

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

McLoughlin, Brian J. *Shaping Melbourne's Future? Town Planning, the State and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. xiv, 261. 6 black and white plates, 22 maps, 4 diagrams, 6 tables, bibliography, index. \$69.95

Thomas S. Carter

Volume 23, Number 1, November 1994

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016704ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016704ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Carter, T. S. (1994). Review of [McLoughlin, Brian J. *Shaping Melbourne's Future? Town Planning, the State and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. xiv, 261. 6 black and white plates, 22 maps, 4 diagrams, 6 tables, bibliography, index. \$69.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 23(1), 64–65. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016704ar>

Teaford's "biography" (p. vii) of these heartland cities begins in early nineteenth century. He discusses the settlement patterns of the "river cities" (Cincinnati, St. Louis); the "cities of the lake region" (Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee), and the smaller "capital cities" (Columbus, Indianapolis, Lansing). He analyzes the economic base of these cities. They were manufacturing centers and provided commercial services to their agricultural hinterland. He then discusses the physical layout of the cities and their "cultural complexion" (p. 72). Teaford argues that by the early twentieth century midwestern cities briefly basked in their reputation as the "cultural vanguard" of the nation in terms of architecture, the arts, and the new spectator sports such as baseball. Teaford suggests that after 1920 these heartland cities were eclipsed by the growth in what later became the "sunbelt." The suburban areas around the cities also challenged the dominance of the central cities, and after World War II, "Midwesterners faced the ugly symptoms of aging" (p. 211). By the 1980s, the "heartland" became the "rustbelt;" cultural leadership in music, media, and the arts shifted to the coasts, and midwesterners found themselves victims of "cultural colonialism" (p. 243).

The themes Teaford conjures up certainly echo the current popular conception of the urban history of the midwest. Whether they will bear the weight of a more critical scrutiny is doubtful. Teaford's lively prose captures the breakneck speed with which midwestern cities developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chicago, for example, grew from a marshy frontier settlement in 1840 to the booming metropolis of a million people in 1890. The population boom and bust in some cities has been equally dramatic. The city of Detroit had a population under 300,000 in 1900, just under a million in 1920, had grown to 1.8 million by 1950, and slid back to one

million in 1990. These were demographic roller coasters. Yet other midwestern cities displayed more sedate patterns which call into question Teaford's generalizations. Milwaukee, for example, was the same size as Detroit in 1900, grew to about 700,000 by 1950, and has dropped back to about 630,000 since.

In short the biological metaphor doesn't quite work. There is more variety in the growth patterns than Teaford can explain. Further, birth, maturity and aging, after all, lead inevitably to death in living creatures. Yet almost 18 million people currently live in the metropolitan areas of Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis and Milwaukee. Many more live in the smaller urban areas of the Old Northwest. At the end of the book Teaford recognizes that he has conceptualized himself into a corner. By the 1980s, he writes, the heartland had "grown old;" the "Midwest's pulse [was] fainter." But he concludes sanguinely: "this did not necessarily mean that death was imminent" (p. 254). He finds no resurrection; rather he jettisons his conceptual framework: "Perhaps by the 1990s the notion of 'cities' of the heartland was a conceptual anachronism" (p. 255). He concludes by speculating on the future; he finds "conurbations defying definition" (p. 255). One wishes he had used these insights to refine his original conceptual framework of the "urban life cycle" or to retrieve the work of other theorists of urban development — from Kingsley Davis, to Eric Lampard or Allen Pred, or Jan deVries, to name just a few. Thus the book provides a useful overview of midwestern urban development, but it raises more questions than it answers.

Margo Anderson
Department of History
University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee

McLoughlin, Brian J. *Shaping Melbourne's Future? Town Planning, the State and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. xiv, 261. 6 black and white plates, 22 maps, 4 diagrams, 6 tables, bibliography, index. \$69.95

Land use planners should read this book and weep. In *Shaping Melbourne's Future*, J. Brian McLoughlin compares the aims of land use planning with its outcomes. Asking the question, how effective have planners been in relation to other influences in the urban environment, he concludes that the real powers shaping land use and the built form historically have been the major factions of capital: industry, commerce, property, and financial interests. More recently, public corporations built around State bureaucracies have themselves become influential power blocs. The power of ordinary people to control their own living environment has generally been puny by comparison. His conclusion is even more damning when he states that not only have the policies and controls of the planners failed, planning has often been socially regressive. It has resulted in cost inefficient decisions and increasing social and income segregation.

