



Davarian L. Baldwin, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities Are Plundering Our Cities*, New York: Bold Type Books, 2021. ISBN: 9781568588926 (cloth); ISBN: 9781568588919 (ebook)

As many US universities shuttered their campuses in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and students and faculty logged in from bedrooms, kitchens, and cars for vision-blurring hours of Zoom, pundits and practitioners alike debated the implications of this unprecedented shift to online education. The locus of higher education seemed to have been transported to the digital realm, or at least fragmented away from the central campus. Davarian Baldwin's *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* refocuses attention on the material and political role that universities play in contemporary US cities, considering their function not only as sites of learning and research but also as landlords, property developers, employers, police, and power brokers. Baldwin exhorts us to abandon discussions of universities which stick to "purely educational terms" and to set our sights on the "UniverCity", "one of the most central yet least examined social forces shaping today's cities" (p.6, 12).

Baldwin's text comes after roughly two decades of crystallization of and debate within the emerging field of Critical University Studies (CUS), which aims to historicize the often decontextualized and romanticized university (see, for the main contours and fractures of CUS, Boggs et al. 2019; Singh 2021). Baldwin only briefly positions *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* in direct conversation with CUS scholarship, presenting a rich empirical study rather than theoretical material. Yet, this work is an engaging contribution to radical or abolitionist CUS that "account[s] for the shifting regimes of accumulation that constitute the university as such" (Boggs et al. 2019), as opposed to advocating for a return to a presumed prelapsarian mid 20th century university as scholarship in a more liberal vein has done. Baldwin's prose is straightforward and engrossing, and the book would serve as an excellent grounded companion to radical/abolitionist CUS literature as well as work on 21st century processes of urban redevelopment and gentrification.

In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower is also of a piece with Baldwin's career-spanning work on the city and University of Chicago which explores the interweaving of academic knowledge production about race and poverty, particularly that of the so-called Chicago School, and urban development (Baldwin 2004, 2017; Baldwin and Crane 2020). In this book, Baldwin expands his geographic focus and charts parallel practices, narratives, and community impacts across multiple university settings, demonstrating that the University of Chicago is no anomaly when it comes to the entanglement of US higher education with ongoing histories of and resistance to settler colonialism and racial capitalist city-making.

Baldwin's analysis in *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* is structured around four chapter-long case studies hewn largely from interviews with administrators, students, planners, and community members. Each case study highlights one or more universities operating at a unique scale and within a specific municipal context, beginning with the private liberal arts Trinity College where Baldwin is a Professor of American Studies and founding director of the Smart Cities Research Lab. Over the course of the late 1990s and early 2000s, Trinity wavered between attempting to preserve its status as a cloistered elite enclave with walls and tactical real estate purchases, and expanding its institutional footprint in the largely working-class and Latinx city of Hartford, CT. As with all of the universities profiled by Baldwin, Trinity's dual strategy of erecting campus barriers and increasing "community engagement" efforts might appear contradictory, but is not so. Rather, as Teona Williams (2021) argues in this journal, both fortress construction and an increased presence in the surrounding community, whether through educational programming or policing, bolsters the university's racial and extractive management of the urban built environment.

A train trip away from Trinity, Baldwin takes us to the institutional behemoths of Columbia and New York University (NYU) which have both undertaken large-scale campus redevelopment projects in the last decade and battled pushback from students, faculty, and residents of nearby neighborhoods. Here, Baldwin constructs two in-depth procedural timelines which bring to the fore how Columbia and NYU have positioned themselves as engines of economic growth for New York City, allowing them to side-step municipal governance

structures. The final two chapters, focused on the University of Chicago and Arizona State University (ASU) in Phoenix, are perhaps the most layered and dynamic as they articulate how universities are integral to economies driven by land speculation. As with all private property-related endeavors in the US, campus construction and expansion in Chicago and Phoenix is predicated upon settler colonial narratives of discovery and “empty” land, and defended with university police forces. While each of the four case study universities is a recipient of public subsidy in some form, Baldwin’s inclusion of ASU makes clear that it is not only well-funded private institutions which are implicated in land speculation and redevelopment projects. For ASU, it was in part state budget cutbacks in the early 2000s which drove university administrators to seek “other revenue streams” in the form of real estate transactions in downtown Phoenix (p.167).

