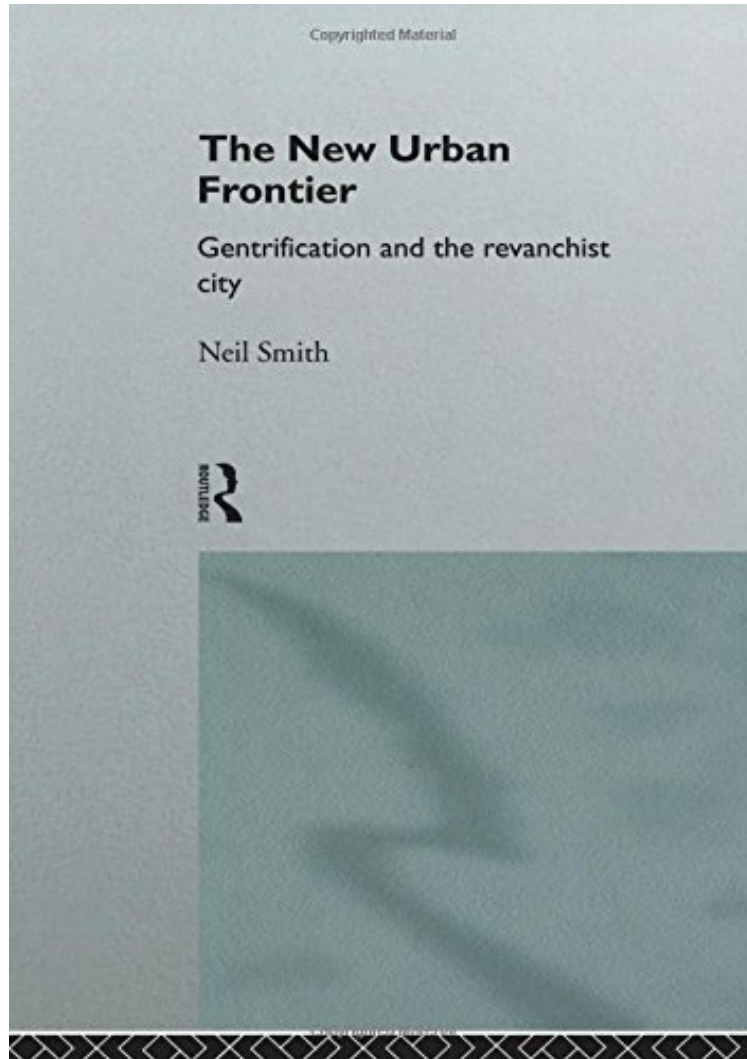


(Download) The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City

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Neil Smith

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#435293 in Books Routledge 1996-09-22 1996-08-22 Original language: English PDF # 1 11.69 x .65 x 8.26l, 1.10 #File Name: 041513255X288 pages | File size: 34.Mb

Neil Smith : The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Cities want the well-to-do, not the average person. By George H. Conklin New unreleased census data bears out what the author predicted 10 years ago: cities are revanchist and want to redevelop with the wealthy in mind. Thus there is a great emphasis on downtowns with tax subsidized housing for the above average household. Indeed, the modern city is best described as the revanchist city. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Gentrification: A structural and cultural analysis By M. Macias Trained as a geographer, Neil Smith is currently a Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at CUNY Graduate School, and the Director of the

