City of Rhetoric: Revitalizing the Public Sphere in Metropolitan America, David Fleming

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century conversations about aesthetic theory" that link her rhetorical *ethos* with
Stoic thought. Agnew goes on to find a "bridge" from "criticism's inward turn"
via Matthew Arnold's disinterestedness as an antidote to the wear and tear of
industrial capitalism (with an acknowledging nod to Shaftesbury) that associ-
ates—if not connects—Wilde and Pater not only with the objectivity of Carlyle
and Ruskin but also, to engage her central thesis, with "Cicero, the Stoics, and
eighteenth century theorists" (10).

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**David Fleming. *City of Rhetoric: Revitalizing the Public Sphere in Metropolitan
America.* Albany: SUNY Press, 2008. xiv + 332 pages. $29.95 paperback.**

I have been looking forward to the publication of *City of Rhetoric* since
I first heard David Fleming present his research on the rhetoric of gentrification
several years ago. My anticipation was a response to Fleming's obvious passion
for his subject as well as his commitment to rigorous rhetorical thinking. So
when I was provided the opportunity to review the book, I jumped at the chance
and looked forward to the fuller rhetorical analysis of the transition of an
infamous public housing project on the near north side of Chicago into a mixed-
income neighborhood.

That said, my response to having read the book is to feel a mix of satisfac-
tion and disappointment; it is a response I am not sure I can make complete sense
of. That which I found disappointing in Fleming's book is not too far removed
from that which I found satisfying about it, which is to say I found the book most
provocative.

City of Rhetoric is divided into three parts. Part one, "The Geography of
Politics," lays out Fleming's rhetorical approach to the politics of place. Part
two, "Designing the Twenty-First Century Public Sphere," consists of four
chapters that each provide a descriptive analysis of areas in Chicago crucial to
Fleming's argument. Part three, "Lessons for Theory and Practice," build on the
analysis chapters a case for enriching and enlivening civic rhetoric through
enhancing rhetorical education. This organization makes a good deal of sense
because it is straightforward and gives Fleming a structure that allows for shift-
ing focus from rhetoric to city history and urban planning back to rhetoric (with

the addition of) rhetorical education. At the same time, the breaks between the three parts are so abrupt, because the matters of concern are so different, that, as Fleming himself makes note of in the first chapter of part three, the middle chapters may "probably read more like a local history lesson or urban sociology seminar than an analysis of situated discourse practices" (179). The point is not a trivial one for Fleming. The success of his argument depends, as he goes on to indicate, on his ability to show how the richly detailed discussions of local housing policies and practices, economic developments and urban expansion, as well as political history all shape our public discourse in important (and not always positive) ways. Showing this, Fleming explains, enables him to conclude with suggestions for more consciously controlling the forces that constrain our capacities for civic dialogue. Here I discuss briefly how well Fleming has succeeded in bringing the separate pieces together and has so persuasively shown the need for scholars and teachers in rhetoric to attend to the details of local history and urban sociology.

To be clear, I have no doubt the details matter. The circumstances and situations people find themselves in as citizens cannot but influence, at the same time they are influenced by, varieties of public discourse. Discerning the nature as well as the extent of that influence is where the important work lies. Fleming's contribution to this work begins with an interesting thesis in part one of *City of Rhetoric*. Recalling the limited, effective population of the Athenian democracy and invoking the population density of contemporary urban neighborhoods, Fleming proposes that we rethink the scale of the civic space optimal for democratic participation in contemporary American cities. He calls this space an "urban district," which he describes as "about 1.5 square miles (1,600 acres) in area and about 50,000–100,000 in population" (57). This densely populated geographic space functions as the primary political space for citizens, a space in which residents have "a reasonable chance to directly participate in binding, effective, political decision-making" (56). As the space of civic participation and public deliberation, Fleming further proposes that preparing students to take part in decision-making on the level of the urban district should become the priority of rhetorical education.

The appeal of Fleming's notion of urban district as rhetorical space lies in its seeming potential to resolve a number of problems all at once. Some of these problems are the practical problems of identifying the scale of meaningful participation and designing a rhetorical education that best prepares students for participation on that scale. Some of these problems are conceptual problems of better understanding the nature of meaningful political deliberation and the articulation of the concept of the urban district with more encompassing boundaries of citizenship, such as those of the nation-state.

