

constraining the very open-endedness that he touts as a condition of democratic subjectivity. His admirable plea for a “proactive stance with regard to pluralism

itself” shows how hard it is for proponents of a heteronomous ethos to avoid the tropes, and the temptations, of sovereign mastery (p. 130).

AMERICAN POLITICS

Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization. By John Arena. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 303p. \$82.50 cloth, \$27.50 paper.
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— Jessica Trounstein, *University of California, Merced*

In this book, sociologist John Arena offers a detailed case study that explores the dismantling of government-run public housing in New Orleans, Louisiana. Through seven chronologically structured chapters, spanning 1965 to 2008, he traces the historical development of public housing apartments and the institutions created to govern them, as well as detailing the many different decisions that cumulatively led to their demolition, thereby making way for the gentrification of previously poor neighborhoods. In place of government-run housing complexes, scattered-site mixed-use and mixed-income developments were to be built and managed by public-private partnerships, and the poor were to rely increasingly on the private housing market for shelter. Arena relies on newspaper reports, interviews, archival data, and his own firsthand account as an activist to explain this transformation to privatization.

Understanding this development is vital in a city where, at one time, nearly 20% of the black population lived in government-run public housing. While many different actors supported privatization and gentrification (for political and monetary gain), Arena is particularly concerned with explaining the quiescence and support of public housing residents themselves. Focusing on a handful of black leaders drawn from the ranks of public housing tenants, he asks why these formerly radical leaders (and their advisors), who had once championed public housing, ultimately came to support drastic reductions in housing opportunities for the poor. His answer is an insidious alliance among these former radicals, foundation-funded nonprofit organizations, and the government. Nonprofits, Arena says, build public consensus around policies like the destruction of public housing that, in his eyes, ought to be opposed by poor and working-class people. *Driven from New Orleans* advances our understanding of urban politics, redevelopment, and public housing on a number of different fronts.

One of the major contributions of the book is a convincing, bottom-up description of the way in which

consent was won among black public housing residents. In the 1980s, public housing residents and leaders fought vociferously to protect public housing and won a series of victories against moves toward privatization. Arena argues that as public housing leaders became part of the city's black urban regime and powerful nonprofit organizations over the next several decades, they became limited in the types of protest actions they could engage in without losing their newly won status, and began to urge residents to “accommodate rather than challenge privatization” (p. 60).

In addition to understanding how consent was won, however, it would have been helpful to know more about *why* the support of public housing constituents was needed. Throughout the book, Arena argues that protests were damaging to elected officials and that elites needed to obtain consensus for demolition (even while efforts were made to limit democratic access to the process of redevelopment). This environment represents an enormous shift from earlier periods when elected officials and elites ran roughshod over poor residents in redeveloping cities. While the author notes this transition, he understates the importance of it. More detail regarding these democratizing trends would have strengthened the analysis.

Similarly, a careful discussion of when and why politicians are willing to work at cross-purposes with their electoral base would have increased our understanding of this case and allowed for clearer generalizations to other cities and realms of public services beyond housing. It would have been helpful, for instance, to understand the popularity of various public housing options among different groups in the electorate in order to make sense of the constraints placed on political actors. The black community in New Orleans was not united in support of public housing, and a clearer description of these preferences would have bolstered Arena's cautionary tale about the benefits of descriptive representation. As other scholars have argued, poor and working-class African Americans may be no better-off under black regimes than they were under white governance. This is an important point for scholars of representation. If electing black leaders did nothing to advance the cause of poor black residents, what would have? Arena does not give a direct answer, although he suggests that only political action outside of the bounds of government is likely to make a difference—not a particularly uplifting conclusion for democracy.

Perhaps more importantly, the book would have benefited from additional discussion of the motivations of nonprofit organizations and the conditions under

which they support privatization. The author might have presented the benefits of alliances with nonprofit organizations in addition to the costs, allowing readers to understand the incentives and limitations of different institutional arrangements. Such an approach might have generated a fruitful analysis of the alternate paths and policies that could have been pursued by the public housing leaders and residents. While Arena's thesis is convincing, it would have been strengthened by a discussion of the inevitability (or lack thereof) of the outcome.

