

**Benno Engels**, *The Poverty of Planning: Property, Class, and Urban Politics in Nineteenth-Century England*. Maryland and London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021. 461pp. £112.00/\$145.00 hbk. £38.00/\$50.00 e-book.  
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A warning may be necessary for Welsh, Irish and Scottish readers. The author, Benno Engels, is under the impression that there was an *English* parliament in the nineteenth century. There was, of course, a parliament in England but it included, and possibly even benefited from, the presence of elected representatives from other parts of the United Kingdom. Consequently, the context of *The Poverty of Planning* is weakened by Engels' inappropriate use of the term 'English Parliament'.

Benno Engels' stated objective is 'to establish why central state-sanctioned urban planning had not become a hallmark of nineteenth-century England' (p. 399). He states: 'the legislation that would be sanctioned by the English Parliament was made permissive for English local government authorities who had been left with the responsibility of deciding whether to undertake town improvements' (p. 399). To overlook the fine studies of Dublin or Glasgow, and the excellent works on Liverpool, Leeds and many boroughs in the English urban hierarchy, is to presume their councils were toothless or disinterested or incompetent in the fields of urban management. This was far from the case. For reasons of necessity, many municipal authorities were ahead of the national debate. Councillors and council officers sought and planned improvements in urban management by framing and promoting a great many local acts which the *British* parliament passed. The statistical revelations of urban mortality rates coupled with middle-class concerns about the indiscriminate impact of epidemic disease on family fortunes were sufficient motivation for local councillors to approve local plans to improve – and fund – environmental health. Friedrich Engels, amongst others, identified such issues in Manchester in 1842. Elsewhere, English boroughs responded because, politically, it was imperative to raise revenue through property taxes to manage urban development, public order and insanitary cities locally. That political will was lacking at the level of the national British government both because an urban consensus was impossible to achieve, and because framing effective and enforceable controls of a general nature was legislatively problematic given the strong county-based representation in parliament.

Engels (B.) provides 15 pages of end notes to a chapter on social theory exploring a 'neo-Marxist approach' to urban planning in Victorian England. Based on social class and property relations with themes linked to inter- and intra-class conflict, this will not be unfamiliar territory to readers of *Urban History*. Similarly, chapters on local government improvements before 1835, and on middle-class activism thereafter, set up a neo-Marxist chapter on working-class agitation which draws heavily on publications by Kirk, Gray and Joyce, amongst others. Engels then argues that a late nineteenth-century transition from industrial to monopoly capitalism marked the rise of working-class activism which, he claims, triggered 'a series of endogenous developments that helped loosen the stranglehold that property owners had been able to exert for so long over the political decision-making apparatus' (p. 317). However, as business historians have pointed out, in responding to technological changes it was capital rather than labour that altered the scale of industrial production through mergers and monopolies from the 1880s and which in turn gradually altered the composition of the political elite, locally and nationally.

Planning involves regulations, by-laws, funding and a conceptual framework for urban management and development. It involves not just houses, but amenities for homes. Sanitation, schools, parks and galleries, markets, property valuation and by the late nineteenth century public utilities and public health, all of which and more formed part of the civic mission. Only at the local level was framing such provisions feasible since faith, social composition, vested interests and political will each varied significantly from place to place. As a result, beyond a general regulatory framework and often codified long after individual towns and cities had developed their own amenities, the *British* parliament was often limited to defining minimum standards. The British parliament considered, revised, standardized and sometimes improved the detailed proposals already enshrined in local statutes and prepared by knowledgeable municipal council officials and their skilled parliamentary draughtsmen. The town clerks knew their job. It was they who took control of urban planning – and much more besides.

**Richard Rodger** 

University of Edinburgh

[Richard.Rodger@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Richard.Rodger@ed.ac.uk)

**Tara A. Dudley**, *Building Antebellum New Orleans: Free People of Color and Their Influence*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021. i + 336pp. 20 plates. 83 figures. 22 tables. Bibliography. £48.52 hbk.  
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In *Building Antebellum New Orleans: Free People of Colour and Their Influence*, Tara A. Dudley painstakingly undertakes an investigation of two families, each deeply rooted in the local community of *gens de couleur libres*, as case-studies to explore legacies in property ownership, engagement and entrepreneurship. This population of people captivated the imagination of contemporary travellers to New Orleans, and a skewed mythology developed about them that has persisted even in scholarship. Tapping into a rich historiography, Dudley joins the ranks of historians – like Virginia Meacham Gould, Shirley Elizabeth Thompson and Emily Clark among others – who have corrected key scholarly misperceptions regarding free people of colour and afforded them their due in contributing to the vibrant culture of the city. In her thematic exploration of the craftsmanship exhibited by the builder-architects as native sons of the city, who distinguished themselves from immigrants from Saint-Domingue, Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean by their perfection and usage of traditional forms, especially the Creole cottage, Dudley argues that they incorporated their own flairs into what was a quintessentially American architecture.

Dudley shows how the Dolliole and Soulié families, both headed by free mothers of colour and French fathers, left their imprint on the city in multiple ways. She divides the book into three parts – ‘Ownership: possessing the built environment’, ‘Engagement: forming and transforming the built environment’ and ‘Entrepreneurship: controlling the built environment’ – to map out the origins of both families and the processes by which they acquired, improved and managed property, and became pillars of their local communities. The family trees provided offer a helpful