of questioning has been quite fruitful in my efforts to get the point across to the public and students. My experience shows that the economic and financial arguments in favor of high quality design that Bacow gives could have been emphasized even more than they were.

The issue of the marginalization of design is one that Bacow handles very well, sprinkling her suggestions with lively examples. One of the best is an unreferenced quote from an engineer: "Design? Yes, we used to have one architect in our department. His job was to choose the location for the state seal on the bridges after we finished building them" (34). Apart from other reasons, the book is worth reading to gather ammunition for one's next pro-design battle.

But there is no doubt that *Designing the City* would have been better if more research had been done before the author put pen to paper. The faults lie more in omission than in factual error. Some omissions are minor—like the failure to mention, in a discussion of transit station art, such well-known examples as the art commissioned for downtown Detroit's elevated railway stations (50–51). More substantial is omitting any mention of the Golden Gate Bridge from a five-page discussion of the aesthetics of bridge design (44–49), and the highway landscape programs in Seattle, Phoenix, Oregon, Minnesota, and elsewhere from a discussion of that topic (42–44). From

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