Economic Inequality and Gentrification in Modern-Day South Africa

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South Africa is one of the most powerful and important countries in modern Africa. Known for its first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela, and its unique and abundant wildlife, this medium-sized country has had an effect on the world stage for decades. Tragically, however, extreme and systematic income inequality is far too prominent in the lives of South Africans. Much of this inequality was created and accelerated due to the apartheid regime in the twentieth century, which was a system of legalized and institutionalized segregation that crippled public life and social cohesion in South Africa. While South Africa is undoubtedly an important nation for global financial markets and international trade, it is also a country still reeling from the unimaginable traumas of apartheid.

Much of the most drastic inequality in South Africa can be found among racial lines, as white South Africans are far wealthier on average than black or "coloured" South Africans. This is correlated with the fact that white South Africans were often able to benefit from the apartheid regime, whereas non-white South Africans were subjected to unimaginable oppression. Due to the income inequality on display in South Africa, economic productivity and potential of the country is at risk. The wealthiest people in South Africa often have an extremely high standard of living, yet rampant poverty and unemployment is widespread. Due to deep-seated and systemic inequality that has not been completely abandoned since the end of the apartheid era, some of the world's starkest income inequality is found in South Africa. There is a positive correlation between inequality and gentrification in South African cities.

Johannesburg, the largest city in South Africa, contains many clear signs of the inequality plaguing South Africa today. In the time soon after the end of apartheid, Johannesburg had extensive racial discrepancies in access to basic living necessities. In 1995, 97 percent of white South Africans had a tap for water in their residence, but the same could be said for only 67 percent of black South Africans. Half of all blacks had a toilet that flushes in their "dwelling," compared to 99 percent of whites (Beall et al. 839). Even when a democratically elected government led by Nelson Mandela came to power in 1994, the social gaps that the government would have to bridge in order to attempt to build up any remotely unifying social fabric among the citizenry of South Africa. Despite these striking gaps in access to resources, citizens of Johannesburg may be more advantaged than many people living in urban areas in Africa.

Thirty-six percent of urban residents in Africa do not have sufficient water supply, and 45 percent do not have access to basic sanitation (Beall et al. 839). These statistics do line up with the general economic perception of South Africa as a whole among the international community: as one of the wealthier countries in Africa and a critical player in the region, yet a society still deeply indebted to the divisions between its haves and its have-nots. The divide between those with access to basic needs and those without serves as one of the greatest barriers to economic advancement in modern-day South Africa. It is difficult to obtain basic skills required for even generally menial jobs if one is not able to have basic nourishment and a reasonably sanitary standard of living. Lack of access to these needs degrades the potential productivity of an individual, which tends to reinforce the tragic cycle of poverty that seems almost impossible to break for many poor South Africans.

Furthermore, modern economic development in South African cities is often affected by what are referred to as unfunded mandates. This occurs when a locality seems to be or feels obliged to provide certain necessities or services to its citizens, but cannot afford to do so (Beall et al. 850).

Because apartheid created incredibly stark class divisions primarily based on race within much of South African society, the haunting legacy of apartheid is still present in many localities. While inequality is present to at least some degree in virtually every society in the world, not many states are more stratified than South Africa's major cities. This inequality even further stratisfies the gap in access to items that are generally considered important for a productive life, but not one hundred per cent necessary.

An example of one of these items is electricity. While electricity is present in many regions of South Africa and its use has been considerably increased in the country since the end of apartheid, the dividing line between South African households who have access to electricity versus those who do not is stark. A survey taken in the aftermath of the apartheid regime showed that 11 percent of informal residents of Guateng, the region of the country which includes Johannesburg, used electricity as their most prominent power source within their residence (Beall et al. 845). The greatest reason why many people do not power their residences with electricity in South Africa is that the cost of electricity is far higher than many other methods of power.

While South Africa's government has made efforts to attempt to redistribute resources to poorer communities within the country as a means of reducing economic inequality, this has been met with stiff resistance from taxpayers in wealthier areas, such as the Sandton region of Johannesburg, which is one of Africa's wealthiest areas (Beall et al. 850).

Unequal access to resources and wealth seems to have led to modern gentrification efforts in South African cities. This tends to occur when a group of wealthier South Africans who seem to demand a high standard of living settle in a neighborhood, leading to property values spiking due to rising incomes in the immediate area.

An example of the effects of modern gentrification in Johannesburg is the Parkhurst region of the city. The city was gentrified after the apartheid regime when more upscale, suburban-style homes as well as a variety of new and more expensive businesses were added. Today, the socioeconomic demographics of Parkhurst residents have risen significantly, and a typical home in the neighborhood today may have features such as high perimeter walls, enhanced home security, and electric fencing (Monare et al. S115-S116).

