



The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination

Sarah Schulman

Download now

Read Online 

The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination

Sarah Schulman

The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination Sarah Schulman

In this gripping memoir of the AIDS years (1981–1996), Sarah Schulman recalls how much of the rebellious queer culture, cheap rents, and a vibrant downtown arts movement vanished almost overnight to be replaced by gay conservative spokespeople and mainstream consumerism. Schulman takes us back to her Lower East Side and brings it to life, filling these pages with vivid memories of her avant-garde queer friends and dramatically recreating the early years of the AIDS crisis as experienced by a political insider. Interweaving personal reminiscence with cogent analysis, Schulman details her experience as a witness to the loss of a generation's imagination and the consequences of that loss.

The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination Details

Date : Published February 6th 2012 by University of California Press (first published January 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9780520264779

Author : Sarah Schulman

Format : Hardcover 179 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Gblt, Queer, History, Lgbt, Autobiography, Memoir

 [Download The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagi ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Ima ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination Sarah Schulman

From Reader Review The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination for online ebook

Merritt K. says

This book is one gut punch after another -- even if you think you know what happened in the plague era of American AIDS history, you truly don't know how much you've lost until you read this kind of reflection. Absolutely essential to anyone seeking to understand contemporary queer culture and how we got here.

Alvin says

I've always thought of Sarah Schulman as a hero for her work as an AIDS activist and Gay Libber, so I had high expectations for this book. I was not disappointed.

I know of nobody else who's so carefully analyzed the horrific consequences of gentrification and excessive social stratification on both culture and the individual human psyche. (Hint: people with gentrified minds tend to become boring conformists and/or social climbing snobs who identify with the ruling class, don't know understand how privilege works, and don't know how to organize politically.) She gives a clear, concise history of the gentrification process from an economic and urban planning point of view, but also anchors it in concrete examples that bring it to life in all its ugliness. She does this while simultaneously recounting the history of AIDS and AIDS activism that was occurring at the same time. Can you say erudite?

A large part of the book is given over to a beautiful evocation of queer Bohemia as it existed before AIDS and gentrification. Schulman not only describes the social life of the era, but pays homage to a host of individual geniuses and trailblazers lost to the plague. There is no way to read this section without being awed and moved.

My one quibble with the book is that it's shot through with political assertions that, if one doesn't share all of Schulman's political beliefs (and I don't), may strike one as dubious. Fortunately, she makes these assertions openly, clearly, concisely, and passionately - which makes for lively reading. Unfortunately, she tends to have a rather low opinion of those who hold opposing viewpoints so every time I disagreed with something I imagined her muttering at me, "What can you expect from a privileged, white, male assimilationist?" (That may just be my post-traumatic-stress-disorder reaction from growing up around dogmatic Marxists.)

On a final note, Schulman talks a lot about her personal life as a queer novelist, activist, and teacher, analyzing these roles from a socio-political perspective of ruthless objectivity. Like Joan Didion only perhaps even more-so. She is clearly an admirable human being, devoted to both her ideals and the flawed human beings around her those ideals are meant to uplift.

Liz says

not three stars like "it was okay", three stars like "love-hate". I really want people to read this so we can talk about it, it's pretty short, come on

really into her fundamental thesis that it's productive to compare the erasure of marginalised (in this case,

queer) histories to the erasure of marginalised neighbourhoods through gentrification — often literally, as in the case of the process of gentrification in New York being sped up by the AIDS-related deaths of queers in rent-controlled apartments. Really into everything she says about history, historical erasure, the generation gap between young and old queers, the traumatic weight of AIDS deaths, the insidious professionalisation of the arts and consequent erasure of queer voices.

Really not into the (commonly made) mistake throughout the book where she equates gentrification with homogenisation — gentrification is more often justified politically as a form of "integration", like bringing rich people or white people into predominantly poor or PoC neighbourhoods. It's very reliant on the idea of "mix", on urbanism as "mix", on selling the idea of living in a diverse bohemia. Rich white gentrifiers generally don't just want to live in suburbia with smaller bathrooms, they want to consume multi-ethnic bohemia, the problem is that they do, it is consumed, eaten. Like she's totally right that gentrification has more to do with capitalism and government policy than with artists. But artists in NYC in particular had a crucial and well-documented role in its gentrification. They didn't control it, they didn't cause it. But they were used for it.

