

BOOK REVIEWS

AMERICAN SURVIVORS—CITIES AND OTHER SCENES

by Karen Gerard

New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1985. Pp. 325. \$22.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by *Henry G. Cisneros**

By the turn of this century, the City of New York had flowed inexorably into the surrounding terrain, populating Queens, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Staten Island with warehouses, office buildings, factories and homes. Almost nine decades later, an economist and former director of New York City's economic development has written a book entitled *American Survivors—Cities and Other Scenes*. Karen Gerard has crafted an immensely readable work—an urban diary, if you will—about her personal experiences and analyses in New York's contemporary decline and resurgence. She joined Chase Manhattan Bank in the 1950s, rising to a vice-presidency before she became a thoughtful deputy mayor for economic policy under the irrepressible Mayor Ed Koch.

Ms. Gerard's book could perhaps be retitled *Diary of a New York Yuppie*. The reference is not meant to be slighting, because Gerard includes many personal references about her decades in the city, including glances at career mobility, rearing children, race relations, working women executives, and much more. She effectively merges personal commentary with some revealing insights into the urban process.

For example, she writes about Ann Rhymer, her black housekeeper for twenty-five years. Mrs. Rhymer moved northward from the Deep South during the Great Depression, refused to use the servants' entrance when she started working for the Gerard family in 1958, and obviously influenced Gerard's own thinking about what came to be called "the underclass." Gerard notes that "Ann Rhymer would be the first to acknowledge it—that there is another group of blacks that *is* set apart, objects of study and discussion[,] . . . those who are alienated, living outside the economic mainstream, women dependent on welfare, and men 'dropping out' through drug addiction or a life of street crime."

The book is not comprised solely of personal observations, however. Gerard's economics training influences her writing, as it influenced earlier attempts to calculate alternative formulas for a standardized national welfare system during the Nixon years. She writes that the attempt was doomed to failure then, and is even less likely to achieve workable reality in the Reagan era.

Most mayors in the United States would agree with Gerard's inevitable

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conclusion: "Transference of income will not take care of our poverty problems unless we achieve strong enough economic growth to provide jobs and develop a labor force with the skills and motivation to engage in paid employment." Her ultimate conclusion is that "[s]trong, sustained economic growth is the sine qua non for reducing poverty." This conclusion often receives scant attention from the nation's media, in terms of perceiving what mayors and other city officials concerned with economic development are trying to achieve; indeed, elected officials are often careful to avoid being labeled with the damaging sobriquet of "trickle down theorist."

Gerard uses statistics to back up her conclusions. She notes that "[s]trong growth helped the nation to reduce the poverty count by over forty percent between 1960 and 1973, [while w]eak, sporadic growth contributed to the increase in poverty that occurred in the next decade." She concludes that poverty will again decline if the nation maintains vigorous economic growth during the 1980s.

Although not a panacea, economic growth is the only way to effectively deal with the vastly underpublicized numbers of the poverty-stricken in urban America—not to mention newly arrived immigrants—who are daily facing a hostile environment in many large U.S. cities. More importantly, we must recognize the effect of poverty upon the institution of the family. Gerard touches on this critical urban concern, although a more extensive analysis of poverty's role in breaking up the traditional American family is needed.

As a mayor and public official, I must confess to a deep feeling of unease and worry about what is happening to the American family in our cities, where eighty percent of the nation's population now resides. There are too many poor children, too many poor families in our cities today. And poverty is crushing the family as we prefer to think of it.

Statistics underscore the debilitating effect of poverty on the American family. Fully a third of our children will receive some form of welfare before they turn eighteen. The number of single family households headed by women—a subject dear to Gerard's heart—has doubled in the last ten years. More than half of the children living in these single-family homes live in poverty. A child under six years of age is six times more likely to be poor than a person over sixty-five.

Near the end of her book, Gerard asks: "Who are the survivors in American cities?" Her answer focuses on the men and women of the post-war "baby boom" who are now reaching middle age, along with such diverse groups as the new immigrants, youthful criminals, and women taking on new roles outside the family. She lists another long-time survivor—the family—with a question mark, before delving into middle class concerns.

Gerard also addresses the rise of new professionals in urban America. Like many middle class professionals, Gerard has spent her career gauging success—traditional up-the-ladder American success—by watching her peers. Entry into the labor force, she argues, is not the test; instead, it revolves solely around "what you do and how well you are paid once you are there." She has incisively watched the salary inflation of those with MBA or

law degrees, attributing the huge rise in these job sectors to corporate specialization in New York City.

