

BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 2

Teorías de la gentrificación

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El estudio de la gentrificación ha transitado por un amplio recorrido conceptual desde su formulación inicial hasta las discusiones actuales, constituyendo un campo de debate central en la teoría urbana crítica. Este bloque del marco teórico tiene como objetivo establecer una definición operativa de gentrificación, exponer sus principales dimensiones y recoger los debates contemporáneos sobre sus formas, causas y efectos, integrando estas discusiones con el enfoque estructural y multiescalar que guía esta investigación.

Origen del concepto y primeras definiciones

El término “gentrificación” fue introducido por Ruth Glass (1964) para describir el proceso de transformación de barrios obreros en Londres, donde sectores de clases medias altas se asentaban en zonas previamente habitadas por poblaciones de menores ingresos, generando el desplazamiento progresivo de estas últimas. Glass observó que estos procesos de cambio residencial no eran simplemente mejoras en el parque habitacional, sino fenómenos con implicaciones sociales profundas, vinculados a la transformación de la estructura de clase y a la expulsión de los antiguos residentes.

Teorización estructural: el rent gap y la lógica del capital

Uno de los desarrollos teóricos más influyentes en el estudio de la gentrificación proviene de Neil Smith (1979, 1986, 1996), quien, desde una perspectiva marxista, conceptualizó la gentrificación como una expresión de las lógicas de acumulación del capital en el espacio urbano. Su formulación del “rent gap” o “brecha de renta” explica que la gentrificación ocurre cuando existe una diferencia significativa entre el valor actual de uso de una propiedad o terreno y su valor potencial en el mercado si se reinvirtiera en ellos, generando incentivos para la inversión y revalorización del espacio. Según Smith, este proceso no es un fenómeno espontáneo ni cultural, sino un mecanismo estructural que facilita la reinversión del capital en áreas urbanas previamente devaluadas, en un contexto de urbanización bajo el capitalismo avanzado.

Este enfoque permite entender la gentrificación como una estrategia de rentabilidad, articulada con dinámicas de especulación inmobiliaria, políticas urbanas orientadas a la valorización del suelo y procesos de desplazamiento de poblaciones con menor capacidad adquisitiva. Desde esta perspectiva, la gentrificación forma parte de los mecanismos de acumulación por desposesión (Harvey, 2003), en los que la transformación del espacio urbano sirve como vía de resolución de crisis de sobreacumulación, al tiempo que genera profundas desigualdades y conflictos sociales.

Dimensiones simbólicas y culturales: la gentrificación simbólica

En paralelo a la explicación estructural, otros enfoques han resaltado las dimensiones culturales y simbólicas de la gentrificación, mostrando cómo el consumo cultural, el capital simbólico y los estilos de vida desempeñan un papel en la reconfiguración de los barrios. Sharon Zukin (1982, 1995), en sus trabajos sobre Loft Living y The Cultures of Cities, analizó cómo la cultura y la estética urbana se convierten en instrumentos de valorización de los espacios urbanos, a través de la atracción de sectores creativos, artistas y profesionales que generan una revalorización simbólica de los barrios. Este proceso, al que Zukin se refiere como “gentrificación simbólica”, muestra cómo las dinámicas culturales y de consumo pueden actuar en conjunto con los intereses del capital inmobiliario, convirtiendo ciertos barrios en espacios deseables que atraen inversiones y generan procesos de desplazamiento.

Debates contemporáneos: nuevas formas y escalas de la gentrificación

El campo de estudios sobre gentrificación ha incorporado debates contemporáneos que amplían la comprensión del fenómeno, discutiendo sus nuevas formas y escalas. Autores como Loretta Lees, Tom Slater y Elvin Wyly (2008) han analizado la globalización de la gentrificación, mostrando que este proceso ya no se limita a las ciudades del Norte Global, sino que se extiende a ciudades del Sur Global con características particulares, ligadas a procesos de neoliberalización, financiarización y políticas de regeneración urbana. Este fenómeno ha sido conceptualizado como “gentrificación planetaria” (Lees et al., 2016), resaltando su dimensión global y las especificidades que adopta en

contextos con diferentes estructuras socioeconómicas e institucionales. Asimismo, se han identificado nuevas formas de gentrificación, como la "super-gentrificación" (Butler y Lees, 2006), que describe procesos de transformación de barrios ya gentrificados en espacios de consumo de élite, y la gentrificación impulsada por nuevas construcciones (Davidson y Lees, 2005), que se produce a través de la promoción de proyectos de vivienda de lujo en zonas estratégicas, sin necesidad de transformación del parque habitacional existente. Estas formas reflejan las conexiones entre la gentrificación y los procesos de financiarización del espacio urbano, donde la lógica de inversión del capital transforma directamente los espacios urbanos en mercancías.

El desplazamiento como núcleo del fenómeno

Un punto de debate central en la literatura es el papel del desplazamiento como elemento constitutivo de la gentrificación. Mientras algunos enfoques han relativizado el desplazamiento directo como indicador, otros, como Slater (2009), insisten en que la expulsión de las poblaciones de menores ingresos es un rasgo definitorio del fenómeno, ya sea de forma directa (a través del aumento de los precios de alquiler y la compra de viviendas) o indirecta (a través de la transformación del entorno social y cultural que genera la exclusión simbólica).

Hacia una definición operativa para esta investigación

Este recorrido teórico permite establecer que la gentrificación, en el marco de esta investigación, se define como un proceso estructural y multicausal de revalorización del espacio urbano, ligado a dinámicas de acumulación de capital, de producción simbólica del espacio y de desplazamiento de poblaciones, que se expresa de forma específica en las ciudades globales. Esta definición integra las dimensiones estructurales (rent gap y acumulación de capital), culturales (consumo simbólico y estilos de vida) y políticas (intervenciones urbanas y regulación estatal) del fenómeno, permitiendo un análisis comprensivo de la gentrificación como fenómeno global-local. De este modo, este bloque del marco teórico ofrece un armazón analítico sólido que permitirá, en los siguientes apartados de la tesis, conectar las dinámicas de la gentrificación con la financiarización del espacio urbano y con las desigualdades y resistencias que emergen en las ciudades globales, estableciendo las bases para el análisis comparativo de los seis casos seleccionados.

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Importancia de incluir el Bloque temático 2 en el marco teórico

Incluir un bloque específico sobre las teorías de la gentrificación en el marco teórico es esencial para dotar a la investigación de una definición operativa sólida y una comprensión integral del fenómeno, más allá de su percepción como simple renovación barrial. Este bloque permite articular los enfoques estructurales (rent gap y acumulación de capital), simbólicos (producción cultural y consumo de estilos de vida) y políticos (intervenciones urbanas y marcos regulatorios) de la gentrificación, integrando los debates contemporáneos sobre sus nuevas formas y escalas, incluida su expansión en el Sur Global. De este modo, la tesis puede analizar la gentrificación como un proceso multicausal, estructural y multiescalar, conectado con las dinámicas del capitalismo avanzado, preparando el terreno para entender sus vínculos con la financiarización del espacio urbano y las desigualdades que genera en las ciudades globales estudiadas.

THE NEW URBAN FRONTIER

Gentrification and the revanchist city

NEIL SMITH



LONDON AND NEW YORK

THE NEW URBAN FRONTIER

Why have so many central and inner cities in Europe, North America and Australia been so radically revamped in the past three decades, converting urban decay into new chic? Will the process continue in the twenty-first century, or is it ended? What does this mean for the people who live there? Can they do anything about it?

This book challenges conventional wisdom—which holds gentrification to be the simple outcome of new middle-class tastes and a demand for urban living—to reveal gentrification as part of a much larger shift in the political economy and culture of the late twentieth century. Documenting in gritty detail the conflicts that gentrification brings to the new urban “frontiers,” the book explores the interconnections of urban policy, patterns of investment, eviction and homelessness.

The failure of liberal urban policy and the end of the 1980s financial boom have made the end-of-the-century city a darker and more dangerous place. Public policy and the private market are conspiring against minorities, working people, the poor and homeless people as never before. In the emerging revanchist city, gentrification has become part of this policy of revenge.

Neil Smith is a Professor of Geography and Acting Director of the Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture at Rutgers University.

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PREFACE

In his paradigmatic essay “The significance of the frontier in American history,” written in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner (1958 edn.) proposed that:

American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier.... In this advance the frontier is the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization.... The wilderness has been interpenetrated by lines of civilization growing ever more numerous.

For Turner, the expansion of the frontier and the rolling back of wilderness and savagery were an attempt to make livable space out of an unruly and uncooperative nature. This involved not simply a process of spatial expansion and the progressive taming of the physical world. The development of the frontier certainly accomplished these things, but for Turner it was also the central experience which defined the uniqueness of the American national character. With each expansion of the outer edge by robust pioneers, not only were new lands added to the American estate but new blood was added to the veins of the American democratic ideal. Each new wave westward, in the conquest of nature, sent shock waves back east in the democratization of human nature.

During the latter part of the twentieth century the imagery of wilderness and frontier has been applied less to the plains, mountains and forests of the West—now handsomely civilized—and more to US cities back East. As part of the experience of postwar suburbanization, the US city came to be seen as an “urban wilderness”; it was, and for many still is, the habitat of disease and disorder, crime and corruption, drugs and danger (Warner 1972). Indeed these were the central fears expressed throughout the 1950s and 1960s by urban theorists who focused on “blight” and “decline,” “social malaise” in the inner city, the “pathology” of urban life—in short, the “unheavenly city” (Banfield 1968). The city was rendered a wilderness, or worse, a “jungle” (Long 1971; Sternlieb 1971; also Castells 1976). More vividly even than in the news media or social science narratives, this became the theme of a whole genre of Hollywood “urban jungle” movies, from *King Kong* and *West Side Story* to *The Warriors* and *Fort Apache, the Bronx*. This “discourse of decline,” as Robert Beauregard (1993) has put it, dominated the treatment of the city.

Antiurbanism has been a central theme in US culture. In a pattern analogous to the original experience of wilderness, the last three decades have seen a shift from fear to romanticism and a progression of urban imagery from wilderness to frontier. Cotton Mather and the Puritans of seventeenth-century New England feared the forest as an

impenetrable evil, a dangerous wilderness, a primeval place. But with the continual taming of the forest and its transformation at the hands of increasingly capitalized human labor, the softer imagery of Turner's frontier became an obvious successor to Mather's forest of evil. There is an optimism and an expansive expectation associated with the "frontier" which refracts a sense of self-confident conquest. Thus in the twentieth-century US city, the imagery of urban wilderness—a desperate relinquishing of hope—was beginning, by the 1960s (widespread uprisings notwithstanding), to be replaced by a vision of the urban frontier. This transformation can be traced in part to the discourse of urban renewal (Abrams 1965), but was intensified in the 1970s and 1980s as the rehabilitation of single-family homes and tenement blocks became increasingly symbolic of a successor form of "urban renewal." In the language of gentrification, the appeal to frontier imagery has been exact: urban pioneers, urban homesteaders and urban cowboys became the new folk heroes of the urban frontier. In the 1980s, the real estate magazines even talked about "urban scouts" whose job it was to scout out the flanks of gentrifying neighborhoods, check the landscape for profitable reinvestment, and, at the same time, to report home about how friendly the natives were. Less optimistic commentators indict the emergence of a new group of "urban outlaws" in connection with inner-city drug cultures.

Just as Turner recognized the existence of Native Americans but included them as part of his savage wilderness, contemporary urban frontier imagery treats the present inner-city population as a natural element of their physical surroundings. The term "urban pioneer" is therefore as arrogant as the original notion of "pioneers" in that it suggests a city not yet socially inhabited; like Native Americans, the urban working class is seen as less than social, a part of the physical environment. Turner was explicit about this when he called the frontier "the meeting point between savagery and civilization," and although the 1970s and 1980s frontier vocabulary of gentrification is rarely as explicit, it treats the inner-city population in much the same way (Stratton 1977).

The parallels go further. For Turner, the westward geographical progress of the frontier line is associated with the forging of the "national spirit." An equally spiritual hope is expressed in the boosterism which presents gentrification as the leading edge of an urban renaissance; in the most extreme scenario, the new urban pioneers were expected to do for the flagging national spirit what the old ones did: to lead the nation into a new world where the problems of the old world are left behind. In the words of one federal publication, gentrification's appeal to history involves the "psychological need to re-experience successes of the past because of disappointments of recent years—Vietnam, Watergate, the energy crisis, pollution, inflation, high interest rates, and the like" (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 1980). From here, as we shall see, it was a short path from a failed liberalism to the revanchist city of the 1990s. No one has yet seriously proposed that we view James Rouse—the developer responsible for such maverick downtown tourist arcades as Baltimore's Inner Harbor, South Street Seaport in New York or Boston's Fanueil Hall—as the John Wayne of gentrification, but insofar as such projects serve to anchor the gentrification of many downtowns, the proposal would be quite in keeping with the frontier discourse. In the end, and this is the important conclusion, the frontier discourse serves to rationalize and legitimate a process of conquest, whether in the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century West, or in the late-twentieth-century inner city.

Turner's effect on Western history is still monumental, and the groove he carved for a patriotic history has been difficult to escape. Yet a new generation of "revisionist" historians has begun to rewrite the history of the frontier. Patricia Nelson Limerick senses the latter-day urban reappropriation of the frontier motif in her corrective to Hollywood histories of the West:

If Hollywood wanted to capture the emotional center of western history, its movies would be about real estate. John Wayne would have been neither a gunfighter nor a sheriff, but a surveyor, speculator or claims lawyer. The showdowns would appear in the land office or the courtroom; weapons would be deeds and lawsuits, not six-guns.

(Limerick 1987:55)

Now this might seem in many ways a highly nationalist scripting of the gentrification process. In fact, of course, gentrification is a thoroughly international phenomenon, having emerged widely in the cities of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Europe, and more sporadically in Japan, South Africa and Brazil. In Prague or Sydney, or for that matter Toronto, the language of the frontier is not such an automatic ideological lubricant to gentrification as in the US, and this frontier mythology, applied to the *fin-de siècle* city, see msadistinctly American creation. While there is no doubt that the frontier mythology is more viscerally present in the US, still the original frontier experience is not simply a US commodity. In the first place, it was as intensely real a vision of the New World for potential immigrants from Scandanavia or Sicily as it was for the Germans or Chinese already living in Kansas City or San Francisco. But second, other European-colonial outposts—the Australian or Kenyan outback, the "northwest frontier" of Canada or India and Pakistan, for example—shared different but equally powerful elixirs of frontier and class, race and geography which laid them open to parallel ideologies. And finally, the frontier motif has in any case emerged in non-US situations.

Most notably, perhaps, the frontier emerges in London as what became known as the "frontline". Following riots between police and Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, and white youths in London (and other British cities) through the 1980s, a territorial line emerged in several neighborhoods. These front-lines, such as All Saints Road in Kensington and Chelsea (Bailey 1990) or those in Notting Hill or Brixton, were simultaneously defenses against police incursions in the 1970s and at the same time strategic "beachheads" established by the police. They also quickly became antigentrification lines in the 1980s. Sir Kenneth Newman, former Metropolitan Police commissioner, launched the police dimension of this frontline strategy in the early 1980s, and explained its purpose in a lecture to the right-wing European Atlantic Group. Citing the "growth of multi-ethnic communities" which were responsible for producing a "deprived underclass," Newman anticipated "crime and disorder," and identified eleven "symbolic locations" in London, including the frontlines, where special tactics would be required. For each location, "there was a contingency plan to enable the police swiftly to occupy the area and exert control" (cited in Rose 1989).

The frontier motif has been every bit as literal in the cultural froth of everyday London life. As enthusiastically as anywhere in the US, "urban cowboy" became a cult style for some. "Yup, it's high noon all over London," says Robert Yates (1992) "and Wild West

fanatics are donning their stetsons, saddling their horses, and making believe that Tower Bridge is Texas.” In Copenhagen the “Wild West Bar” opens in a gentrified neighborhood where, in May 1993, six protestors were shot by police in a riot following a Danish vote for the Maastricht European Union treaty. From Sydney to Budapest, Wild West bars and other frontier symbols regularly script and adorn the gentrification of city neighborhoods. And of course the motif often sports a distinctive local moniker, as with the empire theme in London wherein the gentrifiers become “the new Raj” (M. Williams 1982) and the “Northwest Frontier” takes on an entirely new symbolic and political meaning (see also Wright 1985:216–248). In this version, the internationalism of gentrification is more directly admitted.

As with every ideology, there is a real and partial if distorted basis for the treatment of gentrification as a new urban frontier. The frontier represents an evocative combination of economic, geographical and historical advances, and yet the social individualism pinned to this destiny is in one very important respect a myth. Turner’s frontier line was extended westward less by individual pioneers, homesteaders, rugged individualists, than by banks, railways, the state and other collective sources of capital (Swierenga 1968; Limerick 1987). In this period, economic expansion was accomplished largely through geographical expansion on a continental scale.

Today the link between economic and geographical expansion remains, giving the frontier imagery its potency, but the form of that connection is very different. Economic expansion today no longer takes place purely via absolute geographical expansion but rather involves internal differentiation of already developed spaces. At the urban scale, this is the importance of gentrification *vis-à-vis* suburbanization. The production of space in general and gentrification in particular are examples of this kind of uneven development endemic to capitalist societies. Much like a real frontier, the gentrification frontier is advanced not so much through the actions of intrepid pioneers as through the actions of collective owners of capital. Where such urban pioneers go bravely forth, banks, real estate developers, small-scale and large-scale lenders, retail corporations, the state, have generally gone before.

In the context of so-called globalization, national and international capitals alike confront a global “frontier” of their own that subsumes the gentrification frontier. This link between different spatial scales, and the centrality of urban development to national and international expansion, was acutely clear in the enthusiastic language of supporters of urban Enterprise Zones, an idea pioneered by the Thatcher and Reagan governments in the 1980s, and a centerpiece of 1990s urban privatization strategies. As Stuart Butler (a British economist working for the extreme right-wing American think tank, the Heritage Foundation) suggests, in this diagnosis of urban malaise, the conversion of the inner city into a frontier is not an accident and the imagery is more than a convenient ideological conveyance. As in the nineteenth-century West, the construction of the new urban frontier of the *fin de siècle* is a political geographical strategy of economic reconquest:

It may be argued that at least part of the problem facing many urban areas today lies in our failure to apply the mechanism explained by Turner (the continual local development and innovation of new ideas) to the inner city

“frontier”.... Proponents of the Enterprise Zone aim to provide a climate in which the frontier process can be brought to bear within the city itself.
(Butler 1981:3)

* * *

This book is divided into four parts. The introductory part sets the stage for the social, political and economic conflicts that are raised by gentrification. The first chapter focuses on the struggle over Tompkins Square Park in New York’s Lower East Side, and highlights how one of the most intense anti-gentrification struggles of the 1980s turned the neighborhood into a new urban frontier. The second chapter offers a short history of gentrification and a survey of current debates, and makes the central argument that in the 1990s, continuing gentrification contributes to what I call the “revanchist city.” Part I pieces together several theoretical strands that help explain gentrification. Where chapter 3 focuses on the housing market and the local scale, chapter 4 is explicitly global in focus and deals with wider economic arguments about uneven development. Chapter 5 considers some of the arguments that connect gentrification with the social restructuring of class and gender. Using case studies from Philadelphia, Harlem, Budapest, Amsterdam and Paris, Part II attempts to show the fluid interconnection between global shifts in the social economy and the myriad detail of local instances of gentrification. I emphasize here the role of the state and the “catch 22” character of the process for existing working class residents, as well as the different contours of gentrification in different cities and different decades. Part III attempts to turn the frontier motif on its head. By actually mapping the gentrification frontier, we can demonstrate the kernel of harsh economic geography around which the acclamatory cultural scripting of urban pioneering is built. The last chapter argues that the emerging revanchist urbanism of the *fin de millenaire* city, especially in the United States, embodies a revengeful and reactionary viciousness against various populations accused of “stealing” the city from the white upper classes. Gentrification, far from an aberration of the 1980s, is increasingly reemerging as part of this revanchism, an effort to retake the city.

* * *

In retrospect I suppose I first saw gentrification in 1972 while working for the summer in an insurance office in Rose Street in Edinburgh. Every morning I took the 79 bus in from Dalkeith and walked half the length of Rose Street to the office. Rose Street is a back street off majestic Princes Street and long had a reputation as nightspot with some long-established traditional pubs and a lot of more dingy howffs—watering holes—and even a couple of brothels, although these were rumored to have decamped to Danube Street by the early 1970s. It was the place in Edinburgh for a pub crawl. My office was above a new bar called “The Galloping Major” which had none of the cheesy decor or sawdust on the floor of the old-time bars. This one was new. It served quite appetizing lunches adorned with salad, still a novelty in most Scottish pubs at the time. And I began to notice after a few days that a number of other bars had been “modernized”; there were a couple of new restaurants, too expensive for me—not that I went to restaurants much in any case. And narrow Rose Street was always clogged with construction traffic as some of the upper floors were renovated.

I didn't think much of this at the time, and only several years later in Philadelphia, by which time I had picked up a little urban theory as a geography undergraduate, did I begin to recognize what I was seeing as not only a pattern but a dramatic one. All the urban theory I knew—which wasn't much, to be sure—told me that this “gentrification” wasn't supposed to be happening. Yet here it was—in Philadelphia *and* Edinburgh. What was going on? In the remaining years of the 1970s I had many similar experiences. I heard and loved Randy Newman's song, “Burn on Big River” as a biting environmental protest, but by the time I got to Cleveland in 1977, the bar scene in the Flats by the Cuyahoga River was already beginning to attract a few yuppies, and students like myself, as well as Hell's Angels and the last workers from the docks. I thought I saw the writing on the wall. I bet an incredulous friend from Cleveland that the city would have significant gentrification within ten years, and although she never did fork over, she was forced to admit defeat long before the ten years were up.

The essays in this book involve a variety of experiences of gentrification but they are based more in the US than anywhere else. Indeed three or four of the chapters—especially the concluding arguments discussing political and cultural opposition to gentrification—are based on my experiences and research in New York City. This obviously raises questions about the applicability of the arguments in other contexts. While I accept the admonition that radically different experiences of gentrification obtain in different national, regional, urban and even neighborhood contexts, I would also hold that among these differences a braid of common threads ripples through most experiences of gentrification. A lot can be learned from the New York experience, and there is much in New York that strikes a chord elsewhere. When Lou Reed sang “Meet You in Tompkins Square” (on his album *New York*) he made the violent struggles around that park in the Lower East Side an instantly recognizable international symbol of the emerging “revanchist city” for many people.

Many of the chapters in this book represent revised and edited versions of essays I have published previously, and so my first debt lies with my co-authors. I am especially grateful to Richard Schaffer, with whom I worked on the initial Harlem research in Chapter 7, and to Laura Reid and Betsy Duncan, who coauthored a first version of Chapter 8. I should also acknowledge a National Science Foundation Grant no. SE-87-13043 which sponsored the research reported in Chapter 9.

Many people have commented on different aspects of this work and in other ways contributed to it. The following list is very partial and I apologize for those I have inevitably missed in reconstructing the history: Rosalyn Deutsche, Benno Engels, Susan Fainstein, David Harvey, Kurt Hollander, Ron Horvath, Andrea Katz, Hal Kendig, Les Kilmartin, Larry Knopp, Mickey Lauria, Sheila Moore, Damaris Rose, Chris Tolouse, Michael Sorkin, Ida Susser, Leyla Vural, Peter Williams, Sharon Zukin. Many people have eagerly introduced me to gentrification in their cities and helped to broaden my own vision: Benno Engels, Ron Horvath, Janelle Allison, Ruth Fincher, Mike Webber, Blair Badcock, Judit Timár, Viola Zentai, Zoltan Kovács, Ed Soja, Helga Leitner, Eric Sheppard, Jan van Weesep, John Pløger, Anne Haila, Alan Pred, Eric Clark, Ken and Karen Olwig, Steen Folk.

I am grateful to Mike Siegel, who drew the maps and artwork, and to Ruthie Gilmore, Marla Emory, Annie Zeidman, and especially Tamar Rothenberg, who gave excellent

research support at various stages. Whatever coherence the book can claim owes a lot to them.

Several people have been especially important in my gentrification research. Roman Cybriwsky was very generous with his time, ideas and support at the earliest stage of my gentrification research, and that generosity continues in his donation of a print for this book. Briavel Holcomb has been an equally generous and supportive colleague, always passing something on that will interest me—including brown-eared copies of her confidential referee's reports on some of my earliest work. Bob Beauregard always somehow found the time to fully engage, even when he disagreed; with Bob Lake and Susan Fainstein, Bob Beauregard has been the most collegial of colleagues.

Eric Clark has been a firm critic as well as supporter; I have learned a lot from his arguments, on paper and in person, and have benefited from his generosity. Jan van Weesep invited me to Utrecht in 1990, and thereby gave me the time and space to begin thinking about gentrification in a broader context. But not before he organized a two-day conference on "European gentrification"—then promptly lent me his car on the second day to explore the Polders (where there is no gentrification) so that he could get out a European gentrification agenda, unobstructed by my insistence on a global purview. A fair exchange is no robbery. Chris Hamnett, who arrived in Utrecht along with the first squalls of a hurricane, is a longtime friend and impish antagonist without whom discussions of gentrification would have been a lot more bromidic.

I have to make special acknowledgment of Joe Doherty. At a particularly impressionable point in my education I had the enthusiastic idea of studying the diffusion of new silage technologies in the Midwest, and without Joe's gentle and patient guidance that gentrification was something I could get my teeth into, I might well have become a pastoral geographer. In the same context, I should also acknowledge the bureaucrat in the US Department of Agriculture—I forget his name—who never answered my letter requesting data, and thereby made Joe's advice more persuasive. Joe was also the one who alerted me to Ruth Glass's role in coining the term "gentrification."

Rick Schroeder, Do Hodgson, Tim Brennan, David Harvey, Haydee Salmun, Delfina Eva Harvey, Ruthie Gilmore, Craig Gilmore, Sallie Marston are friends whose influence, support and comradeship transcend any concern with gentrification. Indeed, they remind me that there is life after gentrification, although I am not always so sure.

I have known Cindi Katz for just about as long as I have known gentrification, but only since the day that the New York City police first violently evicted homeless people from Tompkins Square Park, on the coldest day of December 1989, have Cindi and gentrification been entwined together in my life. With her I would love to see a world after gentrification, and a world after all the economic and political exploitation that makes gentrification possible: the personal tendrils of a new politics.

Finally, the journey from Dalkeith to Philadelphia in 1974 was very much a journey away from home. With this book I might be able to give something back. Dalkeith isn't quite facing gentrification, I suspect, but most people in Dalkeith will recognize the broad politics of gentrification only too well. Therefore I would like to dedicate this book to my mother and father, Nancy and Ron Smith, who ensured not just that I got the education that took me away but that it was a political education. I know they will be honored to share the dedication with people fighting gentrification everywhere.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many of the chapters in this book are revised, updated and edited versions of papers that first saw the light of day elsewhere. They appear here with the permission of those editors and publishers. Chapter 1 is an updated adaptation of two essays: "Tompkins Square: riots rents and redskins," *Portable Lower East Side* 6 (1989), edited by Kurt Hollander; and "New city, new frontier: the Lower East Side as Wild West," in Michael Sorkin (ed.) *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, New York: Hill and Wang (1992). Chapter 3 is derived from "Toward a theory of gentrification: a back to the city movement by capital not people," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 45 (1979). An earlier version of Chapter 4 was originally published as "Gentrification and uneven development," *Economic Geography* 58 (1982). Chapter 5 expands upon "Of yuppies and housing: gentrification, social restructuring and the urban dream," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 5 (1987). Chapter 6 originally appeared as "Gentrification and capital: theory, practice and ideology in Society Hill," *Antipode* 11, 3 (1979). An earlier version of Chapter 7 was coauthored with Richard Schaffer: "The gentrification of Harlem?," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 76 (1986). Chapter 9 is distilled from "From disinvestment to reinvestment: tax arrears and turning points in the East Village," *Housing Studies* 4 (1989), coauthored with Laura Reid and Betsy Duncan. And Chapter 10 develops the theme of two papers: "After Tompkins Square Park: degentrification and the revanchist city," in A.King (ed.) *Re-presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st Century Metropolis*, London: Macmillan (1995) and "Social justice and the new American urbanism: the revanchist city," in Eric Swyngedouw and Andrew Merrifield (eds.) *The Urbanization of Injustice*, London: Lawrence and Wishart (1996).

INTRODUCTION

1

“CLASS STRUGGLE ON AVENUE B”

The Lower East Side as Wild Wild West

On the evening of August 6, 1988, a riot erupted along the edges of Tompkins Square Park, a small green in New York City's Lower East Side. It raged through the night with police on one side and a diverse mix of anti-gentrification protestors, punks, housing activists, park inhabitants, artists, Saturday night revelers and Lower East Side residents on the other. The battle followed the city's attempt to enforce a 1:00 A.M. curfew in the Park on the pretext of clearing out the growing numbers of homeless people living or sleeping there, kids playing boom boxes late into the night, buyers and sellers of drugs using it for business. But many local residents and park users saw the action differently. The City was seeking to tame and domesticate the park to facilitate the already rampant gentrification on the Lower East Side. “GENTRIFICATION IS CLASS WAR!” read the largest banner at the Saturday night demonstration aimed at keeping the park open. “Class war, class war, die yuppie scum!” went the chant. “Yuppies and real estate magnates have declared war on the people of Tompkins Square Park,” announced one speaker. “Whose fucking park? It's our fucking park,” became the recurrent slogan. Even the habitually restrained *New York Times* echoed the theme in its August 10 headline: “Class War Erupts along Avenue B” (Wines 1988).

In fact it was a *police* riot that ignited the park on August 6, 1988. Clad in space-alien riot gear and concealing their badge numbers, the police forcibly evicted everyone from the park before midnight, then mounted repeated baton charges and “Cossacklike” rampages against demonstrators and locals along the park's edge:

The cops seemed bizarrely out of control, levitating with some hatred I didn't understand. They'd taken a relatively small protest and fanned it out over the neighborhood, inflaming hundreds of people who'd never gone near the park to begin with. They'd called in a chopper. And they would eventually call 450 officers.... The policemen were radiating hysteria. One galloped up to a taxi stopped at a traffic light and screamed, “Get the fuck out of here, fuckface....” [There were] cavalry charges down East Village streets, a chopper circling overhead, people out for a Sunday paper running in terror down First Avenue.

