



How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood, by Peter Moskowitz

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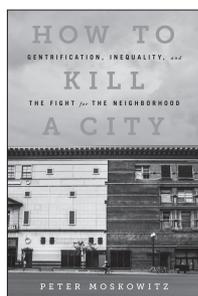
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Peter Moskowitz. (2017). *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood*. New York, NY: Nation Books. 272 pages. \$26.99 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Wei Zhai, *University of Florida*

Contemporary readers of Jane Jacobs's (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* might wonder why Jacobs was so worried about the destruction of America's big cities.

Most of America's cities have thrived in the past two decades like they haven't for a long time. Urban living is in, and big-city real estate markets are hot. But with the rising fortunes of cities has come the destruction Jacobs feared, in the form of gentrification.

There are no clear answers to the questions of what gentrification really means, what causes it, who controls it, and how it actually changes neighborhoods and the people who live in them. Peter Moskowitz attempts to answer these questions in his new book *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood*. In it he details how gentrification has swept through some of America's biggest cities: Detroit (MI), San Francisco (CA), New York (NY), and post-Katrina New Orleans (LA).

Moskowitz is very negative about the future of American cities. He highlights the uneven treatment of poor neighborhoods during the post-Katrina period in New Orleans. He details how the government undertook storm clean-up in less desirable neighborhoods, which left room for these neighborhoods to be rebuilt without as much concentrated poverty and blight. In his chronicle of Detroit, Moskowitz shows how gentrification differs in a city that is steadily emptying out because of the city's mayor. Mayor Dave Bing proposed shrinking the boundaries of Detroit to focus on the downtown area while cutting out the struggling outer ring. Even though the proposal was not approved, developers and state governments still invested primarily in the downtown area. Instead of wanting to keep economic growth in concentrated areas, residents of San Francisco and New York struggle to contain it. Despite stable economies, liberal leanings, and high involvement in municipal politics in both New York and San Francisco, policies that could help poorer residents have been slow to be enacted and are overwhelmed by the influx of new private capital.

How to Kill a City adds to the growing canon aimed at understanding and explaining the process of gentrification, but there seems a slippery concept of the word *gentrification*. According to this book, gentrification is "violence" (p. 4), "trauma" (p. 5), "systemic violence" (p. 5), and "revanchism" (p. 9). We also get "colonization, occupation, genocide" (p. 17) and "nefarious" (p. 36). Clearly, gentrification requires a clearer definition so that citizens can understand it, scholars can measure it, and planners can respond to it.

Moskowitz argues that choices by governments limited the creation of affordable housing and changed public housing policies,

giving poorer residents little refuge in increasingly expensive cities. However, few chapters use critical assessment to strengthen these arguments, which could be improved with the addition of data and maps. More specifically, when Moskowitz raises important issues about gentrification, class strife, and capitalism, he relies largely on assumptions and unsubstantiated assertions, with little evidence to support his many theories about the nature and causes of gentrification. The book relies largely on perception and discussions with residents, developers, and government officials.

The closing chapters do provide some utility for government officials and policymakers. Moskowitz argues that gentrification involves the investments and decisions of the private entities, including developers and big corporations, that decide to set up shop in new neighborhoods, which can be very beneficial for urban areas that are struggling. But when city leaders become too reliant on the plans and dollars of the private sector, the people living and working in these neighborhoods have no one to look out for them and the livelihoods they have built. The public sector depends on taxes from the private sector, which makes it parasitic and often more interested in tax revenues than in protecting existing residents from the forces of gentrification.

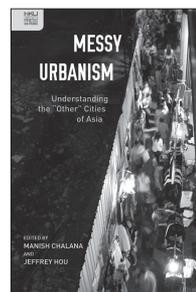
Despite its weaknesses, *How to Kill a City* provides a robust tale of how gentrification happens in four very different cities. The book is a tremendous resource for professional planners seeking to understand how and why gentrification happens and why it yields expensive neighborhoods and commercial areas in America's big cities. The book can help planners initiate productive conversations with elected officials and citizens about this thorny issue.

Reference

Jacobs, J. (1961). *The death and life of great American cities*. New York, NY: Random House.

Wei Zhai is a doctoral student in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Florida.

International Planning



Manish Chalana and Jeffrey Hou (Eds.). (2016). *Messy Urbanism: Understanding the "Other" Cities of Asia*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 268 pages. \$75.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Katherine Idziorek, *University of Washington*

Messy Urbanism: Understanding the "Other" Cities of Asia, edited by Manish Chalana and Jeffrey Hou, is a collaborative and cross-disciplinary effort to define and illustrate the physical, social, and cultural aspects of informal urban development in Asia. Often oversimplified and viewed as messy by