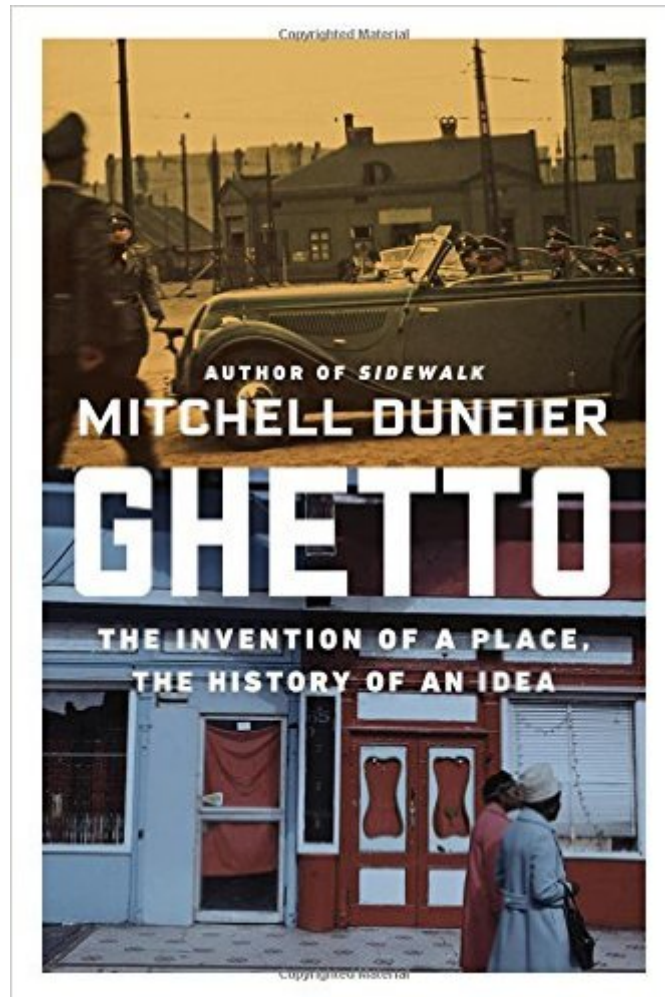


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Ghetto: The Invention Of A Place, The History Of An Idea



Synopsis

A five-hundred-year story of exclusion and containment, from the first Jewish ghetto to the present. On March 29, 1516, the city council of Venice issued a decree forcing Jews to live in a closed quarter, the ghetto named for the copper foundry that once occupied the area. The term stuck, and soon began its long and consequential history. In this sweeping account, Mitchell Duneier traces the idea of the ghetto from its beginnings in the sixteenth century and its revival by the Nazis to the present day. We meet pioneering black thinkers such as Horace Cayton, a graduate student whose work on the South Side of Chicago established a new paradigm for thinking about Northern racism and black poverty in the 1940s. We learn how the psychologist Kenneth Clark subsequently linked the slum conditions in Harlem with black powerlessness in the civil rights era, and we follow the controversy over Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report on the black family. We see how the sociologist William Julius Wilson refocused the debate on urban America as the country retreated from racially specific remedies, and how the education reformer Geoffrey Canada sought to transform the lives of inner-city children in the ghetto. By expertly resurrecting the history of the ghetto from Venice to the present, Duneier's *Ghetto* provides a remarkable new understanding of an age-old concept. He concludes that if we are to understand today's ghettos, the Jewish and black ghettos of the past should not be forgotten.

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Customer Reviews

As I approach seventy, it is harder and harder for me to read non-stop for long periods of time

without taking a break, unless it is a good mystery novel of course. But *Ghetto* was one of those rare exceptions. One reason for that is that Duneier is simply an excellent writer and story teller. This is an enviable talent for a scholar to have, i.e., the ability to write a book with twenty-seven pages of endnotes (a fair amount of which I read) and seventeen pages of bibliographic references that is hard to put down. Duneier provides an excellent intellectual history of the ghetto and how "the mental architecture of stigma and confinement," to quote Patricia Collins, has imposed itself on different groups, at different times, and in different places. But the book is more than that and could not be more timely. We have the presumptive nominee of a major political party calling for a ban on all Muslims from entering the country (and many of his supporters in favor of making the practice of Islam illegal in the United States) and referring to Mexican immigrants as rapists (and for good measure insulting a federal judge of Mexican descent); a spate of deadly shootings of unarmed black men by police officers with few indictments to prosecute despite compelling evidence to the contrary (to at least go to trial); and in Britain a majority vote to leave the EU based in substantial measure on xenophobia. We are still grappling in the twenty-first century with what W.E. B. DuBois called the problem of the twentieth century. *Ghetto* gives us a better insight into why that is — why it is that the problem has proven so intractable. His comparisons are careful, outlining what different groups, experiences, and periods had in common and what made each unique.

This book resonated with me on so many levels: Black scholars defining/illuminating my childhood home (the ghetto); becoming aware that the "ghetto" originated with the Jews centuries ago; while the Jewish ghetto was more one of group solidarity - people thriving within their culture - the African American (AA) ghetto was/is more like a prison/encampment with pretty much no opportunity to get out (e.g. generational); more information on restrictive covenants (who knew) and how they were demonically planned to keep Black folks in very small dense communities with hardly any services (the results of which still impact our communities today); how AA have not been thought of as humans (kinda knew but when you hear more proof — |whoo) since forever; how the government, including colleges and powerful national outside organizations, were complicit (knew this too but again more proof) in systematically and diabolically upholding the draconian policies and unfair real estate planning practices. The author juxtaposes the Jewish ghetto where people "simultaneously suffered and flourished" and were able to move far away from their ghetto and fellow Jews, with the AA ghetto and how they were unable to "break through restrictive covenants (in addition to red lining and the rest) to the borders of existing neighborhoods"; offering limited opportunities no matter how successful. — | black settlement patterns were unnatural and based

on white aspirations to racial purity. They did not resemble those of other ethnic and racial groups. I especially appreciated how Duneier framed and enlightened the 'ghetto' term, as it relates to blacks, from mainly AA scholars' perspectives.

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