The conclusion may not come as a surprise to professionals and academics in the urban field. Few books, however, document so effectively the reasons why planners have so seldom achieved what they have set out to do, notably to guide the overall pattern of growth in the urban area. McLoughlin provides a very comprehensive, yet organized and easily understood monograph built on historical, socio-political and geographical themes.

In the historical dimension, the discussion focuses on those crucial turning points which since 1930 have separated the patterns of urban development and

form into distinct periods. Within these periods he analyzes the impact of immigration, capital shifts from one sector of the economy to another, changes in income, destabilizing developments such as the Middle East oil embargo and de-industrialization. He illustrates how land use planning has been highly reactive to these wider developments in the economy.

In considering the socio-political dimension, McLoughlin analyzes the influence of an impressive range of structures and agencies that constitute the power blocs in society. At the same time, the discussion is often sufficiently comprehensive to detail the role of particular individuals. The author discusses the influence and locational preferences of various sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, finance, commerce, and housing. The role of community groups such as anti-freeway and anti-slum organizations is assessed, as is the role of labour and the philosophies of political parties at local state and federal levels. The influence of the built environment professions — architects, engineers, and planners — is considered as well. This section ends with comments on the extensive influence of public corporations that act not just as mediators between other factions and the engineers of powerful investment partnerships between private sector capital and government, but also as power blocs in their own right.

The damning evidence in these two themes is brought together very effectively in the geographical dimension in which a series of maps provides a very clear contrast between stated planning intentions and actual outcomes. Comparisons are made at both the macro (metro-region) level and the micro level that deals with specific projects or areas such as the city centre to provide answers to a number of broad questions. Did the various plans shift the direction of

development as intended? Did plans contain explosive suburban growth? Were major open space allocations protected? Did the city centre develop as planned? It is apparent that there has been very little correspondence between plans and reality at the metro-region level, though slightly more success has been achieved at the residential neighbourhood level.

McLoughlin then questions why planners have had so little influence in Melbourne. He concludes that they have been cut off institutionally and politically from those with greater leverage over development — the factions representing industry and commerce, for example. He also suggests that the strategies planners have put forward have not been well grounded in theories of urban growth and development. Nor has there been any systematic monitoring and analysis of demographic and development phenomena which would help planners to understand the urban dynamics which they are trying to control. Moreover, in his judgement planners seem unaware of relevant academic research that could assist them. But, in the end McLoughlin also wonders whether perhaps we are all a little naive about the ability of planners to influence the pattern and form of development in a society so wedded to the market economy.

There is a short section on changes in research and practise that might improve the situation, but it is very brief and weakly developed. Certainly this is a topic that could have been expanded.

This book should certainly be read by those in the general field of planning and urban development. It will also be of interest to students and professionals in the related fields of urban studies, geography, history, sociology, and political science. Few books make such a significant contribution to our understanding of the

various factors, agencies and processes that affect how land is developed and the urban built form produced. No claim is made that what has happened in Melbourne is typical of the successes or failures of the planning profession in general but this is a very informed study of the difficulties the planning profession faces.

Thomas S. Carter
Department of Geography
University of Winnipeg

Schwartz, Joel. *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals and Redevelopment of the Inner City*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993. Pp. xxiii, 375. Illustrations, maps, tables, index. US \$35.00.

Joel Schwartz's thoroughly researched and clearly written study of housing redevelopment in New York City reveals a strong consensus among the city's urban experts and liberal activists for the housing policies adopted between the 1930s and the end of the 1950s. During the period, the city granted huge subsidies to private builders and undertook massive construction projects that "transformed the city, physically and morally," the author writes in his preface.

The physical transformation is apparent to any observer. Huge high rise apartment complexes, including 314 acres supported by Federal Title I slum clearance funds, are enduring monuments to the power of New York's redevelopment machine. The moral transformation is invisible. It stems from the treatment of the people who do not live in these complexes — the ones who were relocated. Ridding the town of the decrepit tenements where its least fortunate citizens lived was one of redevelopment's primary goals. Providing better housing for