Really really not into her unforgivably silly and misogynist anti-child screed that blames lesbians who have children for like the individualisation and rightward trend of queer movement today because like they make Schulman responsible for helping organise childcare which is demobilising and it's not like they have the energy to mobilise *politically* for childcare assistance which would be okay. What the fuck? Fuck you.

Mattilda says

I've been waiting for this book for years, and take a look at this incredible paragraph:

"The deaths of these 81,542 New Yorkers, who were despised and abandoned, who did not have rights or representation, who died because of the neglect of their government and families, has been ignored. This gaping hole of silence has been filled by the deaths of 2,752 people murdered by outside forces. The disallowed grief of 20 years of AIDS deaths was replaced by ritualized and institutionalized mourning of the acceptable dead. In this way, 9/11 is the gentrification of AIDS. The replacement of deaths that don't matter with deaths that do. It is the centerpiece of supremacy ideology, the idea that one person's life is more important than another's. That one person deserves rights that another does not deserve. That one person deserves representation that the other cannot be allowed to access. That one person's death is negligible if he or she was poor, a person of color, a homosexual living in a state of oppositional sexual disobedience, while another death matters because that person was a trader, cop, or office worker presumed to be performing the job of Capital."

Sarah Schulman deserves an award for that paragraph alone.

Sarah says

It's really easy for me to read books that I find comfortable. Books that make me happy, or soothe me, or amuse me. But I know that the books that upset me, or make me uncomfortable, or leave me awake in the middle of the night are frequently the ones that I really need to read.

I've been someone who has celebrated gentrified GLBTQ victories, and not even realized the ways in which they can be problematic. I'm a middle class cisgendered white girl who sometimes can't even see the structures of my own privilege.

This wasn't a perfect book, especially the moments in which I found the author perhaps too self-congratulatory (but better than false modesty, especially considering the ways in which women are socialized to be humble). And I'll admit that I started to get irritated at the overuse of the word "gentrification" (I realize it was the theme of the book, but there are really only so many times something needs to be hammered home, especially in a book that is less than 200 pages).

But this book is about the loss of an entire generation of people, and how that loss is not discussed, analyzed, or addressed, and how frequently it is ignored, whitewashed, and re-told in more palatable form.

I only wish I could push a lot of people to read it.

Oriana says

This is an incredibly fascinating, incredibly frustrating, incredibly heartbreaking, and incredibly enraging book.

So much of it is deeply moving, a howling cry from the trenches lamenting the endless horror of the AIDS crisis and the myriad ways an entire segment of our society was failed, over and over, by every single one of the powers that be. Schulman has clearly been through the shit, fighting for her life and the lives of all the queer artists around her who were dying, dying, dying.

But the problems with this book are *vast*. It's wide-ranging and poorly balanced and often, honestly, insane. Her political and sociological analyses are sometimes staggering but at other times just utterly incomprehensible.

But some of it is so intense! Here she is talking about some of her long-gone friends: "I mean there were two competing aesthetics as the time: the people who favored candlelight vigils with the release of white balloons, and the kind of people who published a zine called *Diseased Pariah News*."

or

"I remember when David threw a 'dying party' in his Chelsea condo. He invited his closest friends and had us standing around eating and drinking while we watched him, emaciated, lying on the living room couch, dying in front of us."

or her truly devastating discussion of the way AIDS hastened the gentrification of entire neighborhoods like Greenwich Village, because as these men died, fast fast fast one after the other, whole apartment buildings full of dead and dying men with no legal benefactor to inherit their leases, the landlords booted any remaining significant others, cursorily "renovated," then doubled or tripled the rents to usher in a new moneyed demographic. Crushing.

But then, elsewhere, she says things like, "gay people are the new Jews" and "9/11 is the gentrification of AIDS" and "we decided to gentrify the truth about sex in order to save lives." What what what? In fact, she uses the words "gentrify" and "gentrification" so often, and in so many bewilderingly different permutations, that you start to wonder if this is a concept that *ever* held a fixed meaning, for her or for you or for anyone,

or if it's actually just a nonsense string of syllables onto which pretty much any idea can be projected.

