



Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul

Jeremiah Moss

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"ESSENTIAL READING FOR FANS OF JANE JACOBS, JOSEPH MITCHELL, PATTI SMITH, LUC SANTE AND CHEAP PIEROGLI."--VANITY FAIR

An unflinching chronicle of gentrification in the twenty-first century and a love letter to lost New York by the creator of the popular and incendiary blog *Vanishing New York*.

For generations, New York City has been a mecca for artists, writers, and other hopefuls longing to be part of its rich cultural exchange and unique social fabric. But today, modern gentrification is transforming the city from an exceptional, iconoclastic metropolis into a suburbanized luxury zone with a price tag only the one percent can afford.

A Jane Jacobs for the digital age, blogger and cultural commentator Jeremiah Moss has emerged as one of the most outspoken and celebrated critics of this dramatic shift. In *Vanishing New York*, he reports on the city's development in the twenty-first century, a period of "hyper-gentrification" that has resulted in the shocking transformation of beloved neighborhoods and the loss of treasured unofficial landmarks. In prose that the *Village Voice* has called a "mixture of snark, sorrow, poeticism, and lyric wit," Moss leads us on a colorful guided tour of the most changed parts of town—from the Lower East Side and Chelsea to Harlem and Williamsburg—lovingly eulogizing iconic institutions as they're replaced with soulless upscale boutiques, luxury condo towers, and suburban chains.

Propelled by Moss' hard-hitting, cantankerous style, *Vanishing New York* is a staggering examination of contemporary "urban renewal" and its repercussions—not only for New Yorkers, but for all of America and the world.

Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul Details

Date : Published July 25th 2017 by Dey Street Books

ISBN : 9780062439697

Author : Jeremiah Moss

Format : Hardcover 480 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, New York, History, Travel, Cities, Urban Studies

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From Reader Review *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul* for online ebook

Thomas Ryan says

Not since "Low Life" has a finer book on New York City been produced. Powered by detail, with a poet's ear for words, and the empathy of a therapist, this book is one long love letter to a great city reduced by a simple formula-- rezone, build high using tax breaks, cut services in the 'poor' areas, bring in corporate supported boxes and chains and destroy the Mom&Pop stores and shift the working class to second class status and promote the moneyed class and tourist class at their expense and create a luxury city. Yes, I like a good cup of coffee and the ability to ride my bike safely but if we drive all the artists and writers and liberal anger from the City, we will pay a steep price. This is a great wake up call to eat local and drink local and support all the real things we love about New York City.

Michelle Ruiz Andrews says

3.5 stars, really.

For anyone in NYC (and plenty of other cities) who wonders why there are so many empty storefronts and such a sad lack of small, local businesses (non-Starbucks coffee, real bagels, delis, dives and pizza), Jeremiah Moss of the fantastic blog *Vanishing New York* delivers the deeply-reported explanation, making a compelling case for the fact that "hyper-gentrification" was no accident, but a very deliberate shift in the policy and philosophy of New York City—away from investing in and prioritizing working-class New Yorkers and definitively moving toward a more capitalist, big bank-favoring, tourist-obsessed town. It's staggering to realize how much classism and racism have been sanctioned through the public policies of New York.

I'm a fan of Moss and his SaveNYC initiative and I loved the history and education this book gave me. I believe Moss is doing a great service in reminding us what the soul of New York looks like. My main complaint would be that, at times, he paints in too broad of strokes—veering off track with get-off-my-lawn-style rants about "new" city moms and their big strollers (ahem) and over-romanticizing crack alleys with the same vigor of 100-year-old mom and pop bakeries. At 15 hours on Audible, it's a bit of a beast, and I wish he'd spent more than the last 10 minutes offering ideas for how best to move NYC forward without losing its heart.

John says

Although there are almost always two sides to the story, Moss makes a convincing case for gentrification in New York as having erased an awful lot of the city's history. As has been noted, he's strongest when presenting specific examples, rather than expounding theory. Definitely recommended.

Jill says

“It’s these two seemingly opposite states—alone and connected—that hold me. Even in the howling crowds, as the city crumbles and dies all around us, now and then, here and there, if we’re paying close attention, we can still find pleasure in the gifts of New York.”

I have complicated views on this book. The history and author’s viewpoint and obvious love of New York are compelling, and his point that Manhattan is turning into a luxury generic suburb and losing what makes it distinct isn’t false. He is methodical and passionate in accounting this neighborhood by neighborhood, mostly in Manhattan. But also there’s a lot of oversimplification and conclusory notions about corporations and real estate development as universally bad. It’s a little repetitive at times, but I believe author intends this. Did find the portions where he has some sense that he is also part of the gentrification of NYC refreshing to an otherwise pretty pious attitude.