The analysis makes another significant contribution by revealing the benefits of public housing from the perspective of the residents themselves. Arena concedes that public housing was often built in a manner that strove to control poor black populations; nonetheless, he says, public-housing apartment complexes were places of intense community development and potential sites of politicization. So while many observers have condemned the ghettoization of the nation's black poor through structures like St. Thomas and Iberville, Arena reminds readers that many people considered them homes worth saving. Yet he could have done more to map the preferences of the residents of public housing and their neighbors, especially in the later period covered by the book. He asserts that "identity politics" promulgated by the nonprofit sector undermined the organization of a movement in opposition to demolition. His argument implies that the formerly radical public housing leaders and supportive tenants acted against their own self-interest, misguided and co-opted by the privatization-seeking nonprofits, developers, and politicians. Arena dismisses opposition to his position as betrayal. But it is at least plausible that among some actors, support for dismantling of public housing was genuine.

A final contribution of the book is the evidence offered by the analysis for understanding federal/urban relationships. Many of the developments in New Orleans public housing were driven by changes in federal funding and federal requirements (like the development of tenant councils). This case offers an excellent example of the ways in which the federal government convinces lower levels of government to comply with its goals and the consequences (at times unintended) of such mandates. Arena makes clear that each small change in structure and personnel driven by federal guidelines pushed the Housing Authority of New Orleans toward the demolition of public housing.

Overall, Arena has written a detailed and insightful account of the ways in which public housing tenants in New Orleans were convinced to support their own evictions. Understanding the role of nonprofit organizations in orchestrating this consent is both interesting and useful, as is the description of the ways in which the black governing regime undermined its poor constituents. There are lessons here for a variety of different political science literatures.

The Other Welfare: Supplemental Security Income and U.S. Social Policy. By Edward D. Berkowitz and Larry DeWitt.

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— Jennifer L. Erkulwater, *University of Richmond*

Compared to Social Security, family assistance, and health care, political scientists have paid relatively little attention to disability policy and politics. Historians Edward D. Berkowitz and Larry DeWitt remind us, however, that this oversight leaves us with a blinkered view of the American welfare state. An exceptional historical account of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), *The Other Welfare* explains how a program initially designed to simplify and professionalize public assistance, to rectify all that was callous and ineffectual with state-administered programs for the poor, ended up a poster child for welfare fraud and government ineptitude. The book opens with President Richard Nixon's proposal in 1969 to create a guaranteed minimum income for the nation's poor and closes shortly after President Bill Clinton's signing of welfare-reform legislation in 1996. Bracketing these two major reform episodes, Berkowitz and DeWitt weave a compelling narrative of American antipoverty politics over the last four decades.

Serving as the foil for the rest of the book, Chapter 1 explains how SSI came to be. Administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and using the latest in computer technology to deliver cash benefits, SSI converted the state-run system of assistance programs for the aged and disabled into a single program with uniform benefit levels and eligibility rules, and without the ignominy of traditional "welfare." Embodying the can-do optimism of 1960s-era liberalism, SSI was only one piece in a flurry of legislation in the late 1960s and early 1970s that dramatically expanded Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

The rest of the chapters trace the unraveling of this can-do optimism. Almost from the start, SSI was a troubled program. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the years 1974–75 in which the SSA rushed to implement SSI, its revolutionary new public-assistance program, and explain why, despite the agency's best efforts, the launch of the program was a disaster of long lines, missed payments, erroneous payments, broken-down computers, and angry claimants. Taking readers into the thicket of disability politics, Chapters 4 and 5 discuss policymakers' tortured efforts to parse the "deserving" from the "undeserving" poor, noting why this distinction was all but impossible to maintain in the case of the disabled, as President Ronald Reagan quickly discovered during his ill-fated attempt in 1981–84 to purge the Social Security disability rolls of people who were not "truly disabled."

The disability reviews energized liberal advocacy organizations, which found SSI to be a useful vehicle