

BOOK REVIEW

**Urban neighborhoods in a new era: Revitalization politics in the postindustrial city**, edited by Clarence N. Stone and Robert P. Stoker, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2015, 294 pp., \$30.00 (paperback), ISBN 9780226289014

Books that address the revitalization of cities and neighborhoods in the post-industrial era often focus on revitalization of the downtown, or Central Business District (CBD), and demonstrate the failures of these places through unsuccessful policies and politics. Stone and Stoker take a different approach to understanding the politics of revitalization in post-industrial cities. Stone, Stoker, and their contributing authors focus on the combination of economic growth and neighborhood improvements as paired objectives. In the nexus between economic growth and neighborhood improvement, the authors feature six North American cities – Baltimore, Chicago, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Denver, and Toronto – to demonstrate policy-making and politics coming together in positive ways and in detrimental ways. While the book documents failures of some initiatives, the authors do not focus solely on the failures. Instead, they consider the failures as lessons, and provide advice or remedies that they believe would have made a difference.

In their chapter “Policy Shift without Institutional Change: The Precarious Place of Neighborhood Revitalization in Toronto,” Martin Horak and Aaron Alexander Moore demonstrate that without institutional change and policy shifts, continued neighborhood revitalization will not be successful. The authors argue that Toronto has little experience designing policy geared toward measurable positive change in distressed neighborhoods. During 1972–1980, Toronto’s mayors designed revitalization policies that, while seeming progressive, capitalized on their tax base to reaffirm the interests of the middle class and above. This tactic led to massive gentrification and the continued marginalization of people of color and the poor. Recently, Toronto started two initiatives, the reconstruction of several public housing complexes and “the citywide Strong Neighborhoods Strategy, which promotes youth programming, community capacity building, policing, and neighborhood services to ‘priority neighborhoods’ located in Toronto’s postwar inner suburbs” (p. 183). Toronto fell prey to an all-too-common danger, the implementation and shift in policy without the institutional changes to support these shifts. This failure to make lasting institutional changes left many policies unfunded or grossly underfunded, resulting in too little help for distressed neighborhoods. Horak and Moore recommend remedies, and explain the social and economic reasons behind policy failures. They argue that the failures in Toronto’s policies are due to officials confusing the difference between making policy and implementing institutional change. Horak and Moore offer not only a narrative and analysis of failure, but also a way to avoid the problems of the reference city, and teach about neighborhood revitalization policy in postindustrial cities.

It has become common to use a city’s failed policies as a cautionary tale. This book takes the next step, explaining why these policies did not work for that specific neighborhood, what could have worked better, and suggest options for treating social issues in neighborhoods and working toward remedies for urban policy failures. This approach to neighborhood revitalization policy should be implemented broadly. Policy analysts, urban planners, urbanists, city officials, and neighborhood non-governmental organizations need fewer studies that begin with “things have failed” and end with a catalog of failures. Those who advocate for “more new policies” miss

the importance of working within existing policies, or consider the intersecting social problems and forces within specific failures. We need to fix policies to bring measurable positive changes to distressed neighborhoods.

The last chapter, "Contending with Structural Inequality in a New Era," explores the question, "Does the new era hold the *possibility* of more beneficent treatment of distressed neighborhoods?" (p. 209). Though the authors answer this question in the affirmative, the discussion about race was flat, a moment of missed opportunities to demonstrate the fraught relationship between race, neighborhood activism, policy-making, and politics. One such missed opportunity was the explanation of how and why these neighborhoods are distressed. Most of the neighborhoods are distressed or devalued because they are mostly inhabited by people of color and people who are poor, who also hold other marginalized statuses. Given a more multi-faceted approach toward race and its intersections with class, the authors could have contributed to the literature not only about revitalization policy-making, but also the relationship between race, social issues, and revitalization. That aside, I would recommend this book to my colleagues in urban planning and public policy, as well as urbanists broadly. *Urban Neighborhoods in a New Era: Revitalization Politics in the Postindustrial City* approaches policies of revitalization differently. Their focus is not singularly the CBD, or the entire city as a unit; instead, the text considers the neighborhood as central, and considers how neighborhood improvements and broader community development strategies can build toward economic growth and inclusion in the post-industrial era.

Nicholas A. Belongie

*Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University at Buffalo*

 [NABelong@buffalo.edu](mailto:NABelong@buffalo.edu)

© 2017 Nicholas A. Belongie

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2017.1342379>

