



## The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985 (Creating the North American Landscape (Paperback))

*By Jon C. Teaford*



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**The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985 (Creating the North American Landscape (Paperback))** By Jon C. Teaford

After prospering in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, America's great urban centers faced economic, demographic, and political decline during the depression of the 1930s. When the Second World War brought economic recovery, politicians and planners of the 1940s confidently anticipated a new golden age for big cities. But the postwar boom never came, and urban America has been waiting for the "renaissance" ever since. In "The Rough Road to Renaissance", Jon C. Teaford describes efforts in twelve older central cities in the Northeast and Midwest to achieve revitalization during the period from 1940 to 1985. Focusing on the "view from City Hall" rather than on state or federal perspectives, Teaford explores the changing trends in city politics and municipal finance as well as the policies that pursued the elusive goal of urban renaissance. He also considers the environmental, transportation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction programs undertaken to create better cities and to close the widening competitive gap with suburbia.

In the early fifties, Teaford explains, big cities were planning for a bright future. Crosstown highways, low-income highrises, and vigorous demolition drastically altered the urban landscape and confidently anticipated new development. But the automobile culture was already derailing urban renewal as city dwellers sought the good life in the suburbs. By the late sixties, rising crime, racial tension, labor militancy, and a wave of abandonment seemed to offer further evidence of impending urban demise. Yet in the 1980s, "messiah mayors" and visionary planners boosted the hopes and morale of urban residents. Once again there was talk of renaissance, but beneath the facade of revival serious problems persisted. In "The Rough Road to Renaissance", Jon Teaford tells a story that residents of Boston, Minneapolis, Chicago, New York, St. Louis, and other famous urban centers will recognize-- a story that is still being written



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# **The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985 (Creating the North American Landscape (Paperback))**

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## **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

This well-organized, well-written, and informative study analyzes a dozen large cities of the Northeast and Midwest over more than four decades, focusing primarily on the alternating cycles of optimistic reform and pessimistic realism about their fate. Teafor, author of several books on urban planning issues (e.g., *The Twentieth-Century American City*), doesn't gloss over the declining condition of many cities; he examines problems with the retail economy, tax base, transportation, housing, and much more. He recognizes that some urban centers managed to make their environment more livable, in part because they had energetic political leaders, but describes some of these leaders as naive and unable to deal with serious underlying problems. He weaves a variety of complex themes easily into an analysis of changing styles of political leadership, presenting a cogent survey of an important subject. For informed laypersons and specialists.

- *Charles K. Piehl, Mankato State Univ., Minn.*

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## **Review**

This is surely the definitive history of the postwar crisis of the American city. Jon Teafor reaffirms his standing as our best historian of American urban governance with this profound and deeply researched examination of the long struggle of politicians, planners, and citizens against the forces of decentralization and decay.

(Robert Fishman, author of *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*)

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