(Carr 1988:10)



Plate 1.1 New York City police retake
Avenue A on the edge of Tompkins
Square Park. 1988 (© Andrew
Lichtenstein)

Finally, a little after 4:00 A.M. the police withdrew in “ignominious retreat,” and jubilant demonstrators reentered the park, dancing, shouting and celebrating their victory. Several protestors used a police barricade to ram the glass-and-brass doors of the Christodora condominium, which borders on the park on Avenue B and which became a hated symbol of the neighborhood’s gentrification (Ferguson 1988; Gevirtz 1988).¹

In the days following the riot, the protestors quickly adopted a much more ambitious political geography of revolt. Their slogan became “Tompkins Square everywhere” as they taunted the police and celebrated their liberation of the park. Mayor Edward Koch, meanwhile, took to describing Tompkins Square Park as a “cesspool” and blamed the riot on “anarchists.” Defending his police clients, the president of the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association enthusiastically elaborated: “social parasites, druggies, skinheads and communists”—an “insipid conglomeration of human misfits”—were the cause of the riot, he said. In the following days, the city’s Civilian Complaint Review Board received 121 complaints of police brutality, and, largely on the evidence of a four-hour videotape made by local video artist Clayton Patterson, seventeen officers were cited for “misconduct.” Six officers were eventually indicted but none was ever convicted. The police commissioner only ever conceded that a few officers may have become a little “overenthusiastic” owing to “inexperience,” but he clung to the official policy of blaming the victims (Gevirtz 1988; Pitt 1989).

Prior to the riot of August 1988, more than fifty homeless people, evictees from the private and public spaces of the official housing market, had begun to use the park regularly as a place to sleep. In the months following, the number of evictees settling in

the park grew, as the loosely organized antigentrification and squatters' movements began to connect with other local housing groups. And some of the evictees attracted to the newly "liberated space" of Tompkins Square Park also began to organize. But the City also slowly regrouped. Citywide park curfews (abandoned after the riot) were gradually reinstated; new regulations governing the use of Tompkins Square Park were slowly implemented; several Lower East Side buildings occupied by squatters were demolished in May 1989, and in July a police raid destroyed tents, shanties and the belongings of park residents. By now there were on average some 300 evictees in the park on any given night, at least three-quarters men, the majority African-American, many white, some Latino, Native Americans, Caribbean. On December 14, 1989, on the coldest day of the winter, the park's entire homeless population was evicted from the park, their belongings and fifty shanties hauled away into a queue of Sanitation Department garbage trucks.

It would be "irresponsible to allow the homeless to sleep outdoors" in such cold weather, explained a disingenuous parks commissioner, Henry J. Stern, who did not mention that the city shelter system had beds for only a quarter of the city's homeless people. In fact, the city's provision for the evicted ran only to a "help center" that, by one account, "proved to be little more than a dispensary for baloney sandwiches" (Weinberg 1990). Many evictees from the park were taken in by local squats, others set up encampments in the neighborhood, but quickly they filtered back to Tompkins Square. In January 1990 the administration of supposedly progressive mayor David Dinkins felt sufficiently confident of the park's eventual recapture that it announced a "reconstruction plan." In the next summer the basketball courts at the north end were dismantled and rebuilt with tighter control of access; wire fences closed off newly constructed children's playgrounds; and park regulations began to be more strictly enforced. In an effort to force evictions, City agencies also heightened their harassment of squatters who now spearheaded the anti-gentrification movement. As the next winter closed in, though, more and more of the city's evictees came back to the park and began again to construct semipermanent structures.

In May 1991, the park hosted a Memorial Day concert organized under the slogan "Housing is a human right" and, in what was becoming an annual May ritual, a further clash with park users ensued. It was now nearly three years since protestors had taken the park, and, with almost a hundred shanties, tents and other structures now in Tompkins Square, the Dinkins administration decided to move. The authorities finally closed the park at 5:00 A.M. on June 3, 1991, evicting between 200 and 300 park dwellers. Alleging that Tompkins Square had been "stolen" from the community by "the homeless," Mayor Dinkins declared: "The park is a park. It is not a place to live" (quoted in Kifner 1991). An eight-foot-high chain-link fence was erected, a posse of more than fifty uniformed and plainclothes police was delegated to guard the park permanently—its numbers augmented to several hundred in the first days and during demonstrations—and a \$2.3 million reconstruction was begun almost immediately. In fact, three park entrances were kept open and heavily guarded: two provided access to the playgrounds for children only (and accompanying adults); the other, opposite the Christodora condominium, provided access to the dog run. The closure of the park, commented Village Voice reporter Sarah Ferguson, marked the "death knell" of an occupation that "had come to symbolize the failure of the city to cope with its homeless population" (Ferguson 1991b). No alternative

housing was offered evictees from the park; people again moved into local squats, or filtered out into the city. On vacant lots to the east of the park, a series of shantytown communities were erected and they quickly took the name “Dinkinsville,” linking the present mayor with the “Hoovervilles” of the Depression. Dinkinsville was less a single place than a collection of communities, with a similar impossible geography to that of Bophuthatswana. Existing collections of shanties under the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Williamsburg Bridges expanded.

As the site of the most militant antigentrification struggle in the United States (but see Mitchell 1995a), the ten acres of Tompkins Square Park quickly became a symbol of a new urbanism being etched on the urban “frontier.” Largely abandoned to the working class amid postwar suburban expansion, relinquished to the poor and unemployed as reservations for racial and ethnic minorities, the terrain of the inner city is suddenly valuable again, perversely profitable. This new urbanism embodies a widespread and drastic repolarization of the city along political, economic, cultural and geographical lines since the 1970s, and is integral with larger global shifts. Systematic gentrification since the 1960s and 1970s is simultaneously a response and contributor to a series of wider global transformations: global economic expansion in the



Plate 1.2 The closing of Tompkins Square Park, June 3, 1991 (© Andrew Lichtenstein)



Plate 1.3 Tompkins Square Park
fenced off, 1992 (© Andrew
Lichtenstein)

1980s; the restructuring of national and urban economies in advanced capitalist countries toward services, recreation and consumption; and the emergence of a global hierarchy of world, national and regional cities (Sassen 1991). These shifts have propelled gentrification from a comparatively marginal preoccupation in a certain niche of the real estate industry to the cutting edge of urban change.

Nowhere are these forces more evident than in the Lower East Side. Even the neighborhood's different names radiate the conflicts. Referred to as *Loisaida* in local Puerto Rican Spanish, the Lower East Side name is dropped altogether by real estate agents and art world gentrifiers who, anxious to distance themselves from the historical association with the poor immigrants who dominated this community at the turn of the century, prefer "East Village" as the name for the neighborhood above Houston Street. Squeezed between the Wall Street financial district and Chinatown to the south, the Village and SoHo to the west, Gramercy Park to the north and the East River to the east (Figure 1.1), the Lower East Side feels the pressure of this political polarization more acutely than anywhere else in the city.

Highly diverse but increasingly Latino since the 1950s, the neighborhood was routinely described in the 1980s as a "new frontier" (Levin 1983). It mixes spectacular opportunity for real estate investors with an edge of daily danger on the streets. In the words of local writers, the Lower East Side is variously a "frontier where the urban fabric is wearing thin and splitting open" (Rose and Texier 1988:xi) or else "Indian country, the land of murder and cocaine" (Charyn 1985:7). Not just supporters but antagonists have found this frontier imagery irresistible. "As the neighborhood slowly, inexorably

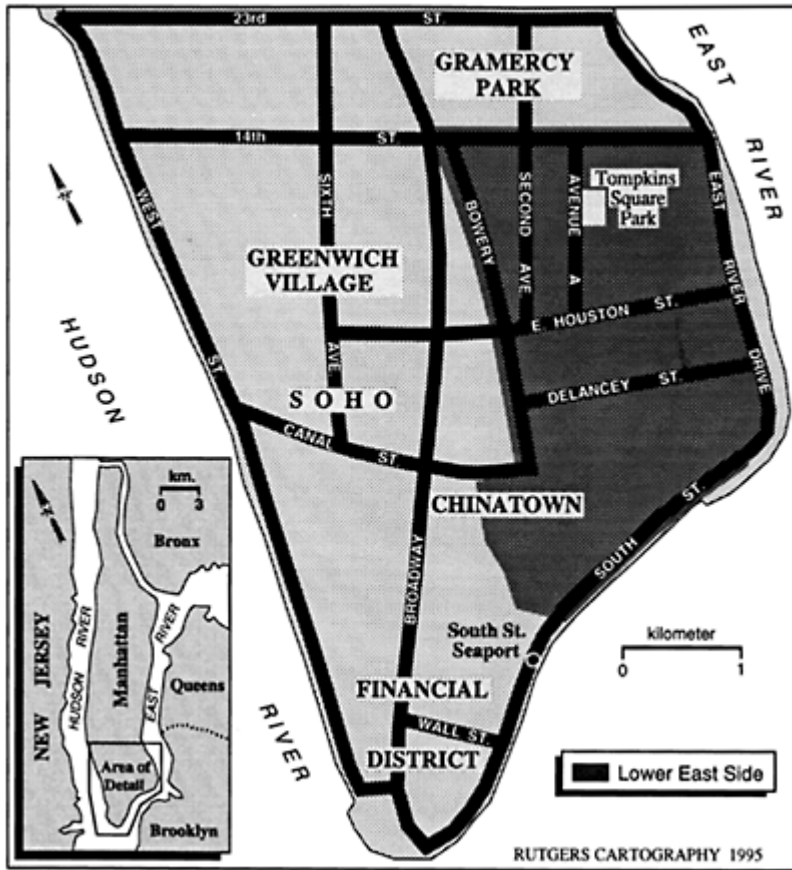


Figure 1.1 New York's Lower East Side

gentrifies,” wrote one reporter, in the wake of the 1988 police riot, “the park is a holdout, the place for one last metaphorical stand” (Carr 1988:17). Several weeks later, “Saturday Night Live” made this Custer imagery explicit in a skit cast in a frontier fort. Custer (as Mayor Koch) welcomes the belligerent warrior Chief Soaring Eagle into his office and inquires: “So how are things down on the Lower East Side?”

The social, political and economic polarization of “Indian country” is drastic and fast becoming more so. Apartment rents soared throughout the 1980s and with them the numbers of homeless; record levels of luxury condo construction are matched by a retrenchment in public housing provisions; a nearby Wall Street boom generated seven- and eight-figure salaries while unemployment rose among the unskilled; poverty is increasingly concentrated among women, Latinos and African-Americans while social services are axed; and the conservatism of the 1980s spawned a recrudescence of racist violence throughout the city. With the emergence of deep recession in the early 1990s,

rents have stabilized, but unemployment has soared. In the late 1990s the resurgence of gentrification and development is destined to magnify the polarization of the 1980s.

Tompkins Square lies deep in the heart of the Lower East Side. On its southern edge along Seventh Street a long slab of residential buildings overlooks the park, mostly late-nineteenth-century five- and six-storey walk-up tenements adorned with precariously affixed fire escapes, but also including a larger building with a dreary, modern, off-white facade. To the west, the tenements along Avenue A are barely more interesting, but many cross streets and the mix of smoke shops, Ukrainian and Polish restaurants, upscale cafes and hip bars, groceries, candy stores and night clubs make this the liveliest side of the park. Along Tenth Street on the northern edge stands a stately row of 1840s and 1850s townhouses, gentrified as far back as the early 1970s. To the east, Avenue B presents a more broken frontage: tenements, St. Brigid’s Church from the mid-nineteenth century, and the infamous Christodora building—a sixteen-storey brick monolith built in 1928 that dominates the local skyline.

“One day,” laments the tony, habitually understated AIA guide to New York architecture, “when this area is rebuilt, the mature park will be a god-send” (Willensky and White 1988:163). Actually, the park itself is rather unexceptional. An oval rosette of curving, crisscross walkways, it is shaded by large plane trees and a few surviving elms. The walkways were lined by long rows of cement benches, replaced in the park reconstruction by wooden benches sectioned into individual seats by wrought iron bars designed to prevent homeless people from sleeping. Wide grassy patches, often bare, made up the body of the park and these were fenced off in the reconstruction. At the north end of the park are handball and basketball courts, playgrounds and the dog run, and at the south end a bandshell, which hosted everyone from the Fugs to the Grateful Dead in the 1960s to May Day demonstrations and the annual Wigstock Parade in the late 1980s. By day, before its reconstruction, the park would be filled with Ukrainian men playing chess, young guys selling drugs, yuppies walking to and from work, a few remaining punks with boom boxes, Puerto Rican women strolling babies, residents walking dogs, kids in the playgrounds. After 1988, there were also cops in cruisers, and photographers, and a growing population of evictees attracted to the relative safety of this “liberated” if still contested space. The encampments burgeoned before June 1991, and were made from tents, cardboard, wood, bright blue tarpaulins, and all sorts of scavenged material that could provide shelter. Hard drug users traditionally congregated in “crack alley” on the southern edge; a group of mostly working people clustered to the east, and Jamaican Rastafarians hung out by the temperance fountain closer to Avenue A. Political activists and squatters congregated closer to the bandshell, which also provided shelter during the rain. The bandshell was demolished in the reconstruction.

Variously scruffy and relaxing, free-flowing and energetic, but rarely dangerous unless the police are on maneuvers, Tompkins Square exemplifies the kind of neighborhood park that Jane Jacobs adopted as a *cause célèbre* in her famous antimodernist tract, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). If it hardly has the physical features of a frontier, neither class conflict nor police riots are new to Tompkins Square Park. Originally a swampy “wilderness,” its first evictees may have been the Manhattoes whose acceptance of some rags and beads in 1626 led to their loss of Manhattan Island. Donated to the city by the fur trader and capitalist John Jacob Astor, the swamp was drained, a park was constructed in 1834, and it was named after Daniel

Tompkins, an ex-governor of New York State and US vice-president from 1817 to 1825. Immediately the park became a traditional venue for mass meetings of workers and the unemployed, although, to the apparent consternation of the populace, it was commandeered for use as a military parade ground in the 1850s and throughout the Civil War.

The symbolic power of the park as a space of resistance crystallized after 1873 when a catastrophic financial collapse threw unprecedented numbers of workers and families out of job and home. The city's charitable institutions were overwhelmed and at the urging of the business classes the city government refused to provide relief. "There was in any case a strong ideological objection to the concept of relief itself and a belief that the rigors of unemployment were a necessary and salutary discipline for the working classes" (Slotkin 1985:338). A protest march was organized for January 13, 1874 in Tompkins Square, and the following account is reconstructed by labor historian Philip Foner:

By the time the first marchers entered the Square, New Yorkers were witnessing the largest labor demonstration ever held in the city. The Mayor, who was expected to address the demonstration, changed his mind and, at the last minute, the police prohibited the meeting. No warning, however, had been given to the workers, and the men, women and children marched to Tompkins Square expecting to hear mayor Havemeyer present a program for the relief of the unemployed. When the demonstrators had filled the Square, they were attacked by the police. "Police clubs," went one account, "rose and fell. Women and children went screaming in all directions. Many of them were trampled underfoot in the stampede for the gates. In the street bystanders were ridden down and mercilessly clubbed by mounted officers."

(Foner 1978:448)

Within an hour of the first baton charges, a special edition of the *New York Graphic* appeared in the streets with the headline: "A Riot Is Now in Progress in Tompkins Square Park" (Gutman 1965:55).

Following the police riot the New York press provided a script that would have gratified the 1988 mayor. Decrying the marchers as "communists," and evoking the "red spectre of the commune," the New York *World* consistently built an analogy between the repression of the urban hordes in Tompkins Square and Colonel Custer's heroic Black Hills expedition against the savage Sioux of South Dakota. What began in 1874 as an outlandish juxtaposition between the park and the frontier (Slotkin 1985) had by the 1980s become an evocative but seemingly natural description.

The destiny of the Lower East Side has always been bound up with international events. The immigration of hundreds of thousands of European workers and peasants in the following decades only intensified the political struggles in the Lower East Side and its depiction in the press as a depraved environment. By 1910, some 540,000 people were crammed into the area's tenements, all competing for work and homes: garment workers, dockers, printers, laborers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, servants, public workers, writers, and a vital ferment of communists, Trotskyists, anarchists, suffragists and activist intellectuals devoted to politics and struggle. Successive economic recessions forced

many into unemployment; tyrannical bosses, dangerous work conditions and a lack of workers' rights elicited large-scale union organizing. And landlords proved ever adept at rent gouging. The decade that began with the Triangle fire of 1911—the fire engulfed 146 women garment workers from the Lower East Side, imprisoned behind locked sweatshop doors, forcing them to jump to their death in the street below—ended with the Palmer Raids of 1919 in which a wave of state-sponsored political terror was unleashed against the now notorious Lower East Side. In the 1920s as the suburbs burgeoned, landlords throughout the neighborhood allowed their buildings to fall into dilapidation, and many residents who could were following capital out to the suburbs.

Like other parks, Tompkins Square came to be viewed by middle-class reformers as a necessary “escape valve” for this dense settlement and volatile social environment. Following the 1874 riot, it was redesigned explicitly to create a more easily controllable space, and in the last decade of the century the reform and temperance movements constructed a playground and a fountain. The contest for the park ebbed and flowed, but took another surge during the Depression when Robert Moses redesigned the park, and again two decades later when the Parks Department tried unsuccessfully to usurp park land with a baseball diamond. Local demonstrations diverted this redesign (Reaven and Houck 1994). A hangout for Beat poets in the 1950s and the so-called counterculture in the 1960s, the park and its surroundings were again the scene of battles in 1967 when police waded into hippies sprawled out in the park in defiance of the “Keep off the Grass” signs.

This explosive history of the park belies its unremarkable form, making it a fitting locale for a “last stand” against gentrification.

BUILDING THE FRONTIER MYTH

Roland Barthes once proposed that “myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things” (Barthes 1972:129). Richard Slotkin elaborates that in addition to wrenching meaning from its historical context, myth has a reciprocal effect on history: “history becomes a cliché” (Slotkin 1985:16, 21–32). We should add the corollary that myth is constituted by the loss of the *geographical* quality of things as well. Deterritorialization is equally central to mythmaking, and the more events are wrenched from their constitutive geographies, the more powerful the mythology. Geography too becomes a cliché.

The social meaning of gentrification is increasingly constructed through the vocabulary of the frontier myth, and at first glance this appropriation of language and landscape might seem simply playful, innocent. Newspapers habitually extol the courage of urban “homesteaders,” the adventurous spirit and rugged individualism of the new settlers, brave “urban pioneers,” presumably going where, in the words of *Star Trek*, no (white) man has ever gone before. “We find a place on the lower [*sic*] East Side,” confesses one suburban couple in the genteel pages of the *New Yorker*:

Ludlow Street. No one we know would think of living here. No one we know has ever heard of Ludlow Street. Maybe someday this neighborhood will be the way the Village was before we knew anything about New

York.... We explain that moving down here is a kind of urban pioneering, and tell [Mother] she should be proud. We liken our crossing Houston Street to pioneers crossing the Rockies.

(“Ludlow Street” 1988)

In its real estate section, the *New York Times* (March 27, 1983) announces “The Taming of the Wild Wild West,” pursuant to the construction of the “Armory Condominium” two blocks west of Times Square:

The trailblazers have done their work: West 42nd Street has been tamed, domesticated and polished into the most exciting, freshest, most energetic new neighborhood in all of New York...for really savvy buyers, there’s the rapid escalation of land prices along the western corridor of 42nd Street. (After all, if the real estate people don’t know when a neighborhood is about to bust loose, who does?)

As new frontier, the gentrifying city since the 1980s has been oozing with optimism. Hostile landscapes are regenerated, cleansed, reinfused with middle-class sensibility; real estate values soar; yuppies consume; elite gentility is democratized in mass-produced styles of distinction. So what’s not to like? The contradictions of the actual frontier are not entirely eradicated in this imagery but they are smoothed into an acceptable groove. As with the Old West, the frontier is idyllic yet also dangerous, romantic but also ruthless. From *Crocodile Dundee* to *Bright Lights, Big City*, there is an entire cinematic genre that makes of urban life a cowboy fable replete with dangerous environment, hostile natives and self-discovery at the margins of civilization. In taming the urban wilderness, the cowboy gets the girl but also finds and tames his inner self for the first time. In the final scene of *Crocodile Dundee*, Paul Hogan accepts New York—and New York him—as he clambers like an Aussie sheepdog over the heads and shoulders of a subway crowd. Michael J.Fox can hardly end his fable by riding off into a reassuring western sunset since in the big city the bright lights are everywhere, but he does see a bright new day rise over the Hudson River and Manhattan’s reconstructed financial district. The manifest destiny of the earlier frontier rains a reciprocal Valhalla on the big city.

The frontier myth of the new city is here so clichéd, the geographical and historical quality of things so lost, that we may not even see the blend of myth in the landscape. This merely testifies to the power of the myth, but it was not

Plate 1.4 Real estate capital rides the new urban frontier

always so. The analogy between the 1874 Tompkins Square marchers and the Sioux Nation was at best tentative and oblique, the mythology too young to bear the full ideological weight of uniting such obviously disparate worlds. But the real and

conceptual distance between New York and the Wild Wild West has been continually eroded; perhaps the most iconoclastic evocation of a frontier in the early city came only a few years after Custer's Black Hills campaign when a stark, elegant but isolated residential building rose in the boonies of Central Park West and was named "The Dakota Apartments." By contrast, in the condomania that has engulfed Manhattan a century later—an environment in which any social, physical or geographical connection with the earlier frontier is obliterated—the "Montana," "Colorado," "Savannah" and "New West" have been shoehorned into already overbuilt sites with ne'er a comment about any iconographic inconsistency. As history and geography went west, the myth settled east, but it took time for the myth itself to be domesticated into the urban environment.

The new urban frontier motif encodes not only the physical transformation of the built environment and the reinscription of urban space in terms of class and race, but also a larger semiotics. Frontier is a style as much as a place, and the 1980s saw the faddishness of Tex-Mex restaurants, the ubiquity of desert decor, and a rage for cowboy chic, all woven into the same urban landscapes of consumption. A *New York Times* Sunday Magazine clothing advertisement (August 6, 1989) gives the full effect:

For urban cowboys a little frontier goes a long way. From bandannas to boots, flourishes are what counts.... The Western imprint on fashion is now much like a cattle brand—not too striking, but obvious enough to catch the eye. For city dudes, that means accents: a fringed jacket with black leggings; a shearling coat with a pin-stripe suit; a pair of lizard boots with almost anything. When in doubt about the mix stride up to the mirror. If you're inclined to say "Yup," you've gone too far.

New York's upmarket boutiques dispensing fashionable frontier kitsch are concentrated in SoHo, an area of artists' lofts and effete galleries, gentrified in the late 1960s and 1970s, and enjoying an unprecedented boom in the 1980s. SoHo borders the Lower East Side to the west and southwest. Here, "frontier" aspires on occasion to philosophy. Zona, on Greene Street, sells Navajo rugs, "Otomi Indian natural bark notepaper," Santa Fe jewelry, terra-cotta pottery, "Lombok baskets in rich harvest colors," bola ties. Zona oozes authenticity. All the "pieces" are numbered and a catalogue of the "collection" has been produced. On a small, plain, deliberately understated sign, with writing embossed on gold paper, the store offers its "personal" philosophy of craft-friendliness suffused with more than a whiff of New Age spiritualism:

At a time when the ever expanding presence of electronic tools and high technology is so pervasive the need to balance our lives with products that celebrate the textual and sensorial become essential. We think of our customers as resources and not simply as consumers. We are guided by the belief that information is energy and change is the constant.

Thank you for visiting our space.

Americana West, on Wooster Street, strives for a purer desert look. On the sidewalk outside the front door, a patrician Indian chief complete with tomahawk and feathered headgear stands guard. The window display features a bleached buffalo skull for \$500

while inside the store are sofas and chairs made from longhorns and cattle skin. A gallery as much as a store, Americana West purveys diverse images of noble savages, desert scenes à la Georgia O'Keeffe, petroglyphs and pictographs, whips and spurs. Cacti and coyotes are everywhere (none real); a neon prickly pear is available for \$350. In lettering on the front window, Americana West announces its own theme, a crossover cultural geography between city and desert: "The Evolving Look of the Southwest. Designers Welcome... Not for City Slickers Only."

The frontier is not always American nor indeed male. At La Rue des Rêves the theme is jungle eclectic. Leopard coats (faux of course), antelope leather skirts, and chamois blouses seem still alive, slinking off their hangers toward the cash registers. Fashion accessories dangle like lianas from the jungle canopy. A stuffed gorilla and several live parrots round out the ambience. La Rue des Rêves may have been "too, too"—it was a casualty of the late 1980s stock market crash—but the theme has survived in clothing chains as well as boutiques. At the Banana Republic customers have their safari purchases packed in brown paper bags sporting a rhinoceros. On the silver screen, meanwhile, movies such as *Out of Africa* and *Gorillas in the Mist* reinforce the vision of pioneering whites in darkest Africa, but with heroines for heroes. As middle-class white women come to play a significant role in gentrification their prominence on earlier frontiers is rediscovered and reinvented. Thus designer Ralph Lauren began the 1990s with a collection centered on "the Safari woman." He explains thus the romantic and nostalgic ur-environmentalism that drove him to it: "I believe that a lot of wonderful things are disappearing from the present, and we have to take care of them." A mahogany four-poster draped in embroidered mosquito netting, jodhpurs, faux ivory, and a "Zanzibar" bedroom set patterned with Zebra stripes surround Lauren's "Safari Woman," herself presumably an endangered species. Originally Ralph Lifschitz born in the Bronx, but now ensconced on a Colorado ranch half the size of that borough, "Lauren" has never been to Africa—"sometimes it's better if you haven't been there"—but feels well able to represent it in and for our urban fantasies. "I'm trying to evoke a world in which there was this graciousness we could touch. Don't look at yesterday. We can have it. Do you want to make the movie you saw a reality? Here it is" (Brown 1990).

Even as Africa is underdeveloped by international capital, engulfed by famine and wars, it is remarketed in Western consumer fantasies—but as the preserve of privileged and endangered whites. As one reviewer put it, the safari collection "smacks of bwana style, of Rhodesia rather than Zimbabwe" (Brown 1990). Lauren's Africa is a country retreat for and from the gentrified city. It provides the decorative utensils by which the city is reclaimed from wilderness and remapped for white upper-class settlers with global fantasies of again owning the world—recolonizing it from the neighborhood out.

Nature too is rescripted on the urban frontier. The frontier myth—originally engendered as an historicization of nature—is now reapplied as a naturalization of urban history. Even as rapacious economic expansion destroys deserts and rain forests, the new urban frontier is nature-friendly: "All woods used in [Lauren's Safari] collection are grown in the Philippines and are not endangered" (Brown 1990). The Nature Company, a chain store with a branch in South Street Seaport at the south end of the Lower East Side, is the apotheosis of this naturalized urban history, selling maps and globes, whaling anthologies and telescopes, books on dangerous reptiles, and stories of exploration and conquest. The store's unabashed nature idolatry and studied avoidance of anything urban

are the perfect disappearing mirror in which contested urban histories are refracted (N.Smith 1996b). In affirming the connection with nature, the new urban frontier erases the social histories, struggles and geographies that made it.

The nineteenth century and its associated ideology were “generated by the social conflicts that attended the ‘modernization’ of the Western nations,” according to Slotkin. They are “founded on the desire to avoid recognition of the perilous consequences of capitalist development in the New World, and they represent a displacement or deflection of social conflict into the world of myth” (Slotkin 1985:33, 47). The frontier was conveyed in the city as a safety valve for the urban class warfare brewing in such events as the 1863 New York draft riot, the 1877 railway strike, and indeed the Tompkins Square riot of 1874. “Spectacular violence” on the frontier, Slotkin concludes, had a redemptive effect on the city; it was “the alternative to some form of civil class war which, if allowed to break out within the metropolis, would bring about a secular *Götterdämmerung*” (Slotkin 1985:375). Projected in press accounts as extreme but comparable versions of events in the city, a magnifying mirror to the most ungodly depravity of the urban masses, reportage of the frontier posited eastern cities as a paradigm of social unity and harmony in the face of external threat. Urban social conflict was not so much denied as externalized, and whosoever disrupted this reigning urban harmony committed unnatural acts inviting comparison with the external enemy.

Today the frontier ideology continues to displace social conflict into the realm of myth, and at the same time to reaffirm a set of class-specific and race-specific social norms. As one respected academic has proposed, unwittingly replicating Turner’s vision (to not a murmur of dissent), gentrifying neighborhoods should be seen as combining a “civil class” who recognize that “the neighborhood good is enhanced by submitting to social norms,” and an “uncivil class” whose behavior and attitudes reflect “no acceptance of norms beyond those imperfectly specified by civil and criminal law.” Neighborhoods might then be classified “by the extent to which civil or uncivil behavior dominates” (Clay 1979a:37–38).

The frontier imagery is neither merely decorative nor innocent, therefore, but carries considerable ideological weight. Insofar as gentrification infects working-class communities, displaces poor households, and converts whole neighborhoods into bourgeois enclaves, the frontier ideology rationalizes social differentiation and exclusion as natural, inevitable. The poor and working class are all too easily defined as “uncivil,” on the wrong side of a heroic dividing line, as savages and communists. The substance and consequence of the frontier imagery is to tame the wild city, to socialize a wholly new and therefore challenging set of processes into safe ideological focus. As such, the frontier ideology justifies monstrous incivility in the heart of the city.

SELLING LOISAIDA

The frontier takes different forms in different places; it adapts to place as it makes place. But everywhere the frontier line is variously present. A *Wall Street Journal* reporter describes dining possibilities in “Indian Country” at the end of the 1980s: “For dining a new restaurant on Avenue C called ‘Bernard’ offers ‘organic French cuisine.’ Frosted glass windows protect diners from the sight of the burned out tenements across the street

as they nibble their \$18 loins of veal” (Rickelfs 1988). Shades of Baudelaire in Haussmann’s Paris, as we shall see. Notice that the poor, abandoned and homeless of the neighborhood were already invisible without the frosted window; only the burned out shells from which they were evicted threaten to intrude.

On the Lower East Side two industries defined the new urban frontier that emerged in the 1980s. Indispensable, of course, is the real estate industry which christened the northern part of the Lower East Side the “East Village” in order to capitalize on its geographical proximity to the respectability, security, culture and high rents of Greenwich Village. Then there is the culture industry—art dealers and patrons, gallery owners and artists, designers and critics, writers and performers—which has converted urban dilapidation into ultra chic. Together in the 1980s the culture and real estate industries invaded this rump of Manhattan from the west. Gentrification and art came hand in hand, “slouching toward Avenue D,” as art critics Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick (1984) put it. Block by block, building by building, the area was converted to a landscape of glamour and chic spiced with just a hint of danger.