John Spiller says

“Vanishing New York” is a fascinating examination of the “hyper-gentrification” of New York City (well, more focused on Manhattan and Brooklyn). The conventional wisdom holds that Rudy Giuliani’s “broken windows” approach to policing spurred gentrification, making lower Manhattan more attractive to professionals, which lead to a virtuous cycle of urban “pioneers” attracting investment and redevelopment of decaying squalor. Devoting chapters to the recent transformation of bellwether neighborhoods (Bowery, East Village, Chelsea, Harlem, etc.), Moss provides a detailed rebuttal to this notion. In fact, it is interesting to note how little “broken windows” policing contributed to the vanishing of “old” New York.

While Moss cops to a lack of objectivity, he makes a compelling case that New York is increasingly being transformed into a giant suburb where generic chain stores are venerated over long-time locally owned businesses. Why dine at an authentic greasy spoon diner when you get eat at a replica of the diner that is cleaner with healthier food? It’s the urban experience with the unseemly parts of urban dwelling stripped away. Indeed, as Moss points out, the economics of gentrification almost guarantees that generic chain stores will predominate even if there is no demand for them.

“Vanishing New York” raises uncomfortable questions about the process of gentrification which deserve to be answered in any discussion of urban revitalization.

Jeff Buddle says

Okay. Let's push all the mourning for a lost New York aside. We've lost a lot. When I moved to Greenpoint there was a real five and dime, replaced now by a Sleepy's. My wife and I, after seeing our apartment to be, ate pierogies and borscht at a now shuttered Polish restaurant. When we moved onto Franklin Street, there was one bar...ONE bar on Franklin Street. There are now at least 10. There was a little diner on the corner called Rudy's. When my wife and I went, the proprietor -Rudy- insisted that we get the egg sandwich on the "new rolls." His place was sacrificed for a hipster restaurant that charged an arm and a leg for yogurt. It's

since been shuttered and now stands empty. Yes, we've lost a lot.

Capitalists will tell you that this change is just free markets doing their work. In "Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul," Jeremiah Moss shows that it ain't such. THE destruction of New York is a systematic attempt to rid the city of its undesirables. These undesirables are the poor, the brown, the ones who will challenge capitalism's hierarchy. Bloomberg himself said that the poor can live in the boroughs, Manhattan is for the rich.

Moss goes neighborhood by neighborhood lamenting what is lost in each. He has talked with Mom & Pop, which the sex workers of 42nd street, with craftsmen and workers. All of them feel they are being forced out. There is nowhere to live, nowhere to socialize, nowhere to shop. It's true. What's happening to New York is the same shit that's happening everywhere. It's being handed over to the rich. The rest of us are just their servants.

In this book, Moss has captured New York at its tipping point. It's still valiantly holding on to some of its character, but money is trying very hard to force it out, to co-opt it and sell condos in its name. Capital is all too willing to demolish something interesting and replace it with something bland if it puts money in its pockets. Moss's book is essential, not just for New Yorkers, but for urbanists everywhere. You can't have a future unless you value the past.

Melanie says

I argued with the author on almost every page. He was opinionated, dismissive of much of the outer boroughs (where I would argue that much of the soul he laments we lost remains, and yes, I have lived in Brooklyn, Queens, and, currently, the Bronx), contradictory, and a teller of incomplete stories to make his argument better. That said--I'm glad I read it and I recommend it. It is the story of our collective "lost" NYC, the way things change in such a way that we, long-term NYers, are in constant mourning for the places we don't have any more. I got impatient with him--yes, I have CBGB history, but if I were the owner of the building, BRC, the Bowery Residents Committee, founded in 1971 by residents of the Bowery who do excellent work helping the homeless, I would probably rather rent it out for more money to continue my mission than at a price to keep CB's, and my memories, there. Same with 125th street--no, sidewalk vendors are not somehow guaranteed free space to hawk their wares. Even 5 Pointz--yes, I appreciated the graffiti'd building, but isn't it part of the nature and beauty of graffiti that it is impermanent? Moss, a pseudonym, came to NYC in the 90's; if he wants to be part of the resurgence of a gritty city, he still can--in Detroit, and I do NOT mean that as a put-down. Detroit reminds me of gritty NYC in the 70's and early 80's, scrambling and recreating itself and not done.