This career scrutiny prompts her to pose a provocative question: How do you promote entrepreneurship, the risk-taking that is essential to innovation, in large corporations? She feels, and I agree, that the product—what we teach our lawyers and MBAs—can be improved. Gerard questions whether law schools stress training in adversarial skills, while ignoring training in mediation and negotiation. What is it, she asks, that we want our best and brightest to do in a rapidly changing society?

The answer Gerard offers is not totally satisfying, but she correctly contends that the original question about innovation and entrepreneurship can only be decisively resolved when we begin asking the right questions. She concludes these passages with the following: “Unless we are prepared to ask those hard questions, we will find that jobs may be out there for a new crop of lawyers and MBAs, but oversupply—in the sense of misallocation of our resources—will remain a deep-seated problem.”

There is more in the form of trenchant questions, coupled with less than satisfying answers. The net result, however, is well worth reading. I have been impressed with Karen Gerard since first meeting her at a conference on the economic futures of American cities; she remains equally impressive throughout her “survivor’s diary.” For anyone heading toward an urban professional career, her *American Survivors* is a good travel guide to examining the future.

GOVERNING THE UNGOVERNABLE CITY

by Barbara Ferman

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985. \$22.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by *Federico F. Pena**

As a former state legislator and now a mayor, debate often erupts at our national meetings over who has the most difficult jobs in America—governors, legislators or mayors. Although Barbara Ferman's book, *Governing the Ungovernable City*, makes clear that the chief executive of major cities would get her vote as the toughest political office, she has written a remarkably optimistic text on the task of governing our cities.

Ferman's book, which is written in an academic style with voluminous references to the best urban and political scientific research in the field, is well-grounded in political realism and makes clear what most practitioners of urban politics know first hand: the field of study is complex and the effort at governing our cities effectively will not submit to easy formulas or simple models.

The book examines two cities in detail, Boston and San Francisco, and places them in a theoretical context that makes for useful lessons and rules for mayors of all sizes and types of cities. Although Boston and San Francisco differ from other U.S. cities in many of their political, cultural and formal arrangements, they still have characteristics that make for ready reference. Most major cities have similar non-partisan elections with a civil service and a myriad of independent boards, commissions, authorities and elected officials that contribute to a highly fragmented political environment.

Ferman found that the political styles of the mayors of San Francisco and Boston were heavily influenced by their electorate. San Francisco citizens tend to be more issue-oriented. In order to be successful, San Francisco mayors must respond to the issues concerning their electorate. In Boston, the electorate tends to be more service-oriented. Boston mayors gain votes primarily by providing jobs and services to the community. Ferman contends that mayors must be sensitive to the priorities of their constituencies because mayors cannot be economically productive unless they have a strong political base.

My experience as mayor of Denver has convinced me that Ferman is essentially correct. One of the chief problems facing American mayors is that they often lack the political power to effectively lead the cities. The problem is further compounded when cities are both issue-oriented and service-oriented. In Denver, the newly arrived professionals are highly issue-oriented, but many of the ethnic groups within the city remain primarily

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service-oriented. Only by balancing these interests is it possible for a mayor in Denver to be a successful leader.

In four well-written sections, Ferman focuses her attention on the formal and informal strategies that mayors in various political cultures and contexts use to achieve or try to achieve basic municipal goals. Two of the sections of special note analyze the role of the federal government in urban affairs and mayorial efforts at enticing the private sector into partnerships for economic development. Although the description of the federal role needs to be extended to account for the rapid diminution of federal resources for cities and urban needs, the book in general is as current as the most recent effort at reforming the civil service or reorganizing the independent authorities.

Ferman's major service is to move away from analyzing municipal outputs or styles of leadership and instead focus attention on political skills and the political context. Ferman emphasizes the trade-offs that must be reached between managing declining resources and increasing needs, trying to instill realism among urban constituents and yet maintain hope, working to create islands of opportunity and entrepreneurship while not abandoning the poor, homeless or dependent.

To achieve these trade-offs requires both political skill and executive power. And the accumulation of power raises the question of the balance between enough power to govern, keeping fragmentation and rivalries from destroying an urban agenda and the danger of too much power for narrow or self-aggrandizing purposes.

The book's basic optimism lies in its commitment to effective executive action as essential for a good urban life, and a belief that our cities' executives can summon sufficient political skills to overcome the problems of governing with diminished resources and fragmented power.