

**Rae, Douglas W. *City: Urbanism and Its End*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. Pp. xix, 516. Tables, maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. US\$30.00 (hardcover).**

This beautifully turned out, weighty volume offers a detailed, thoughtful history of the decline of New Haven, Connecticut. Its strength is that it is meticulously researched and well written, and places its dismal tale in a context broad enough to do full justice to the complexity of the story.

The author's biographical details provide an interesting background to his study. Douglas W. Rae, who is Richard Ely Professor of Management and Professor of Politics at Yale University, teaches politics to MBA students. He served as chief administrative officer of New Haven, where Yale is located, under the city's first African-American mayor, John Daniels. His writing is informed by the blend of theoretical and practical understanding that one might expect from such a background.

The book's central contention is two-pronged:

- That New Haven, like many other North American cities, has suffered serious depredations, and much of what was once a lively inner city has been reduced to ghetto status, by virtue of population dispersal, rapid development of surrounding municipalities, and de-industrialization.
- That both economic and political power residing outside the city leaves the city helpless in the face of these developments.

The author adds a touch of dignity to this grim course of events by labelling it "the end of urbanism," a term that seems fitting enough in the circumstances he describes, but that would have made for a much less compelling argument had the subject of his study been, say, Rome, Copenhagen, San Francisco, or Vancouver.

To be sure, the essentials of his argument are indisputable and are in fact widely understood, at least among students of city life. Developments throughout most of the 20th century have deprived city neighbourhoods of many of the functions that formerly bolstered their importance as lively centres of public life. Among these developments are the displacement of most water, rail, and urban public transportation by road-based, individual transport; the development of high-tech communications; deindustrialization; the destruction of a great deal of neighbourhood retailing by competition from large-scale stores serving entire regions; the relocation of much entertainment from the public sphere into the home, and single-use, low-density zoning, especially the strict separation, in Canada and the United States, of residence from commerce.

The strength of the study is not these observations in themselves, but in the intelligent way they are marshalled into an argument, the careful selection of case study material that fleshes them out and brings them to life in a vivid portrayal of New Haven's sad journey through the past century, and in writing that flows easily. Rae not only shows the direct impact of major

technological change, but also maps the influence of such indirect effects as the rise and decline of voluntary associations and the professionalization of social service delivery.

The study begins with a portrayal of how 19th-century industrialization produced the lively streets and viable neighbourhoods that residents of New Haven were still enjoying well into the 20th century. It then proceeds to document the height of New Haven's urbanism—Rae chooses the years 1910–17—during which Mayor Frank Rice, portrayed as a mediocre leader, is nevertheless able to preside over a prosperous, dynamic city.

A plethora of carefully chosen detail vividly portrays life in the homes, streets, and workplaces and shows how commerce and civil society combined to produce a city that "worked" superbly, despite inadequate governance structures.

Part 2 of the book paints a similarly detailed picture of New Haven's decline under the influence of deindustrialization, exurban development, and social and racial change. This part also centres upon the tenure of a mayor, Dick Lee—unlike Rice, an extraordinary leader—who was nevertheless unable to reverse New Haven's decline. The contrast between a mediocre mayor under whom the city prospered, and an exceptionally capable one who could not halt decline, effectively supports Rae's contention that forces beyond its control determined the city's fate.

Throughout this account of New Haven's odyssey, Rae authoritatively addresses theoretical debates while demonstrating a chief administrative officer's grasp of the daily exigencies of running a city. A look at some of the details of his argument shows the strengths, as well as the occasional weakness, of this mixture of theoretical insight and practical understanding.

One of the characteristics of urbanism he identifies is the intricate network of voluntary associations that provided personal support and fed civic activism during New Haven's heyday. In a sly swipe at the excruciatingly fashionable work of Robert Putnam, Rae refers to this phenomenon as civic density, and dubs the network *civic fauna*, studiously avoiding Putnam's term, *social capital*, and, for a *coup de grâce*, citing a 1916 reference to the term *social capital*. He also notes in passing that Jane Jacobs independently discovered the concept long before Putnam published his famous *Bowling Alone*.

A manager's perspective is brought to bear in chapter 5, Rae's closing chapter on the height of New Haven's urbanism, where he foreshadows some of the causes of its decline by focusing on the rigidity of local government structures and the even more paralyzing multiplicity of detailed restrictions on local government action found in state legislation. This catalogue of reasons why city government was unable to accomplish anything more ambitious than routine administration of such mundane matters as the condition of sidewalks once again reinforces his argument that New Haven was prevented by the limitations on its power from arresting its decline.

His grasp of administrative detail also stands him in good stead when, in his portrayal of Dick Lee's efforts at urban renewal, he