

Book Review

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Hyra, Derek. *Slow and Sudden Violence—Why and When Uprisings Occur* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2024), 368 pp. ISBN: 9780520401471.

In *Slow and Sudden Violence: Why and When Uprisings Occur*, Hyra argues that gentrification is often positioned as a tool for revitalization even though the reality is that it's a form of "slow violence" that displaces low-income, primarily Black communities. He delves into the process of transformation of historically Black, low-income neighborhoods into an affluent, predominantly white community by diving into the real estate histories of St. Louis and Baltimore. This book is not simply a discussion on urban transformation but it is about the invisible social, political, and economic violence committed through public policies and private investment that exacerbate inequalities and lead to the formation of a new urban underclass that is excluded from the benefits of redevelopment.

While many scholarly books written about gentrification focus on the consequences for both the neighborhood and long-term residents vulnerable to displacement, Hyra emphasizes the more subtle "slow violence" of it over decades. The term "slow violence" was coined by Nixon (2011, 2), referring to the gradual and covert harm. Hyra's take on "slow violence" adds a unique theoretical dimension to the ongoing debate on gentrification and more broadly, urban transformation. He highlights how gentrification leads to displacement over time, creating a powerful juxtaposition of how urban change can destroy communities in visible and invisible ways. He also contrasts the slow violence that occurs invisibly with policies and investments in urban areas with sudden, dramatic, and visible events such as police brutality and riots.

He contends that police violence is not an isolated incident but a part of a much larger cycle of racial and spatial oppression. He connects this violence to urban redevelopment policies that segregate, displace, and gentrify poor, Black neighborhoods. He argues that these policies create a system and environment of poverty and trauma, in addition to stark economic and class differences. Further, he analyzes the intersections of race, class, space, and power from a critical race theoretical framework, situating his analysis in the broader scholarly discussion of racial and spatial injustices.

Building on the earlier critiques of gentrification, such as Wacquant's (2008) work on urban marginality, Hyra emphasizes the cultural dimensions of displacement, which contributes to the sense of alienation for the long-term residents. Although Hyra critiques the dysfunctionality and disorganization of the neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and that bulldozing them would leave displaced residents better off. His challenge was not as explicit as that of scholars such as Gans (1962) and Fullilove (2004) in their studies of urban displacement. These scholars make the argument clear that rather than being disorganized, these communities often had essential networks of informal social capital and community cohesion which forced displacement destroys.

While Hyra's book touches on the displacement of marginalized communities, particularly Black neighborhoods, it fails to acknowledge the existing social bonds and community networks that were already there. Many of the neighborhoods being demolished or redeveloped, especially public housing projects, were genuine communities despite being poor and marginalized. This could have been emphasized more in the book. Hyra's critique of the economic and cultural impacts of gentrification tends to focus more on broader processes of hypergentrification and the racial and class divides that it exacerbates.

That being said, his analysis is powerful as he goes beyond the descriptive and simplistic good versus bad narrative of the role of gentrification to the more analytical and historically comparative account of inequality and racial tensions exacerbated by gentrification. The evidence provided in the book is very convincing because it addresses the personal and systemic impact of gentrification using qualitative and quantitative evidence. He highlights the voices of the residents who lived through these transformations to provide personal narratives. Their stories humanize the data, demonstrating the experience of both the slow erosion of their community and sudden shocks such as police brutality or the abrupt closure of a long-standing business that comes with gentrification. He also uses historical data, urban policies, and demographic statistics to further illuminate the neighborhood's economic and social changes over time. This blend of personal experience narratives and statistical data presents a multidimensional view of the impacts of gentrification at the micro (individual) and macro (systemic) level perspectives.

He critiques the well-intentioned policies of urban revitalization, such as tax incentives and mixed-income housing, which bring improvements to a neighborhood that now serves the interests of new and more wealthy residents at the expense of displacing the already marginalized groups. This critique highlights how well-intentioned policies for one group can also have adverse outcomes for another. This perspective also aligns with critical

urban theories. We, on the other hand, argue that such policies were never well-intended because their foundation is based on estimated profit at the expense of poor, vulnerable populations.

Despite the strong academic rigor and accessibility of the book, it lacks more detailed policy prescriptions. One of the critiques of this book is that there is still a need for comparative analysis with other cities facing similar issues. Although Hyra excels at diagnosing the problem and tracing its historical roots, his writing focuses less on concrete solutions to mitigate the negative effects of gentrification. The analytical approach of the book provides a good understanding of the effects of gentrification and the role of public policies and private investments. Still, it falls short in providing realistic solutions to this issue.

Overall, though, Hyra's work makes a significant and innovative contribution to understanding gentrification's broader social implications—including its slow violence. He expands the scope of existing discussions about displacement and urban inequality that focus on class conquest and economic exploitation by highlighting the cultural and emotional violence experienced by displaced communities. His rigorous research and clear writing make the book accessible to both academic and general readers. *Slow and Sudden Violence* is a must-read for anyone trying to understand the complexities of gentrification in a hypergentrified city. We highly recommend this book to those studying sociology, urban policy, race, or class with an emphasis on American cities.

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