

BOOK REVIEW

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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