



Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It

Mindy Fullilove

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They called it progress. But for the people whose homes and districts were bulldozed, the urban renewal projects that swept America starting in 1949 were nothing short of assault. Vibrant city blocks—places rich in history—were reduced to garbage-strewn vacant lots. When a neighborhood is destroyed its inhabitants suffer “root shock”: a traumatic stress reaction related to the destruction of one’s emotional ecosystem. The ripple effects of root shock have an impact on entire communities that can last for decades.

In this groundbreaking and ultimately hopeful book, Dr. Mindy Fullilove examines root shock through the story of urban renewal and its effect on the African American community. Between 1949 and 1973 this federal program, spearheaded by business and real estate interests, destroyed 1,600 African American neighborhoods in cities across the United States. But urban renewal didn’t just disrupt the black community. The anger it caused led to riots that sent whites fleeing for the suburbs, stripping them of their own sense of place. And it left big gashes in the centers of U.S. cities that are only now slowly being repaired.

Focusing on three very different urban settings—the Hill District of Pittsburgh, the Central Ward in Newark, and the small Virginia city of Roanoke—Dr. Fullilove argues powerfully that the twenty-first century will be one of displacement and of continual demolition and reconstruction. Acknowledging the damage caused by root shock is crucial to coping with its human toll and building a road to recovery.

Astonishing in its revelations, unsparing in its conclusions, *Root Shock* should be read by anyone who cares about the quality of life in American cities—and the dignity of those who reside there.

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