Each case study is replete with on-the-ground detail such that it is not possible to collapse one campus history into another. Still, strong thematic threads emerge across the four chapters. *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* demonstrates the centrality of universities to multiple moments of state-sponsored urban development programs designed to bolster property values and shape the racial and class dynamics of cities. In the thick of the urban renewal era of the mid 20th century, a coalition of universities lobbied for and won an amendment to the Federal Housing Act of 1949. The Section 112 credits program “triggered a two-to-one federal matching grant for any urban renewal project on or near a college or university up to five years before the project even began” (p. 30). For administrators, the projects had a clear aim of racial containment and displacement to create a campus environment purportedly “safe and friendly” for students and faculty. In the early 21st century, administrative goals remain largely unchanged though the university is now situated within a new municipal “renovation” project centered on the “knowledge economy” and urban revanchism (Smith 1996). Universities occupy multiple positions in this equation as boosters and drivers of development as well as spaces for the production of patentable and therefore profitable knowledge.

Race and racial capitalism are also central to Baldwin’s story. University expansion projects are never neutral in their location and beneficiaries. For example, Baldwin describes the

University of Chicago's movement into the South Side, long a bastion of Black life and culture in the city, in order to create a "world class" campus (p.141). Using municipal tax increment financing, the university converted blocks of public space and local businesses into a privatized retail corridor dominated by chain stores. Physical displacement and demolition were also accompanied by a neutralization through incorporation of Blackness, exemplified by the university purchasing and moving famed blues bar the Checkerboard Lounge from the nearby neighborhood of Bronzeville to its new retail development in Hyde Park. Those who are assumed not to belong on or near campus, particularly Black students and South Side residents, are subject to police violence (p.148). In many of Baldwin's case studies, university administrators and students mobilize narratives of crime and disorder attributed to local communities of color to justify both campus enclosure and the clearance of the preexisting built environment. Though Baldwin does not delve deeply into the history of the relationship between race and private property in the US or the settler colonial origins of the university, *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* connects nicely with recent work on these topics such as Craig Steven Wilder's *Ebony and Ivy* (2013) and the much publicized essay "Land-grab universities" published last year by *High Country News* (Lee and Ahtone 2020).

Given the ample evidence Baldwin presents that US universities, despite their public funding and public-serving narrative, are powerful profit-making enterprises dependent on the state-sanctioned exploitation of land and labor, what opportunities exist for disruption and transformation? Baldwin turns to this question in the final pages of *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower*, noting that no intervention will "fully rehabilitate a community from the substantial losses in an ongoing process of university-driven neighborhood surveillance, upscaling, and displacement" (p. 211). In the spirit of David Harvey (2008) via Henri Lefebvre's notion of the "right to the city", Baldwin proposes six strategies which might yield more democratic control of surplus capital, urban space, and the university itself: university payment of compensation for the use of public services; community benefits agreements for publicly funded university projects; community-based planning and zoning oversight; disarming or at minimum limiting the scope of

campus police; fair labor practices; and the redistribution of athletic revenues to athletes and communities (p.210-211).

These strategies are less poetic than la paperson's (2017: xiii) call for a "third university", a decolonizing entity built through subversion of the university in its current form, or Moten and Harney's (2013) undercommons, a theft and relational repurposing of the university's resources. They also sit somewhat at odds with Baldwin's own recognition that community benefits agreements and community oversight of planning processes are precisely what failed residents living in Columbia's target development zone in upper Manhattan (p.100-101), as well as the current widespread reckoning with the limitations of reformist measures. Baldwin thus implicitly asks us to contemplate what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007: 242) refers to as a "non-reformist reform" might look like when it comes to US higher education. How might we redirect the resources and power of the university at the scale of the city as part of a larger liberatory project?

Perhaps more valuable than the closing recommendations is Baldwin's overarching insistence on studying the university as a profit-making institution which, like other such entities, has endeavored to render its workings inscrutable and unassailable. In refusing the narrative that higher education functions solely as a public good, Baldwin opens the university up to rethinking and rematerializing. As Baldwin turns the lens on his own place of work, he reminds all of us who labor in higher education that we must look beyond institutional self-mythologization to examine the current and historical roles our universities have assumed, to whose benefit and harm. Armed with this knowledge, we might then join with others who are struggling to remake the land and labor relations which undergird the contemporary university, rather than reconfiguring who controls its current form.

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