

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Goetz, Edward.**

*New Deal Ruins: Race Economic Justice, and Public Housing Policy.*

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.

256 pages.

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*New Deal Ruins* provides a welcome and important addition to the study of public housing redevelopment and revitalization. The book tracks the rise of public housing “dismantling” in the United States since the 1970s (a trend also present in Canada, Australia, Europe, and elsewhere), and offers a compelling critique of this policy and its impacts on public housing residents. Edward Goetz is a leading scholar on American public housing, known for thoughtful and balanced work on a subject surrounded by, as he puts it, “myth and hype” (p. 23). *New Deal Ruins* sidesteps any sensationalism and develops a nuanced, readable, and thoroughly convincing critique of this dismantling. This work adds to a growing body of critical scholarship on public housing redevelopment that is amplifying the voices of tenants and activists who oppose the demolition of these communities and the “deconcentration” of low-income tenants. It is a must-read for urban policy makers, housing scholars, planning students, and public housing advocates.

*New Deal Ruins* points to three forces—racism, neoliberalism, and gentrification—to explain the emergence of contemporary public housing demolition programs. These themes are tackled over six chapters that explore the impacts of dismantling at various scales (project, neighbourhood, city) and that weave together local stories, legal and policy histories, new qualitative and quantitative research findings, and theoretical critique. Chapter One traces the history of public housing policy in the US, in which exaggerated “loud failures” have overshadowed the “quiet successes” of a program that has safely and affordably housed thousands and thousands of Americans. Chapter Two outlines the recent history of dismantling, and the links between race, gentrification, and public housing demolition. Chapter Three examines redevelopment policy in Atlanta, Chicago, and New Orleans—three cities in which dismantling has been taken to its extreme. Chapter Four examines project-level data to demonstrate the central role of race in redevelopment, finding that African American communities have been disproportionately targeted for demolition, and that African Americans have been subject to higher rates of forced removal from their homes. Chapter Five outlines why this type of displacement is problematic based on original data (from a project in Duluth, Minnesota) as well as a summary of research findings from redevelopment sites across the US. Chapter Six looks at neighbourhood-level impacts of dismantling, and how the “benefits” of gentrification come at the expense of public housing tenants in the form of displacement. *New Deal Ruins* concludes with an assessment of public housing policy and a set of policy recommendations, which range from the immediately practical to longer-term, transformational alternatives to neoliberal redevelopment.

*New Deal Ruins* makes a number of important contributions. One of these is its fresh take on the historical significance of 1990s-era redevelopment programs. While HOPE VI and the like are understood as something new—neoliberal policy innovations meant

to chip away at public housing as a welfare state institution—Goetz demonstrates how they are also continuing with a broader project of dismantling that has been underway for decades, building, for example, on *de facto* demolition programs of the 1980s. Another key scholarly and political contribution is this book's racial analysis of dismantling policy. The undeniable race-based impacts are demonstrated in clearly argued terms that will satisfy mainstream and conservative readers, while the conclusion that redevelopment is "racist policy" provides ammunition for housing activists and radical scholars alike. Finally, this work unsettles taken-for-granted planning orthodoxies in a crisp, readable, and methodical fashion. This is a difficult task, in a context where public housing is so stigmatized, its residents and architecture so popularly degraded, that redevelopment is popularly seen as a "common sense," and even benevolent policy. Goetz challenges these conceptions, providing a counter-narrative emphasizing the benefits of public housing, critiquing the validity of pro-deconcentration discourse, and outlining scholarly findings that challenge the presumed benefits of redevelopment. Critiques of redevelopment are often dismissed for naively romanticizing public housing, or defending the status quo in places with real problems. The arguments in this book, however, cannot be ignored. They are made with considerable nuance and thoughtfulness, thoroughly backed up with careful research, and presented in a clear and very readable style.

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**O'Donoghue, Daniel P. (ed).**  
*Urban Transformations: Centres, Peripheries and Systems*  
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209 pages  
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The definition and interpretation of what is considered "urban" is in constant flux. Debates regarding the precise terminology of places have resulted in continuously changing typologies that reflect the complexity of cities and their hinterland. *Urban Transformations: Centres, Peripheries and Systems*, a collection of discrete chapters by members of the International Geographical Union Urban Commission, explores the relationship between core and peripheral areas at a range of historical, spatial and conceptual scales. The goal of the book, as articulated by editor Daniel P. O'Donoghue, is to provide students with "real exposure to, and understanding of, the evolving form and function of cities and their associated peripheral regions as well as their impact on modern twenty-first century landscapes." As a collection of essays, the book presents varied and interesting case studies, however, as an educational resource the book is hindered by awkward organization and the dissimilarity cases. The wide temporal and geographic range covered in the book, coupled with extensive context-dependent details within each chapter, makes it difficult to grasp the broader understanding that the editor seeks.

Thematically, the book is built around the idea of “urban transformations.” The broadness of the theme is reflected in the diverse array of topics covered. Many chapters touch on, and a few focus on, the changing spatial structure of urban areas, however, the majority of chapters are stand-alone products with little relation to the rest of the book. Beyond the sweeping catchall of “urban transformations,” it is difficult to identify many other threads tying the different chapters together as the focus shifts from Internet services in Madrid to riots in England, or childcare in Tokyo to segregation in South Africa.

The diversity of the chapters helps fulfill the editor’s goal of providing students with real exposure to a range of global urban evolution case studies. As individual pieces of work, the chapters provide insight to the resilience and transformative processes of cities, but unfortunately the sum does not provide much more than the individual parts. Despite some strong sections, overall the book is hindered by three significant shortcomings.

First, the book’s organization is not intuitive. The chapters are organized by geographic region. In the introduction, the editor explains that any one approach to organizing such distinct chapters will attract criticism and that the choice is one of preference rather than correctness. That being said, his choice of organization is not conducive to gaining a broader, global understanding of the material. Not only does the book not flow from chapter to chapter, this approach undermines the global nature of the material—one of the book’s strongest points. By clustering chapters of similar geography together, it is more difficult for the reader to appreciate the similarities and differences that arise from global comparisons.

Second, the range of topics is too great. Although the diversity of the material was no doubt intended to be an asset, it ultimately acts as a hindrance. By including chapters on a wide range of topics, geographies, and time periods, there is little common ground for the reader to stand on. Additionally, the constant fluctuation of context-dependent information is a barrier to gaining a cross-national understanding of the various phenomena.

Third, there is a lack of consistency in the style, research quality and writing quality of the chapters. Due to the organizational approach, research papers are intermixed with report-like articles and exploratory essays. This unpredictability is awkward for the reader as it is difficult to establish consistent expectations. This is unfortunate as many chapters, such as Jim Simmons’ study of power nodes in Toronto, are clear, concise, well-articulated pieces of research.

The global scope of the book remains its strongest feature. Unfortunately, due to the aforementioned factors, the book is best used as a targeted resource for a select number of chapters rather than as a body of work as a whole. Considering that students are the target audience, a stronger thread is needed to tie the chapters together. O’Donoghue’s chapter on core-peripheral contrasts in South East England could have been expanded into a template for other chapters to follow. The book contains a lot of good information and interesting hypotheses; however it is in need of stronger editorial guidance, better organization and simplified themes.

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