



Us versus them: Race, crime, and gentrification in Chicago neighborhoods, by Jan Doering

New York, Oxford University Press, 2020

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As an urban planner interested in managing social conflicts in cities, and in finding suitable solutions for guaranteeing the “right to the city,” I recommend Jan Doering’s *Us versus Them*. This is an intriguing study of community conflicts about crime, race, and gentrification, based on an analysis of Chicago’s Rogers Park and Uptown neighborhoods. Doering makes two broad contributions to the sociological literature. First, he adds to existing understanding of the link between crime and gentrification, demonstrating how anti-crime initiatives can amplify gentrification and boost the marginalization of low-income, Black, and Latino residents. Second, he shows how individuals and organizations invoke race as they negotiate the politics of crime and gentrification. Every chapter builds on a solid theoretical framework drawn from urban sociological studies around the world.

Chapter 1, the Introduction, describes the methodology. Doering conducted 3 years of comprehensive ethnographic fieldwork in two hyper-diverse neighborhoods serving as metropolitan hubs for multiple ethnic groups. Over time, his focus shifted from the politics of racial groups to the politics of racial claims-making. Chapter 2, “A Brief History of Living Together,” discusses street crime and gang violence in connection in Rogers Park and Uptown.

Chapter 3, “Racial Displacement in Action?” examines grassroots strategies for fighting crime in these two communities. In particular, Doering focuses on the ways community activists tried to harness state services by urging residents to systematically call 911 as often as possible. Despite the fact that police service is not unlimited and an overload of the system could hurt residents more than help them, some block clubs formed “911 phone trees” that allowed their members to report the same crime to the police multiple times, giving the incident more weight than a single call would have had. Community activists successfully exerted pressure to intensify policing and to close down or transform buildings and businesses they considered to be “problems.”

Chapter 4, “You’ve Got Reason to Be Afraid,” investigates electoral campaigning to help us understand the shaping of local political dynamics in the two communities. Candidates hoped to capitalize on voters’ fear of crime but the candidates, typically new candidates and not incumbents, ran the risk of being charged with racist fearmongering. Generally, incumbents appeared content to deemphasize crime if their opponents allowed them to do so. Incumbents worried that frightened voters might turn against them, holding them responsible for having failed to make the neighborhood safer during their time in office.

Chapter 5, “Resisting Gentrification and Criminalization,” homes in on conflict in Rogers Park’s and Uptown’s political arena, examining how social justice organizations tried to fight racial marginalization and gang violence at the same time. The case study focuses on the creation of Resist Youth Criminalization and Harassment (RYCH), an Uptown-based, grassroots organization that fought the closing of a basketball court in Broncho Billy Park. The teenagers spent so much time in a play lot that the play lot did not seem open to everyone. Doering describes how criminalization and gentrification went hand in hand. The gentrifiers used the police to banish Black residents from public spaces in order to make the area more attractive for White middle-class buyers. When the park became more attractive, this did make the area more attractive to Whites and led to the displacement of Black renters. To oppose this process, RYCH developed an ambitious racial justice program for Uptown, including an initiative to reduce gang violence.

Chapter 6, “White Vigilantes?” analyzes the ways that positive loiterers named “Lakesiders” in Rogers Park and “Northtowners” in Uptown acted to warn gang members and drug dealers that residents were organized and ready to call the police. The term *positive loiterers* refers to White residents that regularly walked the neighborhood together in order to detect crime and to report suspicious behavior to the police. The chapter analyzes how safety volunteers responded to the neighborhoods’ different climates of racial contestation. In doing so, it reveals an irony of racial politics. Because crime was a hotly contested topic in Uptown, a local positive loitering group self-consciously engaged African Americans but avoided practices that could have exposed the positive loiterers to racial challenges (i.e., being called racists). These efforts fashioned the group into an

example of interracial cooperation in a polarized neighborhood. By contrast, the positive loiterers in Rogers Park did not expect to face racial challenges and developed an aggressive style that alienated Black and Latino residents. In addition, this chapter reveals that Black and Latino residents did not oppose public safety activism monolithically; some of them joined positive loitering initiatives to promote peace and safety, although the Rogers Park group did not accommodate them.

Chapter 7, “Racial Identities and Political Standpoints,” is the most important to me because it helped me to understand the dynamics of racial politics in Chicago. Doering believes that race is a key factor for explaining community conflict in Chicago. He notes that since most of the newcomers to Rogers Park and Uptown were White and middle-class while many of those facing displacement were Black, gentrification was suffused with Black-White tension. In general, the politics of crime and gentrification produced a complex tangle of divisions and alliances in Rogers Park and Uptown and most of the relationships within this tangle were in some way related to race. Doering found that African Americans in Rogers Park and Uptown he spoke with believed that preventing crime among Black youths was key. Children and teenagers needed good schools, after school programs, summer jobs, and opportunities for cultural enrichment that would keep them away from gangs. There was widespread support for the notion that the community should not simply give up on those who run into trouble. African Americans maintain a basic level of empathy for gang members and their situation, which is not always the case among Whites.

Chapter 8, “Crime and Gentrification beyond Black and White,” explores immigrants’ participation in neighborhood politics by providing a snapshot of three immigrant concentrations in these two communities: Uptown’s Southeast Asian enclave, Rogers Park’s Latino-dominated Clark Street, and a community of African immigrants residing in both neighborhoods. The chapter demonstrates that while Asians and Latinos suffered from crime but not gentrification, Sub-Saharan African immigrants were affected by both crime and gentrification. Very few immigrants participated in safety initiatives or social justice events—indicating a low level of political participation. For instance, residents of the three communities were distrustful and hostile to Chicago’s community policing program called C.A.P.S.—Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy. Launched in the early 1990s, the program aimed not only to reduce crime but also to improved trust in the police and an improved ability to fight disorder. However, an unexpected consequence of the program is that it led to inflated perceptions of crime and boosted gentrification.

To sum up, *Us versus Them* is a serious and insightful book for urban scholars, policymakers, and the lay public interested in reducing racial segregation and addressing gentrification and crime. However, the book has two flaws. First, Doering describes gentrification in both Rogers Park and Uptown but does not offer suggestions for how to slow or stop it, assuming it desirable to do so. Second, the book would have benefited from more charts, figures, and maps to help describe and explain the link between crime, race, and gentrification. For instance, Chapter 8 portrays the perspectives of three ethnoracial communities based on direct interviews, but Doering did not summarize the information in tabular form (i.e., the number of interviewees, the questions asked, the place where the interviews were conducted). Also, a map could have helped to guide me as to where gentrification was taking place in these two communities.

The book is relevant for policymakers and researchers in Europe, where the Council of Europe and the European Commission has recently launched the “Intercultural Cities Initiative” (ICC) to develop, implement and monitor a novel approach to integration, based on the concept of diversity advantage (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/home>). *Us versus Them* may be helpful to Europeans tasked with challenge of implementing “diversity advantage.”

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