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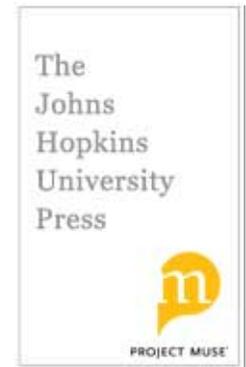
From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban
Problems in Cold War America (review)

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From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America.

By Jennifer S. Light. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
Pp. x+287. \$42.

If they can put a man on the moon, why can't they fix the slums? The question is clichéd, but not unreasonable. As Jennifer Light shows in this detailed study, veterans of Project Apollo and other aerospace and defense programs of the 1960s did indeed try to use high-tech methods to solve the problems of American cities. Building on the work of Thomas Hughes, David Jardini, and others, Light profiles "defense intellectuals," defined here as "civilian experts who participated in defense planning" for at least part of their careers (p. 239, n. 6). Carefully reading résumés, she finds all manner of policy experts passing through the Pentagon or its sponsored think-tanks—RAND and MITRE prominent among them—on their way to urban policy posts.

Joseph Califano, for example, got his start in Robert McNamara's Department of Defense before becoming Lyndon Johnson's domestic adviser and Jimmy Carter's Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Ithiel de Sola Pool of MIT used his experience studying communications in Communist countries to suggest ways to make American cities more responsive to their citizens. Even General Bernard Schriever, famous for developing missiles, founded a short-lived outfit called Urban Systems Associates.

Light tracks such experts' roles in several efforts to apply military techniques and rhetoric to urban problems. Following World War II, defense intellectuals sought, unsuccessfully, to decentralize American cities to make them less vulnerable to nuclear attack. Next they proposed computer simulations of cities to support more humane urban renewal. Space scientists promised that photographs from orbit would clarify city planning. And communications experts imagined cable television restoring American democracy. Through it all the experts claimed to be securing America against Communism, taking almost literally Johnson's declaration of war on poverty.

"In city after city," Light writes, "or innovation after innovation, few experiments achieved their promised reforms" (p. 8). Light sees three reasons for this. First, many defense intellectuals were simply not very good at handling civilian problems and proposed inappropriate solutions. "Mathematical models could not capture the complexity of goals in urban settings" (p. 86), and satellite imagery proved too blurry to be of use to planners. Second, the urban programs were never funded at the scale of military projects. When engineer Harold Finger moved from NASA to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, his research budget dropped from \$4.5 billion to \$11 million. By the early 1970s, Vietnam, Watergate, and a stalled economy left cities bankrupt and government dis-

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credited, unable to implement suggestions for community programs costing hundreds of millions. And third, the failure of the most ambitious schemes obscured the modest success of some defense technologies. Computer models improved dispatching for firefighters and police, while aerial mapping and geographic information systems—both with origins in the military—became “essential tools” for city administration (p. 138).

Light does an excellent job explaining the origins of think-tank studies and the mind-set of the defense intellectuals, but she has trouble establishing just how much of an impact they had. She does not wade into the mire of urban finances to count the savings from more efficient data processing, and only briefly does she consider the legacy of defense-inspired programs over the past thirty years. Nor does she weigh military influence against previous civilian efforts at quantifying the city, such as the *Hull-House Maps and Papers* of the 1890s or Wilbur Smith’s computerized traffic models of the 1950s. More attention to the history of city planning and policy might have given Light better perspective on the work of the newcomers. As it stands, she must hedge her bets, concluding, enigmatically, that although the defense movement produced “few changes in the day-to-day character of urban life,” it nevertheless “deeply . . . shape[d] urban analyses and city operations” (pp. 235–36).

Today, the quasi-military studies of the 1960s seem out of place, like fossilized seashells on the tops of mountains. As historians of American cities stumble across missile experts straying far from their silos, they will find guidance in this careful account of a peculiar moment in urban policy.

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Cold War Laboratory: RAND, the Air Force, and the American State, 1945–1950.

By Martin J. Collins. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002.
Pp. xviii+278. \$34.95.

In March 1946, the U.S. Army Air Forces placed a contract with Douglas Aircraft for a study to determine the best system for conducting long-range air warfare. Project RAND, as it was then called, was conceived by General Henry “Hap” Arnold and his special consultant, former MIT engineering professor Edward Bowles, as part of their vision for a reconfigured air force closely bound to industry and cognizant of the centrality of scientific and technological innovations to developing war technology and preparedness. Within two years, RAND was established as a nonprofit corporation committed to developing an interdisciplinary “science” of air warfare and employing systems analysis to solve problems of military organization and weapons development.