The rawness of the neighborhood has in fact been part of the appeal. Only in the Lower East Side have art critics celebrated “minifestivals of the slum arts”; only here have artists cherished “a basic ghetto material—the ubiquitous brick”; and only here would the art entourage blithely admit to being “captivated by the liveliness of ghetto culture” (Moufarrege 1982, 1984). Alongside the gallery called “Fun,” the knickknack boutique named “Love Saves the Day,” and the bar called “Beulah Land” (Bunyan’s land of rest and quiet) came “Civilian Warfare” and “Virtual Garrison” (both galleries), “Downtown Beirut” (a bar) and an art showing called “The Twilight Zone.” Frontier danger permeated the very art itself, whatever the nostalgic eclecticism of the Lower East Side scene. The “law of the jungle” ruled the new art scene, an art scene driven by “savage energy,” gushed Robinson and McCormick (1984:138, 156). Neoprimitivist art, in fact, depicting black-figured urban “natives,” often running wild in the streets, was a central theme of this “savage energy.”

The most insightful critique of this connection between art and real estate remains that by Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Ryan in a classic article, “The fine art of gentrification” (Deutsche and Ryan 1984). The complicity of art with gentrification is no mere serendipity, they show, but “has been constructed with the aid of the entire apparatus of the art establishment.” Linking the rise of the “East Village” with the triumph of neo-Expressionism in art, they argue that however countercultural its pose, the broad abstention from political self-reflection condemned Lower East Side art to reproducing the dominant culture. The unprecedented commodification of art in the 1980s engendered an equally ubiquitous aestheticization of culture and politics: graffiti came off the trains and into the galleries, while the most outrageous punk and new-wave styles moved rapidly from the streets to full-page advertisements in the *New York Times*. The press began sporting stories about the opulence of the new art scene—at least for some: Don’t let the poverty of the Lower East Side fool you, was the message; this generation of young artists gets by with American Express Goldcards (Bernstein 1990).

The simultaneous disavowal of social and political context and dependence on the cultural establishment placed avant-garde artists in a sharply contradictory position. They came to function as “broker” between the culture industry and the majority of still-aspiring artists. Lower East Side galleries played the pivotal role: they provided the

meeting place for grassroots ambition and talent and establishment money (Owens 1984:162–163).² Representing and patronizing the neighborhood as a cultural mecca, the culture industry attracted tourists, consumers, gallery gazers, art patrons, potential immigrants—all fueling gentrification. Not all artists so readily attach themselves to the culture establishment, of course, and a significant artists' opposition survived the commodification and price escalation that boosted the neighborhood's twin industries in the 1980s. Following the Tompkins Square riot, in fact, there was a flourishing of political art aimed squarely at gentrification, the police and the art industry. Some artists were also squatters and housing activists, and a lot of subversive art was displayed as posters, sculpture and graffiti in the streets or in more marginal gallery spaces (see for example Castrucci *et al.* 1992).

For the real estate industry, art tamed the neighborhood, refracting back a mock pretense of exotic but benign danger. It depicted the East Village as rising from low life to high brow. Art donates a salable neighborhood "personality," packaged the area as a real estate commodity and established demand. Indeed, "the story of the East Village's newest bohemian efflorescence," it has been suggested, "can also be read as an episode in New York's real estate history—that is, as the deployment of a force of gentrifying artists in lower Manhattan's last slum" (Robinson and McCormick 1984:135).

By 1987, however, the marriage of convenience between art and real estate started to sour, and a wave of gallery closures was precipitated by massive rent increases demanded by landlords unconstrained by rent control. It is widely speculated that these landlords—many of them anonymous management companies operating out of post office boxes—offered artificially low rents in the early 1980s in order to attract galleries and artists whose presence would hype the area and hike rents. Handsomely successful, they demanded sharp increases as the first five-year leases came due. The neighborhood was now saturated with as many as seventy galleries, artistic and economic competition was cutthroat, and a financial shakeout, synchronized with the 1987 stock market crash, ensued. First Avenue was manifestly not "downtown Beirut" and a host of artistic and financial fantasies plummeted to earth. Many galleries closed. The most successful decamped to SoHo where gentrification capital also regrouped; the less successful (financially) often went across the bridge to Williamsburg in Brooklyn. Left in the lurch by the real estate industry, many Lower East Side artists were also summarily dropped by a cultural elite that had found other dalliances (Bernstein 1990)—but not before the culture industry as a whole had spearheaded a fundamental shift in the neighborhood's image and real estate market.

That some artists became victims of the very gentrification process they helped precipitate, and that others actively opposed the process, has touched off a debate in the art press (Owens 1984:162–163; Deutsche and Ryan 1984:104; Bowler and McBurney 1989). However wittingly or otherwise, the culture and real estate industries worked together to transform the Lower East Side into a new place—different, unique, a phenomenon, the pinnacle of avant-garde fashion. Fashion and faddishness created cultural scarcity much as the real estate industry's demarcation of the "East Village" instantaneously establishes a scarcity of privileged addresses. Good art and good locations become fused. And good location means money.

PIONEERING FOR PROFIT

The Lower East Side has experienced several phases of rapid building associated with larger economic cycles, and the present-day built environment results from this history. A few early buildings remain from the 1820s to 1840s, but rectangular “railroad” tenements are more common, built in the 1850s through the Civil War to house the largely immigrant working class. These are the tenements that figured so vividly in Jacob Riis’s 1901 *How the Other Half Lives* (Riis 1971 edn.). In the decade and a half after 1877, with the economy expanding and immigration growing, the area experienced its most intense building boom. Virtually all vacant land was developed with “dumbbell” tenements, so named because the rectangular form of the traditional railway tenements were now forced by law to include dumbbell-shaped airshafts between structures. By the 1893 economic crash, which effectively ended this building boom, almost 60 percent of all New York City housing comprised dumbbell tenements; at least 30,000 such buildings throughout the city are still inhabited, with the largest concentration in the Lower East Side (G.Wright 1981:123). The next building boom, beginning in 1898, was concentrated at the urban edge; the Lower East Side did receive some “new law” tenements (post-1901, when a new law required improved design standards), but many landlords in the area had already begun disinvesting, neglecting maintenance and repairs on their grossly overcrowded buildings.

New York’s ruling class has long sought to tame and reclaim the Lower East Side from its unruly working-class hordes. Only five years after the federal government severely curtailed European immigration, the Rockefeller-sponsored Regional Plan Association offered an extraordinary vision for the Lower East Side. The 1929 New York Regional Plan explicitly envisaged the removal of the existing population, the reconstruction of “high-class residences,” modern shops, a yacht marina on the East River, and the physical redevelopment of the Lower East Side highway system in such a way as to strengthen the connection with neighboring Wall Street:

The moment an operation of this magnitude and character was started in a district, no matter how squalid it was, an improvement in quality would immediately begin in adjacent property and would spread in all directions. New stores would start up prepared to cater to a new class of customers. The streets thereabouts would be made cleaner. Property values would rise.... After a while, other apartment units would appear and in the course of time the character of the East Side would be entirely changed.

(quoted in Gottlieb 1982; see also Fitch 1993)

The stock market crash of 1929, the ensuing Depression and World War II, the unprecedented wave of postwar suburban expansion, and eventually the New York City fiscal crisis all mitigated against the planned reinvestment and reconstruction of the Lower East Side as a high-class haven. Various slum clearance and low-income residential projects were initiated between the late 1930s and early 1960s, but, combined with the withdrawal of capital, these policies often intensified the long-term economic and social processes laying waste to the Lower East Side and other such neighborhoods. In the postwar period, disinvestment and abandonment, demolition and public

warehousing, were the major tactics of a virulent antiurbanism that converted the Lower East Side into something of a free-fire zone. Especially hard hit was the area south of Houston Street and the Alphabet City area to the east between Avenue A and Avenue D. Urban renewal here simply reinforced the ghettoization of poor residents, especially Latinos, amid the rubble of disinvestment.

Not until a further half-century of disinvestment, dilapidation and decline did the 1929 vision begin to be implemented. Even as yuppies and artists began to pick over the wreckage in the late 1970s, everyone else was moving out. From the 1910 peak population of over half a million, the Lower East Side lost almost 400,000 inhabitants over the next seven decades; in the 1970s it lost 30,000, giving it a 1980 population of nearly 155,000. In the heart of Loissaida between Houston and Tenth Streets, Avenue B to Avenue D have been most intense, the population declined by an extraordinary 67.3—so-called Alphabet City—where abandonment and property disinvestment percent. The median household income of \$8,782 was only 63 percent of the 1980 citywide figure, and twenty-three of twenty-nine census tracts in the area experienced an increase in the number of families living below the poverty level. In Alphabet City it was the poor who were left behind; 59 percent of the remaining population survived below the poverty level. The neighborhood so deliberately colonized by yuppies and artists at the end of the 1970s was the poorest in Manhattan outside Harlem. In the 1980s, the neighborhood actually experienced a population reversal with 161,617 recorded in the 1990 census.

Declining property values accompanied declining populations in the 1970s and much of the 1980s. Consider the case of 270 East 10th Street, a run-down but occupied five-storey dumbbell tenement between First Avenue and Avenue A, half a block west of Tompkins Square Park. In 1976, at the time of peak disinvestment, it was sold by a landlord who simply wanted out; the price was a mere \$5,706 plus the assumption of unpaid property taxes. By the beginning of 1980 it was resold for \$40,000. Eighteen months later it went for \$130,000. In September 1981 the building was sold again, this time to a New Jersey real estate concern for \$202,600. In less than two years the building's price multiplied five times—without any renovation (Gottlieb 1982).

This is not an unusual case. On Tompkins Square Park the sixteen-storey Christodora Building, now a symbol of antigentrification struggle, experienced a similar cycle of disinvestment and reinvestment. Built in 1928 as a settlement house, the Christodora was sold to the City of New York in 1947 for \$1.3 million. It was used for various City functions and eventually as a community center and hostel, housing among others the Black Panthers and the Young Lords. Run down and dilapidated by the late 1960s, the building attracted no bids at a 1975 auction. It was later sold for \$62,500 to a Brooklyn developer, George Jaffee. The doors of the deserted building had been welded shut and remained that way for five years while Jaffee unsuccessfully sought federal funds for rehabilitating the Christodora as low-income housing. In 1980 Jaffee began to get inquiries about the building. The welder was called to provide entry, the building was inspected, and offers of \$200,000 to \$800,000 began to materialize. Jaffee eventually sold the building in 1983 for \$1.3 million to another developer, Harry Skydell, who in turn "flipped" the building a year later for \$3 million, only to recoup it later in a joint venture with developer Samuel Glasser. Skydell and Glasser renovated the Christodora and in 1986 marketed its eighty-six condominium apartments. The quadruplex penthouse, with

private elevator, three terraces and two fireplaces, was offered for sale in 1987 for \$1.2 million (Unger 1984; DePalma 1988).

At 270 East Tenth, at the Christodora, and at hundreds of other buildings in the Lower East Side, it is real estate profits, first and foremost, that are revitalized. The Tompkins Court, a 1988 rehabilitation, offered one-bedroom units at the "post-87 crash bargain price" of \$139,000–\$209,000, two-bedroom units for \$239,000–\$329,000. For the least expensive of these an estimated annual household income of \$65,000 was required; for the most expensive an income of \$160,000. Even the small studios were inaccessible to those earning less than \$40,000. Several blocks away at another tenement rehab, seventeen co-ops were sold, with two-bedroom units ranging from \$235,000 to \$497,800 (Shaman 1988). Mortgage and maintenance costs on the latter amounted to almost \$5,000 per month. Two months' payment on this apartment exceeded the neighborhood's median annual income. Only by the early 1990s did sale prices begin to drop appreciably—as much as 15–25 percent at the top end of the market but less at lower rental levels.

Unrestrained by rent control of any sort, commercial rents and sales rose even faster. Long-time small businesses were forced out as landlords indiscriminately raised rents. Maria Pidhorodecky's Italian-Ukrainian restaurant, the Orchidia, a fixture on Second Avenue since 1957, closed in the mid-1980s when the landlord was able to raise the rent for the 700-square-foot space from \$950 to \$5,000 (Unger 1984).

In his investigation of the workings of the Lower East Side real estate market, journalist Martin Gottlieb uncovered the results of the rent gap (see chapter 3) first hand. At 270 East Tenth Street, for example, while the combined sale price of building and land soared from \$5,706 to \$202,600 in five and a half years, the value of the building alone, according to city property tax assessors, actually fell from \$26,000 to \$18,000. And this is a typical result; even taking into account the structured undervaluation of buildings *vis-à-vis* the market, the land is much more valuable than the building. The perverse rationality of real estate capitalism means that building owners and developers garner a double reward for milking properties and destroying buildings. First, they pocket the money that should have gone to repairs and upkeep; second, having effectively destroyed the building and established a rent gap, they have produced for themselves the conditions and opportunity for a whole new round of capital reinvestment. Having produced a scarcity of capital in the name of profit they now flood the neighborhood for the same purpose, portraying themselves all along as civic-minded heroes, pioneers taking a risk where no one else would venture, builders of a new city for the worthy populace. In Gottlieb's words, this self-induced reversal in the market means that a "Lower East Side landlord can drink his milk and have it too" (Gottlieb 1982).

The economic geography of gentrification is not random; developers do not just plunge into the heart of slum opportunity, but tend to take it piece by piece. Rugged pioneersmanship is tempered by financial caution. Developers have a vivid block-by-block sense of where the frontier lies. They move in from the outskirts, building "a few strategically placed outposts of luxury," as Henwood (1988:10) has put it. They "pioneer" first on the gold coast between safe neighborhoods on one side where property values are high and the disinvested slums on the other where opportunity is higher. Successive beachheads and defensible borders are established on the frontier. In this way economic geography charts the strategy of urban pioneering.

Whereas the myth of the frontier is an invention that rationalizes the violence of gentrification and displacement, the everyday frontier on which the myth is hung is the stark product of entrepreneurial exploitation. Thus whatever its visceral social and cultural reality, the frontier language camouflages a raw economic reality. Areas that were once sharply redlined by banks and other financial institutions were sharply “greenlined” in the 1980s. Loan officers are instructed to take down their old maps with red lines around working-class and minority neighborhoods and replace them with new maps sporting green lines: make every possible loan within the greenlined neighborhood. In the Lower East Side as elsewhere, the new urban frontier is a frontier of profitability. Whatever else is revitalized, the profit rate in gentrifying neighborhoods is revitalized; indeed many working class neighborhoods experience a dramatic “devitalization” as incoming yuppies erect metal bars on their doors and windows, disavow the streets for parlor living, fence off their stoops, and evict undesirables from “their” parks.

If the real estate cowboys invading the Lower East Side in the 1980s used art to paint their economic quest in romantic hues, they also enlisted the cavalry of city government for more prosaic tasks: reclaiming the land and quelling the natives. In its housing policy, drug crackdowns, and especially in its parks strategy, the City devoted its efforts not toward providing basic services and living opportunities for existing residents but toward routing many of the locals and subsidizing opportunities for real estate development. A 1982 consultants’ report entitled *An Analysis of Investment Opportunities in the East Village* captured the City’s strategy precisely: “The city has now given clear signals that it is prepared to aid the return of the middle class by auctioning city-owned properties and sponsoring projects in gentrifying areas to bolster its tax base and aid the revitalization process” (Oreo Construction Services 1982).

The City’s major resource was its stock of “*in rem*” properties, mostly foreclosed from private landlords for nonpayment of property taxes. By the early 1980s the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development held over 200 such *in rem* buildings in the Lower East Side and a similar number of vacant lots. With sixteen of these properties, the Koch administration made its first significant foray into the real estate frenzy of gentrification; artists were to be the vehicle. In August 1981 HPD solicited proposals for an Artist Homeownership Program (AHOP) and the next year announced a renovation project that was to yield 120 housing units in sixteen buildings, each costing an estimated \$50,000, aimed at artists earning at least \$24,000. Their purpose, the Mayor proclaimed, was “to renew the strength and vitality of the community,” and five artists’ groups and two developers were selected to execute the \$7 million program (Bennetts 1982).

But many in the community disagreed vigorously enough to oppose the AHOP plan. The Joint Planning Council, a coalition of more than thirty Loisaia housing and community organizations, demanded that so valuable a resource as abandoned buildings should be renovated for local consumption; city councilwoman Miriam Friedlander saw the plan as “just a front for gentrification”; “the real people who will profit from this housing are the developers who renovate it.” And indeed, the HPD Commissioner expressed the fervent hope that the project would be “a stimulus for overall neighborhood revitalization.” While supporting artists portrayed themselves as normal folks, just part of the working class, a population already largely displaced from Manhattan who deserved housing as much as anyone else, an artists’ opposition emerged—“Artists for Social

Responsibility”—who opposed the use of artists to gentrify the neighborhood. HPD, the mayor and AHOP were ultimately defeated by the City Board of Estimates, which refused to provide the initial \$2.4 million of public funds (Carroll 1983).

But AHOP was a warm-up for a larger auction program, as HPD prepared to leverage gentrification citywide using *in rem* properties. The Joint Planning Council decided to grab the initiative by proposing its own community-based plan, and in 1984 it proposed that all City-owned vacant lots and properties be used for low- and moderate-income housing and that the speculation responsible for eliminating existing low-income units be controlled. The City ignored the community plan and came back with a “cross-subsidy” program. HPD would sell City-owned properties to developers, either by auction or at appraised value, in return for an agreement by developers that a vaguely specified 20 percent of rehabilitated or newly built units would be reserved for tenants unable to afford market rates. Developers would receive a tax subsidy in return. Initially some community groups gave the program tentative support; others sought to adjust the ratio of market-rate to subsidized housing to 50:50, while others rejected the entire idea as a backdoor route to building minimal public housing.

But opposition mounted as the actual intent of the program became clear. In 1988 the City announced that the Lefrak Organization—a major national developer—would build on the Seward Park site where, in 1967, 1,800 poor people, mostly African-American and Latino, were displaced when their homes were urban renewed. They were promised the new apartments scheduled for the site, but twenty years later the renewal was yet to happen. The fee for the site was \$1, and Lefrak would pay a further \$1 per year for the ninety-nine-year lease. Under the plan, Lefrak would build 1,200 apartments, 400 of which would be market-rate condominiums, 640 would be rented at \$800–\$1,200 to “middle-income” households earning \$25,000–\$48,000, and the remaining 160 units would go as “moderate-income” units to those earning \$15,000–\$25,000. No apartments were actually earmarked for low-income people. Further, all rental units would revert to Lefrak as luxury co-ops on the open market after twenty years; Lefrak would get a thirty-two-year tax abatement, and an overall City subsidy of \$20 million. Lawyers representing several of the 1967 tenants filed a class action suit against the Lefrak condo. “Yupper-income housing in low income neighborhoods” is how one housing advocate described the plan, “and the purpose is creating hot new real-estate markets” (Glazer 1988; Reiss 1988). The project got as far as a “Memorandum of Understanding” with the City, but as the depression closed in, the folly of attaching any subsidized housing to market development became clear. Lefrak abandoned the project—but not before it became clear that the City had no intention of mandating Lefrak to build the 20 percent of subsidized units in the same neighborhood. The geographical mobility of the subsidized housing of course opened up the specter of gentrification again for those who had not already seen through the “double-cross subsidy” program, as it came to be known by community activists.

With AHOP and the cross-subsidy proposal, the City led the economic cavalry charge into the Lower East Side, but it also resorted to a little mood creation. In an effort to clear the streets of “natives” who might hinder the gentrification frontier, Operation Pressure Point was launched in January 1984. An estimated 14,000 drug busts were made in eighteen months throughout the Lower East Side, and the *New York Times* gloated that “thanks to operation pressure point, art galleries are replacing shooting galleries.” But the

petty offenders were quickly released, the kingpins never apprehended, and when the pressure eased the street sellers returned.

Along with Operation Pressure Point, the City organized an assault on the parks as part of its wider gentrification strategy. As developer William Zeckendorf Jr. secured massive tax abatements and zoning variations for his twenty-eight-storey luxury Zeckendorf Tower at Fourteenth Street and Broadway—a “fortress” development intended to anchor future forays into the Lower East Side—the City had already weighed in with tactical support.³ The plan evicted the homeless and others of the “socially undesirable population” from adjacent Union Square Park, and began a two-year, \$3.6 million renovation. Inaugurating the renovation in the spring of 1984, Mayor Koch justified the Zeckendorf subsidy by blaming the victims: “First the thugs took over, then the muggers took over, then the drug people took over, and now we are driving them out” (quoted in Carmody 1984). In its initial sparkling antisepsis, the new park complemented the facade of the Zeckendorf condo. Some trees have been thinned out, walls knocked down, paths widened and an open plaza constructed at the south end, all offering long-range visibility for surveillance and control. Sharp-edged, bright new stonework replaced slabs worn gray by weather and footsteps, the farmers’ market was spruced up but retained, and the park’s monuments cleaned and polished in a nostalgic “restoration” of a nonexistent past. The same strokes that deoxidized the park’s green statues back to their gleaming bronze splendor attempted to wipe away the city’s history of homelessness and poverty. As Rosalyn Deutsche concluded, “the aesthetic presentation of the physical site of development is indissolubly linked to the profit motives impelling Union Square’s “revitalization” (Deutsche 1986:80, 85–86).

If the gentrification of Union Square Park hardly lived up to expectations, with patrolling cops and returning evictees very much restoring the park to the frontier edge, the City nonetheless persevered. The City’s efforts moved south to Washington Square Park in the Village, where, as in Union Square Park, boundary fences were erected, a curfew imposed, police patrols stepped up. Then in 1988 they moved east into Tompkins Square Park. Rebuffed by the summer demonstrations culminating in the August police riot, the City’s traditional park gentrification strategy of curfews and closures followed by “restoration” was defeated—for a time—by the August riot.

“ANOTHER WAVE MORE SAVAGELY THAN THE FIRST”: THE NEW (GLOBAL) INDIAN WARS?

“A sort of wartime mentality seems to be settling onto New Yorkers affected by the housing squeeze,” commented *New York* magazine as the gentrification boom got under way in the early 1980s (Wiseman 1983). Especially in the Lower East Side, the geography of recent urban change reveals the future gentrified city, a city sparkling with the neon of elite consumption anxiously cordoned off from homeless deprivation. As the gentrification frontier came to course through neighborhood after neighborhood, most rapidly during economic expansions, but rarely at a slouch, previously working class sections of the city were dragged into the international circuits of capital. While Lower East Side art was shown in London or Paris, the neighborhood’s fanciest condos were advertised in *The Times* and *Le Monde*.

Gentrification portends a class conquest of the city. The new urban pioneers seek to scrub the city clean of its working-class geography and history. By remaking the geography of the city they simultaneously rewrite its social history as a preemptive justification for a new urban future. Slum tenements become historic brownstones, and exterior facades are sandblasted to reveal a future past. Likewise with interior renovation. “Inner worldly asceticism becomes public display” as “bare brick walls and exposed timbers come to signify cultural discernment, not the poverty of slums without plaster” (Jager 1986:79–80, 83, 85). Physical effacement of original structures effaces social history and geography; if the past is not entirely demolished it is at least reinvented—its class and race contours rubbed smooth—in the refurbishment of a palatable past.

Where the militance or persistence of working-class communities or the extent of disinvestment and dilapidation would seem to render such genteel reconstruction a Sisyphean task, the classes can be juxtaposed by other means. Squalor, poverty and the violence of eviction are constituted as exquisite ambience. The rapid polarization of new classes in the making is glorified for its excitement rather than condemned for its violence or understood for the rage it threatens.

The effort to recolonize the city involves systematic eviction. In its various plans and task force reports for gentrifying what remains of the inner city, New York City government has never proposed a plan for relocating evictees. This is stunning testimony to the real program. Denying any connection between gentrification and displacement, City officials refuse to admit the possibility that gentrification causes homelessness. Public policy is geared to allow the housed to “see no homeless,” in the words of one Lower East Side stencil artist. The 1929 Regional Plan for the Lower East Side was at least more honest:

Each replacement will mean the disappearance of many of the old tenants and the coming in of other people who can afford the higher rentals required by modern construction on high-priced land. Thus in time economic forces alone will bring about a change in the character of much of the East Side population.

(quoted in Gottlieb 1982:16)

One developer justifies the violence of the new frontier: “To hold us accountable for it is like blaming the developer of a high-rise building in Houston for the displacement of the Indians a hundred years before” (quoted in Unger 1984:41). In Burlington, Vermont, one restaurateur has taken seriously the mission of getting “those people” out of sight. The owner of Leunig’s Old World Cafe, in the gentrified, cobblestone, boutique-filled Church Street Marketplace, became incensed at the homeless people who, he said, were “terrorizing” his restaurant’s clients. Funded by donations from restaurateurs and other local businessmen in the town, he began an organization called “Westward Ho!” to provide homeless people with one-way tickets out of town—to Portland, Oregon.

Some have gone further in the effort to see no homeless, hoping in fact to illegalize homelessness altogether:

If it is illegal to litter the streets, frankly it ought to be illegal...to sleep in the streets. Therefore, there is a simple matter of public order and hygiene

in getting these people somewhere else. Not arrest them, but move them off somewhere where they are simply out of sight.

(George Will, quoted in Marcuse 1988:70)

This kind of vengeful outburst only lends more weight to Friedrich Engels' famous admonition of more than a century ago:

the bourgeoisie has only one method of settling the housing question.... The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night are not abolished; they are merely *shifted elsewhere*.

(Engels, 1975 edn., 71, 73–4; emphasis in original)

Evicted from the public as well as the private spaces of what is fast becoming a downtown bourgeois playground, minorities, the unemployed and the poorest of the working class are destined for large-scale displacement. Once isolated in central city enclaves, they are increasingly herded to reservations on the urban edge. New York's HPD becomes the new Department of the Interior; the Social Security Administration the new Bureau of Indian Affairs; and Latino, African-American and other minorities the new Indians. At the beginning of the onslaught, one especially prescient East Village developer was cynically blunt about what the new gentrification frontier would mean for evictees as gentrification raced toward Avenue D: "They'll all be forced out. They'll be pushed east to the river and given life preservers" (quoted in Gottlieb 1982:13).

The dramatic shifts affecting gentrifying neighborhoods are experienced as intensely local. The Lower East Side is a world away from the upper-crust *noblesse* of the Upper East Side three miles north; and within the neighborhood, Avenue C is still a very different place from First Avenue. Yet the processes and forces shaping the new urbanism are global as much as local. Gentrification and homelessness in the new city are a particular microcosm of a new global order etched first and foremost by the rapacity of capital. Not only are broadly similar processes remaking cities around the world, but the world itself impinges dramatically on these localities. The gentrification frontier is also an "imperial frontier," says Kristin Koptiuch (1991:87–89). Not only does international capital flood the real estate markets that fuel the process, but international migration provides a workforce for many of the professional and managerial jobs associated with the new urban economy—a workforce that needs a place to stay. Even more does international migration provide the service workers for the new economy: in New York, greengrocers are now mainly Korean; the plumbers fitting gentrified buildings are often Italian, the carpenters Polish; the domestic workers and nannies looking after the houses and children of gentrifiers come from El Salvador, Barbados or elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Immigrants come to the city from every country where US capital has opened markets, disrupted local economies, extracted resources, removed people from the land, or sent the marines as a "peace-keeping force" (Sassen 1988). This global dislocation comes home to roost in the "Third-Worlding" of the US city (Franco 1985; Koptiuch 1991), which, combined with the threat of increasing crime and repressive policing of the streets, invites visions of a predaceous assault on the very gentrification that it helped to stimulate. In her

research on the disruption of the ways in which children are socialized, Cindi Katz (1991a, 1991b) finds a clear parallel between the streets of New York and the fields of Sudan where an agricultural project has come to town. The “primitive” conditions of the core are at once exported to the periphery while those of the periphery are reestablished at the core. “As if straight out of some sci-fi plot,” writes Koptiuch (1991), “the wild frontiers dramatized in early travel accounts have been moved so far out and away that, to our unprepared astonishment, they have imploded right back in our midst.” It is not just the Indian wars of the Old West that have come home to the cities of the East, but the new global wars of the New American World Order.

A new social geography of the city is being born but it would be foolish to expect that it will be a peaceful process. The attempt to reclaim Washington, DC (probably the most segregated city in the US), through white gentrification is widely known by the African-American majority as “the Plan.” In London’s gentrifying Docklands and East End, an anarchist gang of unemployed working-class kids justify mugging as their “yuppie tax,” giving a British twist to the Tompkins Square slogan, “Mug a yuppie.” As homes and communities are converted into a new frontier, there is an often clear perception of what is coming as the wagons are circled around. Frontier violence comes with cavalry charges down city streets, rising official crime rates, police racism and assaults on the “natives.” And it comes with the periodic torching of homeless people as they sleep, presumably to get them “out of sight.” And it comes with the murder of Bruce Bailey, a Manhattan tenant activist, in 1989: his dismembered body was found in garbage bags in the Bronx, and, although police openly suspected angry landlords of the crime, no one was ever charged. It is difficult to be optimistic that the next wave of gentrification will bring a new urban order more civilized than the first.

Antonio La Spina

Luiss Guido Carli & Centro
Studi Pio La Torre
alaspina@luiss.it

Types of gentrification, crime and social impact

14

1. Two ideas of gentrification

Gentrification can be seen as “the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users”¹. Very frequently this phenomenon is seen as implying a willful displacement of less affluent dwellers in order to make room for the newcomers. This probably happens because more often than not it is mostly dictated by profit motives, at the cost of undermining and disintegrating

¹ Jason Hackworth, “Postrecession gentrification in New York city,” *Urban Affairs Review* 37, no. 6 (2002): 815. He adds that “this general approach is chosen in place of the ‘classic’ definition – direct displacement of the working class from residential quarters – in light of several decades of research and debate that shows that the concept is usefully applied to nonresidential urban change and that there is frequently a substantial time lag between when the subordinate class group gives way to more affluent users” (*ibidem*, 839). Semi (2017, 395) refers to Hackworth’s definition, too, and notices that it does not include many of the aspects which are frequently stressed by other authors. Hackworth has recently updated his views. Among other things he (2018, 51-52) stated that “the notion that gentrification was a risky bet for real estate investors is a distant memory”, given that it has become “a high-profit-margin segment of the real estate industry”.

pre-existing community bonds. I would label SG the ideal type of a gentrification essentially driven by *speculation*, or at any rate by self-interest. However, even when that has indeed been the case, it did not mean that aggressive speculators of the SG kind have always fought against any type of public intervention. On the one hand, they might have opposed those public bodies or measures that were aimed at shielding poorer people and restricting the room for manoeuvre of large-scale investments. On the other hand, real estate investors needed favourable policy decisions from urban planners and municipalities, also “through programs that prodded the private market (‘enterprise zones, for example) rather than direct subsidy”². “Overall, gentrification is now more corporate, more state facilitated, and less resisted than ever before”³. There was deregulation to a certain extent, but public bodies did not totally abstain from interfering. Gentrification always requires some kind of public intervention, even when it is of the SG type.