HOWEVER--that said, he asks a lot of good questions. Do we really need a chain drug store on seemingly every corner? What are the ways in which NYC policies are favoring giant real estate construction over neighborhoods? To what extent is change organic, kind of natural, and to what extent are we seeing hypergentrification due to policies? Near the end of the book, he has, among other things, suggestions that have worked in other cities; for example, in London, you can't write off the loss on your empty building after a short time limit. This would keep landlords from warehousing their buildings until Marc Jacobs decides the neighborhood is cool enough. He has a number of ideas listed there.

As someone who participated in the gentrification of a number of neighborhoods listed in the book--at the time, I was a teacher, trying to find a place to live on my teacher's salary, but doesn't it come to the same

thing?--the East Village, Cobble Hill and Jackson Heights, all of which were kind of fringy--and affordable--when I moved there, and Astoria, which was kind of a quiet, affordable backwater for awhile--I'm particularly interested in this kind of story, as I have, myself, contributed to the change of neighborhoods I now can't afford to live in. And with the rise of ultraluxury apartments being sold to absentee residents who don't pay taxes on the full value of their palaces and making New York so safe nobody is afraid to come here--yes, I know tourism is one of the few things we still "make" and their dollars support one of our remaining "industries"--among other factors, I wonder about the future of the city. It remains a place of local neighborhoods, but maybe that is mostly outside Manhattan. How can we make inevitable change positive change?

Peter Mcloughlin says

Very detailed and compelling case made that New York which was dominated by a working class, ethnic, and bohemian culture has been hollowed out, gentrified, colonized by the super rich, homogenized by chains uprooting small shops, and suburbanized by the grandchildren of white flight come home to roost. This has left New York once a gritty place of oddballs and outcasts to home for David Brooks bobos and bankers. It is not the city I remember from the 80s which is why I rarely visit it anymore. I live in the burbs why bother going to gentrified skyscraper version of the burbs only with snooty rich people.

Jennifer says

Received through FirstReads...

I loved this, it really struck a nerve. If it makes you happy to see old buildings torn down and replaced with generic glass and metal structures, this is not for you. This made me so angry, as it brought to mind several places that used to exist in the town I grew up in, which were torn down and either replaced completely, or "improved", which is my personal favorite. They tore down an old, half-timbered pub, replaced it with something that looks like Chipotle with condos on top, slapped the same name on it, hung photos of the old place on the wall, and insisted it was the same restaurant. Sorry for ranting, but it still makes my blood boil.

Bill reilly says

Vanishing New York could be a metaphor for all of America, as the rich have taken over. Caleb Carr's "soul sucking transformation" applies nationwide; it is not just the Big Apple. The adult entertainment area of Manhattan has been cleaned up to make way for the squeaky clean and family friendly image of Mickey Mouse and Disney. It figures, as Walt Disney was rumored to be a drug addict and pedophile. The author begins in the East Village. It has been widely known as an artist's community since the 1960's. Unfortunately, the neighborhood has transformed from one of radicals and anarchists to one filled with Wall Street vampires. Alphabet City was immortalized by David Byrne with the apocalyptic "Life during Wartime," a vastly overlooked song. I share in Jeremiah's contempt for the self important, yuppie banker crowd. The mom and pop places are vanishing like the buffalo out west. Starbucks, the Seattle based spawn of Satan, has taken over and spread like a fungus. A local coffee shop which had existed for 100 years closed because of the latte paradise. What a shame and loss of character, and another loss to the café capitol of the new world order. The mayor's office love affair with real estate developers began with Ed Koch in the early 1970's and continued with Giuliani and Bloomberg. This was well chronicled by Wayne Barrett in the