Center for Place, Culture, and Politics. In the intellectual tradition of David Harvey, Smith brings a Marxist perspective to issues of contemporary political economy, urban social theory, and the theory of geography. The *New Urban Frontier* represents a collection and revision of many of his earlier writings on the subject. Though the book reads like separate essays rather than a cohesive narrative, it provides a theoretical framework and brief history lesson for anyone interested in understanding the complex political and economic conditions that have given rise to gentrification. Additionally, Smith's analysis of frontier imagery, and his premise of "revanchism" of the state, which book-ends the collection, offer rich critical material for a deeper understanding of the cultural context for this phenomena. Smith's main argument is that the cycles of the economic system and the needs of capital are the main drivers of gentrification, not the social or "demand-side" factors often cited. However, this does not mean that he ignores the deeply powerful cultural narrative that has facilitated these economic processes. In the introduction, Smith discusses the image of the frontier in the U.S. national imagination, and how it has been employed in the narrative of gentrification. Smith's clear-eyed view of how the central city has been explicitly marketed to "urban pioneers" as a terrain to be explored, conquered, and civilized theorizes gentrification as a "frontier": a process of violence, appropriation and displacement sanitized by a narrative of individualized struggle and triumph. Furthermore, Smith contends that this urban frontier is not the object of a "return to the city" by a cultural elite that has rejected the suburbs, which is also a strong theme in the gentrification narrative. Smith uses empirical data to show that the majority of gentrifiers are not from the suburbs, but city residents of other neighborhoods drawn by cheap housing and new public and private investment. Though this evidence would be stronger if there were a more current study to draw from, his critique rejects the idea that gentrification is inherently anti-suburban: "Albeit a reversal in geographic terms, the gentrification and redevelopment of the inner city represents a clear continuation of the forces and relations that led to suburbanization. (p. 87)" Smith is at his strongest in his explanation of these forces and relations that lead to gentrification. He provides an historical context and relies on case studies (Philadelphia's Society Hill, New York's Lower East Side, Harlem, Budapest, Amsterdam and Paris) to advance his case for a theory of gentrification. He clearly illustrates how experiences of gentrification, though they may be different, share common characteristics of uneven development, cycles of divestment and reinvestment, and displacement. From here, Smith proposes a Rent Gap theory of gentrification. Rent Gap theory is based on an understanding of the cyclical nature of capitalism, which requires underdevelopment and redevelopment (driven by the needs of capital, not consumer choice). According to Smith, neighborhoods decline when the built environment in which capital is invested reaches a point in their life cycles where there is more value in decline (for future new use) than in maintenance. Gentrification happens when there is a sufficient gap between capitalized ground rent under present use and potential ground rent. This spurs both private and public investment and provides a new cycle of investment and profit for private capital. Smith acknowledges that there are weaknesses in his theory, particularly in terms of how social conditions, cultural shifts, and demand-side factors also contribute to neighborhood changes. At the time of his writing, Smith predicted that gentrification would continue but at a slower pace, when in fact the housing boom of the late 1990s was in large part tied to massive redevelopment of downtowns and central cities. However, the housing bubble also perfectly illustrates that on which his analysis is based: the cyclical nature of capitalism prescribes exactly these flows of increased investment and ebbs of divestment, punctuated by periodic crises. While Smith analyzes gentrification as a predominantly market-driven process, throughout the book he implicates the state for its role in protecting and advancing the interests of private capital and the upper class. Using the term "revanchism" (an allusion to the French nationalist "Revanchists" that sought to punish those who "stole" France during the Revolution), Smith paints a picture of "a divided city where the victors are increasingly defensive of their privilege, such as it is, and increasingly vicious defending it (p. 227)." He points to the criminalization of the poor and homeless, the policing of public space, and the militarization of law enforcement as examples of the increasing vengefulness of the state against the least powerful. While Smith was writing during a time of intense "revanchism" in federal policy (Welfare Reform and the Rockefeller Drug Laws provide two good examples), this analysis is just as powerful and relevant today, particularly in relation to gentrification and the reclamation of the inner city for the upper class. While gentrification is still being spun as benign at worst and benevolent at best, the poor, homeless, and working class bear the brunt of inadequate social services, "quality of life" ordinances, police harassment and other punitive policies that serve to enforce a vision of the city that does not belong to them.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. beyond uneven development

By M. Ghazal

I'll start with the bad news: If you're familiar with Neil Smith, you'll realize, as he mentions in the Acknowledgments, that most of these chapters aren't new. The majority are revamped mashings of a variety of articles he wrote. Nonetheless, new work still fills a lot of *New Urban Frontier*. His considerations for the cultural production/consumption of gentrification (i.e. frontier discourse) are rather new and important, considering previous articles where he rejects social emphases (and his following article in 1999 with James DeFilipis where he re-affirms the priority of economic analyses). The book also attempts to negotiate with gentrification on a global context, considering, for example, the intricacies of uneven dev. at the global level, and 'three European cities'. Also, and I felt this was a treat, two chapters discuss other theories of gentrification and urban (re)development on local (US?) and global levels. Personally, I would recommend this book as a great example of gentrification studies - the book attempts

to open up the many facets of this phenomenon (local-global economic trends, social correlations, cultural aspects, and even a little bit on future resistance). It's also quite ideal for anyone being introduced to the field, as Smith makes helpful attempts to survey the many opposing positions. Personally, I preferred the articles.

Why have so many central and inner cities in Europe, North America and Australia been so radically revamped in the last three decades, converting urban decay into new chic? Will the process continue in the twenty-first century or has it ended? What does this mean for the people who live there? Can they do anything about it? This book challenges conventional wisdom, which holds gentrification to be the simple outcome of new middle-class tastes and a demand for urban living. It reveals gentrification as part of a much larger shift in the political economy and culture of the late twentieth century. Documenting in gritty detail the conflicts that gentrification brings to the new urban 'frontiers', the author explores the interconnections of urban policy, patterns of investment, eviction, and homelessness. The failure of liberal urban policy and the end of the 1980s financial boom have made the end-of-the-century city a darker and more dangerous place. Public policy and the private market are conspiring against minorities, working people, the poor, and the homeless as never before. In the emerging revanchist city, gentrification has become part of this policy of revenge.

... beautifully written and illustrated ... In pulling together this collection of essays, Smith has done an extraordinary job of weaving together materials written over the course of 15 years ...About the AuthorNeil Smith is professor of Geography and acting Director of the Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture. An urban geographer and social theorist, he has written extensively on gentrification, the history of geography, and the production of nature. He is author of *Uneven Development* (Blackwell 1991) and of the forthcoming *The Geographical Pivot of History: Isaiah Bowman and the American Century* (John Hopkins Press).