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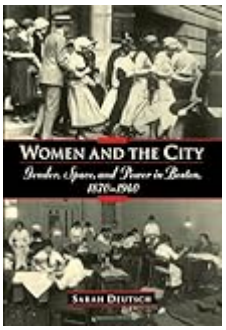

Sarah Deutsch. *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. xii + 387 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-505705-8.

Reviewed by Janet M. Davis (Department of American Studies and History, University of Texas at Austin)

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Separate Spheres Reconsidered

>From media denunciations of Hillary Rodham Clinton's supposed rejection of "teas and cookies" in 1992, to the spate of contemporary local laws banning public breastfeeding, U.S. culture remains deeply ambivalent toward women in the public sphere. Sarah Deutsch's fine study of Boston women explores the long roots of this gendered uneasiness. Choosing Boston as a "typical" American city in terms of its female majority and its historical trajectory toward greater economic and ethnic segregation, Deutsch starts in the 1870s when Boston women began collectively making claims to urban space, and ends shortly after the first woman was elected to the Boston City Council in 1937. Paying special attention to the symbiotic relationship between gender, class, race, and geography, Deutsch argues that diverse groups of women actively refashioned public space as a way to facilitate their broader participation in public life: "For all players, the ability to lay claim to certain types of space and the power to shape space-public arenas, housing, and so forth-was crucial to their ability to meet their basic needs and their often less basic desires" (p. 6).

Deutsch maintains that cross-class and cross-ethnic alliances were paramount to women's efforts to rebuild the city on their own terms. Working together through labor unions, the Women's Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU), the Boston Women's Trade Union League (BWTUL), and settlement houses like Denison House, diverse women actively reshaped the city's terrain. They successfully pushed the municipal government to sponsor health clinics, milk, school lunches, vocational assistance, and kindergartens. The organizations themselves also transformed the public sphere. Deutsch points out that the WEIU's decision to locate its organization in the heart of the city, the legislative nerve center, was hardly random. By creating downtown lunchrooms for working women and organizational spaces for themselves, according to Deutsch, "[WEIU leaders] wanted to create public space where middle-class and elite women could appear without being declassed and working women could appear in public without having their virtue questioned by being 'on the streets' " (p. 145).

Despite the fact that women's organizations universalized women's experiences along elite and middle-class ideological lines, Deutsch demonstrates that ethnicity

and class bore heavily on the ways that various women constructed their own relationship to the urban environment. While elites conceptualized their own geographical universe around dichotomous (yet interrelated) notions of "public" and "private," working-class women could make no such easy distinction; domestic and public life intermingled through a complex web of family and neighborhood ties. Well-to-do women reinforced their moral guardianship of the home by hiring domestic servants to substitute for their own labor. Although the elite home was a space for socializing within its carefully guarded walls, it represented a site of limited female power, because women's respectability became questionable once outside. Engaging in "home" work, taking in lodgers and boarders, or (less commonly) running their own business, working-class women, in contrast, constantly collapsed the boundaries between private and public through daily acts of survival and sociability. In the vibrant, polyglot immigrant street cultures of the West End and South End, stoops served as a female space for social contact, a place to visit and gossip, while dandling a small child or making lace. But these laboring women, particularly mothers, were acutely vulnerable to the economic upheavals of the period. Living in overcrowded housing, often with fetid drinking water and little ventilation, working-class women's status became even more precarious during depressions. Their demands for better living conditions, higher wages, and decent childcare, coupled with middle-class and elite women's desire for public authority, animated this shared project of transforming urban space.

Deutsch remains mindful that women's alliances were always fragile, always shifting, and that class and ethnic divisions remained constant. For example, when tough talking Irish American telephone union leader Annie Molloy ran for the City Council in 1922, the white Brahmins of the Boston League of Women Voters' refused to endorse her candidacy, supporting patrician reformer Florence Luscomb instead. Furthermore, after Mildred Gleason Harris became the first woman to win a seat in the Boston City Council in 1937, she dismissed and belittled her large black constituency. Two years later, she lost reelection. Deutsch contends that such exclusionary practices stymied women's success in seeking elected office. In addition, working-class women's attempts to gain occupational mobility through elite "matronage" were risky. Those who refused to conform to genteel notions of respectable womanliness (like Annie Molloy) were marginalized by well-to-do matrons. Even age played a role in fragmenting coalitions of women as college-educated heterosocial "New Women" professionals rejected the older, homosocial world of their mothers in favor of higher education, careers, and building coalitions with male reformers.

These stories of women's coalitions, coupled with fascinating biographical sketches of individual women like Euroamerican interior decorator Amelia Muir Baldwin and African American beauty culturist Geneva Arrington, provide a vivid and complex portrait of Boston's dynamic gendered terrain. In seven well organized and clearly argued chapters, Deutsch moves from home space to picket lines and ballot boxes. Using Denison House journals, WEIU annual reports, census data, occupational studies, personal papers, tenement reports, newspapers, novels, data from the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics, correspondence, and more, Deutsch convincingly shows that women were far from simply reactive to abstract social and economic forces of modernization. Instead, women took the lead in shaping this new heterosocial cityscape-indeed modernity itself-on their own terms. On this front, Deutsch makes a notable contribution to gender studies, urban history, cultural studies, and political history.

Deutsch's choice of primary source materials are both the book's strength and its weakness. She brings the reader into this tangled tapestry of shifting alliances so fully and convincingly that she occasionally loses her larger focus on space. In the book's most unforgettable scenes, one gets a real, almost claustrophobic sense of the stifling tenements of the West End and South End, the spacious antiseptic distinction between private and public in the Back Bay, the dangerous intimate geography of domestic service, the volatile milieu of the picket lines, and the contentious, paradoxical public world of women in elected politics-where local media unfailingly described women officeholders as "charming" housewives and "excellent" mothers. In other chapters, the book retreats into a more traditional-yet still solidly written and elegantly argued-social and political history of the alliances themselves without paying broader attention to space and place. Furthermore, because the book largely uses institutionally based source materials, this lens of elite and middle-class interpretation sometimes obscures the voices of working-class women. Periodically, Deutsch alludes to women's participation in public amusements, public dress, and their use of public transportation, but this wider world of the streets could have received more attention in favor of compressing some of the machinations of various organizational factions. As a scholar of U.S. popular culture, I would like to have seen

more attention to the ways that women shaped popular spaces like neighborhood "cheap nickel dumps," amusement parks, dime museums, or vaudeville theaters, more in line with works by Kathy Peiss, Margaret Finnegan, and Alison Kibler [1]. Still, Deutsch's provocative monograph forcefully breaks new ground in its persuasive reappraisal of the gendered, racialized, and class-based dialectics of public and private life.

[1]. See Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Owl Books, 1998); Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

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