

Newcomers: Gentrification and Its Discontents

Matthew L. Schuerman

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Matthew L. Schuerman's measured *Newcomers* examines gentrification and how it impacts cities for good and ill.

Terms are defined with care in the text, which argues that new people moving into older urban neighborhoods don't create problems until displacement occurs. When those who already lived in the area can no longer afford to live there, or when they feel pressure to leave, gentrification becomes a social justice issue. It's one that impacts many US cities, including three—Chicago, San Francisco, and New York City—that the book explores in detail.

Covering policy choices at the citywide and neighborhood level as well as individual champions of neighborhoods—like the Ortner, who used their influence to make changes to the landscape of New York's Park Slope—the book focuses on causes and effects. Most statements are dispassionate and avoid advocating for specific strategies for urban redevelopment.

Nine sections cover the origins of urban renewal, development from the 1970s to the 1990s, and the growing conflict surrounding gentrification in the past twenty years. Issues are discussed with expertise, from profit-driven real estate development to longtime, low-income residents who're confronted by the artistic and professional classes who relocate into their gentrified neighborhoods. Taking a historian's approach, the text teases out its subjects' motives and clarifies their choices without casting them as pure villains or heroes.

The conclusion is mixed in a fitting way. If there is a thread throughout the book, it is the notion that cities would be better off "having fewer rules but enforcing them better." The text advocates for better implementation of effective strategies, including rent control, nonprofit housing organizations, and homeownership assistance.

Newcomers approaches a thorny and politically charged topic with nuance, resulting in an insightful, thorough portrait of seventy years of gentrification.

LAURA LEAVITT (November / December 2019)

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