

This is a pre-print of an article accepted for publication on 11th August 2016 and scheduled for publication in *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (May 2017).

DOI: 10.1177/1478929917695299

Book Review

Blazing the Neoliberal Trail: Urban Political Development in the United States and the United Kingdom by Timothy PR Weaver.

Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 349pp., £45.50 (h/b), ISBN 9780812247824

In *Blazing the Neoliberal Trail* Timothy Weaver constructs a thoroughgoing and empirically-rooted study of neoliberalism in action. Aiming to get beyond both interest-based and purely institutionalist accounts of the rise of neoliberalism, Weaver brings an 'ideational lens' to bear (p. 7) upon his comparative analysis of British and American urban policy in the 1980s and '90s. Weaver argues that many studies of neoliberalism are couched either 'in abstract terms or in national-level settings' (p. 20). He seeks to show how neoliberal thinking became entrenched not only at the macro-level of national politics but also at the more concrete meso-level of urban life in British and American cities.

The book is structured in two parts, the first exploring the neoliberalisation of urban policy at the national level, through the ascendance of the concept of 'enterprise zones', and the second turning to how this transatlantic neoliberal policy played out 'in the trenches' of two urban environments: Philadelphia in the US, and London's Docklands in the UK. Through a forensic analysis of relevant documents drawn from archives in both countries, and insightful interviews with key political figures, Weaver develops a compelling and nuanced account of the realisation of neoliberal ideas in policy.

At the national level, Weaver finds that the concept of enterprise zones as a means for transforming inner city areas through job creation and entrepreneurial opportunities for 'social improvement' and increased 'self-worth' found purchase with the Reagan, Bush and Clinton governments and took root 'even more strongly under Tony Blair's Labour government' (p. 37). Yet at the local level, stark differences are revealed between the dynamics of this central plank of neoliberal urban policy. Weaver differentiates between neoliberalism 'by default' and 'by design'; the former describing the process of change in Philadelphia, where enterprise zones were slow to take on as part of a 'tentative, gradual, [...] reluctant turn to neoliberalism', the latter in London's Docklands, where the 'willingness and ability of Conservative government ministers to harness the power of central state institutions to impose their neoliberal blueprint' meant a 'faster, less compromised, and more radical' shift (p. 244).

Weaver's central argument about the *ideational* trajectory of neoliberalism, and its variegation in practice, is well developed and convincing. One question indirectly raised by this book is whether the cleavages that have opened up since 2015 within the Democratic and Labour parties – whose capitulation to neoliberal thinking in the Blair-Clinton years, Weaver notes, cemented the hegemony of neoliberal thought at the national level – represent the beginning of the end of neoliberal supremacy.