These sorts of features would be unthinkable in poor or even middle-income neighborhoods of South Africa. Many of South Africa's high-income and/or gentrified urban neighborhoods are disproportionately white. The 2011 South African census showed that 73.76 percent of Parkhurst's population was white (2011 South African National Census).

The demand for residences in gentrified regions of South Africa is often rooted in the desire among higher-income South Africans to live at a high and often very expensive standard of living. This further shows the clear racial divisions in South African society as well as the traumas that the country's apartheid regime inflicted on nonwhite South Africans.

Residents who move to gentrified neighborhoods are generally likely to be of higher social status than most of the general population due to the increased costs of living in areas that have been subjected to gentrification. Gardens, garages, and parking spaces now are far more likely to play a role in the lives of Parkhurst residents than those who live in most other areas of Johannesburg, much less South Africa as a whole.

Parkhurst has a variety of Western-style stores, restaurants, and supermarkets, which tend to be highly clustered on a small number of main streets in the neighborhood that were originally built up during the initial gentrification process (Monare et al. S116-S117). It is unclear the extent to which visitors to Parkhurst from surrounding neighborhoods and

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Masters Writing Guides areas affect the neighborhood's economy. For example, urban planners who supported initial gentrification in Parkhurst could attempt to argue that promoting upscale businesses and building restaurants to promote tourism to the neighborhood from the greater Johannesburg area would increase economic prosperity for the neighborhood as a whole, and its residents could potentially reap the benefits.

Interestingly, some of the effects of gentrification in Parkhurst might be viewed by the naked eye as almost opposite to what might be expected. First and foremost, gentrification of this neighborhood does not seem to have significantly displaced original residents of the region (Monare et al. S118). Rather, higher-income people seem to be simply coming into the neighborhood to live without necessarily displacing others.

This still raises the average income and educational levels of Parkhurst, which in turn raises property values and thus increases the cost of living. Because of this, not everyone living in Parkhurst today would be considered high-income, and most of those who are of lower resources than the average Parkhurst resident have no plans to leave the area. Some might view this understanding as almost ironic in nature, given that the debate over gentrification of urban areas in much of the West often centers around possible displacement of lower-income populations after a certain amount of time when rent in the neighborhood accelerates.

That said, Parkhurst is attractive to many higher-income prospective residents due to its recent developments in office space, proximity to the Gautrain (a commuter rail line in Gauteng,) and shopping (Monare et al. S117-S118). Furthermore, gentrification in South Africa appears to be a clear consequence of the social segregation that continues to manifest itself today in the country even today.

Neighborhoods in South African cities are highly self-segregated by race. While most South Africans would be considered black, minorities of "coloured" and white South Africans may form a majority or plurality in some regions. The segregated nature of these neighborhoods further proves disparities in access to basic necessities in South Africa. Parkhurst has far greater and higher quality access to basic necessities, such as electricity, water, and sanitation, than many areas in Johannesburg or in South Africa as a whole.

The mentalities from the apartheid era have been sadly present in the development and planning of modern Johannesburg. The city planned during the apartheid era as having portions that were upscale in nature and akin to classic European urban planning. However, only a very small group of citizens would be able to take advantage of these resources, and many poorer neighborhoods in Johannesburg suffer from social ills such as unsafe sex work and the drug trade (Simone 411-412).

Tragically, sex work in Johannesburg is often incredibly dangerous, and sexually transmitted diseases are a major health concern today in South Africa. There is also wide inequality in urban markets in South Africa, which "are renowned for being well run and for their multitude of goods and services overflowing whatever order is imposed upon them. In these markets, cooking, reciting, selling, loading and unloading, fighting, praying, relaxing, pounding, and buying happen side by side" according to A.M. Simone (Simone 426).

Due to a variety of concerns, Johannesburg is not much closer to satisfying the needs of its poor than it was a decade ago. Due to unbelievable differences in standards of living between South Africans, inequality seems to be the primary driver of gentrification. South Africa's wealthiest consume plentiful quantities of resources such as electricity, which poorer South Africans could not even conceive of. This inequality stems from the stark discrepancies due to the country's legacy of colonialism and apartheid, and it manifests itself in ways even far more profound than access to resources.

For example, 90 percent of white South Africans have passed the country's equivalent to eighth grade, in comparison with only 46 per cent of black South Africans (Nattrass and Seekings 46). This educational gap may possibly be the greatest facilitator of inequality in South Africa, and it has a massive effect on urban planning in the country as well. This further ends up affecting the country as a whole due to the educational gaps and differences in access to education between lower- and higher-income neighborhoods that may even be geographically close together in cities like Johannesburg.