This is a pretty short book, but it has very little structure and very little focus. There are pages and pages of interviews she has done elsewhere pasted in. There are big sections in bulleted lists that are really just paragraphs broken up in a confusing way. There's a whole transcription from a time she testified in court. In order to prove that lesbians don't win literary awards, she has a table listing the men and women who have won each of six different prizes over a decade just in order to write "none" in the women's column over and over and over. There's like an entire chapter that just confusingly names people she knew who died, and who they knew and a thing or two about some art they made.

Schulman rants and raves and loses her own thread often. Much of the time she sounds like a "get off my lawn!" old person, believing that no art or artists or creativity can exist that did not exist when she was young and vibrant, that today's gays don't get it or care to, that today's creatives are infantilized and privileged, that nothing is as good as it once was, oh woe oh woe oh woe.

She hates MFA programs and the education system in general (even though she is a professor); she hates publishing and thinks the whole industry is anti-lesbian, and that anyone who gets published is kowtowing to the mainstream and sacrificing their own creativity (which just makes it seem like sour grapes that her books are not put out by mainstream presses or that she, as a queer woman, has not won more awards).

I don't know, man. I really wish that instead of trying to write a sociological study, she had just written a memoir. I *do* want to read more about all the wonderful people she knew and loved and worked and made art with, who died so young, so suddenly, a whole generation lost, my god such an unfathomable tragedy. I want to hear her stories, because she's obviously got tons, and they are obviously so important. But I don't want to hear her theories, because, by and large, they are not fully formed, or not clearly described, or, sometimes, just totally bats. Which makes everything out of her mouth/pen totally suspect and ruins all the deeply necessary things I know she has to say.

Julie Ehlers says

This book is definitely flawed and initially I spent quite a bit of time arguing with it. Fortunately, though, I quickly realized that Schulman was talking about things that I had literally zero firsthand experience with, and the thing to do was to STFU and listen. Everyone should read this book, but you should especially read it if you consider yourself a progressive and assume that you and Schulman are already in agreement about everything. There's a lot to think about here.

6655321 says

I wanted this to be better and there are parts of it that are so right on that i was pacing about nodding in support and then Schulman just crashes into a wall of blind support for the fucking worst ideas, nostalgia or some of the most blindly hagiographic discussions of New York City (a city which she credits with an almost absurd aura of culture mixing ignoring that white gay men who sereoconverted in the mid 1980s were sometimes part of art scenes that were displacing non-white non-middle class people (or worse were slumlords keeping people in abominable conditions)) which cuts to the heart of Gentrification as Schulman defines it. For Schulman gentrification is the smoothing out of urban or psychic space and favoring facile and simplistic accounts and while she does a lot to look at how GLBT organizing has become a NGO dominated suit&tie&whitepickette fence thing she also just seems to never get out of New York City (here is a

hint: there are super politically active queer people, like a fucking lot of them, and they just aren't located in an art scene that has always been dominated by money Sarah, as a mentor of mine put in his copy of Larry Kramer's writing about HIV/AIDS in the 1980s "get the fuck out... and meet real people"). Which is where this is frustrating, Schulman doesn't have a particularly radical read on what GLBT people should be doing, she's right that the ongoing aftermath and devastation wrought by HIV/AIDS is being tidied up but she presents a smoothed over picture of what the struggle was about (which is more than one thing and has severe differences by community) to talk about art again (which i'll be honest i think the political efficiency of art is massively overstated). Anyway, there are some really, really, really good segments in this bookended by some of the worst writing this side of everydayfeminism which is, honestly, disheartening.

Richard says

BRILLIANT! ENRAGING! I want to quote the entire book. It's hard to talk about it. Really, you should just read it and let Schulman speak directly to you. If you are interested at all in supremacy, in erasure of history and culture. Queer folks especially should read Schulman and this book in particular, especially now when articles are coming out arguing that young queer people do not need to care about their history, the history of the people who created the opportunity for them to come out. This is an example of gentrification of the mind, of queer minds. Let us remember the people who have gone before us and seek out their art. For me, the chapter on queer literature filled me with rage and sadness. But, it is also exhilarating and empowering to read something so clear about its point of view.

