

Boyer, M. Christine. *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983. Pp. xii, 330. Tables. \$27.50 U.S.

Mansel Blackford

Volume 13, numéro 2, octobre 1984

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018132ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018132ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Blackford, M. (1984). Compte rendu de [Boyer, M. Christine. *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983. Pp. xii, 330. Tables. \$27.50 U.S.] *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 13(2), 180–180. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018132ar>

Chicago: Continuity and Change in the Decade from 1900 to 1910") see the decline of a specifically German radical working class movement and the concomitant rise of the Socialist Party as the new radical force. The working-class movement was no longer German at its core.

These precise, carefully researched and written essays add to our understanding of infrastructure of urban-ethnic history, while Parot both erects the infrastructure and lays the brick and mortar.

Stanislaus A. Blejwas
Department of History
Central Connecticut State University

Boyer, M. Christine. *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983. Pp. xii, 330. Tables. \$27.50 U.S.

Boyer presents a much needed overview of the evolution of urban planning thought in the United States from the 1890s through the 1940s. Less a history of the realities of city planning (Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (1971) remains the standard work) than an attempt to understand the planning mentality, *Dreaming* is sharply critical of most planning concepts and concludes that because of the failures of urban planning to date "the formation of a humanistic order to the American city still lies in the future" (p. 290).

In the first two of her study's four sections, Boyer examines the development of planning thought before the First World War. While pointing out the diverse origins of planning thought, she finds that in the early 1900s it was directed at two major, interrelated goals: imposing social discipline upon an unruly urban populace and providing city services needed for private commercial and industrial growth. Both aims, Boyer finds, served the needs of private capital more than those of the rest of society. Thus, the park and playground movement, international expositions, municipal art, and comprehensive city beautiful plans were parts of the same movement, as "side by side with the creation of a disciplinary order and ceremonial harmony . . . improvers gave heed to the creation of an infrastructural framework and a regulatory land order" (p. 7). The failure of these early efforts to solve urban problems led, Boyer shows in the second half of her work, to a transformation in planning thought during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, to "a splintering into zoning ordinances, regional plans, and finally a new alliance between economic programs and state welfare programs" (p. 82). Comprehensive planning died. With the growth of suburbs made possible by the automobile, planners neglected the city core as they sought to create a new blend of urban and rural living. As fears of social disorder lessened with the decrease

in immigration, the cultural and social issues that had so concerned early city improvers were lost sight of, and "physical planning in the American city was reduced to functional metropolitan planning" (p. 196). Finally, during the crises of the Great Depression and the Second World War, Boyer writes, urban planning was subordinated to regional planning projects, (such as the T.V.A.), leading to chaotic urban developments: "skyscrapers on spatial platforms floating above the tangled streets and strangled by city highways, isolated blocks of public housing and civic or cultural centers cordoned off within their own sectors" (p. 207).

Dreaming is an important book. Its subject deserves more attention than it has received, and Boyer is to be commended for trying to relate her observations on planning thought to social and economic trends in the United States. Yet, *Dreaming* is also a frustrating book, for so much more could have been done. Deeply influenced by the work of Michael Foucault, Boyer too often fails to point out casual connections and writes in abstractions, examining planning thought without looking at what was actually being accomplished. Her study would have been much improved by some consideration of the findings of urban planning by such historians as Gunther Barth, Bill Wilson, and Mark Foster. By the same token, Boyer frequently lapses into social science jargon (as in "Disciplinary control proceeded by distributing bodies in space, allocating each individual to a cellular partition, creating a functional space out of this analytical spatial arrangement" [p. 70]) which obscures the meaning of what she is trying to say. Nonetheless, *Dreaming* is a valuable work which should be of interest to scholars concerned with the development of planning thought or the evolution of city planning in America.

Mansel Blackford
Department of History
Ohio State University

Dannenbaum, Jed. *Drink and Disorder: Temperance Reform in Cincinnati from the Washington Revival to the WCTU*. Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1984. Pp. xii, 236. \$22.50 U.S.

Noel, Thomas J. *The City and the Saloon: Denver, 1858-1916*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. Pp. xiii, 131. Illustrated, bibliography, index. \$16.50 U.S.

Professors Dannenbaum and Noel approach the subject of alcohol from very different perspectives and time periods, but both provide valuable insights into the importance of liquor in nineteenth century America. Dannenbaum focuses on temperance reformers in the two decades before the Civil War. He is concerned with the grass roots appeal of the temperance movement in Cincinnati, its structure, tactics, goals,