

# PROGRESSIVE CITY LITERATURE

## Abstract

From the website “Progressive Cities and Neighborhood Planning,” created in 2005 and updated periodically. Its purpose is to support and comment on the Collection of that name in the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Since the Collection contains few books or recent articles, this post notes some of them.

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## Progressive City Literature

There is a literature of the progressive city. There is great journalism. There are lots of scholarly articles, some well cited theses and dissertations, even some fugitive pieces – see the Bibliography at [www.progressivecities.org](http://www.progressivecities.org). I’ve written **The Progressive City** (1986) and **Activists in City Hall** (2010). Here I’m listing others, mostly limited to published books – the ones that stick in my mind, and surely I’ve missed a couple.

A sub-genre is the mayoral biography. One of my favorites is Melvin Holli, **Reform in Detroit**, centered on Hazen Pingree, mayor from 1889-97. Pingree, who had owned and managed a large shoe factory, was a man of immense talent who as mayor established

municipal gas and electric utilities, and fought to put the Detroit City Railways (then managed by Tom L. Johnson) under public ownership or failing that, public regulation and made that the center of his program. Better known is the same Tom Johnson who, imbued with the teachings of Henry George, arrived in Cleveland to a career similar to Pingree's as mayor a decade later. His administration is described in Ernest Griffith, **A History of American City Government: The Progressive Years and their Aftermath 1900-1920** (New York: Praeger, 1974). The biography is Tom L. Johnson, **My Story** (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1911).

I had not focused on the urban progressives of this early period while writing the two books works mentioned earlier, but what reminded me recently was re-reading Kenneth Fox's excellent **Better City Government** (1977). Fox reminded me I might extend my analysis by looking at comparisons over time, which I began in a conference paper, "The Progressive City Over Time" [PCOTss-10 MAY 2014]. I'm now asking Fox to contribute additional thoughts on this time dimension.

There were reform mayors and cities with liberal leadership after this earlier period – one thinks of LaGuardia in New York City – and socialist mayors held on to power into the 1950s in some cases (Bridgeport, Milwaukee); but I will skip over these for now to get to the 1970s and 1980s, when there was a second version of the progressive city as veterans of civil rights and student movements won elections and controlled occupied city halls for greater or lesser periods of time through to the present. In this period the mayoral biography made some appearances (Harold Washington in Chicago 1983-87, Bernie Sanders in Burlington VT 1981-89) but there were also memoirs by staffers, and more scholarly, analytical works. Gary Rivlin, **Fire in the Prairie: Chicago's Harold Washington and the Politics of Race** (New York : H. Holt, 1992 ) is perhaps the first thing to read about Harold Washington's mayoralty, though there are other biographies like Dempsey Travis, **"Harold," the Peoples Mayor : the authorized biography of Mayor Harold Washington** (Chicago, Ill. : Urban Research Press, 1989); and Alton Miller, **Harold Washington : the Mayor, the Man** (Chicago : Bonus Books,

1989). The inside story of city hall staff work comes from Robert Mier,, Washington’s Commissioner of Economic Development, **Social Justice and Local Development Policy** (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993). Another excellent account, though much focused on the aftermath under Richard M. Daley, is Joel Rast, **Remaking Chicago** (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999)

A group of Berkeley activists and staffers working with radical city council members wrote perhaps the best programmatic statement of what the progressive city might want to do: Eve Bach, Thomas Brom, Julia Estrella, Lenny Goldberg and Edward Kirshner, **The Cities Wealth** (Washington, DC: Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies, 1975, 1976). In Cleveland, under mayors Carl Stokes, Ralph Perk and Dennis Kucinich from 1969-1979 , major policy initiatives came from planning director Norman Krumholz – the best known being the **Cleveland Policy Planning Report** in 1975. Political background can be found in Todd Swanstrom, **The Crisis of Growth Politics : Cleveland, Kucinich, and The Challenge of Urban Populism** (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); the inside story from Krumholz is Norman Krumholz and John Forester, **Making Equity Planning Work** (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1990), Both books won prizes and they complement each other well as being – together — a case study of the challenges and occasional successes of progressive policy in a de-industrialized and poverty ridden middle American city.

