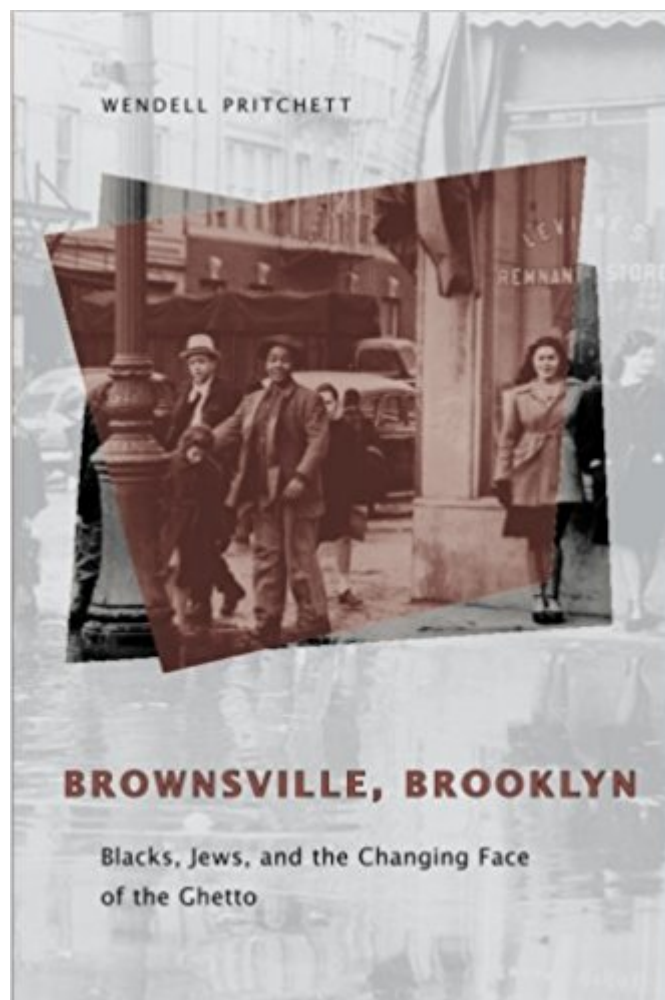




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Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, And The Changing Face Of The Ghetto (Historical Studies Of Urban America)



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Synopsis

From its founding in the late 1800s through the 1950s, Brownsville, a section of eastern Brooklyn, was a white, predominantly Jewish, working-class neighborhood. The famous New York district nurtured the aspirations of thousands of upwardly mobile Americans while the infamous gangsters of Murder, Incorporated controlled its streets. But during the 1960s, Brownsville was stigmatized as a black and Latino ghetto, a neighborhood with one of the city's highest crime rates. Home to the largest concentration of public housing units in the city, Brownsville came to be viewed as emblematic of urban decline. And yet, at the same time, the neighborhood still supported a wide variety of grass-roots movements for social change. The story of these two different, but in many ways similar, Brownsvilles is compellingly told in this probing new work. Focusing on the interaction of Brownsville residents with New York's political and institutional elites, Wendell Pritchett shows how the profound economic and social changes of post-World War II America affected the area. He covers a number of pivotal episodes in Brownsville's history as well: the rise and fall of interracial organizations, the struggles to deal with deteriorating housing, and the battles over local schools that culminated in the famous 1968 Teachers Strike. Far from just a cautionary tale of failed policies and institutional neglect, the story of Brownsville's transformation, he finds, is one of mutual struggle and frustrated cooperation among whites, blacks, and Latinos. Ultimately, Brownsville, Brooklyn reminds us how working-class neighborhoods have played, and continue to play, a central role in American history. It is a story that needs to be read by all those concerned with the many challenges facing America's cities today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

New Yorkers see constant small changes in their city, and the cumulative effect of those changes can remake the character and composition of a neighborhood almost overnight. That is what happened in Brownsville during the late 1950s and early 1960s. What had been an entirely Jewish neighborhood of sidewalk synagogues and old-world customs became an entirely black and Latino neighborhood. Pritchett captures that period of change and the various players -- community activists, business interests, government agencies and politicians -- masterfully. He tells a poignant story of idealistic neighborhood leaders who fought for integrated public housing to meet the needs of their community and were instead given massive projects built to house the city's poor who had been displaced by urban renewal. This is a great book for anyone interested in New York or urban history generally.

As someone who lived not far from Brownsville in the 1950s and early '60s, I can say this is an exceptionally accurate book. It is well-written and is the best attempt I've seen yet at explaining the phenomenon of the changing urban neighborhood. Not only does Pritchett provide many well-researched, well-thought-out answers but, just as important, he raises insightful, penetrating questions. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in American urban history, particularly as it relates to New York City.

Don't be fooled by the first part of the title; for this book is really about Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto. Pritchett studies Brownsville in details, but never forgets to see the bigger picture, which should be of interest for any historian or social scientist. Pritchett is very good at giving you the facts, the analysis and the feelings as well. This book is not just about a ghetto in Brooklyn, it is indeed about urban change and inequality.

Excellent history of this once great and now tragic neighborhood (although it does not do justice to the importance of the community in its heyday)

Mr. Pritchett has managed to take this incredibly rich subject matter and turned it into the most boring book I ever browsed through. He should have left it as his doctoral dissertation and placed it

on the shelf to gather dust.

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