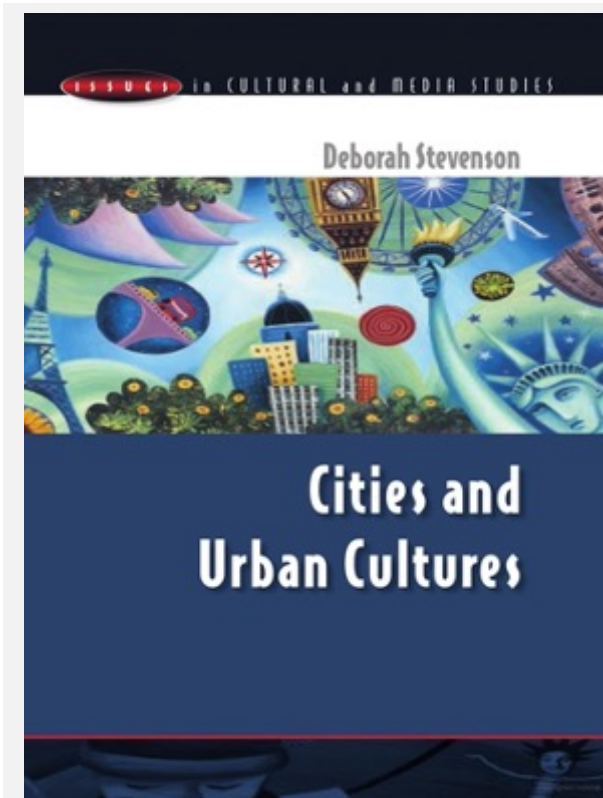


Book Reviews



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Cities and Urban Cultures by Deborah Stevenson covers a vast range of literature and concepts of city and urban culture from a sociological, cultural, and other viewpoints. The author made analogies between rural and urban cultures to help readers understand how urban cultures are conceptualized. Her book introduces an overview of shifts and evolutions in theoretical approaches on how people and media audiences perceive cities, ranging from cultural trends to postmodernism and globalization. Furthermore, she masterfully merges together theories from different periods and fields to gain a better knowledge of how urban living has inspired and altered our cultural creation, and how it has changed our perceptions of the city.

Deborah Stephenson's analysis of academic views of the city and its metropolitan life lays emphasis on the rural and urban divide which dominated early research interest of the post-industrial city's growth. Throughout her text, she questions the differences drawn between *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft*, which was thought to define the types of relationships in rural and urban settings. She used the concepts to explain the interaction in urban and rural spaces. She critically examines some of the most influential sociology theoretical approaches to studying cities from the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A rural-urban dichotomy was also emphasized in academic assessments of urban life. The work of Georg Simmel on the metropolitan area and its potential for rationality and liberty, as well as the Chicago School's methodological advances that developed in the early twentieth century, are discussed in depth.

In chapter 3 and 4, she explored some of the major urban studies attempting to address the challenges concerned with power emphasizing how unequal and conflicting the effort has been. This highlights the significance of theorists like Max Weber and Karl Marx, whose theories introduced the urban managerial perspective and urban political economy, respectively. They had a significant impact on structuralists and produced works that were in direct opposition to Chicago School's quantitative methodology. She demonstrates how much these ideas and related theoretical work impacted a variety of perspectives to studying urban life. She further describes how the works of theorists like Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault writings highlighted the significance of theories that focus more on culture and its significance than on the city. The relevance of the formation and negotiation of meaning in connection to the urban landscape by exploring the semiotic

technique of Barthes and others was also demonstrated in her book. The theoretical ideas explored in this book, as well as other insights from cultural studies that she covered, established more than only analysing the interpretation of personal meaning in connection with the built environment. She shows how impossible it is to imagine the city as neutral, whether in its physical form or through media. As she demonstrates how the movement "City Beautiful" preferred modernist design, which prioritized function over form, and set the foundation for postmodern architecture.

In Stevenson's view, postmodern architecture places more emphasis on the local and the contingency. She discusses the relevance of consumer culture in city development and marketing tourist destinations around the world, and the impact of globalization (a concept that is alluded to and appropriately addressed throughout the text). Deborah Stevenson presents New York as the pinnacle of contemporary cities and the destruction of the twin tower symbolizes a characteristic ambivalence towards cities as signifiers of modernity. In my opinion, the events of September 11 may have inspired Deborah Stevenson, but its importance to the work as a whole is overblown, given that the event itself is only mentioned seldom and intermittently in relation with the book's many themes.

The final chapter of the book is centred on the commercialization of cities. The author demonstrates how cultural texts determine our perception of a City's symbolic limit. Her continued attention to rural/urban conceptual formation is evident here, as she depicts both city and local culture as well as figurations of the suburbs taking on aspects of both in different ways. In her opinion, many approaches to cyberspace, which ignore the "actual" social and structural settings in which such virtual communities are generated, lack theoretical clarity. With regard to scientific observation and theorization of "the city" since the industrial revolution, the book provides a thorough, readable, and in-depth overview. Although, *Cities and Urban Cultures* is critiqued for its exclusively western focus, Deborah Stevenson addresses other specific parts of her work, noting the role that her own subjectivity had in its development. Finally, *Cities and Urban Cultures* provides a clear, detailed, and extremely transparent summary to the academic purpose of comprehending 'the city' and its implications for modernity and postmodernity.