

**Rethinking Neighborhoods: Connections and Cohesion by William A.V. Clark, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024, 222p.**

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Like countless other young couples, when my wife and I were looking to buy our first house, we met with a real estate agent who asked us to tell them about ourselves; where we grew up, our educational background, our family, our current jobs, the cars we drive, and our hobbies. That simple, seemingly innocuous, question helped them understand who we are so they could find a house in the best fitting neighborhood for us. We ended up selecting a house surrounded by other academics (one high school principal and four professors). *Rethinking Neighborhoods* helps explain how and why we selected the house and neighborhood we did, and why it was not surprising that we moved twelve years later. In other words, it provides a detailed summary of existing “research and debates about residential choice, residential sorting, residential segregation, and the role of neighborhoods in social connections” (p. x). It seeks to answer such questions as: why do people choose one neighborhood over another, what are the implications of those choices (for families, for overall health and well-being, and for our cities as a whole), how does neighborhood sorting and filtering work, how does the process of neighborhood selection intersect with peoples’ life course, and what do we know about how neighborhoods function? These questions may appear insignificant given the vast societal changes brought about by the digital age, but William Clark argues that neighborhoods still matter.

Throughout the book, with the exception of crime, safety, and major social movements, Clark explores everything and anything that is even remotely related to the qualities and characteristics of neighborhoods. As he indicates, “the major aim of the book is to re-emphasize the role of classic studies of neighborhoods, and at the same time to draw attention to new and ongoing work on understanding neighborhoods, to re-think their role in urban society.” (p. xiv) Few would tackle such a herculean task, yet Clark is the right person for the job. He has spent the past fifty years conducting research on housing markets, residential mobility, ethnic and racial patterns in urban areas, neighborhood segregation, and residential preferences.

*Rethinking Neighborhoods* is divided into three parts. Part I (*Neighborhoods and the Organization of the City*) sets the stage by exploring the role that neighborhoods play in overall urban structure. Chapters 1 thru 3 delve into how neighborhoods take on their own identity as well as how the characteristics of neighborhoods change (or stay the same) over time. In particular, Chapter 3 covers housing filtering and the prickly topic of neighborhood gentrification. Within Part I, Clark provides detailed discussions of such terms and concepts as neighborhood theory, frameworks for understanding neighborhoods, urban ecology, Chocolate City - Vanilla Suburbs, stuck in place, and social housing.

The second part (*Neighborhood Search, Selection, and Choice*) explores the role of individual behavior in neighborhood formation. Chapters 4 and 5 examine key variables in the search process, individual choice, neighboring preferences, and socio-economic background. Chapter 6 digs deep into the role of social mobility and neighborhood formation. Distributed throughout Part II are full overviews of terms and concepts such as gatekeepers, household constraints, neighborhood clustering, neighborhood sorting, neighborhood reputation, broken windows theory, and red lining.

In the book’s final part (*Neighborhoods Outcomes: Cohesion, Health, and Wellbeing*), Clark’s gaze turns to exploring how neighborhoods impact citywide outcomes (e.g., educational

attainment, health, segregation). In my opinion, Chapter 7 (*Social Cohesion and Neighborhood Connections*) is the most effective chapter of the book. It explores the contemporary issues of social capital, social cohesion, and place attachment. In Chapter 8, Clark looks at the intersection between neighborhood characteristics and individual health and well-being as well as provides an in-depth explanation about the Glasgow effect and environmental epidemiology. The final chapter begins with a look at the 15-Minute City movement, the impact of COVID-19 on neighborhoods, and Just City movement. The chapter then turns to a lengthy summary of the previous eight chapters and concludes with some speculation as to what the future might hold for neighborhoods and cities.

Each of the content chapters are chocked-full of key terms and excellent summaries of concepts and debates, yet they provide little in the way of *new* information. The book's main contribution is its distillation and synthesis of the evolving body of literature on neighborhoods that has unfolded over the past thirty-plus years. Clearly, the book is the culmination of a long and successful career.

There is a lot to like about this book. Without question, Clark draws upon his expertise and helps readers better grasp the idea that where we live has profound implications for our access to opportunities; neighborhoods are the entry points to schools, jobs, health care, and local amenities. Readers learn that where people live also determines who they interact with on a daily basis. Likewise, although it is never stated explicitly, the book does an excellent job of exploring concepts related to *migration selectivity* (e.g., age, education, occupation, income, socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, life stage, push/pull factors) and *spatial analysis* (e.g., distance decay, gravity model, central place, sorting, and cluster analysis).

I would be remiss if I didn't point out some of the book's shortcomings. First, unfortunately much of the literature and research references listed are at least ten years old. There are plenty of contemporary studies that could have been used to substantiate the narrative. Second, there is way too much repetition indicating that the book should have gone through another round of editing and reorganization. Third, Clark indicates that specific examples come from cities throughout the world especially those found in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, continental Europe and Australia/New Zealand. In reality, most of the discussion provided, and case studies referenced, focus on conditions within the U.S. In my mind, it was jarring and awkward to have the narrative center on conditions within U.S. cities and then throw in an example from a city found elsewhere in the world. This dilutes the effectiveness of the book's central theme because the author himself admits that there are distinct differences between cities/neighborhoods in the U.S. and those found elsewhere in the world. Finally, the book is long on discussion and short on concrete conclusions. It is filled with excellent, probing questions, yet rarely does it provide definitive answers. Repeatedly, Clark indicates that further research is needed on said topic. Overall, however, *Rethinking Neighborhoods* is highly accessible, easy to read, and jargon free! The book would make for a good resource for any introductory-level college class that focuses on urban studies, migration theory, and social justice.