Can we argue that gentrification *necessarily* results in disintegration and displacement? The answer is no. In some relevant cases there have been efforts aimed at allowing residents to stay in their homes as well as avoiding other undesirable effects. It is advisable, therefore, to think also of another ideal type of gentrification, an *integrative* one, which I will call IG. One must also bear in mind that “gentrifier” is not a synonym for real-estate developer. Most of the times, gentrifiers are instead relatively well educated middle-class young adults, including couples with children, sometime artists, creative workers or representatives of other social groups featuring non-traditional lifestyles. Such people look for cheaper houses and comfortable locations in the city center or not far from it. They could be willing not to threaten existing communitarian relationships in many respects (unless certain local habits are unlawful or disturbing without good reasons). Grafts of newcomers can of course generate some problems. According to Hyra⁴, one can be “political displacement”. Another is “cultural displacement”, that occur when “newcomers seek to establish new norms, behaviours and amenities”,

2 Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith, “The changing state of gentrification,” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 92, no. 4 (2001): 469.

3 Hackworth, “Postrecession gentrification,” 839.

4 Derek Hyra, “The back-to-the-city movement: Neighbourhood redevelopment and processes of political and cultural displacement,” *Urban Studies* 52 no. 10 (2015): 1753-1773.

and the point of view of “the new residents cohort dominate and prevail over the tastes and preferences of the long-term residents”, who can experience “resentment” and “feelings of community loss”. “Understanding” such “processes ... and attempting to minimize their effects, is critical to ensuring the sustainability of inclusive, diverse, mixed-income communities”⁵.

On the one hand, SG is the result of powerful economic interests and profitable strategies. Therefore, it is much likely going to prevail, unless it is not curbed. On the other hand, we can imagine some coalitions - including residents, respectful gentrifiers, grassroots movements, cultural institutions, certain local politicians and civil servants, and so on - that could - at least in some cases - countervail SG by means of IG. I add that, if a given neighbourhood is characterized by marginality, low incomes, unemployment, insecurity, and other social problems, IG could offer older residents a valuable chance for improvement, provided that it is aptly framed and implemented. Of course, this implies both actual and relevant public expenses, as well as remarkable opportunity costs for would-be speculators, given that the much lucrative opportunities would be totally or partially lost. It nevertheless possible, at least in some occasions, to envisage an IG strategy that protects long-time dwellers and at the same time grants other private actors some reasonable benefits.

It is commonplace to emphasize the negative aspects of SG, perhaps failing to distinguish it from IG. For many people “gentrification is a serious issue in their lives that is nothing but an injustice, an upheaval, a threat to the vitality of urban neighbourhoods”. “The working class and/or low-income communities ... are at best severely disrupted ... or at worst eliminated by it”⁶. Slater⁷ advocates the use of “critical perspectives in gentrification research”. Atkinson⁸ thinks instead that “gentrification has regularly divided the opinions of policy-makers, researchers and commentators”, and that “a move

5 Ibid., 1754, 1756, 1767, 1768.

6 Tom Slater, Winifred Curran, and Loretta Lees, “Gentrification research: new directions and critical scholarship. Theme issue,” *Environment & planning A*, 36, no. 7 (2004): 1141.

7 Tom Slater, “The Eviction of Critical Perspectives from Gentrification Research,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30, no. 4 (2006): 737-757.

8 Rowland Atkinson, “The evidence on the impact of gentrification: new lessons for the urban renaissance?,” *European Journal of Housing Policy* 4, no. 1 (2004): 109, 111, 115, 117.

away from the portrayal of gentrification as a simple social good or evil will inevitably be an analytical improvement". The "impacts" can be either costly or beneficial, but "the research evidence on the benefits of gentrification is significantly more sparse than that of its ill effects".

Given that the word has a pejorative meaning for many people, certain "large, state-led gentrification projects ... are 'rebranded' as social-mixing or urban restructuring, rather than overtly stated as gentrification"⁹. It might also happen that what is officially presented as an IG is actually a SG in disguise, or that an IG undergoes alterations along the way, so that it becomes a SG in due time. However, albeit a genuine IG is not easy to be realized and presumably rare, its possibility must not be excluded *a priori*.

Chaskin and Joseph illustrate what has been done in Chicago and call it an instance of "positive gentrification"¹⁰, whereby a major goal of these efforts is to integrate low-income and public housing residents into the fabric of the developments and the surrounding (regenerating) community, among higher-income residents, and in contexts of greater stability, safety, opportunity and order.

They depict "positive gentrification" as the opposite of "neoliberal urban reform". The latter has produced, among other things, "the increasing privatization of urban spaces"¹¹. According to Freeman and Braconi gentrification can "reverse central-city decay" and "if it proceeds without widespread displacement ... also offers the opportunity to increase socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic integration ... existing residents of inner-city neighborhoods could benefit directly" from it. "Rent regulation and public housing may have a certain logic in the context of gentrification"¹².

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9 Brian Doucet and Daphne Koenders, "'At least it's not a ghetto anymore': Experiencing gentrification and 'false choice urbanism' in Rotterdam's Afrikaanderwijk," *Urban Studies* 55, no. 16 (2018): 3634.

10 Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph, "'Positive' Gentrification, Social Control and the 'Right to the City' in Mixed-Income Communities: Uses and Expectations of Space and Place," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 2 (2013): 480.

11 Ibid., 484.

12 Lance Freeman and Frank Braconi, "Gentrification and Displacement. New York City in the 1990s," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 70, no. 1 (2004): 39-50.

Gainza writes that something similar to IG was accomplished in San Francisco¹³, a working-class neighbourhood of Bilbao where the attraction of cultural industries has been used to revitalize the area [so that] what is taking place ... cannot be described as “regeneration” or “displacement”, but as a change-in-progress that induces transformations on the built environment, population, retail activity and the symbolic dimension ... San Francisco is nowadays an open and dynamic neighbourhood where different identities coexist, provoking new forms of socialization.

Another example is that of the Netherlands, where “the more managed and mild nature of gentrification (compared with that of Anglo-Saxon countries) means that” certain “negative experiences and perceptions ... are rarely found”. “Protection against displacement means that residents are able to appreciate some tangible benefits of neighbourhood improvement without feeling threatened ... Gentrification is a dominant policy tool ... and is characterized by top-down, policy-driven approaches”¹⁴. Steinmetz-Wood *et al.* state that gentrification often does not go hand in hand with “social cohesion and informal social control”¹⁵. Nevertheless, having investigated what happened in Montreal, they found “that the effects of gentrification may not all be negative”. If certain conditions occur, it can be “beneficial for individuals’ perceptions of neighborhood collective efficacy”¹⁶.

As a matter of fact, displacement of low-income people can be caused by factors other than gentrification. There is a “heightened threat of displacement that the poor disproportionately face in all urban areas, regardless of whether there are undergoing gentrification

13 Xabier Gainza, “Culture-led neighbourhood transformations beyond the revitalisation/gentrification dichotomy,” *Urban Studies* 54, no. 4 (2017): 953, 955, 962.

14 Doucet and Koenders, “At least it’s not a ghetto anymore”: 3636, 3645-3646.

15 Madeleine Steinmetz-Wood, Rania Wasfi, George Parker, Lisa Bornstein, Jean Caron, and Yan Kestens, “Is gentrification all bad? Positive association between gentrification and individual’s perceived neighborhood collective efficacy in Montreal, Canada,” *International Journal of Health Geographics*, 16, no. 24 (2017): 1-8.

16 On collective efficacy, also with regard to crime, Kozey (2020).

or not". "A fuller theory of vulnerability" is therefore needed¹⁷. In Billingham's opinion¹⁸, research has been overwhelmingly focused on a few megacities (such as New York or London and not many others). Secondly, it is necessary to study not only neighbourhoods, but also "socioeconomic and demographic change at the municipal and regional levels... More importantly, municipal and regional policies affecting economic activity and class-specific migration patterns have profound influences on the trajectory of gentrification"¹⁹.

2. Gentrification and insecurity

The choice to buy or rent a flat in a gentrifying neighbourhood is a bet. The idealtypical newcomer is prepared to adjust herself to the new situation, to accept some initial or even durable discomfort not only because she likes the place and is a tolerant person, but also on the basis of a rational expectation of certain benefits that must significantly exceed the costs, be they monetary, psychological, transactional, adaptive. In this respect the size and the types of criminal threats that are *perceived* with regard to a given neighbourhood can deter the would-be gentrifier from betting on it.

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Anticipation of increasing crime in "central cities" is regarded, together with racial motivations, as one of the reasons behind the "white flight" to the "suburbs during the middle part of the twentieth century"²⁰. "Crime had an adverse impact on net migration and population size", although this was not so for the "black

17 Chase M. Billingham, "Waiting for Bobos: Displacement and Impeded Gentrification in a Midwestern City," *City & Community* 16, no. 2 (2017): 147, 163. On displacement as opposed to "demographic change" occurring "through normal housing succession" see Freeman and Braconi (2004, 48), Freeman (2005), Slater (2006). Newman and Wyly (2006) point out some of the difficulties that emerge when studying displacement and criticize some of the points made by Freeman and Braconi. They agree that "public regulation of the market" can help "to mitigate displacement pressures". "Low-income residents who manage to resist displacement may enjoy a few benefits from the changes brought by gentrification, but these bittersweet fruits are quickly rotting as the support for low-income renters are steadily dismantled" (*ibidem*, 42, 52). Easton, Lees, Hubbard and Tate (2020) review the methodological problems that are met in several studies concerning the quantification of displacement.

18 Chase M. Billingham, "The broadening conception of gentrification: recent developments and avenues for future inquiry in the sociological study of urban change," *Michigan Sociological Review* 29 (2015): 75-102.

19 *Ibid.*, 80, 81.

20 David S. Kirk, and John H. Laub, "Neighborhood Change and Crime in the Modern Metropolis," *Crime and Justice*, 39 (2010): 441-502.

population”²¹. In the reverse case, when members of certain social groups begin to consider moving towards neighbourhoods amenable to gentrification, we therefore expect that they will be inclined to do so only if they estimate a low risk of becoming victims of serious crimes.

Taylor and Covington studied Baltimore in the seventies and argued that gentrification, implying “social disorganization” and “relative deprivation”, was linked to a certain increase of murders and aggravated assaults²². They added, however, that such “findings may no longer be current if, since 1980, the locations have become more homogeneous and thus, perhaps, have developed into ‘defended neighborhoods’”. Barton, among others, notes that “gentrifiers” vis-a-vis “incumbent residents” are “more likely to possess high-value goods”, which will be presumably be protected by means of updated technologies that they can afford²³. Covington and Taylor, again with regard to Baltimore in the same period, found that in “gentrifying neighborhoods” “robbery” was on the increase and “larceny” was not diminishing²⁴.

Such trends might however be related to specific places and times. Moreover, as emphasized by Kirk and Laub²⁵ (quoting McDonald 1986) among others, after the initial years of a gentrification process it can be expected that “crime declines long term as neighborhoods stabilize and informal social control increases”. “Gentrification appears to lower crime, especially in the long run”²⁶ (Kirk and Laub, 2010, 463-465). This conclusion is shared by Barton and Gruner, who reviewed the main “criminological theories”²⁷. In their view, “a more nuanced approach to the topic” is needed, and “research can contribute to the policy discussion”²⁸. “Property prices” in given

21 Ibid., 456, 457, 459.

22 Ralph B. Taylor and Jeanette Covington, “Neighborhood Changes in Ecology and Violence,” *Criminology* 26, no. 4 (1988): 579, 580, 582, 583.

23 Michael S. Barton, “Gentrification and violent crime in New York City,” *Crime & Delinquency* 62, no. 9 (2016): 1184.

24 Janette Covington and Ralph B. Taylor, “Gentrification and Crime: Robbery and Larceny Changes in Appreciating Baltimore Neighborhoods during the 1970s,” *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 25 (1989): 148, 159, 161.

25 Kirk and Laub, “Neighborhood Change and Crime,”: 463-465.

26 Ibid., 463-465.

27 Michael S. Barton and Colin P. Gruner, “A Theoretical Explanation of the Influence of Gentrification on Neighborhood Crime,” *Deviant Behavior* 37, no. 1 (2016): 30-46.

28 Ibid., 39, 43-44.

neighborhoods and certain types of crimes appear to be inversely related in a significant way²⁹. Boggess and Hipp emphasize that gentrification must be seen as a “spatially diffuse process”³⁰. Crime, therefore, should be studied not only in gentrified or gentrifying neighbourhoods, but also in the surrounding ones. By doing so they found “a positive relationship between gentrification and crime rates” in “isolated neighborhoods”, i.e. those “surrounded by areas that are *not* undergoing ... home value increases”.

Ellen and O'Regan discuss the “dramatic decline in total crime rates”, which has taken place in U.S. cities since the nineties³¹. “Crime rates” in central “cities ... declined more sharply than crime in their own surrounding suburbs”. Because suburbs were less affected, the authors suggest that the “reductions ... may have disproportionately benefited traditionally disadvantaged groups”³². “The crime decline... likely contributed to the rapid gentrification of cities”³³. Papachristos, Brazil and Cheng agree on the “absolute reduction” but argue that a “crime gap” (that is “the disparity in crime rates across urban neighborhoods”) is still present³⁴. “The concentration of homicide and violent crime is especially acute in disadvantaged black communities”. Moreover, in their view at least in some cases – the one they focused upon being Chicago – the reduction of crime was more beneficial to “safer communities” and has “generated additional inequalities by widening the crime gap”³⁵ (*ibidem*, 1052-1053, 1067). Papachristos, Smith, Scherer and Fugiero ³⁶, having

29 Nils Braakmann, “The link between crime risk and property prices in England and Wales: Evidence from street-level data,” *Urban Studies* 54, no. 8 (2017): 2005.

30 Lynnsay N. Boggess and John R. Hipp, “The Spatial Dimensions of Gentrification and the Consequences for Neighborhood Crime,” *Justice Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2016): 608.

31 Ingrid G. Ellen and Katherine O'Regan, “Crime and U.S. Cities: Recent Patterns and Implications,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 626 (2009): 22-38.

32 *Ibid.*, 24-25, 30.

33 Rachael A. Woldoff and Christopher Uggen, “Community and Crime: Now More than Ever,” *City & Community* 17, no. 4 (2018): 942; Barton, “Gentrification and violent crime,” 1183; Kirk and Laub, “Neighborhood Change and Crime,” 465-466; Amy E. Schwartz, Scott Susin, and Ioan Voicu, “Has falling Crime Driven New York City's Real Estate Boom?,” *Journal of Housing Research* 14 (2003): 101-135.

34 Andrew V. Papachristos, Noli Brazil, and Tony Cheng, “Understanding the Crime Gap: Violence and Inequality in an American City,” *City & Community* 17, no. 4 (2018): 1051-1074.

35 *Ibid.*, 1052-1053, 1067.

36 Andrew V. Papachristos et al., “More coffee, less crime? The relationship between gentrification and neighborhood crime rates in Chicago, 1991 to 2005,” *City & Community*, 10, no. 3, (2011): 215-240.

operationalized gentrification by referring to the presence of coffee shops³⁷, also stress differences between neighborhoods with regard to racial composition and proximity to certain other neighbourhoods, even when they exhibit similar patterns of gentrification. Some “white neighborhoods ... experience greater crime declines because they are spatially adjacent to neighborhoods with higher levels of social control”, while the opposite could be true if some of the “nearby surrounding areas” are ones where crime is frequent³⁸. Secondly, “Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics gentrify and experience gentrification in different ways”. Thirdly, the racial composition of each neighborhood matters. “Coffee shops are present almost entirely in areas with declining homicide”, and “the robbery models ... produce somewhat similar findings”, albeit the reverse applies in Black neighborhoods, where anyway coffee shops are rare³⁹. With regard to New York, Barton also found that “concentrated disadvantage was positively associated with assault and homicide”, while “gentrification” is “negatively associated” with “robbery” and “violent crimes” (2016, 1193, 1195)⁴⁰.

Alongside with hard data on crime rates, subjective beliefs can be very influential, too, when a person chooses to move to a new neighbourhood. Taylor and Covington (1993) argue that “population composition”, “unsupervised ... troublesome teen groups”, “physical” and “social incivilities”, which by definition do not amount to criminal behaviours, are nevertheless related to “fear of crime”, insofar they are seen as indicators of dangerous attitudes in certain urban spaces⁴¹.

More recently, Hwang and Sampson voiced a note of caution in their critical evaluation of the efforts which were done in Chicago, where

37 Barton (who uses a different methodological approach) in “Gentrification and violent crime in New York City”, 2016, noticed that “the location of coffee shops” is “influenced by city planning efforts, individual tastes, and residential preferences”, and that they “were clustered in the central business district” (ibid., 1190). This weakens the reliability of the indicator.

38 “With few exceptions, notably highly segregated residential areas and gated communities” (Alex Hirschfield, *et al.*, “How Places Influence Crime: The Impact of Surrounding Areas on Neighbourhood Burglary Rates in a British City,” *Urban Studies*, 51, no. 5 (2014): 1057, 1060). See also Boggess and Hipp (2016).

39 Papachristos *et al.*, “More coffee, less crime?,” 219, 228, 232-235.

40 Barton, “Gentrification and violent crime,” 1193, 1195. Kreager, Lyons and Hay (2011) studied urban revitalization in Seattle, with analogous results.

41 Ralph B. Taylor and Janette Covington, “Community Structural Change and Fear of Crime,” *Social Problems*, 40, no. 3 (1993), 376-378, 385-386, 391.

anyway “racial integration that satisfies particular thresholds is the norm” and residents are protected “against displacement”⁴². Their analysis (based also on Google Street View) has a general relevance, beyond the specific case treated.

Perceptions are shaped by racial-ethnic composition, independent of socio-economic standing, actual crime rates, objective measures of disorder [...] are resistant to short-term changes and even contrary evidence [...] gentrifiers may have preferences for racial or ethnic diversity [However] the durability of race-based residential stratification suggests that gentrifiers’ preferred level of diversity is limited [...] the racialized order of gentrification leads most poor minority neighborhoods to remain so⁴³.

3. Integrative gentrification and crime

A successful IG strategy is supposed to satisfy several coexisting and potentially conflicting objectives and demands. The most intricate aspects have to do with low-income residents, shopkeepers or craftsmen. If they are not organized and vocal, their needs might be overlooked. Even when such needs are taken in due consideration, each of the options that are open to policymakers has disadvantages and can generate “tensions”⁴⁴. If rents are blocked so that residents can stay where they are, this will for sure be a problem for their landlords, but also for tenants and homeowners, in case the cost of living goes up after the arrival of gentrifiers⁴⁵. Apart from this, the main goal of a GI is to improve social integration and welfare in targeted neighbourhoods. Atkinson mentions “increased social mix”, “rehabilitation of property both with and without state sponsorships”, “change of image” which “may invite further investment and alter preconceptions”, “deconcentration of poverty” among the expected beneficial outcomes of gentrification⁴⁶. If the concentration of poor people is

42 Jackelyn Hwang and Robert J. Sampson, “Divergent Pathways of Gentrification: Racial Inequality and the Social Order of Renewal in Chicago Neighborhoods,” *American Sociological Review* 79, no. 4 (2014): 726-751.

43 Ibid. 729-731, 748.

44 Chaskin and Joseph, “‘Positive’ Gentrification,” 480-502.

45 These and other “negative impacts of gentrification processes” are treated among others by Atkinson (2004, 111-117).

46 Atkinson, “The evidence on the impact of gentrification,” 112, 118.

high, it might indeed be expedient to propose some of them to move outside targeted neighbourhoods, provided that poor households accept to live in a new apartment⁴⁷. This of course presupposes a generous allocation of public funds to be devoted to low-income groups. At the same time, well-to-do gentrifiers are “an articulate and vigorous lobbying group” and “generally take more from the city coffers than they contribute”⁴⁸. There is also a risk that troublesome cases of social marginality and criminality are merely shifted elsewhere, without solving them⁴⁹. Hochstenbach and Musterd speak of a “suburbanization of poverty” with regard to the Netherlands, where one finds “large social rental stock, extensive tenant protection ... rent regulation” and “limited ... direct displacement”, so that “individual neighborhoods may remain or become more mixed due to gentrification”⁵⁰. Nevertheless, in their perspective “the aggregate effect at a higher scale may instead be the opposite”, if “lower income households are increasingly confined to a shrinking social rental sector or to affordable segments of the owner-occupied sector, and to low status or declining neighborhoods”⁵¹.

Any option of intervention may be flawed in some respect, but also doing nothing has a cost. To tackle certain problems through action is sometime necessary, so as to prevent bursts of discontent. Even when the weakest members of the community are not capable of exerting pressure, it is unfair to leave them behind. Therefore, an approach which is almost totally “conservative” of the status quo can be questionable as well. Each available line of action, fallible and imperfect as it may be, should be carefully and honestly weighted against the alternatives.

An IG strategy usually needs both vast amounts of public money and intrusive regulatory measures. Both might generate opportunities for particularism, patronage, outright corruption. Such risks can in principle be mitigated or avoided through careful design and implementation.

47 Chaskin and Joseph, ‘Positive’ Gentrification”, 497-499. Kirk and Laub, “Neighborhood Change and Crime”, 469-470.

48 Atkinson, “The evidence on the impact of gentrification,” 117.

49 Kirk and Laub, “Neighborhood Change and Crime,” 444, 465, 468, 473-474, 485.

50 Cody Hochstenbach and Sako Musterd, “Gentrification and the suburbanization of poverty: changing urban geographies through boom and bust periods,” *Urban Geography* 39, no. 1 (2018): 26-53.

51 Ibid., 31, 30, 47.

The great and long-lasting reduction of violent crime rates is the result of several factors, including law-and-order policies more or less loosely inspired by criteria such as zero tolerance, technological advances enhancing crime prevention and detection, demographic changes. IG in turn targets marginalized social groups in order to improve social conditions in the city, with expected effects on crime, too.

According to Sharkey, Torrats-Espinosa and Takyar, academic research has “largely overlooked” the role of those “local nonprofits” that “influence the level of social cohesion within a neighborhood” and “create social capital”⁵². They found “strong evidence that ... community nonprofits had a substantively meaningful negative effect on murder, violent crime, and property crime”⁵³. Therefore, nonprofits working in targeted neighbourhoods should be thought of as central actors in IG programs⁵⁴.

In more general terms, Ramey and Shrider argue that “local crime control or neighborhood improvement efforts” should be “bolstered by public-level assistance” and “outside support” and discuss the experience of the Neighborhood Matching Fund in Seattle (NMF, which has been imitated by “several European cities”, but not much in the U.S.)⁵⁵. The NMF co-finances “parochial” projects with earmarked resources and by doing so stimulates residents’ mobilisation. The authors maintain that such an approach is an effective tool of crime prevention for “struggling neighborhoods – those with high crime rates and high disadvantage”⁵⁶. Publicly sponsored mortgage investments are obviously related to the physical aspects of gentrification/revitalization, such as buildings renovation. Shrider and Ramey emphasized that the NMF aids “organizations that want to make physical improvements or foster social relationships in the

52 Patrick Sharkey, Gerard Torrats-Espinosa, and Delaram Takyar, “Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime,” *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 6, (2017): 1214-1240.

53 Ibid., 1215, 1218, 1234

54 One example is that of the Greater Astoria Historical Society in New York, quoted by Ranaldi (2014, 187-188) in her comparison between Astoria and the Roman Testaccio. With regard to Italy, Giulia Bonafede and Grazia Napoli (2015) discuss the historic centre of Palermo, while Semi (2015) compares experiences in Rome, Milan, Turin, Genoa.

55 David M. Ramey and Emily A. Shrider, “New Parochialism, Sources of Community Investment, and the Control of Street Crime,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2014): 193-216.

56 Ibid., 194, 199, 212, 211.

community”, providing a “public benefit that is free and open to anyone”, and often having “community building as a primary goal”⁵⁷. Without public support “mortgage lending” would cluster “in more advantaged areas”, where it is less needed⁵⁸. The authors argue that the NMF program is conducive to violent crime reduction⁵⁹.

Other IG tools – which like the NMF program are “not aimed specifically at crime reduction”⁶⁰ – could be “school investments”, especially those concerning “early childhood”. Madero-Hernandez et al. offer evidence that, although such investments “have received little empirical attention”, they can produce significant results both in the “short term” and in the “long run”, also because they foster prolonged interaction and cooperation between different types of private and public actors⁶¹.

4. Speculative gentrification and crime

IG must meet multiple urgent and sometimes elusive social needs. Consequently, even when policymakers want to pursue a real IG, the risk of failure is high. SGs are in many respects ambitious, but not so much when compared to IGs. When certain neighbourhoods are gentrifying without a specific commitment to IG, one might expect the even if SG prevails, anyway and eventually it will bring about some crime reduction there. However, if offenders are displaced, crime

57 Emily A. Shrider and David M. Ramey, “Priming the Pump: Public Investment, Private Mortgage Investment, and Violent Crime,” *City & Community*, 17, no. 4, (2018): 996-1014.

58 Nicholas Branick and John R. Hipp, “Growing pains or appreciable gains? Latent classes of neighborhood change, and consequences for crime in Southern California neighborhoods,” *Social Science Research* 76 (2018): 78, 80, 81, 90: Branick and Hipp used mortgage “loan ... data for the city of Los Angeles over the decade of 2000-2010” which includes the subprime crisis started in 2007. They notice that those neighbourhoods where loans are “disproportionately unavailable ... may experience worsening disadvantages over time that may exacerbate local crime levels”. Crime rates are also positively influenced by the “relative quickness” of “demographic ... change”, as well as by the disruption of “social networks and ties”.

59 Ibid., 997, 1000-1001, 996. Albeit they “cannot claim causality” and “cannot directly test” their “mechanism”. Furthermore, “Seattle is somewhat unique compared to other cities”, and “the NMF program” helps “building social ties”, while other “forms of public investment” have different goals (Shrider and Ramey, 2018, 1011-1012).

60 Ramey and Shrider, “New Parochialism,” 193.

61 Arelys Madero-Hernández, Rustu Deryol, Murat M. Ozer, and Robin S. Engel, “Examining the Impact of Early Childhood School Investments on Neighborhood Crime,” *Justice Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2017): 760, 763-765, 781.

can be supposed to reappear elsewhere, and maybe its total amount would even grow⁶², also as a consequence of “increased resentment and conflict”⁶³. Unlike with IGs, this would not be - strictly speaking - a substantial mishap for a SG, but rather only one of its side effects, however annoying it may be.

Gentrifying and even more gentrified neighbourhoods as such must be rendered and kept attractive for both existing and potential residents. Among others Laniyonu⁶⁴ emphasizes that this implies, among other things, the reduction or suppression of “social disorder” - “rather than serious crime” - through “aggressive ... order maintenance policing” (OMP)⁶⁵. He argues that “the intensity of OMP policy will not follow demand for services” expressed by the citizens, but rather “perceptions of threat felt by dominant sociopolitical groups”. Furthermore, he shows that “significant policing” tends to be pursued in “lower status ... adjacent or neighboring tracts”, more than in gentrifying tracts proper⁶⁶. Kellogg speaks of “residential segregation”, “mass incarceration”, “increasing crime rates simply by virtue of increased surveillance”, “criminalization of cultural behaviors”, “unfair and often illegal behaviors in an effort to push ... long-term residents” out of gentrifying areas⁶⁷.

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Gentrification can either take place through scattered purchases or rentals of flats or be guided by big investments and powerful real estate developers, who can acquire, renovate, demolish, re-build, resell entire buildings or blocks. Even when the latter is the case, each and every step of the necessary decision-making processes (involving also municipalities, banks, professionals, residents, corporations, and so on) can in principle be fully lawful. Of course, when considerable sums of money are implied the risk that certain offenses are committed grows, especially where mafia-type organizations are

62 Kirk and Laub, “Neighborhood Change and Crime”.

63 Atkinson, “The evidence on the impact of gentrification”.

64 This author speaks of “revitalization” or “growth strategies” as almost equivalent to what I call SG (Laniyonu, 2018, 899). Others, like Kreager, Lyons and Hays (2011) instead speak of “urban revitalization” in Seattle in a sense that is more akin to IG.

65 Ayobami Laniyonu, “Coffee Shops and Street Stops: Policing Practices in Gentrifying Neighborhoods,” *Urban Affairs Review* 54, no. 5 (2018): 902, 899-900.

66 Ibid., 905, 906, 920, 924.

67 Casey Kellogg, “There Goes the Neighborhood: Exposing the Relationship Between Gentrification and Incarceration,” *Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science* 3, no. 1 (2015): 178, 180, 187, 190, 191-192.

active in the region, or there are opportunities for corruption or other white-collar crimes.

Smith has analyzed the relationship between gentrification and “gang homicides” in Chicago, on the basis of her distinction between “three types of gentrification” which she titles “(a) *private economic investment* ... measured [by] coffee shops”; “(b) *forced state intervention* ... measured ... as public housing demolition”, when “public lands” are turned over to “private investors”; “(c) *changing demographic composition*”, defined as “the im-migration of particular residents ... into previously poorer neighborhoods”⁶⁸. Having analysed data concerning the range of time from 1994 to 2005, she found both an inverse relationship with (c) and another negative albeit weaker correlation with (a). Given the link between “demolition” and “increased gang conflict and fear of relocation”, “highly concentrated in areas of disadvantage”, it is “noteworthy” that type (b) “*significantly increases gang homicides over time*”. “Just as crimes are not equal, neither is gentrification”.

6. Concluding remarks

It is now evident beyond doubt that the answer to the question about the relationship between gentrification and crime begs other questions. Which type of gentrification? Which crimes? Here I have sketched just two types of the former which obviously require to be refined and could be complemented by other types. For the time being I add that actual cases of gentrification can be located along an ideal continuum between SG and IG. Many or perhaps most of them will gravitate towards straightforward SG. Whether gentrification of certain neighbourhoods will be a success, but also whether crime reduction, social integration and human development will actually be reached, is something which depends on the ex-ante features of given cities and also, crucially, on national, sub-national and municipal policies (to which European Union ones must be added when appropriate). Therefore, generalisations should be treated with great caution.

68 Chris M. Smith, “The Influence of Gentrification on Gang Homicides in Chicago Neighborhoods, 1994 to 2005,” *Crime & Delinquency* 60, no. 4 (2014): 570, 574, 578, 584-585.

Not only, as we have seen, pure SG tends to disintegrate social bonds. It can also be doubted that it manages to reduce ordinary crime, if we rightly have in mind - besides refurbished neighbourhoods - the whole urban constellation. By definition, white collar criminals and mafia-type organisations will be interested in SGs, while at least the latter are instead counter-interested in IGs. I repeat that this does not mean that all SGs will necessarily be ridden with bribes or dominated by mobsters. It is a possibility that may not materialize at all, if rigorous and very effective checks, rules, penalties and guardians are in place.

