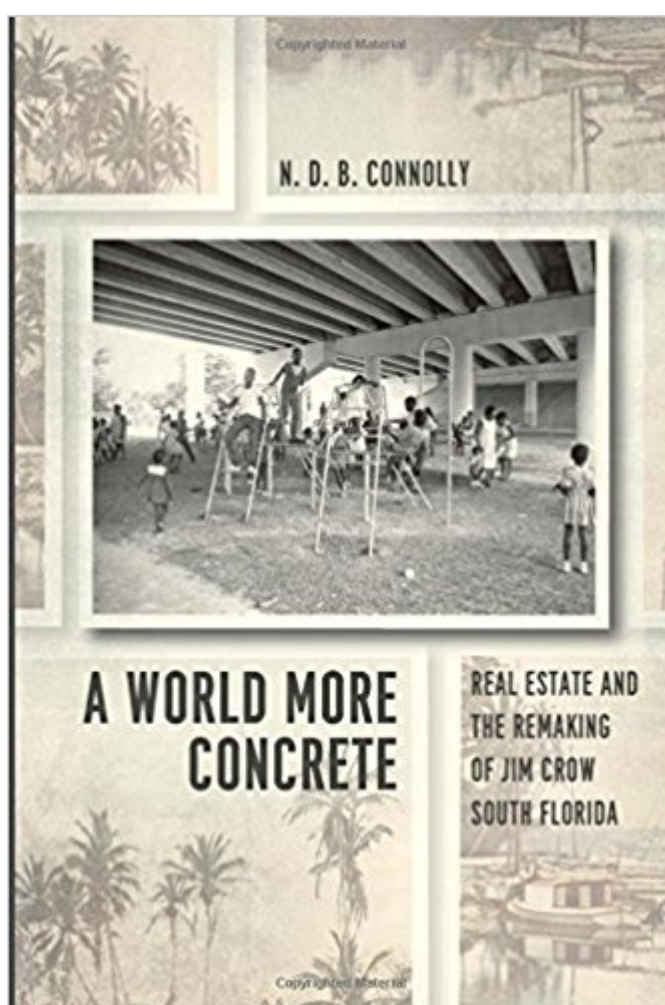


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# A World More Concrete: Real Estate And The Remaking Of Jim Crow South Florida (Historical Studies Of Urban America)



## Synopsis

Many people characterize urban renewal projects and the power of eminent domain as two of the most widely despised and often racist tools for reshaping American cities in the postwar period. In *A World More Concrete*, N. D. B. Connolly uses the history of South Florida to unearth an older and far more complex story. Connolly captures nearly eighty years of political and land transactions to reveal how real estate and redevelopment created and preserved metropolitan growth and racial peace under white supremacy. Using a materialist approach, he offers a long view of capitalism and the color line, following much of the money that made land taking and Jim Crow segregation profitable and preferred approaches to governing cities throughout the twentieth century. *A World More Concrete* argues that black and white landlords, entrepreneurs, and even liberal community leaders used tenements and repeated land dispossession to take advantage of the poor and generate remarkable wealth. Through a political culture built on real estate, South Florida's landlords and homeowners advanced property rights and white property rights, especially, at the expense of more inclusive visions of equality. For black people and many of their white allies, uses of eminent domain helped to harden class and color lines. Yet, for many reformers, confiscating certain kinds of real estate through eminent domain also promised to help improve housing conditions, to undermine the neighborhood influence of powerful slumlords, and to open new opportunities for suburban life for black Floridians. Concerned more with winners and losers than with heroes and villains, *A World More Concrete* offers a sober assessment of money and power in Jim Crow America. It shows how negotiations between powerful real estate interests on both sides of the color line gave racial segregation a remarkable capacity to evolve, revealing property owners' power to reshape American cities in ways that can still be seen and felt today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“In this bold and brilliant book, Connolly demolishes the conventional wisdom about the relationship of race and place in modern America. Rejecting a narrative that pits the black struggle for civil rights against a white defense of property rights, he shows how—and why—some African Americans embraced the logic and laws of real estate for their own ends. Deeply researched and elegantly written, *A World More Concrete* does more than simply describe the landscape created by whites and blacks in a major city; it shows how contemporary America itself was constructed.” (Kevin M. Kruse, author of *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*) “*A World More Concrete* explodes easy assumptions about the relationship between property-holding and white political domination in segregated South Florida. Revealing the tangled connections between black and white landlords and their African American renters, Connolly argues that together, black and white landlords helped ensure Jim Crow’s profitability, and its survival within state and society. His unsentimental conclusion that “people of every complexion made Jim Crow work” will provoke spirited debate among anyone interested in African American history, racial justice, and the quest for equality in America.” (Jane Dailey, author of *The Age of Jim Crow*) “*A World More Concrete* marks the arrival of an exciting new voice in American political and social history. Through a fascinating history of Miami, Connolly brings together politics, culture, and economics in a riveting account of how shared understandings of property rights and real estate were central to the racial segregation that has plagued America’s cities. Connolly unpacks the complex dynamics of property transactions and urban development, meticulously analyzing all the various institutional actors who shape this market in order to understand the political economy of racism.” (Julian E. Zelizer Princeton University) “There are no heroes in Connolly’s *A World More Concrete* except, perhaps, the long-suffering black masses. There are winners and losers, however, and the big winners were whites who controlled the land and real estate in Miami and Southeast Florida.” (Florida Times-Union) “Connolly’s sophisticated interpretation

