

Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age. By Lizabeth Cohen. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019. Pp. 560. \$35.00 hardcover; \$22.00 paperback.)

Historian Robert Caro's description of the destruction wrought by the building of the Cross-Bronx Expressway is one of the best-known stories of postwar urban renewal. In his epic book, *The Power Broker* (1974), Caro explains how New York City developer Robert Moses built the highway through a once vibrant neighborhood, displacing tens of thousands of people and destroying the local economy. Even today, his account is among the most popular images of urban renewal, and other historians have shared Caro's grim assessment of the subject. Recent work has shown how redevelopment across the country aggravated deindustrialization, helped segregate housing and employment, and hurt downtown businesses. Urban elites used federal funding to displace the poor in an effort to make cities more competitive with the suburbs. By some estimates, postwar highway construction alone displaced approximately half-a-million people in the United States, most of them people of color. So-called "slum clearance" often concentrated poor residents in declining shares of the city while government authorities built too little public housing and failed to pay for it. Rather than a palliative for the urban crisis, most historians have seen redevelopment as one of its central causes.

Lizabeth Cohen's biography of urban planner Edward Logue is thus an important intervention in the literature on this subject. In *Saving America's Cities*, Cohen joins other scholars who complicate postwar urban renewal's history. She does not ignore redevelopment's ugly legacies, but she argues that too many works present it as "a decades-long undifferentiated, and unmitigated disaster" (10). Instead, Cohen argues that readers need to see urban renewal as a process that differed from place to place, changed over time, and, in spite of its many problems, often "improved lives" (11). Logue's career as a redeveloper from the 1950s to the 1980s illustrates this argument. A committed New Deal liberal, he trusted government to improve urban life. He believed in "planning with the people," and argued that, if left alone, businesses would rebuild cities to profit themselves, not urban residents. Yet he also sometimes imposed his values on the neighborhoods that he redeveloped, struggling to reconcile his views with those of the communities affected by his work. He supported racial integration and built several projects in cooperation with

residents of color, yet he also deepened segregation in some places. Like any good biographer, Cohen highlights these contradictions even as she pushes her readers to rethink their assumptions about “master builders” like Logue.

To accomplish this goal, Cohen breaks her book into three parts. Each section reveals the complexity of urban renewal’s history. Part One focuses on Logue’s early career in New Haven, CT, and it tells a variation of the traditional narrative of redevelopment. After World War II, suburbanization and deindustrialization undermined the city’s economy. Logue, a Yale graduate and supporter of New Haven’s mayor, headed a redevelopment agency that pursued strategies similar to those of other cities: automobile-friendly roadways, a renovated downtown with more parking, industrial reconstruction, demolition in older neighborhoods, and building new modernist residences in their place. In this phase, Logue, like officials in other cities, worked within a framework Cohen calls “pluralist democracy,” in which public authorities primarily collaborated with representatives of New Haven’s banks, downtown businesses, labor unions, churches, and civic associations. Community groups in places like New Haven’s Dixwell neighborhood, which faced partial demolition, later critiqued this model as elitist and ignorant of their needs.

Cohen, however, stresses that the history of urban renewal did not end in 1960. Consequently, the book’s second part explains how Logue navigated increased neighborhood challenges to city planning after he took a new position in Boston. Many residents opposed top-down redevelopment that ignored their needs, and Cohen explains that Logue’s battles with grassroots resistance in his new job demonstrates that renewal evolved in response to community opposition. She tells this history by contrasting the experiences of different neighborhoods, including Roxbury, Charlestown, and the South End. In some cases Logue and his allies built with little resistance. In other cases, community groups either stopped construction or fought for renewal on their terms. And in still other cases, the Boston Redevelopment Authority and its opposition compromised. The result was a hybrid landscape that included new modernist projects and historic preservation, economic development and affordable housing.