As I have already hinted at, when a potential for gentrification exists, it will often be exploited by certain economic interests and other actors in order to generate a SG, *unless* this “natural” tendency is counterbalanced by a sufficiently powerful IG. Like all other public programs, IGs can fail. Yet, we have mentioned a number of ingredients that, if aptly dosed and melted, can form an effective antidote to failure: public housing; protection of low-income residents from displacement, as well as with regard to their purchasing power; rent control; enhancement of community ties; local nonprofits; schools, education, human capital, civicness; dedicated institutional actors, such as Seattle’s NMF. When these and other elements are actually put in motion, so that the relevant measures go beyond paper provisions and reassuring declarations, an appropriate IG program can prove to be *better suited* than a SG one to reaching the blanket reduction of both ordinary and more serious crimes, fostering inclusive growth, social integration, satisfaction of basic needs, enjoyment of citizenship rights, avoiding the perils of crooked exchanges and racketeering. While a SG stands on its own feet and does not bother to throw problems out of the neighbourhoods it targets, an IG becomes meaningful only if it is part and parcel of a comprehensive strategy for governing the city as a whole.

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Comment on 'The Eviction of Critical Perspectives from Gentrification Research'

LANCE FREEMAN

Abstract

'The eviction of critical perspectives from gentrification research' offers the premise that scholars are becoming less critical of gentrification and that this trend is detrimental to those most vulnerable to gentrification. This argument falls short on a number of grounds. First, the article does not persuasively show that the scholarly literature on gentrification has indeed become less critical. More significantly, Slater does not consider perhaps the most important reason that gentrification can be accurately described in both critical and less than critical terms — gentrification's impacts are multifaceted, affecting different people differently and even the same individuals in different ways. Finally, those most threatened by gentrification are likely to need a combination of resistance and persuasion to blunt the ill effects of gentrification. Slater's call for more critical approaches may inspire some to resist, but will do little to persuade the larger society to take their concerns seriously. Given that those most threatened by gentrification are among the least powerful, their cause will most benefit from a combination of literature that inspires resistance as well as literature that persuades others that gentrification is truly a predicament. Therefore, literature that not merely criticizes gentrification but offers a rationale for blunting its detrimental effects is needed as well.

Introduction

In 'The eviction of critical perspectives from gentrification research', Slater (2006) offers an interesting premise, that scholars are becoming less critical of gentrification. But his argument falls short on a number of grounds. First, Slater does not persuasively show that the scholarly literature on gentrification has indeed become less critical. Two of the three articles he focuses on at the beginning of his article, by Byrne (2003) and Duany (2001), are not scholarly in the sense that they present neither new empirical evidence nor systematic and critical reviews of existing empirical literature. Nor does their work appear in peer reviewed journals. Consequently, the Byrne (2003) and Duany pieces are best viewed as popular polemics in favor of gentrification. The other articles cited by Slater in the first part of the article, perhaps with the exception of Zukin, are rather neutral in their description of gentrification. One can also easily find uncritical depictions of gentrification in the literature dating back to the 1970s and 1980s (Lipton, 1977; Sumka, 1979; Gale, 1986).

But let us assume for the sake of argument that Slater's interpretation of trends in the literature is correct. More significantly, Slater does not consider perhaps the most important reason that gentrification can be accurately described in both critical and less than critical terms — gentrification's impacts are multifaceted, affecting different people differently and even the same individuals in different ways. Thus, those interpretations

Slater calls uncritical are not necessarily incorrect. Slater's call for more critical perspectives and implicit rejection of seemingly neutral studies raises important questions about the role of social science in policy debates. Can social scientists be objective, and if not should they even bother to try? Would the problems posed by gentrification be better addressed through more critical analyses of gentrification or a multitude of perspectives? I would think a multitude of perspectives would best help us understand the challenges posed by gentrification. Finally, those most threatened by gentrification are likely to need a combination of resistance and persuasion to blunt the ill effects of gentrification. Slater's call for more critical approaches may inspire some to resist, but will do little to persuade the larger society to take their concerns seriously. Given that those most threatened by gentrification are among the least powerful, their cause will most benefit from a combination of literature that inspires resistance as well as literature that persuades others of that gentrification as truly a predicament. Therefore, literature that not merely criticizes gentrification but offers a rationale for blunting its detrimental effects is needed as well. Below I elaborate on each of these arguments.

Why the uncritical views of gentrification?

An obvious but overlooked reason for the less than critical views of gentrification is that there could be some truth behind these alternative perspectives. A lack of empirical evidence that would allow one to conclude definitively one way or the other about the totality of gentrification's effects on central city neighborhoods and their inhabitants leaves room for alternative interpretations. Given that scholars have been debating gentrification for nearly 40 years it is somewhat surprising that there is still room for debate on many basic points. As Slater points out, both critical and cultural geographers were preoccupied with ideological and theoretical explanations of gentrification. This preoccupation appears to have also crowded empirical studies of how gentrification impacts residents in these neighborhoods. Despite a voluminous literature, the impact of gentrification on neighborhoods and residents is still subject to debate.

Slater himself points out the lack of research on one type of impact — displacement. Furthermore, Slater misinterprets the results of Freeman and Braconi (2004) who found lower rates of residential turnover in gentrifying neighborhoods among poor and less educated residents. Slater (2006: 749, emphasis in the original) suggests 'people [are] not moving not because they like the gentrification around them, *but rather because there are no feasible alternatives available to them in a tight/tightening housing market* (i.e. that so much of the city has gentrified that people are trapped)'. It is unlikely that this would explain Freeman and Braconi's results for it does not explain why mobility rates would be *lower* in gentrifying neighborhoods and those experiencing the most rapid rental inflation. Presumably, poor households in non-gentrifying neighborhoods would also be trapped as well. Slater's, and by way of reference Marcuse's (2005), argument here is simply not consistent with the data presented by Freeman and Braconi (2004). Furthermore, Freeman (2005) and Vigdor (2002) also failed to find higher rates of residential turnover in gentrifying neighborhoods, as would be expected if gentrification were triggering widespread displacement. Thus, while gentrification is undoubtedly associated with displacement, the magnitude of this association is still uncertain.

Debates over the best way to measure displacement aside, it is worth remembering that displacement is not the entirety of the experience of those living in gentrifying neighborhoods. Not all low-income households are displaced. And not all displacees experience displacement immediately. How should we evaluate the experience of those who manage to stay in gentrifying neighborhoods whether through a housing subsidy, their own upward mobility, or a kind landlord? How should the experience of those residing in neighborhoods that were starved of almost all investment pre-gentrification be considered? Should neighborhood conditions prior to the onset of gentrification figure

into our calculus at all? Or what about the case of gentrification sparked by black gentrifiers, many of whom intentionally seek to improve the life chances of their poorer brethren in poor ghetto neighborhoods (Moore, 2005; Patillo, 2007)?

Vigdor (2002) highlights the challenges of answering the question 'does gentrification harm the poor?' Vigdor argues that answering this question requires one to know whether gentrification results in a neighborhood that the original residents find preferable; whether the original neighborhood residents are owners or renters, for as owners they would stand to benefit from a rise in property values (it is also worth noting that some homeowners are on a low income); what happens to the poor if they are forced to leave their housing, for they could wind up in improved situations; whether gentrification results in an improved tax base that could improve neighborhood amenities and services; and whether gentrification changes employment opportunities in central cities. As Vigdor (2002: 148) notes: 'Previous attempts to identify gentrification's distributional consequences focus almost exclusively on residential displacement'. But as the preceding discussion makes clear, displacement is only part of the picture. The extant literature simply does not allow one to answer these questions definitively. Nor can we logically conclude beforehand what the answers may be.

To amplify the ambiguity around gentrification's impacts, consider qualitative research on an inner-city Chicago neighborhood poised to undergo gentrification. Patillo (2007) describes how poor black residents of this neighborhood were ambivalent about the arrival of the middle class and incipient gentrification. On the one hand newcomers brought investment in new housing in place of vacant lots, and the political and social capital to attract new schools and anti-crime initiatives. Conversely, long-term residents often felt their interests were being crowded out by the newcomers and were rightfully concerned that gentrification would price them out of the neighborhood. Qualitative research by this author also found long-term residents in two predominantly black gentrifying neighborhoods to be ambivalent about gentrification (Freeman, 2006). Residents were appreciative of the improvements in amenities and services that accompanied gentrification but were cynical and resentful about why these improvements were taking place, often felt the newcomers were trying to 'take over', and were fearful of being 'pushed out' of the neighborhood. Or consider survey research by Sullivan (2006) in gentrifying neighborhoods in Portland. In one of the few studies that actually measured residents' attitudes using probability sampling, Sullivan finds that a majority of residents, including long-term residents, and even 44% of the renters approved of the changes taking place in their neighborhood.

Atkinson's (2004) effort to systematically review the literature on the impact of gentrification only underscores the point that the empirical evidence is surprisingly thin on some questions and inconclusive on others. On displacement Atkinson (2004: 114) concludes: 'Ultimately there is no clear message about the scale of displacement upon which policy might draw, though all argue that displacement is a problem where it occurs'. On whether gentrification promotes the deconcentration of poverty (or social mix), 'there is little empirical evidence to support this'. Atkinson could find no studies that measured net changes to a municipality's tax base as a result of gentrification. And as for gentrification's impact on crime, he writes: 'Gentrification has been linked to changes in local crime patterns, though the research itself is contradictory'. Atkinson's discussion on the important point of the origins of the gentrifiers, whether they are from the suburbs or outside the city, rests on studies that are nearly three decades old (Gale, 1986). The origins of the gentrifiers are important because if they are coming from the suburbs they represent a net addition to central cities. Earlier research suggested most originated within the same city, dashing the hopes of those who viewed gentrification as a back-to-the-city movement. Because this research is now several decades old, however, we cannot be confident that this is still the case.

Atkinson (2004: 119), summing up the gentrification literature, writes: 'Part of the problem in debating gentrification has been an absence of evidence to back-up the claims of those who are either "pro" or "anti" the process'. Although Atkinson concludes that

gentrification is usually negative, he also points out, in certain circumstances, particularly heavily disinvested areas with much vacant land, gentrification may not be a zero sum game.

Thus, the less than critical perspectives should be motivated by an attempt to fill some of the gaping holes in the gentrification literature. Without anything close to a consensus about gentrification's impacts, those perspectives grounded in empirical research should be taken seriously. The still remaining holes in the gentrification literature highlight a major shortcoming of the critical approach lauded by Slater. While shining a bright light on the economic, political and, most importantly, intentional government actions that serve to foster gentrification, critical perspectives have failed to answer some basic questions about gentrification's impacts on inner-city neighborhoods and their inhabitants. Given the ambiguity in the empirical literature, it should come as no surprise that alternative perspectives are emerging in the literature. A careful consideration of the evidence seems to have led some to conclude that a solely critical view of gentrification paints an incomplete picture of the process. Comments posted on Slater's website do not provide a compelling picture of the totality of gentrification. Posters obviously self select and likely represent those most aggrieved by gentrification. Likewise, Slater's comment that: 'Qualitative evidence establishes beyond dispute that gentrification initiates a disruption of community and a crisis of affordable housing for working-class people' ignores the myriad other ways gentrification can impact low-income residents and thus paints an incomplete picture of the process.

What role for policy research?

If the empirical literature is incomplete and conflicting, this raises the question of whether Slater's call for more critical scholarship is the right call to make. What appears to be more pressing is more rigorous empirical scholarship that would allow us to move closer to more definitively understanding how gentrification impacts residents. Clearly, examples can be found where gentrification has harmed residents, and probably some examples exist where gentrification has been beneficial on net. *Context would seem to be crucial in determining how gentrification impacted residents in a given neighborhood.* But the lack of conclusive empirical evidence on gentrification's impacts and the ambiguity sometimes expressed by the residents themselves suggest a reflexively critical stance towards gentrification is driven more by ideology than social science.

This last comment begs the question of the appropriate role for social scientists towards controversial topics like gentrification. What unique perspective does social science have to offer? It would seem that social science can help paint the truest picture of the reality of gentrification. This is not a naïve argument about the objectivity of social science. Rather it is a suggestion that the process of social science, with built-in mechanisms for self-correction, is one of the best mechanisms we have for understanding complex social phenomena. Slater's call for a more critical scholarship would seem to put the cart before the horse. Certainly if the weight of the evidence points one toward a critical view, that stance should be adopted. But if the evidence calls for a more nuanced view, then that would seem appropriate as well.

This is not to say that critical commentary on gentrification is unwarranted. But such commentary must be grounded in a thorough understanding of the process of gentrification. Commentary that is reflexively critical or praising of gentrification would seem to do little to further our understanding of the issue. Moreover, given the surrounding controversy, this probably obfuscates more than clarifies our understanding of gentrification.

My final comment relates to Slater's ultimate objective, protecting the interests of poor residents of gentrifying neighborhoods. Even here, I would question whether the critical approach lauded by Slater is likely to be the most effective in achieving this end.

Critical scholarship is and will continue to be necessary to fully understand gentrification. Its great strength questions everyday assumptions about the 'market' and justice of current arrangements. Critical scholarship can also buttress grassroots movements that aim to curb or at least ameliorate some of gentrification's negative impacts. But the critical approach often succumbs to being a conclusion in search of evidence. As such, it may not be that persuasive to those who do not share Slater's ideological inclination.

Poor residents of gentrifying neighborhoods are likely to need allies when gentrification occurs in their community. In a description of a community group's resistance to gentrification, Slater (2004) describes how they rely on moral suasion and embarrassing landlords with picket protests to prevent long-term residents from being evicted. But as Slater himself notes (*ibid.*: 1207), public policy in the form of rent regulation would have a much more powerful impact on dampening displacement. Convincing policymakers that policies that protect the poor in the face of gentrification are warranted will likely require more than reflexively critical scholarship. It, of course, would be naive to assume that scholarly publications would convince everyone to take a balanced view of gentrification. But policy debates can be influenced by social science research. Indeed, the deconcentration of poverty policies described by Slater was spawned, in part, by the work of Wilson (1987) and others. The world does not cleave neatly into greedy capitalists promoting gentrification and community activists resisting it. There are some who would wish to consider gentrification's harm on balance and proceed from there.

To effectively argue that policymakers and scholars should adopt his view of gentrification as first and foremost a 'crisis', Slater needs to articulate a rationale that would privilege the interests of poor renters, and especially those in gentrifying neighborhoods over the poor elsewhere. Almost all advanced industrial nations have programs to help the poor afford housing, the lack of which is the most important problem caused by gentrification. Few, however, have affordable housing policies that specifically address the need for affordable housing in gentrifying neighborhoods. Even if affordable housing were made an entitlement, this alone would not necessarily solve the affordability problems raised by gentrification. For example, someone in a gentrifying neighborhood may obtain a housing voucher, but if the landlord did not accept it, that person may still be forced to move. The first few decades of critical scholarship, which Slater hopes for a return to, have apparently not been that effective in convincing policymakers to take seriously affordable housing problems in gentrifying neighborhoods. As mentioned previously, however, public policy has the potential to significantly ameliorate the challenges posed by gentrification. Consequently, calling for more scholarship of the type that has failed to have much impact on policy seems futile. Going forward, why would we expect reflexively critical scholarship to achieve significant changes in policy stances toward gentrification when such scholarship has yielded little in the way of policy shifts over the past several decades?

What is in need, then, is more empirical research that documents how gentrification affects people and neighborhoods along with an articulation of how society as a whole loses when the least among us are threatened by gentrification. This would surely seem the most promising way of helping those most at risk under gentrification.

Lance Freeman (lf182@columbia.edu), Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, 400 Avery Hall, New York, NY 10027, USA.

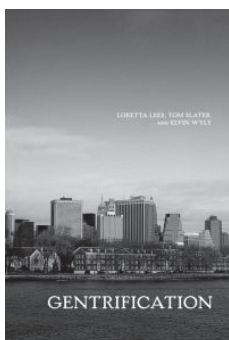
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Résumé

L'article intitulé The eviction of critical perspectives from gentrification research pose en principe que les chercheurs se font moins critiques sur la 'gentrification' et que cette tendance porte préjudice aux plus vulnérables face à ce phénomène. Cet argument ne tient pas pour plusieurs raisons. D'abord, il n'est pas montré de manière probante que la littérature académique sur la 'gentrification' soit vraiment devenue moins critique. De façon plus marquante, Slater n'étudie pas la raison, peut-être la plus importante, pour laquelle la 'gentrification' peut être décrit avec exactitude en termes à la fois critiques et moins critiques : en effet, ses impacts revêtent plusieurs aspects, affectant différemment les populations différentes, voire les mêmes populations. Enfin, les plus menacés par la 'gentrification' ont sans doute besoin d'un mélange de résistance et de persuasion pour atténuer les effets négatifs du processus. L'appel de Slater à des approches plus critiques peut susciter la résistance chez certains, mais va difficilement convaincre la société de traiter sérieusement le problème. Etant donné que les plus menacés font partie des moins puissants, leur cause bénéficiera surtout d'une combinaison de publications inspirant la résistance et de textes capables de convaincre de toute la complexité de la situation liée à la 'gentrification'. En conséquence, une littérature qui ne se contente pas de critiquer la 'gentrification', mais qui propose un raisonnement pour en atténuer les effets néfastes, a tout autant d'utilité.



Loretta Lees, Tom Slater & Elvin Wyly. **Gentrification**

London: Routledge, 2008, 310 p.

Ernesto López Morales¹

Los estudios sobre gentrificación, o *elitización* como ha sido traducido al castellano (García, 2001), parecieran estar experimentando gran surgimiento en el mundo en los últimos años. Sin embargo, la interpretación de sus causas y efectos siguen siendo tema de gran controversia. Esto se debe a que, en primer lugar, la gentrificación es un desafío aún no resuelto para las teorías tradicionales de localización residencial y estructura social urbana. Muy pocos enfoques neoclásicos han explicado, mucho menos modelado, las causas del fenómeno. Segundo, es un desafío tanto para la política como las políticas urbanas, ya que confronta temas cruciales de regeneración y desplazamiento social de áreas centrales y pericentrales urbanas. Tercero, la gentrificación en la actualidad representa uno de los principales campos de batalla teóricos e ideológicos para el urbanismo y la geografía urbana, con posturas epistemológicas y políticas contrastadas. En este contexto, *Gentrification* viene a compilar y analizar en profundidad la producción internacional más relevante existente en torno a este tema, desde la década de 1960 en adelante, y podría ser incluso una referencia clave para los estudios de la gentrificación en Latinoamérica, en los próximos años.

Tras revisar el nacimiento de la observación científica de la gentrificación en los años sesenta, pasando por las transformaciones de Brooklyn (Nueva York) y los estudios de Glass en Islington (Londres), el libro se

centra en un primer gran tema, como son las contradicciones actuales epistemológicas asociadas al fenómeno y sus dos principales corrientes teóricas. Una primera definición denominada enfoque de la oferta, entiende la gentrificación como producto de una acumulación oligopólica de la renta urbana en contextos de economías de mercado. Neil Smith (1979, 1996) es probablemente el autor de mayor contribución en este ámbito. De acuerdo a su teoría del *rent gap* (o brecha de renta), es clave el diferencial entre una renta futura *potencial* y una renta actual *capitalizada* existente en las zonas pericentrales, un valle en la curva de valor de suelo que genera un enorme potencial de beneficio para los desarrolladores inmobiliarios (generadores de oferta). Una expandida brecha de renta definirá el dónde y cuándo existen las mejores condiciones para la acumulación de la renta urbana, lo que se lleva a cabo de la mano de los desarrolladores y propietarios arrendadores a través de acciones concretas orientadas a devaluar al máximo la renta actual capitalizada y apreciar lo más posible la renta potencial. Según esta teoría, la gentrificación de la ciudad es de por sí el producto de una racionalidad económica orientada a la acumulación de esa renta potencial. Si bien este enfoque ha sido comúnmente catalogado como económico-determinista, los autores del libro opinan que tal crítica es limitante, ya que, por el contrario, la teoría del *rent gap* aparece hoy como un lente imprescindible para observar regulaciones públicas y conflictos de poder generados alrededor de la distribución desigual de la plusvalía urbana, temas clave en Latinoamérica. El libro revisa en profundidad aportes contemporáneos en esta línea.

¹ Departamento de Urbanismo, Universidad de Chile (Chile). E-mail: erlopez@uchile.cl

Un enfoque distinto plantea que las causas principales de la gentrificación se hallan en los cambios culturales y de estructura ocupacional, a la manera de las ciudades postindustriales en los países de economías avanzadas. Ley (1980) y Hamnett (1994) son referencias clásicas de este modelo. Contrariamente a la teoría de la oferta, estas explicaciones (basadas en la demanda) otorgan mayor importancia a los cambios en las preferencias de consumo, trabajo y residencia, experimentados por clases acomodadas que buscan diferenciarse de los estilos de vida suburbanos asociables a un régimen anterior de producción fordista-industrial. La tesis aquí implícita es que existiría una verdadera “ideología liberal de la renovación urbana”, postmoderna, más basada en la calidad de vida que en el crecimiento económico. Este enfoque ha sido adoptado en el último tiempo por mayor diversidad de autores en el mundo, con distintas interpretaciones, en general porque las transformaciones culturales y de consumo de suelo urbano parecieran ser más evidentes que las variaciones en la renta urbana o los desplazamientos sociales, en tanto causas o efectos de la gentrificación. En cualquier caso, en la actualidad, disputas tan extremas sobre las causas del fenómeno parecieran ser ya excesivas, a la vez que posturas más contemporáneas tienden a encontrar una síntesis, asimismo reenfocando cada vez más los estudios de la gentrificación hacia los efectos socioespaciales producidos, y no solamente sus causas (Slater, 2006).

Un segundo gran tema analizado por el libro son las recientes transformaciones de escala de la gentrificación. Basándose mayormente en evidencia de países desarrollados, se plantea *grosso modo* que el fenómeno habría transitado por tres fases: una primera etapa de producción esporádica a escala barrial desarrollada hasta fines de la década de los setenta, observada en ciertas ciudades globales, promovida por políticas públicas orientadas a la generación de un clima propicio para los desarrollos inmobiliarios, bajo la premisa de combatir el deterioro urbano. Una segunda fase ocurre en los años ochenta hasta mediados de los noventa, en que la gentrificación pasa a ser parte de estrategias de desarrollo económico mayores, con capital financiero global invo-

lucrado. Esta fase es caracterizada por estrechas alianzas público-privadas (*entrepreneurialism*) y decisivos subsidios públicos a la oferta, en ciudades no necesariamente globales, y con intensos conflictos sociales emanados de desplazamientos.

Finalmente, tras cierta recuperación mundial de la crisis financiera de fines de la década de 1990, una tercera fase de gentrificación comienza a ser observada tanto en el centro como periferias mundiales, con mayor volumen, escala e internacionalización de capital financiero involucrado, instrumentos de crédito más flexibles (tanto a la oferta como la demanda) y más activa participación de los aparatos públicos centrales y locales en su materialización, observándose, además, cierta marginalización de movimientos antigentrificación. Otras variaciones de carácter espacial son también detectadas en esta última etapa, a saber: gentrificación rural, *new-build gentrification* y más recientemente supergentrificación, que describe la ocupación de los superricos de zonas previamente gentrificadas en ciudades globales. Sin embargo, resulta casi paradójico que las funciones de los Estados nacionales y locales parecen cuestiones apenas explicadas aún por las teorías actualmente existentes en torno a este tema.

El tercer tópico analizado por *Gentrification* son las contradicciones de orden político del fenómeno, y los enfoques contradictorios sobre sus efectos en la ciudad. En general, numerosos autores defienden la necesidad de promover una gentrificación positiva en áreas urbanas deprimidas, debido a los varios efectos benéficos que esta generaría, a saber: estabilización de zonas urbanas en decadencia y aumento del valor de las propiedades, disminución de vivienda inutilizada, aumento de la base impositiva fiscal local, estímulo a desarrollos posteriores, reducción de la expansión excesiva de la ciudad, aumento de beneficios emanados de *mix* sociales y rehabilitación de propiedades deterioradas con o sin apoyo estatal. Sin embargo, también existe concordancia en que los efectos negativos observados en el mundo serían largamente más contundentes, a saber: desplazamiento social por aumentos en los arriendos y valores de propiedades, efectos psicológicos secundarios asociados

a los desplazamientos (resentimiento y conflicto en las comunidades desplazadas), disminución de vivienda económica disponible en las zonas en renovación, aumento del valor de propiedades debido a especulación inmobiliaria, aumento de población sin techo, alto uso de recursos públicos para promover ciertas áreas, desplazamiento de usos industriales y comerciales y aumento de los costos de los servicios remanentes, presión sobre áreas urbanas contiguas, pérdida de heterogeneidad social en los barrios, disminución de la tasa de ocupación de viviendas y, en general, pérdida de población en áreas gentrificadas (Atkinson y Bridge, 2005).

Este último punto es extremadamente sensible para los autores del libro, quienes discuten el factor de desplazamiento como condición necesaria (casi exclusiva, según algunos autores) para la gentrificación, ya que también existen formas de “desplazamiento por exclusión”, uno de cuyos ejemplos más destacables es el creciente número de enclaves cerrados en el mundo (notablemente en las urbes latinoamericanas). De tal forma, la aparente inexistencia de desplazamiento espacial y la proximidad geográfica entre diferentes clases sociales como condiciones suficientes para una gentrificación positiva, resultarían ser factores bastante discutibles. Investigaciones más recientes muestran también que procesos de revanchismo social y los limitados resultados de políticas de *mix* social aplicadas en muchos casos mundiales ponen en tela de juicio los supuestos beneficios de la gentrificación. En cualquier caso, pretender posicionamientos políticamente objetivos respecto a este tema es ya de por sí una quimera, su carácter conflictivo pareciera ser ya de naturaleza ontológica, y de por sí una invitación a discutir la enorme complejidad de aspectos de comunidad, desigualdad y transparencia en las políticas urbanas a escala de barrios (Wyly y Hammel, 2008).

Una limitación no menor del libro es su cierto eurocentrismo y norteamericanismo (resulta un tanto curioso que los tres casos de resistencia barrial a la gentrificación analizados en la última parte del libro provengan de Norteamérica), al defender también la tesis de una tendencia de expansión unidireccional (centro-periferia) de la gen-

trificación. Esto sería observable tanto en el nivel de intervención de capitales financieros globales en mercados urbanos periféricos, como en la aparición de producción teórica desde estos últimos países, solo en el último tiempo. Sin embargo, el libro no pareciera abrirse a considerar que la diversidad de procesos de gentrificación en ciudades de las periferias mundiales, Latinoamérica incluida, podrían estar ocurriendo desde hace al menos dos décadas, con trayectorias de considerable mayor autonomía económica y política que las supuestas por estos autores.

Aunque ya no pareciera haber duda de que intensos desarrollos inmobiliarios y políticas de regeneración ocurren con gran intensidad en los centros y pericentros de las ciudades latinoamericanas, estos configuran efectos sociales y económicos a todas luces diferentes a aquellos descritos en el libro, por ejemplo: menor escala y capital de los mercados urbanos, desigual efectividad del sector público en balancear expansión y renovación urbanas, políticas impositivas particulares sobre el suelo (en algunos casos, como el chileno, extremadamente centralizadas), mayor disponibilidad de suelo periférico para la producción de vivienda (consecuentemente, menor presión sobre las áreas centrales y pericentrales) y, especialmente, abierta disimilitud en la prioridad que tiene la regeneración de zonas centrales en las agendas públicas.

En cualquier caso, *Gentrification* debiera ser una referencia sustancial para los estudios urbanos de ciudades latinoamericanas en los próximos años. Una invitación también, según plantean Lees, Slater y Wyly, a superar el cierto sesgo liberal dominante y relativamente despolitizado de los estudios sobre gentrificación en el último tiempo.

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Gentrification in Latin America: addressing the politics and geographies of displacement

Michael Janoschka and Jorge Sequera

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

ABSTRACT

In this article, we develop a contextual framing for the analysis of the social, economic and political transformations that have altered Latin American cities since the turn of the century, especially by displacing deprived households from the central city. We de-centre research on gentrification through the territorial and linguistic lens of Latin America, epitomising four simultaneously paradigmatic, but diverging and diverse gentrification scenarios. In such a comparativist account, emphasis is placed on: (i) the decisive role that public institutions play for gentrification in Latin America, especially with regard to the ferocity of new real estate markets; (ii) the symbolic violence that is required to re-appropriate architectural and cultural heritage; (iii) the vehemence of formalising urbanity in economies that are dominated by informal ways of producing, living and appropriating the city. Such debates conceptualise displacement and eviction from a perspective that is theoretically informed by the realities of Latin American cities.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 May 2013
Accepted 14 September 2015

KEYWORDS

Gentrification; displacement; dispossession; Latin America; Mexico City; Buenos Aires; Rio de Janeiro; Santiago de Chile

Comparativist perspectives on gentrifications in Latin America – an introduction

Recent urban policies in Latin America have triggered mechanisms that target the displacement of deprived households from city centres, as well as from semi-peripheral areas in transformation. This socio-spatial reconfiguration has affected most cities, regardless of whether they were governed by progressive administrations or more market-oriented regimes. However, the articulation of politics and geographies of displacement varies considerably from country to country, from city to city and within a city across time and places. But it has in common some basic aspects, such as real estate investment and exclusionary urban transformation, that lead to the reconquest of reinvented cityscapes by wealthier tenants. Such processes have for decades been addressed as gentrification – at least in the North Atlantic hemisphere (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). Nevertheless, the term has been much less prominent in debates over Latin American cities. This raises the question of whether it makes sense to adopt it for cities with significantly different social, urban, political and administrative structures

and histories, or if its application in this and other world regions implies a neo-colonial reorientation of scientific and political debates.

Such considerations are currently at the forefront of critical approaches to the emerging “geographies of gentrification” outside the Anglophone core (Lees, 2012), gentrifications that at the same time have been referred to primarily by authors located in the “Global North” (e.g. Atkinson & Gary, 2005; Lees et al., 2008; Porter & Shaw, 2008; Smith, 2002). Different opinions exist in this regard. Maloutas (2012) claims that introducing the term to different social and urban contexts outside the Anglophone world implies an excessive conceptual stretching that uncritically assumes that, elsewhere in the world, similar outcomes are a result of the same processes. His perspective challenges some of the assertions made by Lees (2012). She argues that gentrification outside the North Atlantic context can be revealed through a postcolonial approach that takes into consideration the widespread critiques of developmentalism and universalism. This might be the case for Latin America, especially when we reconsider some of the evidence about the multi-scalar, poly-centric and non-hierarchical – but also power-laden and uneven – character of contemporary policy mobility and knowledge exchange (González, 2011; Healey, 2013; McCann, 2011; Vainer, 2014), as well as the pragmatic use of the term gentrification by many social movements (Casgrain & Janoschka, 2013).

