

Book Review

Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, Richard Beckhard R. Schubert, eds.
The Community of the Future
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998

Review by Dr. Gregory G. Gaydos

Every book, every lecture, every poem, every film, every painting seeks to answer the three questions posed by Paul Gauguin. Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? The Drucker Foundation's *The Community of the Future* self-consciously sets out to chart the third with 24 articles by 31 distinguished authors, leaders, academics and philosophers on how to build vital communities within the global community.

This book is divided into six parts, though there is no logical flow from one part to another; they need not be read in sequence. Although this book is a must read for anyone concerned with the community of the 21st century, the quality is uneven. The best article is 'Civilizing the City,' by Paul Drucker who introduces the book by attempting to answer Gauguin's first two questions: Who are we? Where did we come from?

In a short span of one hundred years, the developed world has transformed itself from a society that was 5% urban to one that is 5% rural. From an agricultural society that is full of community but lacks individual freedom to an urban society that is full of individual freedom but without community, we stand at the abyss. Since we are not going back to a rural society, our task is clear: build community within an urban society. In 1943, Drucker argued that this sense of community could be a plant community in the business sector, but this only succeeded in Japan and only as long as they could afford lifetime employment. The government sector has tried to build community and failed. The U.S. spent \$5 trillion from 1965 to 1995 on social welfare spending (more than World War I, World War II, Korea and Viet-Nam put together). The result is a culture of poverty, a statistical explosion of unwed mothers, and a generation of male youth initiated into society not by fathers but by gangs. It is for this reason that Drucker turns to the third sector, the social sector—non-government, non-business, non-profit organizations—to civilize the city, which is what this book is all about. The uneven quality plagues each part.

In Part I: Trends Shaping the Evolution of Community, Lester Thurow makes a persuasive case for an expanded government sector to provide infrastructure because capitalism's time horizon is too short for the business sector to solve problems such as education. Other selections, such as Rita Sussworth's, come up short. She recites the platitudes of liberal cant as if they were axioms to be assumed instead of propositions to be tested. Her assertion, for example, that gender equality is necessary if we are to create healthy communities is problematic. Women, who went from 15% of the work force at the start of the century to no less than 50% today, have made enormous contributions to the modern American economy. At the same time, society (as dramatically illustrated by mass killings in schools and workplaces and as experienced by increased tensions in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens) appears to be crumbling beneath our feet. As Drucker says, he came to the United States in the 1930s and found a healthy society sitting atop a sick economy. Now, in the 1990s, we have a sick society sitting atop a robust economy—for the moment.

A colleague of mine at a faculty forum quoted from *Endangered Minds*, which claimed that children's brains were not developing because mothers were putting them into day care instead of reading to them. He was met with an icy silence and then an icier retort from a female colleague: "We are not going back!" So much for axioms; whatever one's views on parental roles, however, the profound changes taking place in family relations are having implications for the larger society that cannot be dismissed simply because they may be expressed in politically incorrect terms.

In Part II: *The Values of Community*, Claire L. Gaudiani makes a valuable contribution by raising the idea of developing "wisdom capital" though Robert Putnam's article, "People Don't Go Bowling Anymore" (which laments the decline of social capital) cries out for inclusion in this text. R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr. warns us of another liberal buzzword, "diversity." Though Nathan Glazer blithely restates the obvious the liberal cant that no group need give up its character, Thomas cautions that the world is full of Yugoslavias on the brink of dissolution.

In Part III: *The Impact of the New Communication Technology*, Netscape's James L. Barksdale explains how information technology is democratizing the workplace. However, Howard Rheingold's assertion that virtual communities can recreate the public sphere of the 18th century coffee houses and salons that Jurgen Habermas justified as the breeding ground of the American and French revolutions is an absurdity. However valuable computers are, an individual sitting alone typing into his monitor can never replicate the political passion of two people discussing politics face-to-face over a beer.

Part IV: *Strengthening the Social Fabric* offers many provocative arguments such as Hugh Price's call for an end to the anti-achievement peer culture of African Americans. There is, however, also Raul Yzaguirre's effort to fan the flames of multiculturalism. When Ted du Bary introduced this concept in the American context, he envisioned Americans adding to their rich Anglo heritage by grasping the traditions of other cultures such as Japan and China. Unfortunately, in the hands of American radicals, this led instead to such things as the evisceration of western civilization in our leading universities' literature departments (where such antiquated purveyors of "the canon" still exist) by, for example jettisoning Shakespeare in favor of personal anecdotes and political diatribes from postcolonial Marxist feminists from Guatemala.

One extremely heartening development in Parts V and VI, is the emphasis placed upon children. Editor Frances Hesselbein's "The Dream That Lies Before Us" and the essays by Suzanne W. Morse, Richard F. Schubert and Rick R. Little all agree that the focus of any community worth the name has to be its children. It seems as if the baby boomer "Me Generation" is showing signs of turning the corner and becoming the "We Generation." Now that we look ahead and see that our end is closer than our beginning, we may be willing to give up the headlong pursuit of wealth and glory for the only thing that matters. Suzanne Morse quotes a Masai warrior greeting: "How are the children?" to which the response is "The children are well." Inonge Moikusita-Lawanika ends his selection thus: "Each generation needs to pass on the legacy of positive human relationships and community." Or, as Edmund Burke might have said: "Society is not only a contract among the living, but the living and the dead, and the living and those yet to be born."

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