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Review of: *The City as a Human Environment* (Duane G. LeVine & Arthur C. Upton eds., Praeger Publishers 1994)

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Book Reviews

The City as a Human Environment (Duane G. LeVine & Arthur C. Upton eds., Praeger Publishers 1994). ISBN 0-275-94659-2; LC 94-1146. About the authors, bibliography, foreword, index, preface, tables. [216 pp. Cloth \$55.00. 88 Post Road West, Westport CT 06881-5007.]

This volume is one of the Only One Earth Series, and its three main parts deal respectively with Planning the Built Environment, Improving Urban Transportation and Shaping Patterns of Urban Land Use. The shared belief in “local initiative and community participation” in those ventures is the common thread that weaves this set of essays together. This book shows how innovative legislative and philosophical changes can help cities themselves deal with housing and transportation woes, and it is replete with success stories.

One essay describes developments in New Jersey where builders provide one low income unit for every four at market rate. This is made attractive for developers by, e.g., permitting higher density zoning.

Another outlines how Community Development Corporations have helped cities like Boston, New York and Cleveland develop affordable, desirable housing opportunities in spite of the Scylla and Charybdis of rapid gentrification and urban flight. Through innovative financing techniques that link local advisory committees with business and philanthropic leaders, Local Initiative Support Corporation, for example, “seeks to change the behavior of institutions and individuals with respect to low-income communities, not simply to undertake individual projects.”¹ This would seem worthy of consideration by declining cities throughout the country.

In dealing with public transportation, the essays point out that the U.S. lags shamefully behind other western countries. One obstacle to improved transportation options is the public’s love affair with the automobile. As Matthew Coogan states in his essay: “While it may be well and proper for the maid to arrive by public transportation,” some citizens consider such an indignity “below their desired lifestyle.”² Such

¹ At 18–19.

² At 35.

attitudes may be changing, however. After spending an hour and fifty minutes traversing forty miles of New Hampshire roads last Fourth of July weekend, I'm ready to give my car a rest. Perhaps some in the endless line of traffic behind me felt the same.

Essays in *The City as Human Environment* may often be too elementary for seasoned urban planners. Yet, it is difficult to believe that the book will not offer useful insights to all of them — and, perhaps the rest of us — for example in the disclosure of myriad ways public officials can involve *all* citizens in the process of addressing the decline of our cities.

The book, of course, leaves many questions unanswered. One of the more interesting for many readers of *Risk* will be: How are officials to deal with a public that tends “to believe in your omniscience and your infinite ability to hide the facts from them.”³

Claudia Grimes[†]

³ At 129.

⁴ *Id.*

[†] Ms. Grimes is a candidate for the J.D. at Franklin Pierce Law Center. She holds a B.A. (History) from the University of Rhode Island and previously worked for an environmental political action committee for over ten years.