This extensive and theoretically informed review of the evolution of urban policy since the 1960s explores its complex interaction with changing understandings of urban life and social welfare. Highlighting connections and continuities, it examines a broad range of issues that have helped to define urban policy at different times and in different places, including race, economic regeneration and competitiveness, managing dangerous places, community, and managerialism.

The author draws on evidence from the UK to develop his broader argument, but does so with explicit cross reference to developments in the US, because of the way in which the development of urban policy in the two countries has been intertwined. He also considers the emergence of European and globalized forms of (neoliberal) urban policy since the mid 1990s, before reflecting on the hopes and possibilities that might be realized through urban policy in the future.