Fleming does not do much to develop the concept of urban district in terms of a fuller discussion of any of these kinds of issues. In fact, after making his case for the urban district in part one of *City of Rhetoric*, he turns, in part two, to a history of the Cabrini-Green housing project, and a description of the narratives of urban decline and renewal that contributed to the demolition of the projects, the dispersal of a majority of its residents, and the redevelopment of the area into a mixed-income community. I think it fair to say Fleming makes little use of the idea of urban districts in these descriptions, but this misses the point. Perhaps the better way to put it would be that the idea of urban districts is not necessary for the claim Fleming is making here in part two, which is that discourses about poverty and public housing as well as discourses of gentrification contributed to exclusion of Cabrini-Green residents from participating in the making of decisions about their fates and the fate of their community. Fleming writes passionately about the community and its residents. I admire this. At the same time, though, I got the sense that his passion for the empowerment of Cabrini-Green residents led him to too stark an opposition between the discourses of power and the struggle for discourse among the powerless. This is not to say that Fleming's analysis is not insightful. It is instead to say that understanding the confluence of influences global discourses and local discourses have on each other is vital for an accurate critical assessment. As Fleming indicates, for residents to be heard, they had to learn the discourses of power. At the same time, as a number of urban planners argue, the discourses of urban planning and neighborhood redevelopment must necessarily include the voices of residents. I think it is here—articulating the mutual filtrations of the global with the local— where a concept such as that of the urban district could prove useful as a descriptive tool with pedagogical potential.

Fleming has made his choices and I cannot fault him for that. His account is passionate and his commitment to rhetorical education as civic engagement is inspiring. Yet I think the lessons for rhetorical education that he draws from his account of the changes on the near north side of Chicago could do more to fulfill the promise of his idea of the urban district as democratic space. Perhaps my response is less to the specific educational proposals themselves (which I did find both appropriate and provocative) and more to what struck me as a thinness of articulation of these recommendations with the larger problems of urban living, especially as those problems are elaborated as problems of both literacy and rhetoric by a number of researchers in urban planning and public policy.

I do not want my criticisms of *City of Rhetoric* to dissuade people from reading the book. I think it is an important book for every student of rhetoric because it appears at a moment in the history of rhetoric when attention is so drawn to media technologies that dislocate us and our rhetorical actions from the urban

environments in which the majority of the world's population resides. Fleming does a great service by recalling our attention to the relevance of the motives behind the major developments in classical rhetoric—enabling citizens of a city to decide among themselves what the best life is and how best to make that life a possibility for themselves in their community.

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Todd F. McDorman and David M. Timmerman, eds. *Rhetoric and Democracy: Pedagogical and Political Practices*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2008. 292 pages. $59.95 hardcover.

Within the context of a recent presidential regime that has been viewed by many to have far-reaching and negative consequences for the state of democracy and freedom of speech in this country, it is essential that as a nation we strive to recapture liberties lost and Constitutional rights sacrificed in the name of homeland security, the war on terror, and executive privilege during times of war. Such a goal is both the right and responsibility of the citizenry of this nation, yet it is in this obligation to the future of the country that the American public and its educators, as a whole, have been inexcusably remiss. It can be convincingly argued that the main cause for our short-sightedness during the last eight years is attributable to a lack of education in rhetoric, effective speech-making, and the standards of argumentation, and it is this pedagogical oversight that Todd F. McDorman and David M. Timmerman's recent collection of essays, *Rhetoric and Democracy: Pedagogical and Political Practices*, sets out, at least in part, to correct. Beyond this daunting task, however, the editors are equally interested in critiquing political practices as they come to bear on the actual power that the individual in a democracy has to promote change. McDorman and Timmerman summarize their project as one that aims to "offer a rich set of perspectives regarding how rhetoric, through our teaching, research, and actions, is vital to democracy" (xxix). In order to accomplish this, the editors offer in part one, "Rhetoric, Rhetorical Education, and Democracy," to trace the rich history of the rhetoric/democracy relationship and to give rhetoric and oratory intellectual currency as bona fide and importantly interdisciplinary fields struggling to attain scholarly status.