Village Voice. The working class and poor all got screwed. NYC has had a diverse population from its beginnings, although the ruling elite were WASP's. The influx of immigrants from Europe and blacks from the south made the white Protestant's uncomfortable. Catholic's, Jews and others were not welcome. The city was slowly de-industrialized, and blacks and immigrants separated, largely by FHA policy. Even Levittown was whites only. Blacks could not obtain the same low interest loans as whites. The "master builder," Robert Moses, displaced thousands of families, mostly poor and black, to build structures for his own kind, white and wealthy. Moses was a racist monster with plenty of company, including Richard Nixon who railed against Catholics and Jews, in particular. It only got worse, as fashion designer John Varvatos bought the place which housed the legendary CBGB's to sell rock and roll t-shirts for \$350 a pop. A side note here. Varvatos designs Howard Stern's clothes; too bad the king of all media did not save the club. The four horsemen of the apocalypse must be near, as Moses describes edible gold leaf capsules (3 for \$275) sold at a Bowery boutique, which passes through the buyer and exits as a sparkly s***. It seems as if everything and almost everyone is for sale. Koch started the tax abatements for the developers and it continued with Guiliani and Bloomberg. The AIDs crisis killed thousands of artists and Koch did nothing. It is on to Little Italy and the San Gennaro festival. The newbies protested the 11 day event, complaining about the smell of the cooking sausages. An old timer commented that they should go back to Montana to ride their f***** horses. As with most of the city, rents skyrocketed, some to 30,000 a month. The older traditional family businesses have left. 9/11 changed everything, and Michael Bloomberg was elected mayor by only 2 points over Mark Green, a disciple of one of my heroes, Ralph Nader. The billionaire Bloomberg made NYC even more a paradise for the wealthy. The working class were priced out as major corporations were given free reign. It is a new gilded age where people like Donald Trump and Michael Bloomberg are only a symptom of the disease. In 2014, a diner on Bleecker Street was forced to close when their rent was increased to 50,000 a month. High end stores have replaced the family owned small scale retailers. A library in Manhattan was torn down and replaced by luxury hotel with suites going for 18 grand a night. I am nauseous. If God exists, where is he? History is ignored as the Chelsea Hotel is replaced by an "upscale" establishment. Dylan Thomas, Mark Twain, and Bob Dylan were just a few of the hotels former residents. In a lighter moment, Moss recounts a woman with an SUV sized baby stroller taking over most of a sidewalk, forcing him into an Azalea bush while screaming, "you f***** ass***. I love New York. The tales of the City are heartbreaking. In Chelsea, an auto repair shop dating back to the 1800's was in part of Bloomberg's rezoned area. The shop was torn down for a luxury mall and more Coach type, high end retailers. We are ancient Rome, and the end is near. The Red Light District on 42nd Street turned corporate, as Disney took over. With help from other mega-companies, including McDonald's, who built the biggest fast food "restaurant" in the world. Sin City is now home of the golden arches and super-sized meals. The City is gone; now just another tourist trap. Moss asks out-of-towners to please keep to the right side of the sidewalk. Harlem's rich history is up next. The Lenox Lounge on 125th Street, a jazz club whose past included Billie Holiday and Mile Davis closed down in 2012, just another casualty of rezoning and unbelievable (\$20,000/month) rents. After WWII, a G.I., Bobby Robinson, opened Bobby's Happy House in 1946. The store thrived until he was forced out in 2008. It is now a Capital One Bank. I have an account with the bastards, thus making even me, part of the problem and not the solution. Brooklyn, once famous for Nathan's hot dogs and the Dodgers, has become the least affordable place to live in America. By 2014, the median price of a house was \$615,000. In came the luxury developers and out went the working class and artists. Every borough shared the same misery. Mike Tyson's "BK-top of the food chain," became yet another enclave of arrogant yuppies. All is not lost; they gained \$18 cups of coffee. Mayor Mussolini (Rudy G.) dismantled Coney Island piece by piece and replaced the rides with Dunkin Donuts and Bank of America. Karma is a bitch Rudy, and in the end you will pay. The same goes for Bloomberg, another soulless insect. The mayors used eminent domain to remove thousands of small businesses. Jack Bono built a sawdust factory in Willet's Point Queens in 1933. His son and grandson were evicted 75 years later. The Queens deal gave \$1 billion worth of land to developers for \$1. Tax dollars also paid for Citi Field. It is corporate welfare for the rich. The people of the South Bronx are fighting the good fight. So far, they have avoided the

overpriced frappuccino's of Starbuck's and other eyesores. In 2016, the city approved a luxury high rise there too. The green coffee cups will surely follow. Moss garnered much criticism for a nostalgic and unrealistic view of NYC. Change is good is a parallel concept of greed is good. Jeremiah wears the label cranky like a badge of honor. I am on his wavelength, but I believe that it is too late. The globalization monster has not only swallowed up NY, but the rest of the world with it. It is the alpha and the omega, and we are at the omega end of the spectrum. Mother Nature will soon have her revenge. The planet is on fire and its' seven plus billion inhabitants are doomed. Have a nice day and read Vanishing New York.

Jenny says

"The ten most popular kids from every high school in the world are now living in New York City. Those are the people who most of us who came to New York came here to get away from."

Such a good read.