highlights ruthless white exploitation and black middle-class complicity alike, identifying entrepreneurs, landlords, elected officials, and self-styled reformers as eager participants in land control schemes that took advantage of the poor. His unsparing narrative shows how native-born whites and blacks, Cubans, Seminoles, Haitians, and other Caribbean groups all invested in segregation. . . . As these cases and a host of others make clear, the author tells us, the story of Jim Crow in South Florida turns out to be a complicated one in which few clear-cut heroes and villains emerge. Capitalism and the profit motive underwrote urban governance, preserved Jim Crow, and put real estate at the center of race relations in Miami and throughout American society. The author's fascinating account will force planners and urban historians to challenge many of their ideas about race and cities. (Planning Perspectives) "Connolly writes with a passion that is born of systematic and comprehensive research and in a voice that though colored with compassion and self-proclaimed irreverence, is not tainted by bias. (Ethnic and Racial Studies) "At a time when the long-term consequences of both Jim Crow and urban renewal are still painfully evident across the United States, urban landscape, studies such as *A World More Concrete* help understand how the contemporary structures of white supremacy and power came into being in the first place. Throughout Connolly's work, it becomes very evident that urban planning decisions do not only change the physical structure and outlook of the city (in this case Miami) but also the way in which spaces can be and are inhabited and used in the everyday sense of the term. . . . This study provides plentiful new insights into the intersections of race and place in twentieth-century Miami, but also points far beyond that. The rejection of established ideas of this intersection will certainly lead to new readings of the workings of Jim Crow in the United States at large. (American Studies) "Just when scholars of the twentieth-century United States might reasonably assume we know plenty about how residential segregation in the North and South, in cities and suburbs, was created and defended, Connolly has shown us in this complex, multilayered, and engagingly written work that there is still more to learn about that story. . . . Connolly has a flair for language, metaphor, and character development that propels the narrative and renders it continually engaging. From those kids under the bridge to conflicting eulogies upon the death of Luther Brooks, the most prominent white property manager in the slums, Connolly draws out the contradictions that augment our understanding of how people built housing segregation and its impact. His *A World More Concrete* is a significant contribution to modern U.S. urban history and the history of race relations. (American Historical Review) "A *World More Concrete* is a dense, packed tale that expands the historiography on urban racial segregation by embedding it in the history of

capitalism. Connolly sharpens our understanding of the close and mutually constitutive relationships among liberalism, capitalism, and racism by placing real estate at the center of all three. Conflicts over the value of land shaped the American city in ways that policy reforms, social movements, and legal arguments could not undo. At times the density of detail somewhat obscures the larger arguments at the heart of the book. But if big points sometimes get buried in details, those details are consistently illuminating: Connolly uncovers an amazing array of perverse creativity, opportunistic alliances, and deceptive actions that shaped modern Miami. *Building & Landscapes* Connolly's focus on the enduring power of the social and property relationships at the heart of Jim Crow sheds new light on the unfulfilled economic promises of the civil rights movement. *A World More Concrete* demands we re-periodize the long history of the black freedom struggle along different axes of struggle and provides a compelling measure of its success and shortcomings. *(Labor)* *A World More Concrete* offers a densely researched account of the spatial history of the city and tells of how city planners and landlords conspired to cordon off neighborhoods like Jenkins Liberty City. Connolly points out the ways in which Miami is representative of other Sun Belt cities, with a local politics centered on property ownership and racism. *(Los Angeles Review of Books)*