Smaller cities have had book treatments. Bernie Sanders attracted several when he was mayor of Burlington, VT – with two successors Peter Clavelle and Robert Kiss — one of the longest lasting progressive city cases. See Steven Soifer, **The Socialist Mayor : Bernard Sanders in Burlington, Vermont** (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1991); W. J. Conroy, **Challenging the Boundaries of Reform: Socialism in Burlington** ( Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); and Greg Guma, **The People’s Republic : Vermont and the Sanders Revolution** (Shelburne, VT : New England Press, 1989). For the remarkable period when the city maintained its essential commitments perhaps the best treatments are contained in John Davis, ed., **The Affordable City** (Philadelphia :

Temple University Press, 1994). On Santa Monica, one would look first at Stella Capek and John Gilderbloom, **Community Versus Commodity: Tenants and the American City** (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); and for a critical study: Mark Kann, **Middle Class Radicalism in Santa Monica** (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1986).

It's been harder to get multiple sources and informants on other California cities, where much progressive electoral energy has existed and is still evident. San Francisco is perhaps as important as Boston or Chicago; and Santa Cruz needs to be seen alongside the other smaller cities noted here. For the best books I've seen, look at Richard DeLeon, **Left Coast City** (Lawrence, KN: University Press of Kansas, 1992); and Richard Gendron and G. William Domhoff, **The Leftmost City: Power and Progressive Politics in Santa Cruz** (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009). Richmond now demands attention for its mayoral leadership and progressive city council, and other cities have in the past, but I have not seen book length treatments.

Hartford has no book on the ten year, redistributive but imperfectly participatory, patching- up- after- the- 1960s riots regime under Deputy Mayor Nick Carbone. But one should read Louise Simmons, **Organizing in Hard Times : Labor and Neighborhoods in Hartford** (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1994 ) as Hartford followed with an attempt to re-establish a semblance of participatory government under Mayor Carrie Sexton Perry and a radical slate (including the author).

European and Latin American cases are barely touched on in this website, but one must mention at least three sources. The journalistic but graphically descriptive Red Bologna attracted great attention as a 1970s model for American radicals. See Max Jäggi, Roger Müller and Sil Schmid, **Red Bologna** (London : Writers and Readers, 1977). There were a number of British cases after Margaret Thatcher's conservative victory in 1979. The main book I am aware of is Maureen Mackintosh and Hilary Wainwright , **A Taste of Power : The Politics of Local Economics** (London ; New York : Verso, 1987), but there is good journalism and scholarship: see the early issues of the journal **Local Economy**.

I have not mentioned the mass of journalism in and about these cities, and will simply note a sample, though some of this will be hard to find: Roldo Bartimole wrote **Point of View** in Cleveland for many years. David Moberg covered cities like Cleveland under Kucinich, later Chicago and other places for **In These Times**. In Chicago, Rivlin, Moberg and others provided coverage of the Washington administration and its aftermath in **The Reader**. The **Boston Globe** provided relatively deep coverage of the Flynn administration (1983-1993). There is no particular book to recommend for the city government of that period, although Mel King's **Chain of Change : Struggles for Black Community Development** (Boston: South End Press, 1981) is as good as I have seen as a summary of the community development thinking that fed into the 1980s period. Derek Shearer's journalism was important for cities generally in the 1970s and 1980s – he co-edited, with Lee Webb, the first two **Public Policy Readers** for the Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies (1975, 1976); and perhaps his final summary is represented in “In Search of Equal Partnerships: Prospects for Progressive Urban Policy in the 1990s“ in Gregory D. Squires, ed., **Unequal Partnerships: the Political Economy of Urban Political Development in Postwar America**. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 289-307.