

**Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin. By Steven Harris. Washington, D.C. : Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. xx, 394 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. Hard bound.**

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It is not easy to find another social experiment as closely associated with different periods of Soviet history as the regime's grandiose mass housing projects. State-sponsored house communes (*doma kommuny*), communal apartments, people's construction campaigns (*narodnye stroiki*), cooperatives, and Khrushchev's promise to resolve the Soviet Union's housing crisis helped shape the development of the turbulent Soviet history. Despite the undeniable significance of this social experiment and its all-encompassing nature, historical accounts documenting the development of Soviet mass housing projects are a rare commodity. Steven E. Harris' well-researched book, therefore, is a welcome and timely addition to the small yet growing body of literature that focuses on the material development of Soviet history.

The book begins with the postwar campaign to resolve the "housing question" (*zhilishchnyi vopros*) in the Soviet Union. Following Stalin's death in 1953, a new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, launched a comprehensive reform that promised to move ordinary Soviet citizens from overcrowded communal apartments and barracks to separate apartments inhabited by a single family. These apartments became known as the *khrushchevka*. Set during the "thaw," Khrushchev's mass housing reform serves as a proxy to the study of the Soviet regime's efforts to revise and revive the communist project after Stalin's death. Yet, while other historical accounts often privilege the experiences of Soviet cultural elites and the Party leaders during the Khrushchev period, Harris provides insights into the "thaw" using the point of view of ordinary Soviet citizens—blue collar workers, engineers, teachers, etc.—millions of which were affected by Khrushchev's housing campaign.

The book is divided into three parts, each one devoted to the examination of the production, circulation, and consumption of Khrushchev's housing reform. The first half of the book sheds light on the role of the leadership as well as campaign architects and designers in shaping housing distribution policies and the material realities of the *khrushchevka*. It is dedicated to a detailed and lengthy analysis of a variety of political, architectural, and social arrangements that ultimately led to the development of Khrushchev's mass housing policy. The second half of the book focuses on differentiated access to housing in the 1950-60s. It explores social and class identities that constituted "the waiting list" for the allocation of the *khrushchevka*. These identities, Harris argues, reflect the type of person that state officials in charge of the distribution constructed as either valuable or not worthy to be part of the Soviet society. For instance, using data from Saint Petersburg's local archives, Harris demonstrates that for a citizen trying to get on the waiting list, a rehabilitated person as a status was something worth omitting, while a WWII veteran or a native Leningrader was worth mentioning (p. 131). The last part of the book explores the experiences of ordinary residents as they moved to their separate apartments. It highlights a variety of contradictions between the ideal vision and the

material reality of living in the *khrushchevka* and illuminates ways in which ordinary citizens shaped the meaning of living in a separate apartment.

Although Khrushchev's reforms are often perceived as a drastic departure from the political and social preferences of the previous Soviet periods, when it comes to the mass housing reform, the book points out continuities embedded in the new policy. Thus, contrary to a more conventional understanding of Khrushchev's reforms as departing from Stalin's ideas about housing and social arrangements, Harris convincingly shows that the aesthetic ideal of a separate apartment, to which Soviet citizens should aspire, had been established prior to the reform itself. In fact, historical evidence indicates that it was constructed as an ideal housing model during the worst years of Stalin's terror.

The most fascinating part of Harris' study—and to my mind, the core of the book's argument—discusses the relationship between the internal design of the *khrushchevka* and the distribution norms set during the early period of Soviet history. During its earlier stages of existence, extreme housing shortages forced the Bolshevik regime to devise the minimum housing norm of 8.25 meters per person. Apartments could have been settled communally had they had more square meters per individual (*izlishki*). It was this new standard that ultimately determined the distribution constraints characteristic of Khrushchev's campaign. Indeed, as chapter two demonstrates, Soviet architects reduced the *khrushchevka*'s living space to make it impossible for local officials to settle apartments with more than one family. This relationship between distribution policies and architectural design explains the notoriously small size of the *khrushchevka* and casts light on the architects' strategy of making 1920s distribution standards the founding aesthetic principle of their design in the 1950s.

Separate apartments constituted an important part of the "communist way of life" (*kommunisticheskii byt*) and the last three chapters of the book examine the gap between the actual experiences of living in the *khrushchevka* and its idealized vision. The chapters explore the gap between the ideal representations of the material arrangements of the new Soviet home and the realities faced by the *khrushchevka*'s inhabitants as they encountered the impossible task of finding new furniture and consumer goods. Focusing on the relationship between the state and its citizens, the last part of the book argues that the gap between what was promised and what was delivered opened a space where residents could express their dissatisfaction and challenge policymakers' and architects' cultural authority to dictate an appropriate socialist way of life.

The book is meticulously researched and it provides new insights into the relationships between individual citizens and the state during the Khrushchev period. Harris effectively presents the increasingly demanding attitudes of citizens towards authorities as well as the forms of social control generated by the new housing policy. The book will be of interest to academic readers and students studying Soviet history, and different chapters of the book can be assigned as stand-alone pieces to both graduate and undergraduate seminars.

The history of Soviet housing and urban planning merits further study. One underexplored direction in Harris' book is the examination of how these policies might have transformed existing living arrangements, constituted new divisions of domestic labor, and shaped people's perceptions of social distinctions. Furthermore, although Harris mentions the multigenerational nature of the *khrushchevka* just once (2013:246), he does not question the official distinction between a communal apartment (*kommunalka*) and a separate apartment inhabited by a single family. In reality, the boundaries between the two have always been blurred, as the majority of separate apartments were de facto multigenerational households with

at least three generations of people sharing the space. In contrast with other living arrangements set by the mass housing reforms in Western Europe, the multigenerational nature of the Soviet “separate” apartment shaped Soviet citizens’ expectations and social realities in ways that require further assessment.