

Baldwin, D. L. (2021). *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities are Plundering Our Cities*. Bold Type Books. 272 pp.

Review by Jake D. Winfield



In *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower: How Universities are Plundering Our Cities* (2021), Davarian L. Baldwin investigates the growing power of universities in the daily lives of city residents. The author uses multiple case studies and interviews with various stakeholders across the United States to explore the manifestations of this phenomenon, from urban planning and land ownership to policing well beyond campus boundaries. The driving question throughout this book is “What are the costs when colleges and universities exercise significant power over a city’s financial resources, policing priorities, labor relations, and land values?” (p. 9). Baldwin documents how these costs are often paid by community members to benefit students, faculty, and institutions themselves. *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* provides a critical, timely, and essential telling of the consequences of university-led development on neighboring communities, and through it, an examination of macro-level factors that influence scholars’ ability to engage in partnership with local communities.

Baldwin begins by recounting a brief history leading to the current moment in which, he argues, urban life is dominated by the desires of higher education institutions. In the first chapter he shows that profit motives have always been present in U.S. higher education, from practices of enslavement to the economic motivations that helped establish land-grant colleges. He highlights how the anchor institution movement that began in the 1990s was based in part on higher education’s role signaling a thriving local economy. Baldwin then connects these ideas to the current influence of higher education over land development and commercialization of intellectual property. Here, and elsewhere in the text, Baldwin goes beyond secondary sources by including interviews from various stakeholders. This chapter, for example, features interviews in

which Drs. Henry Taylor and Ira Harkavy discuss their role in early scholarship on anchor institutions.

After presenting a historical landscape of the role of profit in higher education, Baldwin provides case studies of institutions, each with a different specific focus. These case studies emphasize phenomena in the past two decades, centering the harm to racially minoritized communities. The second chapter portrays Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, showing how small, elite colleges can utilize the language of community partnership to prioritize their own interests (p. 55). The third chapter, on Columbia University and New York University in New York City, contrasts how these institutions approached campus expansion projects, highlighting the “death of public authority” (p. 90) that is a consequence of the rise of universities in urban development. Moving to the Midwest, Baldwin offers practices at the University of Chicago as an example of how universities can deploy campus police and university amenities to control local communities (p. 129). The final case study examines Arizona State University–Downtown as a real estate developer in Phoenix’s urban core (p. 167).

The variety of the cases allows Baldwin to highlight the different, and often complex, motivations underlying universities’ engagement with their cities. Arizona State has expanded into real estate deals that provide the university with revenues from rent and patents to help offset decreases in state appropriations. Columbia and NYU articulated how their campus expansion projects were driven by their smaller “square feet of building space per student” (p. 92) compared to peer institutions; in contrast, Trinity often worked to remain separate from their neighborhood. These complexities provide the reader with multiple lenses to view other and future university-led

projects. Taken as a whole, this collection of cases provides a comprehensive approach to understanding how universities use their power to shape cities in the United States.

Like the first chapter, the case studies utilize interviews (over 100) with various stakeholders, including university presidents, administrators, faculty, employees of university-based community engagement centers, students, elected officials, and community members. These varied perspectives on the same series of events are one of the book's greatest strengths. Rather than settling for multiple perspectives as a mechanism offering balance, Baldwin deploys them strategically to push back against official narratives portrayed in interviews with university officials in powerful positions. The result is a critical perspective that consistently centers the voices of community members. For example, Baldwin interviewed Flores Forbes, an associate vice president with Columbia's Office of Government and Community Affairs. Forbes articulated benefits for the local community from an expansion project, including a community benefits agreement and workforce training for formerly incarcerated people. According to Baldwin, Forbes "saw no relationship between campus expansion and community displacement" (p. 106). Baldwin, however, provided documentation of changes in local demographics and housing prices both to the reader and to Forbes, concluding that the "residents will get priced out, despite Forbes's dismissal of displacement" (p. 107). This interrogation of power and rebuttal of official narratives appears consistently throughout the text, so the reader never confronts the unchecked perspectives of the universities alone.

The time Baldwin spent in these various case sites further strengthens this text. In Phoenix, for example, Baldwin visited in 2012 and 2018 to see how ASU-Downtown had developed and continued to shape areas near campus. This longitudinal view of campus expansion captures, from an outsider's perspective, how university initiatives changed a cityscape. Other cases gain from Baldwin's work as a faculty member (Trinity College) and graduate student (NYU), which helps ground cases and likely provided him with additional insight into the identities of essential stakeholders. However, observing Baldwin's connection to some institutions leads into a weakness of this book—Baldwin does not clearly ar-

ticulate why these cases were selected. This lack of insight may lead readers to question how pervasive universities' power in cities really is. The concern is somewhat addressed through Baldwin's frequent use of secondary examples, like Yale and Carnegie Mellon, which he offers to supplement his overall argument, but clarity on why he chose to focus on these five universities for the bulk of the book could have helped readers better understand how expansive "UniverCities" are in the United States.

One of the key contributions of *In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower* to community engagement is Baldwin's effort to further complicate community-university partnerships. A common thread through all the cases is the idea of "enlightened self-interest" (p. 39) as a driving factor in the rise of university-led development. The idea of enlightened self-interest has been articulated previously by other scholars focused on community engagement (Taylor & Luter, 2013). Baldwin's focus on the impacts of these changes on minoritized communities also echoes Derrick Bell's (1980) interest convergence thesis, which has been recognized as a factor that drives urban universities' interests in community-university partnerships (Winfield & Davis, 2020). Baldwin's book adds evidence to the notion that university engagement and urban development are not exclusively altruistic.

The text is not entirely pessimistic: It concludes with a road map forward. The epilogue focuses on the University of Winnipeg and its recent initiatives that have prioritized the local Indigenous people. Baldwin also provides other concrete strategies for resisting harmful university-led development, including strong community benefits agreements, binding community-based planning boards, establishing unarmed campus police, and enforcing payment in lieu of taxes agreements (pp. 210–211). The epilogue helpfully provides a road map to reimagine what higher education can do when in partnership with communities to revitalize cities.

Baldwin provides a detailed and varied perspective on how universities are leading urban development initiatives, and the high costs community members often pay. Readers of the *JHEOE* can utilize this text to reflect on their own institutions' practices and recognize how larger systems and the neoliberalization of higher education in the United States (Giroux, 2002) directly impact

scholars' ability to engage in equitable partnerships while institutions engage in double-talk. Community members can utilize this text to understand how universities came to lead urban development while also developing counternarratives to common talking points. Students may also find Baldwin's text instructional. Its critique on the reasoning of those in power provides insight into critical scholarship methodology, in both interviews and publication, that centers minoritized community members.

In the Shadow of the Ivory Tower arrives at a

critical juncture amid the fallout of COVID-19 on city budgets and calls for higher education to defund campus police departments as part of the Black Lives Matter movement. Baldwin's book provides an analysis that questions the good in university-led urban development. As these practices become more commonplace, understanding how they can harm communities will be critical to the work of community-engaged scholars who seek equitable partnerships with local communities.



About the Reviewer

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