Our contribution consists of comparisons of urban realities and processes from Latin America that focus upon “nuanced, complex and contextual accounts” (Robinson, 2011, p. 18) to adopt the concept of “gentrification”. More than comparing urban realities in terms of similarity and difference, such a comparativist approach attempts to elaborate meaningful analytical categories that better help to understand paradigmatic, yet complementary, processes. It draws from the work of Janoschka, Sequera, and Salinas (2014) who have argued that while gentrification takes place differently in Latin America, the term should be applied to urban realities in the region by critically re-articulating three key dimensions, namely; (i) the creation, assemblage and transformation of real estate markets; (ii) the focus on the symbolic dimensions of gentrification and (iii) the key role that displacement plays for the politics and geographies of gentrification in Latin American cities. This article further develops these elements by bringing together four iconic, contemporary, but simultaneously divergent, examples. In each of them, neoliberal policy application and rampant capitalism have paved the way for a successive re-appropriation of strategic portions of urban space by more affluent social actors. Analysing this production of gentrified landscapes by specific, locally assembled modes of urban reproduction, we characterise displacement as follows:

- (i) *Displacement by heritage accumulation*, as it has been orchestrated in the course of the “rescue” of the historic centre of Mexico City.
- (ii) *Displacement by cultural dispossession*, as enacted through the heritage of Tango culture in deprived inner-city neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires.
- (iii) *Displacement by militarization and “states of exception”*, as part of the expansion of (real estate) markets in Rio de Janeiro prior to the 2016 Olympic Games.

- (iv) *Displacement by ground rent dispossession*,¹ as articulated by the return of capital to previously downgraded inner-city neighbourhoods in Santiago de Chile.

This perspective might provide a starting point from which to consider the world of comparative urbanisms and imaginations about gentrifications outside the Anglophone core. It responds to demands for “situated thinking across diverse urban experiences [...] in order to press toward generative theoretical insights on contemporary urbanism” (McFarlane & Robinson, 2012, p. 768). Hence, we will first analyse the social geographies of gentrification in Latin America. This discussion will suggest that gentrification is part of the multifaceted violence that contemporary capitalism exercises, through different *dispositifs* (in the Foucaultian sense) that cause displacement. Second, we will reflect on how displacement can be addressed from a perspective that includes, and refers to, Latin American urban realities. Four different but mutually intertwined mechanisms of displacement will be described, showing that gentrification comprises not only changes in the social composition of an area’s inhabitants, but also the transformation of manifold aspects of daily life that expel and dispossess the underprivileged from spaces reclaimed by capital. Finally, this comparativist approach will relate the gentrification debates in Latin America to strands of research in the Anglophone world that struggle against the “eviction of critical perspectives” (Slater, 2006) and seek a return to critical analysis of eviction and displacement as key mechanisms of gentrification (Desmond, 2012; Lees, 2014; Lees, Shin, & López-Morales, 2015; Newman & Wyly, 2006; Slater, 2013).

Methodological considerations

This article reflects upon the globalisation of gentrification and develops our own view and positionality towards the phenomenon, as researchers who reside in Spain but have lived, studied and worked for long periods in Latin America. It is based upon research carried out in four Latin American cities that participate in the scientific network CONTESTED_CITIES.² The project addresses the comparativist study of variegated geographies and politics of gentrification in the course of ongoing restructurings of urban life in Latin America, and it provides us with an interdisciplinary and culturally sensitive background for the continuous revision of scientific concepts within critical urban studies. Our empirical fieldwork about gentrification and displacement consists of interviews with experts, planners and inhabitants in the neighbourhoods of *San Telmo*, *La Boca* and *Puerto Madero* in Buenos Aires, as well as in different favelas in Rio de Janeiro – especially *Vila Autódromo*, a community next to the future Olympic village that has been resisting eviction for many years. In Santiago de Chile, interviews were conducted with experts and social movements resisting gentrification and displacement, such as the *Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha*. Finally, in Mexico City we carried out expert interviews and developed participant observation in the historic city centre. The resulting vision allows us to develop a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) that is simultaneously based upon microscopic in-depth analysis and theoretical reflections to better understand contemporary Latin American urbanism, of which the four cities are paradigmatic, iconic and at the same time diverging examples.

Social geographies of gentrification in Latin America

Debates about gentrification have only become popular in Latin America rather recently. There are three principle reasons: *first*, there are distinctive temporalities to Latin American gentrifications. About 15 years ago, many authors still disagreed that gentrification was taking place, and the first empirical study about the colonial city centre of Puebla (Mexico) was only published in the late 1990s (Jones & Varley, 1999). *Second*, many Latin American researchers have resisted this “Anglo-Saxon concept” (Jaramillo, 2006, p. 20), proposing terms such as “ennoblement” or “elitization” (González-Hernández, 2009). But as Latin American gentrifications are rarely a process in which “elites” play a role as newcomers in a neighbourhood, both terms are not accurate and did not move forward. *Finally*, the ways gentrification is politically assembled and socially perceived are dissimilar to those of the North Atlantic context. Hence, as its symbolic and material expressions cannot be directly translated, the term itself must be adapted. This is especially the case as Latin American gentrification research starts from a relatively broad consensus that centres on the harmful consequences of the process. By referring to gentrification, researchers can better develop the critical approaches to urban politics that remain somewhat absent from mainstream discourses about urban governance and renovation (Janoschka & Hidalgo, 2014), thereby helping to re-politicise urban studies. Yet, what additional connotations does the term need for it to apply to Latin American urban realities in constant transformation?

Any response to this should take into account the political, economic and social structures of Latin America, especially with regard to the role that the State plays for enhancing gentrification processes. After decades of rampant neoliberalisation and deregulation, and contrary to the “austerity urbanism” in the United States and especially the European Union (Peck, 2012), during the 2000s public administrations in Latin America increased their capacity to shape urban development by active policies and state-led initiatives. However, welfare policies have generally aimed at normalising common capitalist practices, for instance by promoting a specific kind of social housing that displaces lower-income residents from central city areas. In this regard, two further particularities should be underlined: First, the inherited socio-spatial structuration, especially the ubiquitous urban poverty in central city areas, and the informality of urban economies, including the informal production of housing (Gilbert, 1998). As a result, and acknowledging the differences between countries such as Chile and Mexico, Argentina and Peru, or Brazil and Venezuela, certain practices such as the (illegal or informal) occupation of land and vacant housing have until recently been central to the material production of urban space. Similar to other world regions, such informality has produced radically different terrains of habitation, livelihood, self-organisation and politics (Roy, 2011). As a consequence, people internalised an array of conscious and unconscious practices, which in the long run protected society from full penetration by capitalist micro-politics, creating alternative and counter-hegemonic ways of producing, living and appropriating the city (Zibechi, 2012). Such collective organisation of solidarity networks seriously challenges the rapid, even and easy implementation of gentrification policies.

To further understand the social power relations underlying these practices, a second particularity should be considered: The working class, as collective subject of the European or North American scholarship, never had too much in common with what has been addressed in Latin American sociology as popular classes (*clases populares*, Merklen, 2005; García Canclini, 1982). Even during the heyday of the import substitution strategy, perhaps with the exception of Argentina during the Perón era, industrial and unionised workers were only a very marginal element of the Latin American class structure. Additionally, the habitus dispositions of European or North American middle classes would be considered as upper middle class in Latin American societies, shared only by the upper 10–15% of the population. The income gaps between rich and poor, or dominant and subordinated citizens have been significantly higher than in European, and even North American, cities. Yet the most important collective subject should be the popular classes, which can be differentiated from middle and upper classes not only along economic, social and cultural lines but also along ethnic and racial lines. The popular classes consist of between half and two-thirds of the population, but for decades they have been mired in structural poverty. They often live in socially stigmatised habitats (slums, precarious housing, occupied houses, recently also in social housing complexes) and perform rather informal economic activities. Although major formalisation of such economies has recently occurred, the majority of the population still works in the informal sector (Betancur, 2014), and an estimated 20–25% lives in informal settlements (Fernandes, 2011).

This picture necessarily overgeneralises and erases the different weight of informality in the social and economic structures in each country. Furthermore it does not consider the internal differentiation of the popular classes; for instance with regard to gendered dimensions that lead to unequal relationships between men and women within the social reproduction. But our key purpose is to emphasise that different class structures imply a different structuring of urban space, and therefore different ways in which the neoliberal politics of gentrification tackle the spatial reorganisation of the city.

Displacement in Latin American cities – conceptual reflections

Although displacement is intrinsic to the production of capitalist cities, it is at the same time one of the “most understudied processes affecting the lives of the urban poor” (Desmond, 2012, p. 90). In theory, it can be defined as an operation that restricts the options of – usually underprivileged – sectors of society to find adequate places to live in a specific neighbourhood, especially when other social groups with higher economic, social and cultural capital arrive in that area (Slater, 2009). Displacement from a neighbourhood or housing estate “describes what happens when forces outside the household make living there impossible, hazardous, or unaffordable” (Hartmann, Keating, & Le Gates, 1982, p. 3). But what are these forces, and how can we research them to better illustrate the nexus between displacement and gentrification in Latin America?

One key approach to studying the relationship between gentrification and displacement stems from Peter Marcuse (1985). Based on a statistical analysis of the housing market in the city of New York in the 1970s and early 1980s he developed four well-known analytical categories to better address the nature of displacement mechanisms:

last-resident displacement, chain displacement, exclusionary displacement and displacement pressure. Although this typology distinguishes between direct and indirect displacement, it can only be considered a starting point for analysing the displacement of lower-income tenants in Latin American cities. The different social structures and ways of producing urbanity described in previous sections call for different ways of thinking about displacement. In particular we consider it necessary to unravel the hidden, often symbolic forces behind displacement. Furthermore, we will reflect upon the genealogy of gentrification. Many decisions inducing displacement (i.e., planning legislation) were taken years or even decades ago. Sometimes they are not related to a specific urban space or to urban politics at all, but are located in broader societal changes. One example of this is the persistent reduction of poverty in Latin America, which has transformed the popular classes into heterogeneous groups with different claims (Salcedo & Rasse, 2012). This has consequences for the politics and geographies of gentrification and displacement.

Displacement is a social injustice that encumbers certain groups from the right to the city. Consequently, it should also be addressed by considering existing power relations that define and structure discourses about it, something that necessarily includes the role of public administrations (Lees, 2014). In line with this, Garcia Herrera, Smith, and Mejías Vera (2007: 280) remind us that “as the state at various scales adopts gentrification as a housing policy [...] it has little self-interest in collecting the kind of data that documents the level of displacement”; especially as such data would prove the failure of common policy discourses. This means that it is important to take into consideration the methodological limitations that often encumber debates about displacement (Slater, 2009). For instance, much data about displacement is rudimentary and does not allow place-specific analysis or comparisons across time. We can consider this lack of information as a specific and strategically important kind of state power or “technique of governmentality” that is exercised through omission (Sequera & Janoschka, 2015).

To compensate for this lack of information, gentrification researchers could gather such data on their own. However, the size and complexity of Latin American cities mean that, in practical terms, data recompilation is impossible. Additionally, critical urban research can better apply itself building bridges with the neighbourhoods under consideration, that is, by applying participatory or interventionist research methodologies rooted in the intention to transcend the invisible frontiers between social sciences and society. Yet this is difficult when applying conventional quantitative methods. Hence, in an era of rampant capitalist accumulation by manifold processes of dispossession it is more important to focus on the common and often naturalised discourses that justify displacement, thereby transforming the lens through which scientific debates arise.

Gentrification, dispossession and displacement – an analytic perspective

In the subsequent analysis we develop a perspective that considers displacement and gentrification through the dialectics of accumulation and dispossession. When David Harvey (2003) developed this notion to update the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation, he emphasised that it is an active and permanent extractive process. If primitive accumulation meant the capitalist re-organisation of society through private property rights and through the commercialisation of common goods, natural resources

and labour force, “accumulation by dispossession” relates to the new wave of enclosure of common goods. It turns against underprivileged parts of society, applying economic processes to areas of social life that had still stayed at the margins of the market. Additionally, while they act as strategic market agents, public administrations facilitate such dynamics of urban capital accumulation and reproduction. This relationship illustrates the necessity of establishing certain discourses to prepare the population prior to the implementation of politics of displacement and gentrification. Yet it is also true that many common practices in Latin American cities do not conform to the hegemonic reproduction modes of capitalist societies. This is why the previous discussion of the social structures and the collective subject of popular classes is important in order to adapt Harvey’s concepts to the displacement–gentrification nexus in Latin American cities. Popular classes have produced different subjectivities and struggles about the production and collective appropriation of space. With regard to this, Latin American cities share with other world regions of the “Global South” the importance of the social and collective production of urban habitat, a process that sheds light on alternative attitudes towards displacement. For example, Islam and Sakizhoglu (2015, p. 254) have stated that in cities such as Istanbul in which “not everybody has the right to stay put”, “classic” evictions are additionally enforced by state-organised displacement strategies that establish specific regulations and restrictions. Cases of resistance lead to forced rehousing. Following the description of Seong-Kyu (2015), displacement in Seoul creates new shantytowns in the periphery, which are inhabited by those who were dispossessed. Such strategies have become rare in Latin America. Rather, displacement takes place through what has been described elsewhere as public–private pressure and persuasion (Herzer, Di Virgilio, & Rodriguez, 2015), by pricing out of the market (Cummings, 2015), or through direct or physical violence. This means, for example, that basic services such as water and electricity are cut (Alexandri, 2015, p. 27), or that those neighbours, street vendors and other individuals who are resisting displacement are beaten up (Jones, 2015, p. 272). Additionally, there are different governmental techniques to produce and accelerate the displacement of residents. As we will further learn from the four cases in the next section, the dependent variables in these cases are the popular classes and the manifold informal ways of producing and appropriating popular habitat (Herzer et al., 2015). For urban developers, the popular classes might be considered an easy target for removal from urban spaces under transformation. By conceptualising “accumulation by displacement”, we highlight another mechanism of dispossession that works through the exclusion and expulsion of specific ways of life from certain urban areas.

Experiences of displacement and gentrification in four Latin American cities

Displacement by heritage dispossession – the historic centre of Mexico City

The historic centre of Mexico City can be considered a paradigmatic social, political and spatial fix that sheds light upon the neoliberalisation of urban politics, which have profoundly transformed the city since the beginning of the century (Crossa, 2012; Walker, 2013). It is the largest and symbolically most important heritage site in the

Americas which juxtaposes colonial and pre-colonial architecture. It is exemplary of policies that have been applied in Latin American cities with a rich architectural heritage, such as Quito, Lima and Cuenca, to name but a few (Bromley & Mackie, 2009). These policies commonly pursue the redevelopment of historic centres for heritage tourism (Betancur, 2014), displacing popular classes and practices. In Mexico City more than 9,000 buildings, 1,500 of which are of historic or artistic heritage, belong to the conservation area. Three strategies have been combined to achieve the euphemistic “rescue” of the historic centre: social cleansing, securitisation and exclusive renovation of parts of the housing stock. Social cleansing refers to the strategy of making invisible the traditionally important informal commercial appropriation by street vendors, whose number was estimated at more than 30,000 at the turn of the century (Crossa, 2009; Reyes, 2013). Street vendors have been repeatedly identified as standing in the way of gentrification in Latin America. In the historic centre of Mexico City, their activities were first declared illegal, and then they were evicted from public space in a military-like police action during October 2007. This relates to the second strategy, namely the way zero tolerance, video surveillance and other policing strategies were applied to “secure” the area. Since the early 2000s, the historic centre has become a laboratory for mobile security policies originating in the United States, especially as Rudolph Giuliani’s consultancy firm was appointed to elaborate a strategic plan to implement new security policies (Becker & Müller, 2013; Davis, 2013). The results are easily visible, and they involve controlling public space – by surveillance, discipline and punishment. Such policies are considered to “normalise” the historic centre, relative to a supposedly exceptional appropriation. Finally, the increasing symbolic and material eviction of underprivileged people was paired with several public–private partnership interventions aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of public space and at transforming the social profile of users of the material environment. Among others, Carlos Slim, one of the richest people in the world, and the Slim-owned *Fundación Centro Histórico*, bought and renovated several dozen historical buildings in this area. These buildings were occupied chiefly by educational or cultural institutions, and turned into museums, hotels, cafés and restaurants. But many apartments are also rented to students, artists or politicians who live part-time in Mexico City (Betancur, 2014).

These transformations and the ongoing renovation of (abandoned and run-down) buildings have generated exclusion, but lower-income tenants still dominate the area’s inhabitants. This results from the historic occupation and relatively low residential mobility that characterises Mexico City (Ward, 2012). It is important to recall that the historic city centre had become a key site for popular pressure for *in situ* reconstruction of several thousand low-cost housing units after severe damage caused by the 1985 earthquake (Delgadillo, 2008; Duhau, 1987). This history obstructs any rapid, bulldozer-like gentrification of the area under the contemporary neoliberal accumulation regime. In other words, more subtle, indirect and symbolic methods have to be employed to subvert popular identities. Such mechanisms of *displacement by heritage dispossession* first focussed on cleansing and securing public space, and on criminalising, repressing, relocating and expelling informal street vendors—in order to prepare for the extractive powers of spatial dispossession. This is especially the case in areas of potential interest for heritage tourism. The eviction of informal commercial activities belongs to a facet of displacement that aims to secure urban public space for tourists.

But it also represents the transformational and somewhat violent power of tourism, a key mechanism for producing gentrified landscapes (and vice versa). It confronts antagonistic forms of appropriating space that produce contestation over hegemonic practices, applying different kinds of violence: for instance, the *violence of hyper-security* that is required to lock public space, as well as different kinds of *ethnic and racial violence* necessary to project the exclusionary future of contested spaces. Yet this is only a preparatory move for the application of what we define as *touristic violence* – an intangible force that dispossesses both symbolically and materially, eradicating the presence of undesired identities. Although a superficial social cleansing has proven successful, at the same time a wide range of ongoing struggles over space have been observed. This shows that displacement in Mexico City is a process that requires much more time, effort and investment than in the Global North: during many years and sometimes even decades it produces uneven and constantly contested territories.

Displacement by cultural dispossession – Tango gentrification in Buenos Aires

Similarly to Mexico City, heritage also plays a pivotal role in the materialisation of gentrification of Buenos Aires' inner city, especially if we concentrate on the area surrounding the former central market (*Abasto*) and two neighbourhoods in the Southern inner periphery of the city (*San Telmo* and *La Boca*). However, the techniques and mechanisms that are applied vary substantially. They relate primarily to immaterial heritage represented by the Tango culture, listed as UNESCO World Heritage since 2009. Tango is now an example of touristic extraction of culture, and the gentrification processes imply displacement pressures that are intrinsically related to its valorisation circuits and modes of subliminal conflict regulation (Centner, 2012a; Herzer & Gil y de Anso, 2012).

The *Abasto* area was a traditional inner-city working-class neighbourhood, surrounding the homonymous central fruit and vegetable market that operated until 1984. After the market's relocation, the quarter went through an intensive phase of abandonment and stigmatisation, chiefly related to the occupation of vacant plots and abandoned buildings by immigrants, drug trafficking, prostitution and other underground activity. During the late 1990s, it re-emerged as the property developer *Inversiones y Representaciones Sociedad Anónima* (IRSA; related to a George Soros investment fund) renovated and transformed the market building into the largest shopping centre of the city. Additionally, a hotel, a huge supermarket and several high-rise condominiums with approximately 1,100 apartments were built, and many of the tenants of neighbouring properties were bought out and displaced towards peripheral locations (Carman, 2011; Centner, 2012b). However, the key aspect is not the purification and economic redefinition of the territory, but the branding and merchandising that has been taking place since then, in honour of the famous Tango star Carlos Gardel. This strategy introduced different tourism-related uses like museums, thematic restaurants, pedestrian street walks and souvenir shops, and especially a whole series of new aesthetics.

The situation is somehow different in *San Telmo* and *La Boca*, respectively, the Tango gentrification frontiers of the 2000s and 2010s. *San Telmo* can be considered as paradigmatic of long-term abandonment processes in Buenos Aires' southern inner city. It was originally home to the city's elite, but was then stigmatised for more than a

century after an outbreak of yellow fever during the 1880s. Poor immigrants then moved into this and adjacent areas such as *La Boca* and gave birth to, and popularised, Tango. After 1990, *San Telmo* was targeted both by municipal renovation schemes and by the *mise-en-scène* of Tango culture. This set the foundations for displacement by touristic activities. For instance, a commercial reorientation has taken place, and cultural institutions, theatres, libraries, restaurants and concert-café that offer Tango shows for international tourists have mushroomed (García & Sequera, 2013). But this process also transforms the residential real estate market: *San Telmo* has become a prime location for short-term rentals, and also for “residential” tourists such as university professors on sabbatical leave or professionals on long-term holidays who get involved with Tango culture.

However, similar processes have now also expanded to parts of neighbouring *La Boca*. The key attraction – and one of the “musts” of every visitor – has for a long time been *Caminito*, a street with colourful houses that hosts galleries, street markets and restaurants associated with the merchandising of Tango culture. However, *La Boca* is home to a significantly underprivileged population, and the neighbourhood suffered massive downgrading due to deindustrialisation and changes in transport logistics since the 1970s. Hence, it has become a key target for the amplification of Buenos Aires’ tourist corridor, as the spectacle of cultural heritage in *La Boca* symbolises the variegated forms of material and symbolic re-articulation of the neighbourhood. It is stimulated through active public policies that aim at attracting designers, artists and other pioneers of gentrification. This strategy delimits a sphere of otherness that produces a form of violence by merchandising the residents’ cultural assets while simultaneously provoking displacement (Herzer et al., 2015).

Behind the beautification of *fin-de-siècle* architecture in *San Telmo*, the colourful houses of *Caminito* in *La Boca* and the *mise-en-scène* of Carlos Gardel in the *Abasto* neighbourhood, this Tango-related gentrification hides different strategies of cultural dispossession. Running across the mystification of Tango backed both by UNESCO offices and local policy-makers, different fiscal exemptions promote real estate projects targeting artistic ateliers and loft living. This organises the separation of the city from local inhabitants by a kind of dispossession that chiefly addresses a “trap of culture” (Carman, 2006). By devaluing popular culture, such displacement generates what we define as *cultural violence*. But our own research also shows that it involves a *physical (material) violence*: forced evictions, the burning of buildings (for “officially” unknown and non-investigated reasons) and other material relocations that simultaneously exercise different forms of symbolic and economic power occur habitually, especially in the gentrification frontier of *La Boca*. Such strategies have been addressed repeatedly by inhabitants, social movements and media reports. They literally remove population, often to poorer and worse connected suburban locations.

Displacement by militarization and a “state of exception” – Rio de Janeiro’s Olympic dream

Rio de Janeiro is a unique case of a strategically planned and assembled long-term reconfiguration of urbanity, fostered by a key mechanism: the expansion of capitalist market rules towards areas of social, economic and territorial organisation that were previously structured by different accumulation processes. This is a large-scale venture

that is accompanied by broad changes in urban life, and is paired with an implementation of exceptional planning policy regimes. Some elements of market creation concern the selective reincorporation of the city into transnational tourism markets (symbolic gentrification), while others have more to do with general requirements of capital in rapidly expanding medium-income economies such as Brazil. This powerful logic consists of bringing together major exclusionary urban renovation projects, security governance and the preparation and celebration of international (sports) events to implement mechanisms for sustaining a continuous “state of exception” (Sánchez & Broudehoux, 2013). The city’s strategic plan, dating from the early 1990s, articulates major transformations of the social, material and political structures that chiefly aim at displacing and regulating the conduct of undesirable populations (Gaffney, 2010). Such mechanisms introduce new citizenship models (Freeman, 2014), as well as an authoritarian entrepreneurial planning regime that negates political space and constitutionally granted property rights. *Vila Autódromo*, a neighbourhood under threat of eviction because of the construction of the Olympic village, is an example of social discrimination and territorial reconfiguration carried out by a coalition of public administrations and real estate companies (Silvestre & Gusmão de Oliveira, 2012).

For a better understanding of these mechanisms, the morphology and social geography of the city should be taken into account – especially the extraordinarily close proximity between wealthy and poor residents. Many favelas are situated in prime sites, that is, next to beaches, which are archetypical spaces of social diversity and democracy (Godfrey & Arguinzi, 2012). Over 20% of inhabitants live in one of the 750 favelas, but in the central city this ratio exceeds 40%. This means that popular culture, which in Rio de Janeiro is also “black” culture, is a central element of daily urban life (Costa Vargas, 2013). However, favelas present a threat to urban planners, as they are reminders of different and non-market-conformist ways of organising territory. Since the 1990s, the State has pursued major efforts to restore governmental control over these areas. Four intertwined strategies have been followed, all exerting different forms of symbolic and physical violence over inhabitants: (1) municipal investment in the “regeneration” of favelas (programmes such as *Favela Bairro*, *Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento* and recently, *Morar Carioca*); (2) selective eviction of favela inhabitants (even, in the case of the *Aldeia Maracanã* and *Vila Autódromo*, of whole communities, if they stand in the way of mega-events); (3) relocation of inhabitants in social housing complexes that are located in the periphery of the municipality (through the Federal programme *Minha Casa, Minha Vida*) and (4) “pacification” of favelas by Pacification Police Units (*Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora*), a paramilitary force that since November 2008 has supposedly “liberated” several dozens of favelas from drug trafficking and violence, through a quasi-military occupation of the territory. In these areas, exceptional regimes of citizenship with major restrictions of civil rights have applied ever since, and police forces have repeatedly been accused of severe violence, shooting approximately 1,000 favela inhabitants per year (Comitê Popular da Copa e das Olimpíadas do Rio de Janeiro, 2014).

This spatial, social and economic configuration has serious consequences. The vast majority of “pacified” favelas are located in central neighbourhoods that have been undergoing transformations due to preparations for the Olympic Games. In other words, the pacification of favelas does not relate to “objective” insecurities and the desire to gain control over territory, but to other usually hidden objectives related to

strategic urban reform. In this regard, it is important to recall that the pacification of favelas increases property values inside and in adjacent areas, and it exercises displacement pressure, that is, by the formalisation of new markets. As soon as a favela is pacified, municipal and private services become regulated and have to be paid for, and this increases living costs. The most disfavoured inhabitants are thus displaced towards more peripheral favelas. On the other hand, many houses and even entire favelas have been evicted because of the construction of sports installations or other infrastructure, the inhabitants displaced to social housing complexes in the city's far periphery. Hence, disciplinary regimes foster the strategies of displacement and dispossession by (real estate) markets. While the right to housing is accomplished in Rio de Janeiro, the right to the city is now constantly denied to the urban poor, despite having participated for generations in urban life and commonly shared spaces.

Displacement by ground rent dispossession – Santiago de Chile

For at least four decades now urban and regional planning devices have been strategic elements in the neoliberalisation of Chilean society, paving the way for a new urban model. However, Santiago de Chile was also the first Latin American city in which informal settlements became a residual part of the housing stock. This resulted from (i) extensive regularisation of informally occupied land (e.g., the so-called *campamentos*) introduced in the late 1950s and further pursued under the socialist government of Allende in the early 1970s, (ii) eradication and clearance of informal housing *manu militari* between 1979 and 1985, during the Pinochet dictatorship and (iii) development of social housing programmes that provided public subsidies for the purchase of land and property (Casgrain & Janoschka, 2013; Farías, 2014; Hidalgo, 2007). These measures introduced commoditized social housing that applies economic criteria to relate income to residential location. This implies a social and spatial reorganisation of the metropolitan area, evicting poor households towards subsidised social housing complexes located in the metropolitan region's expanding peripheries. Concomitantly the central municipality of Santiago has lost more than 55% of its population since the mid-twentieth century, reaching a minimum of around 200,000 inhabitants in 2002 (Contreras, 2011). Given these factors, Santiago can be considered an exemplary case of abandonment of the inner city and suburban expansion.

However, since the turn of the century it has become also paradigmatic for a diametrically different model of urban development that has strategically orchestrated the social and architectural restructuring of the central city. Between 2002 and 2012, the municipality of Santiago attracted 18% of all new dwellings of the whole metropolitan area, while its population share is roughly 2.6%. This equates to more than 72,000 housing units, and means that the total housing stock almost doubled during this decade, from 76,800 to 148,850 (Figueroa, 2013). If we add adjacent areas (11 consolidated inner city municipalities), this dramatic shift gets even clearer: the market share rose after 2002 from 7.5% to 44% and since 2006, they have even concentrated 58% of new building permissions (López-Morales, 2013; López-Morales, Gasic Klett, & Corvalán Meza, 2012). This is linked to the return of capital, not people, to the city: part of this capital is a consequence of investment strategies developed by private universities, which are increasingly important actors for urban redevelopment and also

residential investment (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2013). In other words, gentrification was primarily led by real estate agents (including those working on behalf of private higher education and national pension investment funds) realising the potential of existing rent gaps yet simultaneously promoting displacement (Casgrain & Janoschka, 2013).

The re-emergence of Santiago's inner city is an example of how entrepreneurial urban planning privileges private investment in a liberal economy. For instance, the State pays a subsidy of up to 10% of the purchase value of dwellings for households with relatively high purchasing power (such as emerging middle classes, young professionals etc., López-Morales, 2013). Additionally, the liberalisation of planning permissions, especially those regulating maximum height, has permitted residential densification with high rise condominiums of between 20 and 35 storeys. But the State is absent when it comes to the urbanity of such residential estates. As a consequence, redevelopment has become extremely fragmentary: on many blocks, two or three residential towers are built, while the rest of the area remains unchanged, sometimes even abandoned. López-Morales (2011) argues that under such a model, increasing ground rents accrue to a small group of large investors at the expense of small- and medium-scale development that would respect existing social and architectural diversity. This policy creates niches for consumers that had otherwise been excluded from the private residential market, such as university students, young middle-class professionals and workers attracted by the centrality, or who work in the service economy that is located nearby. However, new dwellers are of a higher social status than those who originally lived there, and real estate prices have grown exponentially for the last decade. As a consequence, many households cannot afford to stay and are displaced to more peripheral locations. In addition, the potential ground rent is capitalised in a monopolistic way by large-scale investors, dispossessing the small land owners from increases in capitalised ground rent that have been accruing during this decade of intensive reconfiguration (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2013; López-Morales, 2013).

In other words, gentrification in Santiago means a process that is supply-driven, driven in part by the previous deterioration and abandonment of existing housing stock. This specific way of producing gentrification in the inner city results from the manifold displacement pressures that can be described as "creative destruction". Capitalist reproduction generates new commodities that effectively enable accumulation processes. With effective support by a State that paradoxically regulates the absence of regulation, the city's densification results in an irregular and jagged territorial occupation that produces *architectural violence*. It is only the real estate market that defines how urbanity is achieved (or not). In this ultra-neoliberal city, the performance of the investment strategy of highest turnover for minimum investment produces significant *violence of urbanism*, instead of the desired new urbanity of a renovated inner city.