South Africa's wealthiest neighborhoods rival comparable regions in the United States, western Europe, and Oceania in income and amenities. Safety is also a reason that draws affluent South Africans to live in gentrified areas. In urban areas around the world, many wealthier neighborhoods are often at least perceived of as lower in crime than some neighborhoods that are less than well-off.

Crime is a considerable problem in much of South Africa, and often leaves citizens who can afford to do so to maintain extensive and elaborate security systems and procedures around their residences. A reporter for *The Christian Science Monitor* who rented a home in South Africa while on an assignment there noted that his rental home contained "electric fencing, burglar bars, and more laser beams than a Star Wars set" (Baldauf).

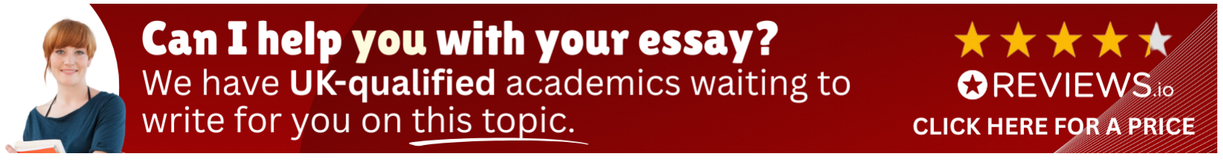
Racial segregation that has led to gentrification has a long history in South Africa on a variety of levels. During apartheid, the central business district of Johannesburg was zoned to only permit whites (De Vries and Kotze 124). During the apartheid era, Johannesburg's economy took a hit from so-called "white flight" in the 1970s and 1980s to suburban-style neighborhoods and regions north of the city such as Sandton and Randburg (De Vries and Kotze 124.) Today, Sandton is one of the wealthiest parts of greater Johannesburg. Much of the urban development in Johannesburg from the end of apartheid to today is not only fueled by the inequality on display in the region, but is generated by it.

Not all urban development in South Africa explicitly equates to gentrification, but even some of it manages to implicitly lead to gentrification. For example, several open spaces (many of them parks) have recently been built in the greater Johannesburg area. In 2001, the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) was created to maintain and promote development in Johannesburg, particularly its inner city and with an emphasis on parks (De Vries and Kotze 127).

Many would believe that the advantages that parks can offer urban spaces would lead to economic development. These advantages could include a potentially healthier population, access to nature and greenery, and a central gathering place for a community that one could possibly conceive of as akin to a plaza. There have been clear economic benefits for parts of cities with major parks in other parts of the world, such as Central Park in New York City. However, it is unclear whether such benefits are a result of the park's impact on the city or whether they are more structural and systemic.

Yet we know that many of the neighborhoods in Manhattan that surround Central Park are among the wealthiest parts of New York City. However, public parks in Johannesburg may have inadvertently led to gentrification because many of those interested in seeking out the cultural and health-related amenities of parks were people of considerable financial resources in the first place. Many poorer regions of South Africa do not have access to parks at all, yet the health problems and epidemics that affect these neighborhoods are not caused due to lack of access to a park. Rather, they are related to unreliable or near-nonexistent access to healthcare in the poorest regions of South Africa, where far too many citizens tragically live in squalor, and even the most basic necessities of life are often hard to find.

Furthermore, promotion of parks in Johannesburg was not primarily intended to uplift underprivileged neighborhoods. In fact, many wealthy neighborhoods of Johannesburg clearly were able to disproportionately benefit from some of the JDA's work in the city. For example, three of the JDA's parks in Johannesburg (Joubert, Attwell Gardens, and Ernest Oppenheimer; with the former being the largest in square meters of all the JDA's parks) are located in the city's central business district (De Vries and Kotze 128), which was closed to nonwhites during the apartheid era.



Furthermore, Johannesburg's central business district has a unique prevalence of resources unlike most regions in South African cities. The CBD was further improved in the financial years of 2001-2002 and 2007-2008 (De Vries and Kotze 128). One of the reasons that inequality leads to gentrification is that increasingly affluent buildup of urban regions often occurs at a drastically accelerated pace compared to economic development of a nation or state as a whole.

As a result, wealthy neighborhoods in a city may get richer and richer as poorer neighborhoods show little economic improvement over a period of time, which fosters the vicious cycle of social inequality in urban areas. While many gentrified parts of South Africa have never been as financially well-off as they are today, several of them still were far more economically developed and had much more advanced access to resources decades ago than most of the country. For example, in 1950, Parkhurst had "its own sewage system, piped water, electricity, street tires, a junior school, tarred roads, shops, churches, and sports fields" (Monare et al. S113).

This trend of gentrification tending to occur in previously advantaged neighborhoods is not exclusive to South Africa, despite the popular perception among many Western media outlets of gentrification primarily happening in old and initially very poor neighborhoods. There are clear patterns in gentrified parts of South Africa regarding the lifestyles of the people who live in these areas. For example, Parkhurst residents are drastically more likely to be of a white-collar profession and possess a university degree (Monare et al. S115).