Ammi Emergency says

This is one of the most important books I've read in years. I read it in a day and have talked about its thesis every day since. So vital, so life giving, and exceptionally gorgeously written on a prose level too.

Caroline says

How do I rate this book? Do I take away because I disagree with the author on many points, even if I understand and respect her anger and perspective? Do I give it 5 stars because it gave me so much to think (and talk) about? I have such conflicted feelings about this book. There are so many important messages, but there are just as many problematic messages. Perhaps more.

The strength and the weakness of this book is often how self-centered it is. The passion that drives Schulman's conviction also drives many knee-jerk statements. She fails to discuss art and counter culture outside her own sphere, meanwhile making sweeping statements about the state of art in the 1990s and on. The period she describes as the beginning of this mental/cultural gentrification coincides with the time I was growing up and finding amazing resources for being a young radical. She laments the lack of uncomfortable art following the AIDS crisis, but this is exactly the time of Riot Grrrl, a strong and powerful 'uncomfortable' art movement addressing feminist and queer issues. Boundaries were being pushed, just not in her scene. Her discussion of parenting is one of the most insulting things I have ever read on the topic and is little better than an argument telling women to stay barefoot and pregnant. The lack of discussion of race is striking. So much of this book exists in a vacuum, without really acknowledging it. But as a memoir of sorts, is it necessary? This is one of the many things I kept coming back to: every time I had a differing point of view from Schulman, I also had to think about how much of

that is reflected in our different experiences, and how much that perspective influences how valid her (or my) points are.

But there were absolutely wonderful things about this book, particularly in the way it addresses being an activist. Schulman addresses the need to convey the costs of activism, to dispel any image of activism being for people who have nothing to lose. Instead, you can lose important things (for example, a homophobic family) but it is worth the cause, and the progress. She also addresses the need and importance of accepting being uncomfortable: with ourselves, and in interacting with others.

Overall, I found the writing lacking clear direction and too inaccessible. I am a highly educated person with a fair amount of counter culture history and theory under my belt, and I often struggled. That being said, I would definitely like to read this book again, and perhaps in a book club where I could discuss it with others.

Conor says

Part history, part memoir, part poetic meditation on what it means to live certain principles in a combative world, this book takes the AIDS epidemic and its aftermath as its subject, honoring those lost and pondering the vacuum their absence has left behind. Sarah Schulman is an academic and a writer who was involved with the endlessly creative and transgressive ACT UP group in the 1980s, and she is unsparing in her critique of the sanitized, jejune New York we've inherited from those who perished in the chaos and despair of the plague decades prior.

Schulman as much reminds as admonishes, telling us of all the warm souls and incandescent minds the world lost out on because of our sanctimony, or judgment, or indifference. Reading this, I was reminded of tales that my Jewish friends will tell of their grandmothers' non-sequitur lamentations over the loss of not just life but potential in the European Holocaust, something that we in younger generations can accept only because we have never inhabited a world where such horror was unthinkable. Such an incomprehensible, unconscionable loss.

Everyone should read this book. Schulman could have just written a maudlin AIDS dirge, but while she honors AIDS' victims, she also challenges us to embrace and cultivate weirdness, difference, adversity, and discomfort. If there's one lesson to take from this book, it's that queerness is about breaking the paradigm, not working to fit within it. And in this unfortunate political moment where anthems are held in higher esteem than the lives of people of color, urban wealth inequality has reached cartoonish heights, and the child survivors of gun massacres are criticized for not sufficiently respecting the politicians who have failed them, I think the following is important to keep in mind:

[W]e currently live with a stupefying cultural value that makes being uncomfortable something to be avoided at all costs. Even at the cost of living a false life at the expense of others in an unjust society. We have a concept of happiness that excludes asking uncomfortable questions and saying things that are true but which might make us and others uncomfortable. Being uncomfortable or asking others to be uncomfortable is practically considered antisocial because the revelation of truth is tremendously dangerous to supremacy. As a result, we have a society in which the happiness of the privileged is based on never starting the process towards becoming accountable. If we want to transform the way we live, we will have to reposition being uncomfortable as a part of life, as part of the process of being a full human being, and as a personal responsibility.

