

Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/hoboken-is-burning/>

This video describes the author's research for a PhD dissertation at Princeton, focusing on urban transformation in the 1970s and 1980s. The author initially sought to understand the rise of inequality in cities, particularly through the arrival of young urban professionals (yuppies) in places like Hoboken, New Jersey. An important finding was a wave of arson fires that coincided with this gentrification, which were allegedly set by landlords to evict rent-controlled tenants and convert buildings for higher-paying residents.

The author's investigation, supported by archival research and oral histories, revealed a narrative of violent displacement that had previously been overlooked in historical discussions about gentrification. The influx of finance professionals during this period led to increased property demand, prompting landlords to resort to illegal means to displace low-income tenants.

This video highlights the scale of the arson crisis, including significant casualties and thousands of displacements. The author argues that while individual landlords may have seen short-term gains, the broader consequences of these practices included deepening urban inequality and a transformation of neighborhoods that catered primarily to wealthier residents.

Ultimately, the author calls for a reevaluation of how historians and sociologists consider the 1980s, advocating for acknowledgement of the complex social dynamics at play during urban redevelopment. The research concludes that revealing these conflicts and the violence underlying gentrification is crucial for understanding how cities change and whose interests prevail in the process. The author emphasizes that cities should be cautious in pursuing similar strategies for revitalization to avoid repeating the cycle of displacement and inequality.