N. D. B. Connolly is the Hebert Baxter Adams Associate Professor of History at Johns Hopkins University and visiting associate professor of history and social and cultural analysis at New York University.

Mr. Connolly is a professor of history at Johns Hopkins University. Connolly's book focuses on the way that Real Estate affects segregation (and vice-versa). There is an excellent interview of Mr. Connolly about this book at <http://www.remappingdebate.org/node/2331> I am a Cuban-American resident of Miami, so I don't have too much experience with Black Miamians. Nevertheless, it was very interesting to listen to the history of something that is so close to home, but I had no idea about. Some of the interesting facts that I learned about in the book are as follows: 1- How the "richer" Blacks tended to be as condescending to the "poorer" Blacks as the White Supremacists. This is especially evident with the Black slum lords. Or even with the middle-class Blacks that moved to the suburbs, and then resisted their downwardly-mobile brethren -- from the urban ghettos -- from later joining them in the suburbs. 2- The connection between education and real-estate in terms of how property taxes influence the achievement level of your local schools. 3- How Martin Luther King failed in many of his battles against Black slum-lords in

various cities, all over the country.4- How segregation was able to morph into the current structure, where you do not have the overt Jim Crow-era redlining. Making it much harder to protest because the segregation is harder to pin down to purely legal regulations.5- "Housing-integration" equals "Class-segregation". That the "rich Blacks" are as dismissive of the "poor Blacks" as "rich Whites" are.6- The concern of much of the civil rights movement has been to make life easier for wealthier Blacks, not necessarily to make life easier for poorer Blacks. For example, in Atlanta in the 1980s, a Pulitzer Prize-winning series of articles by Bill Dedman showed that banks would often lend to lower-income whites, but not to middle- or upper-income blacks. I consider myself to be an FDR Democrat, with the New Deal as the central force that drove the majority of Americans to the wealth that currently possess. However, this book helps to highlight some of the limitations that the New Deal faced when "economics" crossed into the "racial space" in US. You see how the hatred of Black people is the main driving force in how so many White people vote and make their economic decisions (e.g. where they live needs to be as far from Black people as possible). In the Obamacare debates, it was clear that many White people did not want to have a "Medicare-for-all" plan because it would unduly help out so many "lazy" Blacks. This racial Myopia really blinds so many White people to their own class interests. This topic is something that is so enduring that one really gets tired of reading about racism all the time. However, it really is a driving force in US history all the way through the beginning until today. For example, even redlining officially began under FDR's New Deal with the National Housing Act of 1934, which established the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Lastly, this book reminded me how "free Blacks" owned Black slaves in the Old South. Economics sometimes does trump racial politics, but not always. Since real-estate is so important to our lives, I think that it is important to learn about the racial aspects of real estate in the modern US, as well as in previous times. I still remember how the 2008 crisis was blamed by so many right-wingers on all the Blacks who took out mortgages that they couldn't pay. And the reason for the global recession was because of these "dumb Blacks" who messed things up for everyone. How so many middle-class Whites believed that Wall Street was not really responsible for the crisis shows how important it is for the Corporate elite to fan the flames of racism from time to time. Whenever there is an economic crisis, you can just place the blame on the Black "welfare-queens", and that's all.

Good book!

This book challenged my world views. Academically rigorous in demonstrating by example instead

of simply making arguments. This book deals with real estate in black neighborhoods in Miami. However what is striking is that also the principles could apply to wherever there is the economics of property intertwined with politics.

In all ways, an important, revelatory and readable book. Do you not care about the black sections of Miami? Think again! You will be drawn in and transformed.

Excellent

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