Gentrification, dispossession and displacement in Latin America – critical reflections

We have described the dramatic neighbourhood changes affecting key structures and processes within Latin American cities. The four cases have provided us with a better understanding of the mechanisms behind gentrification and displacement, and we have analysed the multi-layered character of gentrification. It involves diverse accumulation

mechanisms that aim at extracting what had formerly been at the margins of capitalist markets. If we understand urban capital accumulation as a spatial expansion of capitalism that is searching for new spaces that have not yet been commodified, the gentrification of popular habitats and its particular urban morphology can be considered as one of the key mechanisms of accumulation. The introduction of new market relations produces displacement, but it does not necessarily mean eviction from specific places. The commodification of non-capitalist ways of (re-)production – especially those related to culture, history, urban morphology and non-hegemonic forms of daily life – introduces new modes of dispossession, exploitation and appropriation. Hence, when we refer to “accumulation by displacement” as an analytic lens to understand the restructuration principles in Latin American cities, we refer to the political, social and geographical assemblage of dispossession. Displacement is one central mechanism of socio-spatial dispossession, and at the same time a dynamic force of capital accumulation and reproduction. The examples of Latin American gentrification presented in our study have demonstrated how gentrification is intrinsically related to the extractive character of contemporary capitalism. In this regard, we refer to the exploitation of market niches that were not part of the hegemonic capitalist market construction, such as the informal production of housing, more generally the production of popular habitat, or the complex forms of informal economies as part of the survival strategies of the popular classes that had produced subaltern urbanisms.

Economic growth and poverty reduction during the last decade in many Latin American countries have contributed to a progressive stigmatisation of different popular appropriations of space in both material and symbolic terms. Many have been portrayed as something “vulgar” or “uncivilised”, and some have been declared as illegal and persecuted. Although such displacement of popular subjectivities may vary from city to city and from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, two common features stand out: On the one hand, rapid economic growth flanked by important anti-poverty measures (such as the basic income schemes in Brazil and Argentina) has largely eradicated extreme poverty, and with this a series of popular practices to overcome it. As poverty is no longer directly related to the social majority, it has become increasingly stigmatised as an individual failure. On the other hand, policy-makers have been trying to eradicate all traces of informality, associating it in public discourse with negative aspects of poverty. This is especially the case in central city areas, and it creates material spaces that supposedly respond to the reduction in poverty. However, the definition of socially accepted forms of appropriating and using urban space has increasingly shifted towards the dispositions of middle-class habitus. This means that displacements are taking place as contingent processes that evict specific identity configurations that do not conform to the new norms of the central city.

Such symbolic exclusion and the displacement of the perspectives of the popular classes is a basic precondition for their material eviction from urban space. It is inherently related to existing social hierarchies, as well as to ethnic and racial stereotypes or stigmas. In the end, displacement re-establishes and exacerbates these hierarchies, counteracting social policies that have been applied supposedly to reduce the invisible boundaries of class structuration and racism. Such operations may occur unconsciously or consciously and they apply different types of violence. But they always produce symbolic profits that originate from the accumulation of different sorts of capital (symbolic, cultural, economic) by those subjects

who are able to define, rule and dominate spaces and places. This argument relates directly to the social reproduction and self-reinforcing power of the upper classes, and their specific discourses about gentrification and displacement that structure possible practice, habitus dispositions and positions in the social field (Dangschat, 2009). Invisible power relations define the ways symbolic displacement is assembled, for example by obscuring certain social and cultural practices while criminalising others. This is why social cleansing and the selective modernisation of territory – the eviction of popular classes and of street vendors from public space – emerge as constitutive elements of gentrification and urban capital accumulation. Latin American gentrification transforms the modes of socio-spatial reproduction, especially if the dichotomy formal–informal is considered. Such strategies make use of both symbolic and physical violence to evict and displace non-desired tenants and users of specific urban spaces considered central for contemporary urban capitalism.

The wide variety of concrete politics of gentrification and displacement in Latin American cities that we have addressed so far can be clustered into two principal arguments, which are both related to identity and otherness: First, architectural and cultural heritage in their variegated forms are used strategically for transforming popular neighbourhoods into gentrified (tourist) landscapes (see Table 1, cases A.1 and A.2). Second, policies of gentrification are used to displace informal or other non-intensive economies to prepare the construction of formal and intensive capitalist reproduction processes, especially in the real-estate sector (see Table 1, cases B.1 and B.2). Both strategies go hand in hand with security discourses that justify the policing and eviction of reproduction strategies once considered the mainstream of Latin American societies. While the strategies of “accumulation by displacement” in the four cities are mutually interwoven, each

Table 1. Accumulation by displacement in Latin American cities – a typology.

Type	Example	Method & mechanism	Extraction	Violence
A.1 Symbolic gentrification: architectural heritage	Mexico City	- Museification of the historic centre - Cleansing of public space	- Architecture, colonial heritage - Informal economies - Public space	- Violence of hyper-security - Ethnic and racial violence - Touristic violence
A.2 Symbolic gentrification: cultural heritage	Buenos Aires	- Mystical valorisation of tango and popular culture - Fiscal exemptions and subsidies for renovation	- Tango - Popular culture - Popular housing	- Cultural violence - Physical violence (evictions, burnings) - Touristic violence
B.1 Formalisation of subaltern urbanisms	Rio de Janeiro	- Expansion of capitalist market rules - Pacification and securitisation - Militarisation of space - Production of social housing - Mega-events	- Popular habitat (favela) - Popular urban morphology - Informal housing market	- State of exception - Quasi-military occupation of territory - Physical violence (state & police terrorism) - Market forces
B.2 Creation of new real estate markets	Santiago de Chile	- De-regulation of planning legislation - Residential densification, capital investment in the city centre - Production of social housing - Public subsidies for relocation	- Centrality - Ground rent	- Architectonic violence, violence of urbanism - Subsidies (eviction & socio-spatial stratification) - Regulation of non-regulation - Market forces

paradigm has produced distinctive forms of violence. Further research should address these mechanisms and their mutual interrelations in more detail.

In this article, we have analysed how symbolic gentrification in Latin American cities is about the dispossession and extraction of popular cultural values, and their transformation into new commodified fetishes that principally address tourism. But dispossession is also orchestrated by the formalisation of subaltern urbanism that necessarily alters the regulated forms of the capitalist city, and by the creation of new architectural landscapes as material expressions of the violence of an urbanism in search of profit maximisation. Both mechanisms condemn the population to live under the discipline of the “good citizen”, producing ruptures of popular habits and habitats as alternative ways of life. However, such neoliberal discipline expands only if public administrations support private capital investment, for instance through military occupation of space. Additionally, this research has also provided an understanding of how incomplete gentrification remains in Latin America, and how many barriers it must overcome before it can extend to whole neighbourhoods. All this distinguishes the politics of gentrification in Latin America from those of the North Atlantic, and raises some hope for effective resistance, as a consequence of, and in reaction to, the violence applied to displace popular practices and habitat in Latin American cities.

Notes

1. This term is based upon the conceptualisation developed by López-Morales (2011, 2013).
2. For further information about the CONTESTED_CITIES network, see: <http://www.contested-cities.net>.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the help and support of many friends, colleagues and *compañeros y compañeras* in the four cities they have been studying. We are also grateful for the extensive and very helpful comments provided by the editors of *Urban Geography* and the guest editors of this special issue on gentrification in Latin America to previous versions of this manuscript, as well as the observations we received from the three external reviewers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This research was supported within the 7th European Community Framework Programme [FP7-PEOPLE-PIRSES-GA-2012-318944] by a Marie Curie International Research Staff Exchange Scheme Fellowship entitled “CONTESTED_CITIES: Contested Spatialities of Urban Neoliberalism, Dialogues between Emerging Spaces of Citizenship in Europe and Latin America”.

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"Whose Culture? Whose City?"

from *The Cultures of Cities* (1995)

Sharon Zukin

Editors' introduction

Sharon Zukin's book, *The Cultures of Cities*, from which this excerpt is taken, is appropriately titled in at least two ways. On the one hand, cities are home to countless groups of people who share distinct ways of life. These may be ethnic or racially based, but they may also be occupational, class, age, or sexuality-based cultures. On the other hand, Zukin's analysis relates to several different ways of defining culture. Conceptually, then, there are different cultures that inform different interpretations of cities. As she points out at the opening of the selection, culture in the sense of refined art, literature, theater, dance, and cuisine, has always been a fundamental part of the urban experience. While the upper classes have long been suspicious of the "hedonism" and baseness that often mark urban life, cities have also provided "high culture" as an antidote to this crass vision of the city. But this is just one sense in which culture plays a role in our understanding of urban life.

In addition, Zukin's work examines culture as a instrument of urban governance. Culture, she argues, is also "a powerful means of controlling cities," of regulating spaces of inclusion and exclusion, and of conditioning collective memory by determining what part of the urban landscape gets preserved as heritage or reconstructed as spectacle. This sense of culture echoes Yúdice's approach (see p. 422) to culture as an expedient resource mobilized for specific social objectives. This is not a culture of high art or literature. In fact, as Yúdice argues, the content of this culture ("high" or "low," "refined" or "popular") is far less important than its utility in achieving a certain social goal.

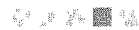
Culture is also a set of images or symbols used to sell the city to outsiders, to encourage them to visit, spend their money, invest, or relocate their residence or business. While this sense of culture also views it as a resource, the broader framework is to see cities developing a "symbolic economy" as a new means of accumulating footloose capital.

Finally, culture in Zukin's analysis is also a terrain of struggle, in the sense originally proposed by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci argued that dominant classes maintained their power not simply by "controlling the means of production," as Marx would have it, but by *controlling culture*, by exerting *cultural hegemony*. Struggles by subalterns against the dominant classes, then, were as much struggles over the cultural field as they were struggles over relations of production. In Zukin's work, this struggle occurs between the dominant crafters of the "symbolic economy" (city governments, boosters, real estate developers, corporations) and local communities, neighborhoods, activists, and other grass-roots groups. The symbolic economy typically entails public-private partnerships. As governments relinquish part of their provision of welfare and other public goods to the private sector, culture is now deployed to help fill in the gaps. The spaces in which

this deployment occurs are often "semi-public" in that they are privately owned or managed. And such spaces are increasingly being substituted for the traditional public spaces in which, according to Zukin, a democratic and grass-roots urban culture thrives.

The Cultures of Cities complements a broad swath of work in cultural geography that focuses on the political economy of the culture industries, and of "selling places." See, for instance, Kearns and Philo's *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital* (1993) and Allen Scott's *The Cultural Economy of Cities* (2000). Yet, as argued in the introduction to this section of the *Reader*, the cultural economy involves more than bringing a political-economic focus to bear on the production of culture. For Zukin, it also means recognizing that the value of economic goods is increasingly dominated by symbolic or cultural properties, and that Disney is a more appropriate model of economic value chains than Ford. There remains debate, however, over the extent to which there really has been a "symbolic turn" in the economy. Daniel Miller ("The unintended political economy," in P. du Gay and M. Pryke, eds., *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life*, 2002, pp. 166–184), for example, has argued that there is no convincing evidence of such a shift and that the assertion that the economy is now more cultural than before represents "a sleight of hand through which a shift in academic emphasis is presupposed to reflect a shift in the world that these academics are describing."

Sharon Zukin is Broeklundian Professor of Sociology at City University of New York. She is the author of *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (1989), *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (1991), and *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (2003). Her work has long been influential among urban, economic, social, and cultural geographers.



Cities are often criticized because they represent the basest instincts of human society. They are built versions of Leviathan and Mammon, mapping the power of the bureaucratic machine or the social pressures of money. We who live in cities like to think of "culture" as the antidote to this crass vision. The Acropolis of the urban art museum or concert hall, the trendy art gallery and café, restaurants that fuse ethnic traditions into culinary logos – cultural activities are supposed to lift us out of the mire of our everyday lives and into the sacred spaces of ritualized pleasures.

Yet culture is also a powerful means of controlling cities. As a source of images and memories, it symbolizes "who belongs" in specific places. As a set of architectural themes, it plays a leading role in urban redevelopment strategies based on historic preservation or local "heritage." With the disappearance of local manufacturing industries and periodic crises in government and finance, culture is more and more the business of cities – the basis of their tourist attractions and their unique, competitive edge. The growth of cultural consumption (of art, food, fashion, music, tourism) and the industries that cater to it fuels the city's symbolic economy, its visible ability to produce both symbols and space.

In recent years, culture has also become a more explicit site of conflicts over social differences and urban fears. Large numbers of new immigrants and ethnic minorities have put pressure on public institutions, from schools to political parties, to deal with their individual demands. Such high culture institutions as art museums and symphony orchestras have been driven to expand and diversify their offerings to appeal to a broader public. These pressures, broadly speaking, are both ethnic and aesthetic. By creating policies and ideologies of "multiculturalism," they have forced public institutions to change.

On a different level, city boosters increasingly compete for tourist dollars and financial investments by bolstering the city's image as a center of cultural innovation, including restaurants, avant garde performances, and architectural design. These cultural strategies of redevelopment have fewer critics than multiculturalism. But they often pit the self-interest of real estate developers, politicians, and expansion-minded cultural institutions against grassroots pressures from local communities.

At the same time, strangers mingling in public space and fears of violent crime have inspired the growth of private police forces, gated and barred

communities, and a movement to design public spaces for maximum surveillance. These, too, are a source of contemporary urban culture. If one way of dealing with the material inequalities of city life has been to aestheticize diversity, another way has been to aestheticize fear.

Controlling the various cultures of cities suggests the possibility of controlling all sorts of urban ills, from violence and hate crime to economic decline. That this is an illusion has been amply shown by battles over multiculturalism and its warring factions – ethnic politics and urban riots. Yet the cultural power to create an image, to frame a vision, of the city has become more important as publics have become more mobile and diverse, and traditional institutions – both social classes and political parties – have become less relevant mechanisms of expressing identity. Those who create images stamp a collective identity. Whether they are media corporations like the Disney Company, art museums, or politicians, they are developing new spaces for public cultures. Significant public spaces of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – such as Central Park, the Broadway theater district, and the top of the Empire State Building – have been joined by Disney World, Bryant Park, and the entertainment-based retail shops of Sony Plaza. By accepting these spaces without questioning their representations of urban life, we risk succumbing to a visually seductive, privatized public culture.

THE SYMBOLIC ECONOMY

Anyone who walks through midtown Manhattan comes face to face with the symbolic economy (see map of Manhattan). A significant number of new public spaces owe their particular shape and form to the intertwining of cultural symbols and entrepreneurial capital.

- The AT&T Building, whose Chippendale roof was a much criticized icon of postmodern architecture, has been sold to the Japanese entertainment giant Sony; the formerly open public areas at street level have been enclosed as retail stores and transformed into Sony plaza. Each store sells Sony products: video cameras in one shop, clothes and accessories related to

performers under contract to Sony's music or film division in another. Sony's interactive science museum features the opportunity to get hands-on experience with Sony video equipment. Sony had to get the city government's approval both to enclose these stores and set them up for retail shopping, for the original agreement to build the office tower had depended on providing public space. Critics charged that retail stores are not public space, and even the city planning commissioners admitted they were perplexed by the question. "In return for the retail space," the chairman of the local community board said, "we would like to hold Sony to the original understanding to create a peaceful refuge, which certainly didn't include corporate banners and a television monitor." "We like it," the president of Sony Plaza replied. The banners "are seen as art and bring warmth and color to the space" (*New York Times*, January 30, 1994).

- Two blocks away, André Emmerich, a leading contemporary art dealer, rented an empty storefront in a former bank branch to show three huge abstract canvases by the painter Al Held. Entitled *Harry, If I Told You, Would You Know?* the group of paintings was exhibited in raw space, amid falling plaster, peeling paint, exposed wires, and unfinished floors, and passersby viewed the exhibit from the street through large plate glass windows. The work of art was certainly for sale, yet it was displayed as if it were a free, public good; and it would never have been there had the storefront been rented by a more usual commercial tenant.
- On 42nd Street, across from my office, Bryant Park is considered one of the most successful public spaces to be created in New York City in recent years. After a period of decline, disuse, and daily occupation by vagrants and drug dealers, the park was taken over by a not-for-profit business association of local property owners and their major corporate tenants, called the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation. This group redesigned the park and organized daylong programs of cultural events; they renovated the kiosks and installed new food services; they hired a phalanx of private security guards. All this attracted nearby office workers, both women and men, who make the park a lively midday gathering place, as it had been prior

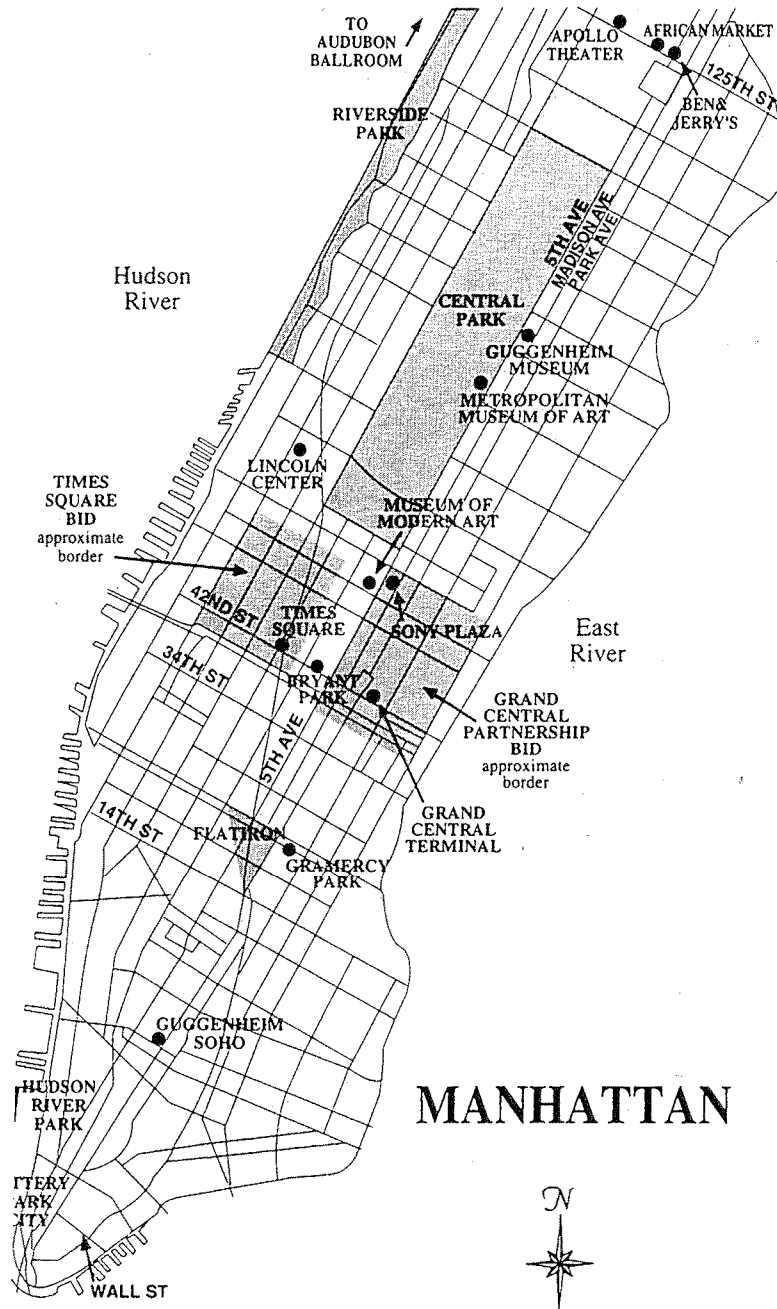


Figure 1 Manhattan

to the mid 1970s – a public park under private control.

Building a city depends on how people combine the traditional economic factors of land, labor, and

capital. But it also depends on how they manipulate symbolic languages of exclusion and entitlement. The look and feel of cities reflect decisions about what – and who – should be visible and what should not, on concepts of order and disorder, and

on uses of aesthetic power. In this primal sense, the city has always had a symbolic economy. Modern cities also owe their existence to a second, more abstract symbolic economy devised by [what Molotch called] "place entrepreneurs," officials and investors whose ability to deal with the symbols of growth yields "real" results in real estate development, new businesses, and jobs.

Related to this entrepreneurial activity is a third, traditional symbolic economy of city advocates and business elites who, through a combination of philanthropy, civic pride, and desire to establish their identity as a patrician class, build the majestic art museums, parks, and architectural complexes that represent a world-class city. What is new about the symbolic economy since the 1970s is its symbiosis of image and product, the scope and scale of selling images on a national and even a global level, and the role of the symbolic economy in speaking for, or representing, the city.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the symbolic economy rose to prominence against a background of industrial decline and financial speculation. The metamorphosis of American-made products into Mexican blue jeans, Japanese autos, and East Asian computers emptied the factories where those goods had been made. Companies that were the largest employers in their communities went out of business or were bought and restructured by takeover artists.

The entrepreneurial edge of the economy shifted toward deal making and selling investments and toward those creative products that could not easily be reproduced elsewhere. Product design – creating the look of a thing – was said to show economic genius. Hollywood film studios and media empires were bought and sold and bought again. In the 1990s, with the harnessing of new computer-based technologies to marketing campaigns, the "information superhighway" promised to join companies to consumers in a Manichean embrace of technology and entertainment. "The entertainment industry is now the driving force for new technology, as defense used to be," the CEO of a U.S. software company said.

The growth of the symbolic economy in finance, media, and entertainment may not change the way entrepreneurs do business. But it has already forced the growth of towns and cities, created a vast new work force, and changed the way consumers

and employees think. In the early 1990s, employment in "entertainment and recreation" in the United States grew slightly more than in health care and six times more than in the auto industry. The facilities where these employees work – hotels, restaurants, expanses of new construction and undeveloped land – are more than just workplaces. They reshape geography and ecology; they are places of creation and transformation.

The Disney Company, for example, makes films and distributes them from Hollywood. It runs a television channel and sells commercial spinoffs, such as toys, books, and videos, from a national network of stores. Disney is also a real estate developer in Anaheim, Orlando, France, and Japan and the proposed developer of a theme park in Virginia and a hotel and theme park in Times Square. Moreover, as an employer, Disney has redefined work roles. Proposing a model for change in the emerging service economy, Disney has shifted from the white-collar worker described by C. Wright Mills in the 1950s to a new chameleon of "flexible" tasks. The planners at its corporate headquarters are "imagineers"; the costumed crowd-handlers at its theme parks are "cast members." Disney suggests that the symbolic economy is more than just the sum of the services it provides. The symbolic economy unifies material practices of finance, labor, art, performance, and design.

The prominence of culture industries also inspires a new language dealing with difference. It offers a coded means of discrimination, an undertone to the dominant discourse of democratization. Styles that develop on the streets are cycled through mass media, especially fashion and "urban music" magazines and MTV, where, divorced from their social context, they become images of cool. On urban billboards advertising designer perfumes or jeans, they are recycled to the streets, where they become a provocation, breeding imitation and even violence. The beachheads of designer stores, from Armani to A/X, from Ralph Lauren to Polo, are fiercely parodied for the "props" of fashion-conscious teenagers in inner city ghettos. The cacophany of demands for justice is translated into a coherent demand for jeans. Claims for public space by culture industries inspire the counterpolitics of display in late twentieth century urban riots.

The symbolic economy recycles real estate as it does designer clothes. Visual display matters in

American and European cities today, because the identities of places are established by sites of delectation. The sensual display of fruit at an urban farmers' market or gourmet food store puts a neighborhood "on the map" of visual delights and reclaims it for gentrification. A sidewalk cafe takes back the street from casual workers and homeless people. In Bryant Park, enormous white tents and a canopied walkway set the scene for spring and fall showings of New York fashion designers. Twice a year, the park is filled by the fashion media, paparazzi, store buyers, and supermodels doing the business of culture and reclaiming Bryant Park as a vital, important place. We New Yorkers become willing participants in the drama of the fashion business. As cultural consumers, we are drawn into the interrelated production of symbols and space.

Mass suburbanization since the 1950s has made it unreasonable to expect that most middle-class men and women will want to live in cities. But developing small places within the city as sites of visual delectation creates urban oases where everyone *appears* to be middle-class. In the fronts of the restaurants or stores, at least, consumers are strolling, looking, eating, drinking, sometimes speaking English and sometimes not. In the back regions, an ethnic division of labor guarantees that immigrant workers are preparing food and cleaning up.

This is not just a game of representations: developing the city's symbolic economy involves recycling workers, sorting people in housing markets, luring investment, and negotiating political claims for public goods and ethnic promotion. Cities from New York to Los Angeles and Miami seem to thrive by developing small districts around specific themes. Whether it is Times Square or el Calle Ocho, a commercial or an "ethnic" district, the narrative web spun by the symbolic economy around a specific place relies on a vision of cultural consumption and a social and an ethnic division of labor.

As cities and societies place greater emphasis on visualization, the Disney Company and art museums play more prominent roles in defining public culture. I am speaking, first, of public culture as a process of negotiating images that are accepted by large numbers of people. In this sense, culture industries and cultural institutions have stepped into the vacuum left by government. At least since the 1970s debacles of Watergate and the Vietnam War, through Irangate in the 1980s and the

confessions of politicians in the 1990s, government has lacked the basic credibility to define the core values of a common culture. On the local level, most mayors and other elected officials have been too busy clearing budget deficits and dealing with constituents' complaints about crime and schools to project a common image. The "vision thing," as George Bush called it, has been supplied by religious leaders from Jerry Falwell to Jesse Jackson and by those institutions whose visual resources permit or even require them to capitalize on culture.

I also see public culture as socially constructed on the micro-level. It is produced by the many social encounters that make up daily life in the streets, shops, and parks – the spaces in which we experience public life in cities. The right to be in these spaces, to use them in certain ways, to invest them with a sense of our selves and our communities – to claim them as ours and to be claimed in turn by them – make up a constantly changing public culture. People with economic and political power have the greatest opportunity to shape public culture by controlling the building of the city's public spaces in stone and concrete. Yet public space is inherently democratic. The question of who can occupy public space, and so define an image of the city, is open-ended.

Talking about the cultures of cities in purely visual terms does not do justice to the material practices of politics and economics that create a symbolic economy. But neither does a strictly political-economic approach suggest the subtle powers of visual and spatial strategies of social differentiation. As I suggested in *Landscapes of Power* (1991), the rise of the cities' symbolic economy is rooted in two long-term changes – the economic decline of cities compared to suburban and nonurban spaces and the expansion of abstract financial speculation – and in such short-term factors, dating from the 1970s and 1980s, as new mass immigration, the growth of cultural consumption, and the marketing of identity politics. This is an inclusive, structural, and materialist view. If I am right, we cannot speak about cities today without understanding:

- how cities use culture as an economic base,
- how capitalizing on culture spills over into the privatization and militarization of public space, and
- how the power of culture is related to the aesthetics of fear.

CULTURE AS AN ECONOMIC BASE

Suppose we turn the old Marxist relation between a society's base and its superstructure on its head and think of culture as a way of producing basic goods. In fact, culture supplies the basic information – including symbols, patterns, and meaning – for nearly all the service industries. In our debased contemporary vocabulary, the word *culture* has become an abstraction for any economic activity that does not create material products like steel, cars, or computers. Stretching the term is a legacy of the advertising revolution of the early twentieth century and the more recent escalation in political image making. Because culture is a system for producing symbols, every attempt to get people to buy a product becomes a culture industry. The sociologist Daniel Bell used to tell a joke about a circus employee whose job it was to follow the elephant and clean up after it; when asked, she said her job was in “the entertainment business.” Today, she might say she was in “the culture industry.” Culture is intertwined with capital and identity in the city's production systems.

From one point of view, cultural institutions establish a competitive advantage over other cities for attracting new businesses and corporate elites. Culture suggests the coherence and consistency of a brand name product. Like any commodity, “cultural” landscape has the possibility of generating other commodities. Historically, of course, the arrow of causality goes the other way. Only an economic surplus – sufficient to fund sacrifices for the temple, Michelangelos for the chapel, and bequests to art museums in the wills of robber barons – generates culture. But in American and European cities during the 1970s, culture became more of an instrument in the entrepreneurial strategies of local governments and business alliances. In the shift to a post-postwar economy, who could build the biggest modern art museum suggested the vitality of the financial sector. Who could turn the waterfront from docklands rubble to parks and marinas suggested the possibilities for expansion of the managerial and professional corps. This was probably as rational a response as any to the unbeatable isolationist challenge of suburban industrial parks and office campuses. The city, such planners and developers as James Rouse believed, would counter the visual homogeneity

of the suburbs by playing the card of aesthetic diversity.

Yet culture also suggests a labor force that is well suited to the revolution of diminished expectations that began in the 1960s. In contrast to high-rolling rappers and rockers, “high” cultural producers are supposed to live on the margins; and the incomes of most visual artists, art curators, actors, writers, and musicians suggest they must be used to deprivation. A widespread appreciation of culture does not really temper the work force's demands. But, in contrast to workers in other industries, artists are flexible on job tasks and work hours, do not always join labor unions, and present a docile or even “cultured” persona. These qualities make them, like immigrants, desirable employees in service industries. Dissatisfaction with menial and dead-end jobs does not boil over into protest because their “real” identity comes from an activity outside the job.

[...]

CULTURE AS A MEANS OF FRAMING SPACE

For several hundred years, visual representations of cities have “sold” urban growth. Images, from early maps to picture postcards, have not simply reflected real city spaces; instead, they have been imaginative reconstructions – from specific points of view – of a city's monumentality. The development of visual media in the twentieth century made photography and movies the most important cultural means of framing urban space, at least until the 1970s. Since then, as the surrealism of *King Kong* shifted to that of *Blade Runner* and redevelopment came to focus on consumption activities, the material landscape itself – the buildings, parks, and streets – has become the city's most important visual representation. Indeed, in *Blade Runner*, the modern urban landscape is used as a cult object. Far more than *King Kong*'s perch on the Empire State Building, *Blade Runner*'s use of the Bradbury Building, an early twentieth century office building in downtown Los Angeles that has been preserved and lovingly restored, emphasizes the city's material landscape as a visual backdrop for a new high-tech, global society...

[...]

More common forms of visual re-presentation in all cities connect cultural activities and populist images in festivals, sports stadiums, and shopping centers. While these may simply be minimized as "loss leaders" supporting new office construction, they should also be understood as producing space for a symbolic economy. In the 1960s, new or restored urban shopping centers from Boston to Seattle copied suburban shopping malls by developing clean space according to a visually coherent theme. To the surprise of some urban planners, they actually thrived. No longer did the city's dream world of commercial culture relate to the bourgeois culture of the old downtown or the patrician culture of art museums and public buildings. Instead, urban commercial culture became "entertainment," aimed at attracting a mobile public of cultural consumers. This altered the public culture of the city.

Linking public culture to commercial cultures has important implications for social identity and social control. Preserving an ecology of images often takes a connoisseur's view of the past, re-reading the legible practices of social class discrimination and financial speculation by reshaping the city's collective memory. Boston's Faneuil Hall, South Street Seaport in New York, Harborplace in Baltimore, and London's Tobacco Wharf make the waterfront of older cities into a consumers' playground, far safer for tourists and cultural consumers than the closed worlds of wholesale fish and vegetable dealers and longshoremen...