If inequality breeds gentrification in South African cities, can the same be said for the United States? While there is much evidence to support this understanding in the urban environments in the United States, the evidence in support of it is not always as clear and evident as it is in South Africa. While deep inequality is undoubtedly present in American cities, it is not always as clear as what can be observed in South Africa.

American inequality is not necessarily comparable to South Africa's economic inequality for a variety of reasons. This is mainly because discrepancies between access to the most basic resources (water supply, sanitation, and electricity) in South Africa are much greater than in the United States, where access to such resources even among very poor Americans is far higher than access to these resources among the poor in many other countries (Beall et al. 833)

To closely investigate the effects of inequality in South Africa today in the aftermath of apartheid, one must consider that South Africa's economy today may be parallel with Gunder Frank's dependency theory, which states that an economy has "core" nations or parts ("metropoles") and "periphery" nations or parts ("satellites") (Class Notes From 1/25/2019).

If wealthier regions of South Africa are considered the core due to their high per-capita spending and economic output, they run the risk of (and often end up) exploiting the periphery. However, the core still needs the periphery in order to access basic lower-level resources that often tends to be produced by the periphery in service to the core and its economic needs.

South Africa's problems today regarding the intersection of inequality and gentrification can also be analyzed through Wallerstein's views on economic development. Much of the disparities in the country's urban environments stem from the fact that some labor sources in South Africa get paid far more than other labor sources.

Wallerstein believes that these discrepancies correlate very closely to where capital is most accumulated in a nation (Class Notes From 1/29/2019). This is true in South Africa, where many of the high-income neighborhoods accumulate disproportionate amounts of wealth. Some gentrified regions of South Africa include robust public transportation options such as commuter rail, as well as upscale shopping centers that can be a major draw to consumers who can afford to shop in them from surrounding regions (Monare et al. S118). Most gentrified neighborhoods in South African cities tend, in a very literal sense, to be far better off economically than at any point in the past.

According to Wallerstein, this would mean that they have engaged in high rates of economic development. This is because he claims that development refers to "catching up" in regards to economic growth, so when development is measured in the capitalist system, it is always based on whether the state or region is better off today in comparison to the past (Class Notes From 1/29/2019.)

When development and gentrification go hand-in-hand in urban areas, they run the risk of increasing property values in at least some parts of the gentrified areas, which is exactly what happened in Parkhurst (Monare et al. S118). Interestingly, Wallerstein might not agree that greater Johannesburg as a whole is developing due to the fact that much of the city overall is not seeing significant improvements in economic productivity and in the day-to-day lives of its citizenry.

There is a positive correlation between inequality and gentrification in South African cities. The racial segregation of apartheid led to unbelievable differences in standards of living among communities in South Africa, primarily divided on the basis of race. The wealthiest regions of South Africa were almost entirely majority-white, since whites were able to benefit economically from the apartheid regime in ways that others could not. While some black and coloured communities were able to begin to engage in upward economic mobility near the end of the apartheid regime, their ability to advance within society was completely unparalleled to that of the white population.

While inequality as a whole in South Africa has begun to modestly decrease since the end of the apartheid regime, it tragically plays a pervasive role in public and civic life in the country today. Even visitors to South Africa will pick up on these social ills quickly once they are in the country. Someone I know who has been to South Africa told me via text message that he observed "extreme inequality" and "people living in squalor without basics such as electricity or clean water while others in incredible mansions."

Since wealthier South Africans demand a high standard of living that often indulges in luxuries, they have flocked to and further developed high-income areas in ways that have become akin to gentrification. This gentrification sadly leaves many poorer regions of South Africa out in the dust.

While seemingly good-faith attempts have been made (with varying degrees of success) by South Africa's government to reduce inequality in the aftermath of apartheid, many of South Africa's wealthiest and gentrified areas are developing and prospering disproportionately fast compared to other areas of the country.

There are no easy solutions to reducing inequality in South Africa, and it is unclear how future gentrification will affect the country in the long run.

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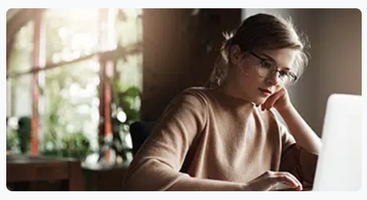

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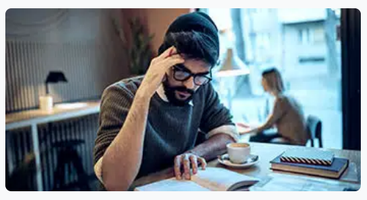

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