



Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect

By Robert J. Sampson

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For over fifty years numerous public intellectuals and social theorists have insisted that community is dead. Some would have us believe that we act solely as individuals choosing our own fates regardless of our surroundings, while other theories place us at the mercy of global forces beyond our control. These two perspectives dominate contemporary views of society, but by rejecting the importance of place they are both deeply flawed. Based on one of the most ambitious studies in the history of social science, *Great American City* argues that communities still matter because life is decisively shaped by where you live.

To demonstrate the powerfully enduring impact of place, Robert J. Sampson presents here the fruits of over a decade's research in Chicago combined with his own unique personal observations about life in the city, from Cabrini Green to Trump Tower and Millennium Park to the Robert Taylor Homes. He discovers that neighborhoods influence a remarkably wide variety of social phenomena, including crime, health, civic engagement, home foreclosures, teen births, altruism, leadership networks, and immigration. Even national crises cannot halt the impact of place, Sampson finds, as he analyzes the consequences of the Great Recession and its aftermath, bringing his magisterial study up to the fall of 2010.

Following in the influential tradition of the Chicago School of urban studies but updated for the twenty-first century, *Great American City* is at once a landmark research project, a commanding argument for a new theory of social life, and the story of an iconic city.

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Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect By Robert J. Sampson Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #72916 in Books
- Brand: University of Chicago Press
- Published on: 2013-06-14
- Released on: 2013-06-14
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.30" w x 6.00" l, 1.63 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 552 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“A revolution is under way in social science, and Robert Sampson’s *Great American City* offers an excellent exemplar of the new turn. . . The book convincingly demonstrates that individual outcomes are not the simple result of atomistic choices but reflect highly contingent decisions that unfold within spatially grounded social structures and institutionalized processes that limit options and reproduce existing inequalities between individuals, households, and neighborhoods. By situating human beings within a well-defined social system, Sampson contextualizes individual actors and their decisions socially, spatially, and institutionally.”

(Douglas S. Massey *Science*)

“*Great American City* takes us from the grand theories conjured by its commanding title, down to the iconic street corner to see what it really means when windows are broken. This is a book of big, challenging, provocative, and inspiring ideas, as well as of meticulous, rigorous, and exhaustive data. Sampson has truly shown his shoulders big enough to be counted among Chicago’s most venerated social observers, as well as the most astute theorists of place.”

(Mary Pattillo *Northwestern University*)

“After *Great American City* we will never be able to view cities in the same way again. This is one of those rare books that deeply affect how we think about the world. It teaches us afresh how the neighborhoods we live in affect us and the people around us. And there are also immense policy implications. Robert Sampson shows definitively how the fate of the urban poor is so very dependent on the communities in which they live.”

(George Akerlof *Nobel Laureate in Economics, University of California at Berkeley*)

“Robert J. Sampson's important new book challenges prevailing notions of community decline. Sampson argues that our communities continue to matter a great deal and that our lives are powerfully shaped by where we live. . . . [With] lots of empirical detail and theoretically driven, *Great American City* shows the striking persistence of poverty across its neighborhoods from 1960 to 2000.”

(Richard Florida *The Atlantic*)

“It’s good reading which is a rare compliment to a sociologist. . . A very important book.”

(Milt Rosenberg *WGN Radio*)

“Robert J. Sampson's very readable research findings are theoretically rich, cutting-edge in urban research, and should be inspirational for future researchers in urban sociology. . . . A definite must read for anyone interested in groundbreaking upper-level urban sociology. Essential.”

(Choice)

"Robert Sampson's *Great American City* is a landmark work in urban sociology in part because it contributes so richly in different ways to our understanding of how neighborhoods operate in Chicago. But it is also a landmark work because it so richly in so many different ways strongly asserts that the community in community studies matters."

(Claude Fischer *City & Community*)

"Rob Sampson has written a great book. It is a must-read for almost all sociologists and demographers, and especially important for urbanists. Though I have written numerous book reviews and read countless others, this essay is by far the hardest one I've been asked to do. It is hard for two reasons: first, there is so much excellent material in *Great American City* to write about that it is hard to know where to begin; and second, the book is so good it is difficult to keep from being overly effusive in praising it."

(Nancy Denton *City & Community*)

"*Great American City* is the rare example of a highly anticipated book by a leading scholar that exceeds expectations. Combining Robert Sampson's observations with major data collection on neighborhoods in Chicago and original analytic methods, the result is a compelling argument for the importance of place. Neither a purely theoretical nor empirical study, *Great American City* is an impressive model of how theory, data collection, and analytic methods can be combined to the benefit of all three endeavors. . . . Among the most important works in sociology in recent decades. . . . Through its publication, Sampson establishes himself as our modern Robert Park, and *Great American City* can be justly regarded as the most sophisticated Chicago School study ever produced."

(Lincoln Quillian *Contemporary Sociology*)

"There is a scene in the film *Crocodile Dundee* in which a young hoodlum threatens the titular protagonist with a knife. In response to his girlfriend's tremulous observation of this fact, Dundee, unfazed, brandishes a comically much larger knife and quips sardonically, "that's not a knife . . . THIS is a knife." The hood turns tail, Dundee returns the knife to its sheath, and the film chugs merrily on. I was reminded of this scene several times while reading Robert J. Sampson's *Great American City*. With respect to social scientists past, present, and future: THIS is a book."

(Jeffrey M. Timberlake *Journal of Urban Affairs*)

"*Great American City* definitely is one of the best bang-for-the-buck values in recent years. It is worth the very small investment to own this *magnum opus* regardless of the research site."

(Robert J. Bursik, Jr. *Theoretical Criminology*)

"Following in the influential tradition of the Chicago School of urban studies, but updating it for the twenty-first century, [Sampson] argues that communities do still matter because life is decisively shaped by where we live. Neighbourhoods influence a wide variety of phenomena including teen births, altruism and crime. Not even national crisis can destroy the enduring impact of place."

(BBC Radio 4's "Thinking Allowed")

About the Author

Robert J. Sampson is the Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard University and coauthor of *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life* and *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Armstead:

Do you certainly one of people who can't read enjoyable if the sentence chained from the straightway, hold on guys this aren't like that. This Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect book is readable by means of you who hate the straight word style. You will find the information here are arranged for enjoyable examining experience without leaving even decrease the knowledge that want to provide to you. The writer of Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect content conveys prospect easily to understand by a lot of people. The printed and e-book are not different in the information but it just different by means of it. So , do you nonetheless thinking Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect is not loveable to be your top collection reading book?

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Nowadays reading books are more than want or need but also get a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. The advantages you got of course the knowledge even the information inside the book this improve your knowledge and information. The details you get based on what kind of e-book you read, if you want drive more knowledge just go with training books but if you want experience happy read one having theme for entertaining for example comic or novel. The actual Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect is kind of guide which is giving the reader capricious experience.

Karen Bright:

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information today can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a knowledge or any news even a problem. What people must be consider while those information which is within the former life are challenging to be find than now could be taking seriously which one is appropriate to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you receive the unstable resource then you get it as your main information there will be huge disadvantage for you. All of those possibilities will not happen with you if you take Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect as the daily resource information.

Jamie Ault:

Precisely why? Because this Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap it but latter it will zap you with the secret that inside. Reading this book beside it was fantastic author who have write the book in such remarkable way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book have got such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking method. So , still want to hold up having that book? If I have been you I will go to the guide store hurriedly.

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