The book’s final section chronicles Logue’s work in New York in a period of declining federal support for urban renewal. Again, Cohen emphasizes redevelopment’s diversity. Logue moved to New York in 1968 to lead the state’s Urban Development Corporation (UDC), a project championed by Governor Nelson Rockefeller to stimulate

economic growth. During Logue's tenure, the UDC launched numerous initiatives, but Cohen highlights his work with low-income housing and integrated communities. In particular, she underscores Logue's commitment to economic and racial diversity in his projects, including Roosevelt Island in New York City. In one of the most powerful chapters, Cohen highlights Logue's efforts to build low-income housing in the suburbs and his fights with local officials who tried to stop him. These battles made many affluent state legislators dislike the UDC, and when New York's economic crisis deepened in the 1970s, officials disbanded it. Logue's career ended with a modest, but fascinating coda as a developer of low-income housing in New York City. Constrained by a small budget, he collaborated closely with community groups for the first time in his career, helping to construct two hundred homes in the South Bronx. In a moment rife with symbolism, this former "master builder" labored to meet the needs of residents on their own terms not far from the infamous stretch of the Cross Bronx Expressway detailed in *The Power Broker*.

Saving America's Cities provocatively asks readers to accept both the necessity and messiness of redevelopment. By focusing only on communities who fought the bulldozers, Cohen argues, scholars see only part of a complex story. Redevelopers like Logue displaced the poor, but they also fought for low-income housing in the suburbs. Meanwhile, cities since the 1960s have grown more unequal without federal support. Planning processes that allow for greater local control have empowered both poor communities of color and affluent white suburbanites opposed to development. The history of urban renewal thus offers no easy lessons, but Cohen convincingly argues that looking at it "will hopefully reawaken from a long slumber the will and wherewithal to revitalize cities that still struggle for economic survival, to invest in neighborhoods still lacking in adequate services, and to improve the prospects for those Americans still poorly housed" (398).

Hopefully, *Saving America's Cities* will inspire even more work on the complexity of postwar redevelopment. Like all books it leaves some questions unanswered. Some of the best work on urban renewal has shown how whites often saw predominantly Black spaces as "empty" or "in decline." These beliefs led even well-intentioned officials to try to redevelop African American or Latinx neighborhoods without treating the residents of these areas as equal players in the process. Cohen persuasively argues that Logue believed in racial integration, but it is not clear that this white, Ivy League-educated master

builder truly saw poor communities of color as partners even at the end of his career. Would he have worked with them if federal funding had somehow returned in the 1980s? Some of his own allies in this era called him “racist” (372). Future histories that seek to redeem the possibilities of postwar redevelopment, rather than merely condemn it, will need to address other questions: How did communities of color negotiate with white allies? How did Black and Latinx activists think about redevelopment in places beyond their own neighborhoods? And were there any moments of true racial egalitarianism in postwar redevelopment, or will future scholars need to find them in another era?

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City on a Hill: A History of American Exceptionalism. By Abram C. Van Engen. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020. Pp. 392. \$30.00 hardcover.)

The historian and public intellectual Jill Lepore has recently been arguing for the importance of a US national story—a shared sense of Americans’ collective history—as a form of social cohesion sorely needed in a divided nation. She has attempted to tell that national story in *These Truths: A History of the United States* (2018). With *City on a Hill: A History of American Exceptionalism*, Abram C. Van Engen has undertaken a similarly ambitious and synthesizing task: telling the story behind Americans’ national story, via the biography of one influential text, *A Model of Christian Charity*, a sermon by Massachusetts Bay Colony governor John Winthrop best known for its invocation of the concept of a “city on a hill.”

Van Engen traces the meaning, material history, and reception of this sermon from its seventeenth-century creation to the present day. He begins by analyzing what Winthrop himself wanted to communicate to his fellow puritans as they emigrated. Van Engen then discusses the motives that drove antiquarians and historical societies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to preserve and publish historical material such as *A Model of Christian Charity*, and how they functioned in concert with politicians and textbook writers to propagate a myth of the Pilgrim origins of the young United States.