ralowe says

god damn it i'd kill a whole cave of pepes for a black act up. the cdc: "In 2014, the estimated diagnosis rate for HIV cases in the United States was 13.8 per 100,000 population and 49.4 among blacks/African Americans." i'm not sure where that's at now 2017. BLM is a black queer femme product granted the legitimacy of disdain from conservatives mostly due to it being a politic that keeps black flesh hidden. the terrifying impossilbe gary fisherisms, a thouand times the critique of the critique of the nation, illegible. a valid alibi, the online outraged liberal circulation of black documentary snuff, mike brown, eric garner, tamir rice and more. by "black flesh" i refer to cathy cohen *boundaries of blackness*. ethical dreaming: beyond *time* magazine, what kind of black trans queer optics do i actually in my heart of hearts imagine? is it not merely beyond sarah schulman's grasp but my own? if the uninvited irruption of black queer trans flesh is beyond discourse then where? is schulman incapable of mitigating this bloody shitstorm? not sure to what extent i could be homies with schulman. i don't think she'd approve of me for some reason and then it'd be over. a really close colleague i used to work with— okay mattilda— deeply admired schulman for the unrelenting purity of her analysis and unwillingness to allow people their contradictions, and i have inherited that trait from her through her. and i believe that whenever it has been feasible— excepting those occasions where it is absolutely necessary— these tendencies have contributed manifestly to successful flourishing, generally as well as mine. not like that shit on tumblr where people tear each other to pieces. "tear each other to pieces"—another heuristic of mattilda's idiomatic inheritance: she'd use it to describe act up meetings in san francisco, how people treated each other, near the end i presume. it's a schulman construct i bet. sitting in a cafe in tech gentrified san francisco i can't help despairing at a recent black trans queer direct action project that came undone but not in so dramatic a fashion implied in "tear each other to pieces". i tried my best to be calm but firm for the most part in meetings. my emails are characterized otherwise. one of the most explosively disliked emails was written while i was in the midst of what i personally experienced as complete emotional detachment. i wonder if that was psychosis. but group-wise the differences were so stark that the few of us that together held precious distinct notions of reciprocity could no longer front on the fact that the group was impossible— and by extension, us. well, not literally in a frank wilderson way "us", 'cause i'm still here, but you know what i mean. how immense and subtle, like the ground beneath your feet, were the forces we were working against. it was cosmic joke, meaning a joke on a cosmic scale, 42. these same forces write themselves as natural in schulman's democratic party aura, even as she knows and articulates that isomorphic naturalizing process enacted by straights against homos. i had low expectations for this book, and kind of wanted to get it out of the way so i can label myself current, but i'm actually worried about how much i did enjoy this book before now. enjoyed it as i floated through the marina waiting for a vegan bakery to open because i thought it described precisely the bland affluence we're fighting against, where i was walking through, choosing to walk through to eat, or something, but to what extent is sarah (i mean "schulman")'s and mine's the same fight? hers is overly and eloquently discursive on a Broadway scale. but in an alternate schulmanhood or schulman dimension i'm tripping on the non-discursive way that black queer trans sociality moves through signals in the mall bathroom... because after all schulman(i keep wanting to type "sarah")'s critiques seemed to have went the right direction for the better part of the most part. sorta. but then i thought about it and gradually i lost my mind, hoodwinked again! schulman does little to disrupt the lowkey andrew sullivanizing formaldehyding and periodizing of HIV/AIDS context she writes from within. the touching elegy of all her lost friends sincerely almost brought a tear to my eye in the marina, but then i remembered how much longer the names of the lost are in that sped-up cut of obit portraits in *tongues untied*, everything we don't know, a deadly miasm on the unfolding present statistically three years old; i feel size queeny and gross stat to stat, however millions more than you, but yeah. damn you, secular humanism! at one point she mocks this ineligibility of subaltern black queer trans deviant flesh to ever matter by noting that one elegized friend although a published author just couldn't write very well, awwe. that's fine, at least he's not a nigger.