Lucy says

I enjoyed this book as much as I could, given the subject matter, which is, to put it plainly, the destruction of New York City by neoliberal-policy-fueled hyper-gentrification. Jeremiah Moss is a year younger than I am, and moved to the city in the year I first began to realize I would not be able to afford to return to it as a resident. Every New Yorker who leaves feels sadness on returning to find it changed. It does go on without you, and to some extent you accept that. But what I've noticed over the past 30 years of visiting, is not normal change but a metastasizing growth that pushed out my parents, my neighbors, small businesses, and the institutions (formal and informal) that all contributed to the vibrant, messy, fertile, fiercely alive city I grew up in and left a sterile glassiness and Starbucks proliferation that I associate with the suburban bland-scape that surrounds (and invades) the Midwestern city I live in now. Moss refutes the oft-cited claim that hyper-gentrification is not only natural but good, a claim that is demonstrably false to all of us who were revitalized out of the homes and communities we created. Turns out that all along that creativity and resilience was just blight. Now New York City is becoming a city for people who hate cities; the phenomena and the methods are being replicated in cities across the country; and those of us who love cities are being priced out into the abandoned, inner-ring suburbs created for and by the original city-haters. The current mode of gentrification does not revitalize cities, it kills them. Even when people make the revitalization claim, they tend to stumble over the question "Revitalized for whom?"

Logan Crossley says

Vanishing New York is an insightful book about a complex topic by a frustrating author. My review is too long, but so is the book. So if you proceed to either one, you've been warned.

Essentially a 420-page rant against the gentrification of Manhattan, VNY reminisces about the past, complains of the present, and shudders at the future. Moss has written a diatribe fueled by the collective pain of communities and the deeply personal pain of watching something you love change before your eyes. He waxes about places shuttered to make room for new development and residents forced out by skyrocketing rents. He recounts colorful anecdotes of the grimy and downtrodden carving out life in front of the rough,

independent, and smart alecky backdrop of a bygone New York.

Moss is an activism lifer, and VNY is his rebel yell. Parts of the book read like protest signs covered with too many words or a piece of spoken word performed at a slam. My main beef is that Moss confuses and conflates his “enemies” into what amounts to one, big, anti-good-ole-NYC conspiracy. Central to this issue is that Moss has the soul of a reactionary in the body of a bleeding heart liberal.

When he decries developers, investors, and bankers, he beats the drum of class warfare. Then he extends that complaint to the Republican politicians that the ultra-rich control and bankroll. Then he further throws his misanthropy towards the pot-luck and bunko crowd of the suburban Midwest. All these people stick in Moss’s craw. All of them just need to bugger off.

Moss despises Heartland America . He makes a trip all the way around the political-philosophical horseshoe and winds up grouping the patrons of Marc Jacobs with the frat-bro early 20s i-bankers with the naive Taylor-Swift-fan-type who wants a succulent and a tiny studio apartment she can afford with Ohioans from pious households. All of these “new” New Yorkers are the enemies of Moss’s beatnik, non-heteronormative, late night diner bathed in neon, rats in piss scented alleyways, mom and pop, book store supportive, blue collar, “fuck you” New York of the Scorsese movies and the Bukowski poems. In the end, he misses the fact that there is no “us vs. them” but instead an ocean full of us-es and them-s all jostling and hustling for a haven in the chaos.

I actually side mostly with Moss and admit that money is sadly winning the fight that VNY defines and explores. That is a tragedy I can see more clearly now. If the ruling class, the power brokers, the ultra wealthy oligarchs both foreign and domestic, had been the consistent villains of this book, I would’ve liked it better. Instead, other ordinary people that Moss happens not to like get the same treatment as the bankers and the mayors. All of them are bad apples who have only served to spoil Moss’s fun.

Wayne Clark says

Author Jeremiah Moss deserves some kind of wonderful award, one that goes far beyond his writing skill. America should honor him for illuminating what is destroying the country’s greatest city. Maybe other cities will be wise enough not to let the same thing happen. The minutiae, the memories, the ordinary scenes and lives captured forever in Vanishing New York become larger than life because of the bigger picture they are now part of thanks to Moss. It’s truly sad what financial myopia has done to the city. Our children will never know what a great place it was. I hope people in other great cities like Paris and Rome have read this book.

Ally says

I started reading this determined to not let Moss infect me with his nostalgia and hopelessness and by the end I was in tears, mourning the city I so dearly love, now that he has stripped away my blinders. I’m furious at our leadership for allowing everything that made this city be cut auctioned and hauled off to the highest bidder. This is a beautiful necessary work but know you cannot resist Moss. If you have any love for NYC you’ll walk away feeling like you just attended the most beautiful memorial service for your best friend who is still alive but sadly has become an asshole.

