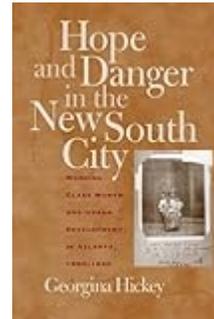**Georgina Hickey.** *Hope and Danger in the New South City: Working-Class Women and Urban Development in Atlanta, 1890-1940.* Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2003. viii + 287 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-2333-6; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8203-2772-3.

Reviewed by Alisa Y. Harrison (Department of History, Duke University)

Flexible Symbols in a Changing Environment

In early twentieth-century Atlanta, poor women went from being considered objects of compassion and reform to being associated with a range of threats to the city's moral and economic health. The story of how poor and working women's lives were constructed in the New South's capital of Atlanta, what these constructions meant, and how they changed over the century's first three decades, is the subject of Georgina Hickey's provocative new book, *Hope and Danger in the New South City*.

>From the late-nineteenth century through the 1920s, Atlanta's press, reformers, boosters, and civic officials traded on shifting ideas about working-class women's physical and moral health in order to try and shape the city as they saw fit. Hickey argues that a range of important debates, including those about managing public health, workers' rights, and the uses of public space, turned on the symbolic relationship between working-class women's bodies and behavior, and urban development. Thoroughly researched and concisely argued, Hickey's book adds to an already-rich body of knowledge about women and urban space, which in-

cludes important work by Kathy Peiss, Christine Stansell, Tera Hunter, Sarah Deutsch, and others. [1] By offering vivid evidence from a wide array of sources such as newspapers, court records, civic government documents, and the papers of public and private reform organizations, Hickey enriches our understanding of the roles that black and white working-class women played in the development of ideas about race, class, gender, politics and culture in the early twentieth century.

In the introduction, Hickey declares, "Women represented both the city's best hope and the greatest threat to its future" (p. 6). Hickey carries this theme throughout the narrative, demonstrating repeatedly that the position of working women in the city was never static, but rather highly flexible and adaptable to many different needs and interests. She begins the story by sketching Atlanta's rapid growth following the Civil War. The city's boosters expounded on the swelling population's enthusiastic work ethic and the progress of the city's industries, yet serious class and race tensions were brewing amid this putative progress. Hickey draws attention to the 1897 Race Strike, where white women walked off their jobs at

the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills after management hired black women to work alongside white bag folders. She explains, "The 1897 strike in many ways was an opening salvo in a two-decade discussion of the relationship of economic growth to moral and social order" (p. 22). The strike "brought to the surface deeply embedded fears of blacks encroaching on the domain of whites through access to white women" (p. 23).

Hickey contends that for the next twenty years, significant battles about labor and politics in Atlanta would be fought over, or in the name of, black and white working women. She makes this point in subsequent chapters that discuss attitudes toward women as workers; the implications of women's visibility in public spaces; working-class women's crucial, if often indirect, role in the growth of welfare organizing; the development of a public health movement that first addressed tuberculosis and then venereal disease; and working-class women's engagement with formal politics and the legal system. Hickey shows that a substantial proportion of women's political significance in Atlanta in the first two decades of the twentieth century derived from their discursive position within the events of the city's cultural and economic development. She offers a particularly striking example of this in her discussion of the 1912 battle over the city's vice districts, a moment when women became tools wielded in a power struggle between various civic factions.

In 1912, the Chief of Police James Beavers stirred controversy by single-handedly closing all of the brothels in Atlanta's most notorious vice district, and ordering all the women who lived in them to vacate the premises. In press reports, the controversy seemed to focus on the prostitutes who served in the brothels, and the degree to which they were victims of a "wretched" system (p. 141). But Hickey suggests that the crux of the issue in fact had little to do with the prostitutes themselves or even with prostitution as an activity; rather, beneath the rhetoric and sensationalism that played on fears of white slavery and women's simultaneous sexual vulnerability and strength, the trouble was a loose-cannon Chief of Police whose actions threatened established channels of power. Beavers was ultimately fired not because of his "attacks on women," but because of "his flagrant attempt to usurp the power of the [city] council-appointed police committee" (p. 143). The controversy ended when Beavers was terminated and business interests and the police reached a compromise where the police would leave the brothels alone and instead target the women who worked in them. Power brokers agreed that by punishing women instead

of business owners, they could protect both Atlanta's moral image and businessmen's profits. Further limiting working women's already restricted autonomy was a worthy sacrifice for the cause of Atlanta's economic growth, and while "images of working-class women appeared almost overnight" in discussions of the prostitution crisis, "once the issues they had been created to represent were resolved, the images disappeared almost as quickly" (p. 135). When these women no longer served a useful purpose, men in power dropped them from the discussion.

Hickey is clearly interested in representations of women and what these representations meant in Atlanta at the turn of the twentieth century. By blending the techniques of cultural history with urban and social history, she is able to account for working-class women's critical significance to Atlanta's development without obscuring the degree to which these women still lacked and often struggled in vain for power. This blending is what makes Hickey's book an especially notable contribution to the literature, as it pushes readers to reconsider the meaning of agency. Hickey balances her portrayal of women as often self-possessed actors with a clear acknowledgment of their political marginality and objectification. Hickey highlights the importance of working-class women's resistance to the constraints they faced and their efforts to gain a foothold in the larger political arena, whether through interactions with Atlanta's woman suffrage movement before World War I, as strikers and unionists, or as mothers and community activists. She notes that they were particularly effective when they acted as litigants bringing suits to court, and especially when they sued for divorce. All the same, Hickey emphasizes the fact that women's success was often fleeting. Their actions were highly significant within the context of their own lives and they found creative ways to exert some control over their destinies as individuals. But as a group, in spite of their visibility through the mid-1920s, working-class women in Atlanta did not become more powerful and by the end of the decade, in many ways they actually began to lose ground.

Hickey details both the rise and fall of working women's visibility and influence. She suggests a variety of reasons why, by the 1930s, both white and black women had lost their central place in the imagery of Atlanta's public realm. Perhaps the foremost reason for women's decline was the onset of the national economic crisis, which generated newly potent imagery of the unemployed man impoverished by the Great Depression. White women, whose right to earn wages had always

been up for debate, could not compete with this picture. Black women's concerns overlapped some with white women's, but also differed in that the largely women-led fight for "racial uplift" in the 1900s and 1910s gave way after the First World War. In its place grew the struggle to build a new class of "race men" who could gain formal "political power and economic inclusion" and thus fight against racism and Jim Crow (p. 176). Efforts to improve black working women's lives had always been tied to a large-scale struggle against white supremacy; beginning in the 1920s, the struggle appeared to become more masculinized and to veer away from what many considered women's domain.

Overall, Hickey's study is both informative and intriguing. It tells a story of contrasts and contradictions, of flexibility and change, and it combines a focus on real people and events with the equally important realm of the symbol and the imaginary. Scholars of women, the South, labor, and culture will all find much of interest and use in this book, and will appreciate the wealth of evidence that Hickey offers to make her claims, particularly in later chapters. Moreover, the book's readable, jargon-free prose makes it suitable for both specialized and more general audiences.

Note

[1]. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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