Jessica Silk says

I agree with others who said this is an important book. Two parts I would like to share/save for myself:

"It's never going to change," a wealthy, white, male, MFA-trained playwright told me about the exclusion of women playwrights from the American theater. "And if you try, people will say you are difficult." On the other hand, Audre Lorde--Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet--told me, "That you can't fight City Hall, is a rumor being spread by City Hall."

"Be we currently live with a stupefying cultural value that makes being uncomfortable something to be avoided at all costs. Even at the cost of living a false life at the expense of others in an unjust society. We have a concept of happiness that excludes asking uncomfortable questions and saying things that are true but which might make us and others uncomfortable. Being uncomfortable or asking others to be uncomfortable is practically considered antisocial because the revelation of truth is tremendously dangerous to supremacy. As a result, we have a society in which the happiness of the privileged is based on never starting the process towards becoming accountable. If we want to transform the way we live, we will have to reposition being uncomfortable as part of life, as part of the process of being a full human being, and as a personal responsibility."

Elaine says

There are times during this book when I wanted to throttle Schulman - some of her political analysis is facile and even knee-jerk, and she endows swathes of the population with a host of characteristics that she condemns as "gentrified", by which she sometimes means just traits that she doesn't like.

But there were also times when I felt like standing up in my train seat and cheering her on, because this book is saying in its cacophonous, slightly obnoxious way many true and heartbreaking things that I have thought, wondered about or tried to avoid thinking. About the gentrification of New York, which I am both a part of and horrified by. (Although I could take her romanticization of "her" East Village to task on an any number of levels, there is also much that is true and moving in what she writes. I am several years younger than Schulman, but still managed to bear witness to the transformation of the EV from gritty stinky dangerous urban landscape that was largely Latino but still with traces of early 20th century immigrations to a post-frat yuppie playground. And although she writes, in 2010, that she hopes the credit crisis has brought the gentrification of New York to a halt, I am part of - and saddened witness to - the absolute gentrification and mallification of more and more of Brooklyn with every passing week. The neighborhood I live in, where 15 years ago, everyone knew each other, men spoke Sicilian and Pugliese dialects on street corners outside social clubs and the best cannoli, pizza, mozzarella, sausage and panelle in the city could all be found in a few block stroll, welcomed its first Lulu Lemon a few weeks ago. And yes, I know I'm the target audience for the Lulu Lemon).

Schulman's sprawling yet slender book is "also" about the enormous trauma of losing a generation of gay men and others to AIDS, and about how that trauma is largely undiscussed and unacknowledged. (As a very young woman in New York in the early 90s, I used to deliver meals to dying men, horribly disfigured, men who to a man were at least a decade younger than I am now. At first, it irked me that they weren't more grateful for our charitable efforts. Then I realized how angry most of them were - and how they had every right to be so, abandoned, more or less, as they were.) The decade that separates me from Schulman means

that my friends didn't die or (mostly) get infected, but I did once tease an older gay friend and colleague about surrounding himself with handsome men many years his junior. He, a consummate lawyer who never loses his cool, looked at me almost saddened by my ignorance, "Elaine, all my friends are dead." Schulman's book is that knife-like statement writ large and angry. She is a survivor, she is saying, and so are all of us, and our culture, and attention must be paid.

She also says stuff I think but daren't speak about often. About how the most transgressive of movements has become about marriage, that most conservative of institutions. And about the way that AIDS is a part of that. I don't agree with all of her analysis by any means. But I'm glad she's talking about it. Just as I'm glad that she's talking about women - and what the current self-inflicted cult of motherhood does to feminist anger and energy, and our hope that society could actually be different for women, and glad she's talking about the deep inequities in our society and the fundamentally meretricious story that is told people about the power of education to change those inequities. (The book touches on a lot of things!)

There's so much in this book. Not all of it is easy, especially since I can guess what Schulman would make of me (a few mutual friends float through this book - I wonder actually, if I've ever met her, but suspect she'd dismiss my straight/cis/white/uber-privileged self as so much cannon fodder - even though I'd love to have a conversation/ argument with her), and not all of it is right. But it's been a while since I have read a book that made me think, react so much - rolling my eyes one page, saluting her the next. And it only takes a few hours to read. Recommended - but not simple.