[...]

Culture can also be used to frame, and humanize, the space of real estate development. Cultural producers who supply art (and sell "interpretation") are sought because they legitimize the appropriation of space. Office buildings are not just monumentalized by height and facades, they are given a human face by video artists' screen installations and public concerts. Every well-

designed downtown has a mixed-use shopping center and a nearby artists' quarter. Sometimes it seems that every derelict factory district or waterfront has been converted into one of those sites of visual delectation – a themed shopping space for seasonal produce, cooking equipment, restaurants, art galleries, and an aquarium. ...

[...]

So the symbolic economy features two parallel production systems that are crucial to a city's material life: the *production of space*, with its synergy of capital investment and cultural meanings, and the *production of symbols*, which constructs both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity. Every effort to rearrange space in the city is also an attempt at visual re-presentation. Raising property values, which remains a goal of most urban elites, requires imposing a new point of view. But negotiating whose point of view and the costs of imposing it create problems for public culture.

Creating a public culture involves both shaping public space for social interaction and constructing a visual representation of the city. Who occupies public space is often decided by negotiations over physical security, cultural identity, and social and geographical community. These issues have been at the core of urban anxieties for hundreds of years. They are significant today, however, because of the complexity and diversity of urban populations. Today the stakes of cultural reorganization are most visible in three basic shifts in the sources of cultural identity:

- from local to global images,
- from public to private institutions, and
- from ethnically and racially homogeneous communities to those that are more diverse.

These rather abstract concepts have a concrete impact on framing urban public space.

Whose Neighborhood Now? Gentrification and Community Life in Low-Income Urban Neighborhoods

AJ Golio 

Tulane University, USA

ABSTRACT

Gentrification is a process of urban change that has wide-ranging social and political impacts, but previous studies provide divergent findings. Does gentrification leave residents feeling alienated, or does it bolster neighborhood social satisfaction? Politically, does urban change mobilize residents, or leave them disengaged? I assess a national, cross-sectional sample of about 17,500 respondents in lower-income urban neighborhoods, and use a structural equation modeling approach to model six latent variables pertaining to local social environment and political participation. Among the full sample, gentrification has a positive association with all six factors. However, this relationship depends upon respondents' level of income, length of residency, and – most particularly – racial identity. White residents and those with shorter length of residency report higher levels of social satisfaction as gentrification increases, but there is a weaker association among racial minority groups and longer-term residents. This finding aligns with a perspective on gentrification as a racialized process and demonstrates that gentrification-related amenities primarily serve the interests of white residents and newcomers. All groups, however, are more likely to participate in neighborhood politics as gentrification increases, drawing attention to the agency of local residents as they attempt to influence processes of urban change.

Key words: gentrification; racial capitalism; displacement; social cohesion; collective efficacy.

In cities across the United States, gentrification is a bitterly contested issue. *Gentrification* refers to the process by which previously disinvested urban neighborhoods experience capital investment and the in-migration of relatively well-off individuals (Smith 1998:198), leading to concerns over pricing out or otherwise displacing incumbent residents (Marcuse 1986; Newman and Wyly 2006). Many insist, however, that this process is not *only* about housing displacement. Activists, journalists, and academics claim that gentrification is a social and cultural process as well—that it invariably alters a

I would like to thank Robin Bartram, Max Besbris, Japonica Brown-Saracino, Warren Lowell, Andrew Messamore, Laura McKinney, Gretchen Purser, Patrick Rafail, Zawadi Rucks-Ahidian, Iris Zhang, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and advice. Melissa Banzhaf, Chase Frederick, Julie Hotchkiss, and other staff members at the U.S. Census Bureau and Atlanta Research Data Center were also invaluable to this research process. I presented versions of this paper at the 2023 Urban Affairs Association conference in Nashville and 2024 Southern Sociological Society conference in New Orleans – thanks to all who attended the panels and provided helpful questions and comments.

Any views expressed are those of the author and not of the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census Bureau has reviewed this data product to ensure appropriate access, use, and disclosure avoidance protection of the confidential source data used to produce this product. This research was performed at a Federal Statistical Research Data Center under FSRDC Project Number 2689 (CBDRB-FY24-0223).

Please direct correspondence to the author at Newcomb Hall 220, 6823 Saint Charles Avenue, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA 70118, USA; email: agolio@tulane.edu.

Received 4 June 2024; revised 9 December 2024; accepted 18 February 2025

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neighborhood's character and social environment such that residents who have lived in the area for a long time now feel out of place and unwelcome.

Within the scholarly literature, however, there remains a methodological divide when it comes to investigating gentrification's impacts (Brown-Saracino 2017). Broadly speaking, quantitative scholars have largely attempted to track physical displacement, or involuntary changes in residence (Carlson 2020), that occur due to gentrification. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, are more likely to focus on gentrification as a social and cultural process – with conflicting results. On one hand, many ethnographers argue that even when residents in gentrifying areas are not forced from their homes, they may still face the loss of local institutions, political power, social networks, and community norms of interaction (Betancur 2011; Davidson 2008; Helmuth 2019; Hyra 2017; Martin 2007; Wynne and Rogers 2021). As opposed to a process of physical uprooting, *social displacement* refers to a feeling of alienation and isolation wrought by this transformation (Chernoff 1980), while *political displacement* refers to the supplanting of local organizing blocs in favor of new coalitions (Hyra 2017; Martin 2007). On the other hand, some scholars downplay the social-political displacement perspective, and suggest that gentrification can increase residents' social satisfaction (Freeman 2006). Politically, some researchers argue that the threats and opportunities presented by gentrification actually spur residents to mobilize in order to resist neighborhood change, protect local cultural practices and institutions, or otherwise attempt to augment the process (Betancur 2002; Summers 2021).

In this paper, I respond to critical points of uncertainty within the gentrification literature by bridging this methodological divide. I quantitatively test the relationship between gentrification and community life to answer two questions. Socially, does gentrification leave residents feeling isolated and unwelcome, or does it tend to bolster satisfaction with their social environment? Politically, does gentrification mobilize residents to get involved in local problem-solving efforts, or leave them disengaged? I answer these questions through a quantitative evaluation of a large, cross-sectional sample of residents living in lower-income urban neighborhoods undergoing varying degrees of changes in demographics and housing investment. Based on the responses of about 17,500 residents¹ across the United States, I create a series of six latent variable constructs that measure various aspects of neighborhood *social environment* and *participation*. Using a multi-group structural equation modeling (SEM) approach, I observe the associations between the degree of socioeconomic change and the six latent variables.

In terms of the relationship between gentrification and satisfaction with the local social environment, I find that it varies, most crucially, by the racial identity of the respondent and other factors. Among the full sample, I find a positive association between neighborhood gentrification and all of the social environment and participation variables. To add additional nuance to these initial findings, however, I use multi-group SEM analysis to observe the results among respondent groups split up by racial self-identification, income, and length of residency. There is a stronger positive correlation between the social environment variables and gentrification among white residents and those who have lived in their home for the shortest amounts of time. In fact, positive relationships between gentrification and the social environment variables virtually disappear among racial minority Black and Latinx groups. The relationship between gentrification and community political participation, on the other hand, is not so dependent on social location. Almost all groups report higher levels of participation as gentrification intensifies, though there are some differences in *how* certain groups get involved.

From these results I make three contributions to research on the social problem of neighborhood gentrification. First and most importantly, my models demonstrate that the extent to which gentrification serves as a social amenity depends on race. These results strengthen the perspective that gentrification is a process of racial capitalism (Rucks-Ahidiana 2022) that primarily serves the tastes of white residents (Golio 2024b; Hyra 2017; Kirkland 2008; Smith 1996; Summers 2019; Torres 2020) and can otherwise serve to alienate people of color (Doering 2020; Golash-Boza 2023; Helmuth 2019; Walton 2021). Second, on a more general level, I do not find support for the social displacement perspective, that gentrification is negatively associated with perceptions of community cohesion. I therefore reorient this debate and argue that concentrated neighborhood poverty and urban decline appear

¹ Due to Census Bureau disclosure requirements, in certain instances I must report rounded entity counts rather than exact numbers. Throughout the paper, I use the tilde symbol (~) to indicate approximate counts.

to be more socially deleterious than gentrification. Third, I find general support for the political mobilization perspective: residents in gentrifying areas – across all social location groups – tend to be more involved in shaping neighborhood affairs than their peers in non-gentrifying areas. This finding draws attention to the agency of local residents as they respond to neighborhood change.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPACTS OF GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification has grown widely in scope and attention over the last half-century. Since it is a widespread contemporary urban phenomenon, it is imperative that we understand the full scope of gentrification's impacts. To this end, quantitative researchers have mostly debated whether gentrification is associated with physical displacement. On this question, the field is famously split, with some scholars finding a lack of evidence of coerced relocation (Ding, Hwang, and Divringi 2016; Freeman 2005) while others find the opposite (Marcuse 1986; Newman and Wyly 2006). With few clear answers on the question of physical displacement, scholars are left to ponder other ways in which gentrification might impact a community and its long-standing residents.

Ethnographic studies emphasize that gentrification holds enormous potential to disrupt the social “fabric” of incumbent communities (Betancur 2011), as new middle- and upper-class residents – and their influence on the landscape – leave incumbent working-class populations feeling isolated. This process is sometimes termed *social displacement* (Chernoff 1980; for variations, see Davidson 2008; Hyra 2017; Wynne and Rogers 2021); it refers not to the loss of a physical dwelling, but to loss of meaningful community life. Scholars argue that even when physical displacement does not occur, residents' affective connections to place can still be disrupted (Elliott-Cooper, Hubbard, and Lees 2019). Gentrifiers bring to their new neighborhoods unique tastes, patterns of behavior, and normative expectations that form the basis of social boundaries that tend to exclude and alienate incumbent residents, particularly along class lines (Danley and Weaver 2018; Centner 2008; Tissot 2011).

Commercial spaces turn over to meet these new demands, leading to the closure of gathering spots that facilitate the formation and strengthening of social ties and cohesion among incumbent residents (Hyra 2017; Torres 2020). Local businesses also serve as highly visible symbols of neighborhood character and symbolic ownership (Deener 2012) – therefore, commercial turnover might cause incumbent residents to feel that the area is no longer “for them” (Ocejo 2014; Torres 2020; Tuttle 2022). Most studies are primarily concerned with “old-timers” (Brown-Saracino 2009), or long-time neighborhood residents, and their feeling that gentrification-related development is not built to address their social needs and priorities, but rather those of newcomers (Balzarini and Shlay 2016; Danley and Weaver 2018; Lee and Reina 2024). Also, these shifts to the urban landscape tend to be geared toward middle- and upper-class tastes and sensibilities, leaving the working class with fewer options for socializing and recreation (Centner 2008; Ocejo 2014; Smith 1996; Torres 2020; Zukin 2010). Therefore, we might expect that gentrification will have a more acutely negative social impact on lower-income individuals.

Though not as widely argued, other research findings suggest that gentrification can strengthen or improve community life for long-time residents. Some may enjoy the new commercial options and public amenities that open during the gentrification process (Freeman 2006), prompting them to engage more with their surroundings. Given that gentrification occurs in historically disinvested neighborhoods (Smith 1998:198), some degree of development may be a welcome sight to some residents (Freeman 2006; Holt et al. 2021). Also, some criminologists find that gentrification is associated with a modest reduction in neighborhood crime rates (MacDonald and Stokes 2020) – particularly in terms of declining violent crime and homicide rates (Barton 2016b; Papachristos et al. 2011). Though there are mixed findings here and a need for additional clarity (Barton and Gruner 2016), lower violent crime rates may allow residents to interact more safely and freely. Finally, as Brown-Saracino (2009) points out, many gentrifiers act as “social preservationists,” who try very intentionally *not* to disrupt the existing social fabric, and take various actions to make sure that old-timers and their institutions remain in place. Given these possibilities, some previous quantitative studies find that gentrification is positively associated with certain aspects of community (Gibbons, Nara, and Appleyard 2018; Steinmetz-Wood et al. 2017), and that there is generally less conflict between newcomers and long-time residents than we might expect (McGirr, Skaburskis, and Donegani 2015).

Turning from the social to the political, there are similarly divergent perspectives on the relationship between gentrification and residents' participation in local problem-solving efforts. Similar to social displacement, the concept of political displacement refers to a loss of decision-making power and general influence for incumbent neighborhood groups (Hyra 2017; Martin 2007). Political displacement is not just about being outvoted by newer resident coalitions – as some scholars attest, gentrification may also be accompanied by a retreat from public participation on the part of long-time residents (Hyra 2017; Knotts and Haspel 2006; Newman, Velez, and Pearson-Merkowitz 2016). As the addition of gentrifiers and capital investment disrupts local institutions and replaces cultural norms, long-standing residents may withdraw from public life (Hyra 2017; Kozey 2020; Newman et al. 2016).

Other scholars, however, document residents' political engagement in issues surrounding local development, suggesting that gentrification may actually spur responsive mobilization. Much of this research focuses on resistance to housing cost increases, predatory financialization, and threats to local cultural practices and institutions (Curran 2018; Martinez 2010; Perez 2004; Robinson 1995; Summers 2021; Summers and Fields 2024). Generally, gentrifying areas are seen as a space of conflicting interests, wherein competing groups (i.e., newcomers and old-timers) vie for control over the neighborhood's institutions and its future (Balzarini and Shlay 2016). But scholars also recognize that residents and institutions are not only involved in resisting gentrification but also facilitating it or seeking to profit from it (Betancur 2002; Hyra 2008). Regardless of their aims, this literature suggests a sense that neighborhood residents are not bystanders to processes of urban change, but rather seeking to get involved for protection, profit, or some combination thereof.

While I have mostly highlighted qualitative work, some previous quantitative attempts have been made to examine the relationship between gentrification and community life. For instance, Gibbons, Barton, and Reling (2020) observe a negative relationship between gentrification and their measures of trust, belongingness and cooperation – but find that it also depends on the dynamics of racial turnover. Recently, Lee and Reina (2024) find an overall *positive* association between gentrification and neighborhood satisfaction – but similarly find racial variation. Given mixed results among both qualitative and quantitative work, I seek to further parse among the conflicting perspectives outlined above: social displacement vs. social amenity, and political displacement vs. political mobilization. I also find validation from these two previous studies to further investigate racial disparities in the quality of social life during gentrification. I note, however, that previous quantitative studies are limited either to a single metropolitan context (Gibbons et al. 2020; Lee and Reina 2024; McGirr et al. 2015) or to a particular aspect of community and social life (Newman et al. 2016), or both (Gibbons et al. 2018; Knotts and Haspel 2006; Kozey 2020; Steinmetz-Wood et al. 2017). I build on these studies, therefore, by contributing an examination of gentrification and community life that aims to be both cross-sectional and more comprehensive. My models encompass a variety of measures related to a neighborhood's social and political environment viewed across most mid- and large-sized American cities.

Gentrification and Stratification by Race and Class

Gentrification is not a single process that plays out evenly across social groups; rather, it interacts with existing landscapes of inequality to produce disparate manifestations and impacts. Along with social class, scholars have also long identified racial stratification within gentrifying neighborhoods. Researchers tend to find that residents of color – particularly those who are Black and Latinx – often more acutely experience gentrification-related feelings of exclusion, alienation, stress, and associated negative health impacts (Gibbons and Barton 2016; Helmuth 2019; Holt et al. 2021; Lee and Reina 2024; Summers 2019).

Though gentrification is typically conceptualized in terms of class turnover, the process often – but not always – also involves shifting racial dynamics. Due to the historic and contemporary relationship among race, wealth accumulation, and segregation in the United States, gentrification is stereotypically envisioned as a process wherein the disinvested areas that gentrification takes place are neighborhoods of color, and the relatively wealthy newcomers are white (Fallon 2021; Golio 2024b). This form of “white influx” gentrification is thought of as socially deleterious to incumbent communities. When gentrifying neighborhoods come to embody a “white space” (Anderson 2015), structured by

white norms of interaction, people of color may feel alienated from this new dominant social environment and the spatial repressions it engenders (Helmuth 2019; Hyra 2017; Monroe Sullivan and Shaw 2011; Summers 2019). This includes attempts by white neighbors to impose neighborhood social control via increased surveillance or by using services such as the police (Dahir, Hwang, and Yu 2024; Doering 2020; Golash-Boza 2023; Walton 2021). “White influx” gentrification, or more generally white entry into neighborhoods of color, was not as common in the twentieth century – white gentrifiers instead appeared to more often move to working-class white neighborhoods (Hwang and Sampson 2014; Timberlake and Johns-Wolfe 2017). Since the year 2000, however, scholars have observed more pronounced patterns of white influx (Freeman and Cai 2015; Hyra 2017; Sutton 2020). This growing dynamic leads me to investigate differences among racial identity groups.

Gentrification does not always reflect the dynamics of white influx. Sometimes the in-movers are middle-class people of the same general racial background as the incumbent community. These co-ethnic forms of development are sometimes referred to as “Black gentrification” (Taylor 1992) and “gente-fication” (Latinx-led gentrification; see Delgado and Swanson 2021). There are mixed views on the implications of these movements for the local social environment. While some residents may adhere to a notion of racial solidarity, propelled by the idea that within-race development is less deleterious than white influx (Boyd 2008; Moore 2009), others point out that these situations are still problematic due to intra-racial class conflict and the displacement of working-class people (Hyra 2008; Pattillo 2007; Taylor 1992).

Building on this previous research, Rucks-Ahidiana (2022) posits that gentrification is a process of racial capitalism – meaning that the process either advances or stagnates through the ascription of racialized value onto people, institutions, or neighborhoods (see also Dantzer 2021). This implies that white-serving aesthetics, social amenities, and institutions (i.e., those that make up the “white space”), therefore, may be more highly valued and prioritized in this process – even, often, in situations of co-ethnic gentrification (Golio 2024b). Those that serve people of color, on the other hand, might be either displaced or else appropriated into this schema (Hyra 2017; Summers 2019). My findings fit into this framework – I identify that the social amenity perspective on gentrification appears to be almost exclusive to white residents, while residents of color report fewer benefits. While my analysis is not equipped to fully tease out the various possibilities of inter- vs. intra-racial development and conflict, I point out that in the context of growing white influx, it is important to pay attention to the social and political lives of racial minority residents – regardless of the dominant racial identity of the gentrifiers.

Conceptualizing Community

Sociological concern over community interaction, trust, and embeddedness has been a perennial theme since the founding of the discipline. “Community,” however, is a difficult concept to define and operationalize. It is a socially constructed idea that depends on the perceptions of group members (Sampson 2012; Suttles 1972). In other words, individuals may perceive themselves as part of a “community” – and this is what makes it a community. My analysis straddles this definition: some of my quantitative measures capture discrete levels of participation, while others query respondents for their perception of their surroundings and neighbors, and the extent to which they believe these constitute a cohesive community. Here, I identify a few specific sociological concepts that are relevant to my data and analysis – without drawing out an extensive debate on exactly which factors make for a strong “community” life.

Most simply, we could define community in terms of social ties – points of connection among people. Social network analysts will have much more to say about ties’ strength, structure, and their ability to serve as “bridges” that make certain outcomes possible. For my purposes, it is sufficient to point out that both relatively strong kinship and friend ties, as well as relatively weak or temporary acquaintance ties, are significant for social support and advancement (Deckard and Auyero 2022; Desmond 2012; Granovetter 1973; Small 2017; Stack 1983).

In addition to ties, community might be measured in terms of social cohesion, or perception of membership in a social group (Friedkin 2004). As applied to a neighborhood, then, cohesion refers to the extent to which residents perceive that their neighbors form a meaningful group beyond merely proximity to one another (Forrest and Kearns 2001). Social cohesion, therefore, typically encompasses

feelings of interconnectedness, trust, and reciprocity (Chan, To, and Chan 2006; Schiefer and van der Noll 2017). Building further, collective efficacy describes both neighbors' perception of social cohesion plus their shared sense of social control and a willingness to intervene on behalf of others (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997).²

There are myriad individual- and group-level factors that impact one's ability to form ties, one's perception of social cohesion and collective efficacy, and one's proclivity to participate in neighborhood affairs. Several of these will appear as control variables in my regression analysis. Most pertinent to my focus on gentrification, however, is how spatial context shapes these various aspects of community life. The logic behind "neighborhood effects" is that all manner of social outcomes are spatially clustered within an urban landscape, making local context sociologically meaningful for analysis (Sampson 2012). No different from many other outcomes, social life is also spatially dependent, and the strength of community varies across neighborhoods (Logan 2012; Sampson 2012; Small and Adler 2019). Where the neighborhood effects literature is primarily focused on the persistence and durability of spatial differences (Sampson 2012), here I look at what happens to perceptions and participation in the context of neighborhood change, as demographics and real estate shift.

DATA AND METHODS

Data: 2013 American Housing Survey

My source of individual-level information is the 2013 round of the American Housing Survey (AHS). I selected 2013 because it is the only survey year that includes a battery of questions related to neighborhood social and political life. The AHS is a national, biennial survey of housing units and the people who occupy them, carried out collaboratively by the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Observations within the AHS are represented as "households" rather than individual respondents. Most demographic variables, such as age or sex, describe the characteristics of the "householder," or a reference person for the household. The actual survey respondent may or may not be the householder. As my analysis hinges on variables related to respondents' individual actions or opinions and relates these to demographic information describing the householder, I limit my working sample only to those observations wherein the respondent is also the householder – ~121,000 of ~168,000 original observations.

I use a confidential version of the AHS to ascertain each respondent's census tract. As is common practice in urban sociological research, I use the census tract to approximate a "neighborhood," and use these terms interchangeably. To connect individual AHS respondents with information on their surrounding neighborhood, I use publicly available census tract-level data from the 2000 Decennial Census and 2009-2013 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates. Via Social Explorer, I downloaded 2000 Census data that were reprojected to match the 2010 census tract boundaries.

I further limited my sample to ~91,500 respondents that reside in populated urban census tracts, here defined as tracts that 1) have a total population in year 2000 of at least 200 residents, 2) are located within a metropolitan area (or MSA, metropolitan statistical area), and 3) have at least 50 percent of the tract's population located inside an urbanized area, or settlement that contains 50,000 or more people (Rucks-Ahidiana 2021). Therefore, functionally I include only respondents that reside within or immediately adjacent to mid- or large-sized cities. I use only urban census tracts for two reasons. First, though some researchers study rural gentrification processes (e.g., Brown-Saracino 2009), gentrification is typically thought of as a process that takes place in urban areas (Smith 1998:198). Second, census tracts only functionally approximate "neighborhoods" within a city, as the geographical boundaries of tracts are drawn to capture a certain number of residents and, therefore, vary in area based on population density.

Next, I limited my sample to ~36,000 respondents with valid, non-missing responses to each variable in my models. The set of questions related to "neighborhood social capital" were surveyed on a random, rotating basis to only about a third of all AHS households. This explains the large number of missing values.

² *Social capital* is a familiar concept that is closely related to those outlined above. However, as suggested in its title, social capital is typically conceived as more of a resource that arises from social ties (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000). In my analysis, I use ties, cohesion, and collective efficacy because these are the concepts that best fit my data. I observe the extent to which neighbors interact and respondents' perceptions of neighborhood trust and control, but cannot observe how these are parlayed as resources or capital.

Finally, my working sample includes only the ~17,500 respondents that reside in neighborhoods that were “gentrifiable” in the year 2000. Following several previous studies (Ding et al. 2016; Freeman 2005; Hwang and Sampson 2014), I consider gentrifiable neighborhoods to be those with a year 2000 tract-level median household income that ranks in the lower half of all urban tracts within the same MSA. These tracts are “eligible” to gentrify, as gentrification is typically conceived of as a process that impacts relatively low-income and historically disinvested areas (Smith 1998:198). The ~17,500 respondents in my working sample reside in ~9,000 different census tracts across ~200 American metropolitan areas.

In various multi-group analyses, I also divide these respondents into distinct sub-samples in order to observe differences in groups based on race, income, and residency length. For race, groups are based on respondents’ self-identified racial categorization: non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black, or Latinx (i.e., Hispanic).³ For income, I divide respondents into quartiles based on self-reported yearly household income, as compared to other respondents in the same MSA. For residency length, I divide respondents into quartiles based on the self-reported number of years occupying their current dwelling (obtained by subtracting their move-in year from 2013), as compared to other respondents in the same MSA. The question of how many years must be spent in a neighborhood before one can be called a “long-time resident” is highly socially and contextually dependent, and therefore difficult to measure in a standardized way. My solution is to base the cut-offs around other respondents within the same metropolitan area rather than an arbitrarily chosen year.⁴

Dependent Variables: Social Assessment and Political Participation

My dependent variables are based around the 21 “neighborhood social capital” variables from the 2013 AHS, which I use to model various aspects of community life. I combine these individual survey items into latent constructs, guided by a principal component analysis conducted by Li and Zhang (2021). Based on their work, I employ six latent variables as dependent outcomes in my analysis.⁵ As I describe in the findings section, a confirmatory factor analysis shows that these constructs fit the data well.

Two of these constructs measure the respondent’s perception of their neighborhood’s social environment. *Social cohesion* captures the extent to which the respondent feels that their neighbors form a close-knit, trusting, and congenial community. *Collective efficacy* aligns closely with the original conception of the attribute developed by Sampson et al. (1997). It measures the respondent’s perception of informal social control within their neighborhood, in terms of how likely they believe it is that a neighbor would intervene in several unsavory situations.

Two constructs measure the respondent’s self-reported levels of social interaction and participation. *Social ties* surveys respondents on how often they interact with their neighbors, and how many of them they would consider to be friends. Therefore, the latent construct captures the local prevalence of both relatively close friendship ties and “weak” acquaintance ties. *Civic participation* evaluates the respondent’s involvement or membership in social/fraternal, service, or religious organizations.

The final two constructs measure the respondent’s self-reported political involvement. *Informal political participation* assesses the respondent’s engagement in interpersonal problem-solving efforts, such as speaking to neighbors or a local religious leader about neighborhood improvement. *Formal political participation*, on the other hand, measures whether or not the respondent has engaged with more formalized mechanisms of problem-solving, such as neighborhood meetings, community councils, or elected officials.

The online appendix provides further information on the AHS survey items, including variable name and survey prompt. I recoded all indicators such that “1” indicates the most negative response

³ No other racial category accounted for enough respondents to form a group large enough to pass Census Bureau disclosure requirements. Residents that do not fall into one of these categories are excluded.

⁴ At the suggestion of an anonymous reviewer, I also tried running the models with the residency length cut-offs determined by the entire distribution of respondents, instead of contextualized by metropolitan area. This alternate operationalization did not substantively change the focal results of the study.

⁵ I apply one minor alteration to Li and Zhang’s (2021) latent constructs. They include a seventh component called “Religious Organizational Involvement,” which consists of only one survey item. This would not work well with my analytic methods of structural equation modeling, so I instead place this item under “civic participation.”

(i.e., “strongly disagree” or “no”) and the highest number indicates the most positive response (i.e., “strongly agree” or “yes”). Therefore, all of the indices are operationalized such that lower values indicate more negative perceptions of the social environment or lower levels of participation, and higher values indicate the opposite.

Focal Independent Variable: Gentrification

Most quantitative studies of gentrification measure the process as a binary variable. Typically, researchers observe a set of tract-level indicators at time $T1$ and then again at time $T2$, and if the differences meet certain pre-determined thresholds, then the neighborhood has “gentrified” (Ding et al. 2016; Freeman 2005; Hammel and Wyly 1996; Lee and Perkins 2023; Rucks-Ahidiana 2021). The binary-threshold measure is useful for simplification, and for direct comparison. Theoretically, however, gentrification is not thought of as a binary state of being, but as a *process* that can be observed at many different stages (Smith 1998:198). Some researchers have pointed out these limits, and instead use either categorical measures with more than two gentrification categories (Lee and Perkins 2023; Timberlake and Johns-Wolfe 2017) or continuous measures (Golash-Boza, Oh, and Kane 2023; Oh et al. 2023; Zapatka and Beck 2021). Here, I use structural equation modeling to create a continuous measure of gentrification and incorporate it into regression models. I view gentrification itself as a latent variable, comprised of several observed indicators that load onto a single factor.

To create this measure, I borrow the four indicators used by Rucks-Ahidiana (2021), based on previous efforts by Hammel and Wyly (1996), Freeman (2005), Ding et al. (2016), and others: change in the tract-level proportion of residents over the age of 25 with a college degree, change in the tract-level median household income (MHHI), change in tract-level median gross rent, and change in tract-level median home value.⁶ I measure change in each indicator between 2000 and 2013 using the aforementioned Decennial Census and ACS data.⁷ Like measures created by Zapatka and Beck (2021), mine is centered around capturing two essential elements of gentrification: both demographic change and real estate investment. There is much disagreement as to how to measure gentrification, and different measures often lead to different results (Barton 2016a; Brown-Saracino 2017). Therefore, guided by previous studies, I considered adding several other variables to the gentrification measure (i.e., poverty status, occupational field), and also tried removing each indicator from my models. However, model strength and factor loadings were consistently strongest with these four variables (see Figure 1).

It is important to measure tract-level changes relative to the metropolitan area in which the tract is located. Without this step, it is possible that observed tract-level changes are due to shifts in the broader urban context, rather than neighborhood-level gentrification. In order to capture MSA-relative changes in my four indicators, I borrow methodology developed by Lee and Perkins (2023). I first put each urban census tract within a given MSA into rank order from lowest to highest based on each indicator’s value in the year 2000, and then divide by the total number of census tracts in the MSA to obtain a relative percentile. I then re-rank each tract in 2013 to obtain a new set of relative percentiles, and observe the differences. For example, if Tract 1 within City A ranks at the 20th percentile (0.2) in terms of median gross rent in 2000, and then ranks in the 40th percentile (0.4) in 2013, this indicates that Tract 1’s surge in rent prices has outpaced growth in other tracts in City A. This gain of 20 percentiles (0.2) will positively influence Tract 1’s overall gentrification score, along with similar measures of MSA-relative changes in college education percentile, MHHI percentile, and median housing value percentile.

Control Independent Variables

A number of individual-level factors are also likely associated with a respondent’s social assessments and participation. I include several in my models as control variables: *Homeownership* is often noted

⁶ Note that all dollar values are adjusted for inflation to 2013 values.

⁷ In the Census and ACS, home value is self-reported by homeowner respondents, and therefore possibly subject to measurement error (Benitez-Silva et al. 2015). However, all four gentrification measures load strongly onto a single factor in confirmatory factor analyses, indicating that despite some estimation error, all of them are likely to rise and fall in tandem. Further, even if homeowners are not always the best judges of value, there are few unproblematic and systematic data alternatives to estimate home value. Assessor’s Office data, for instance, would have to be obtained from every individual municipality or county, and even then, is subject to its own forms of error, particularly in racially marginalized communities. Given a lack of options and strong model fit, I use the self-reported home value measure.

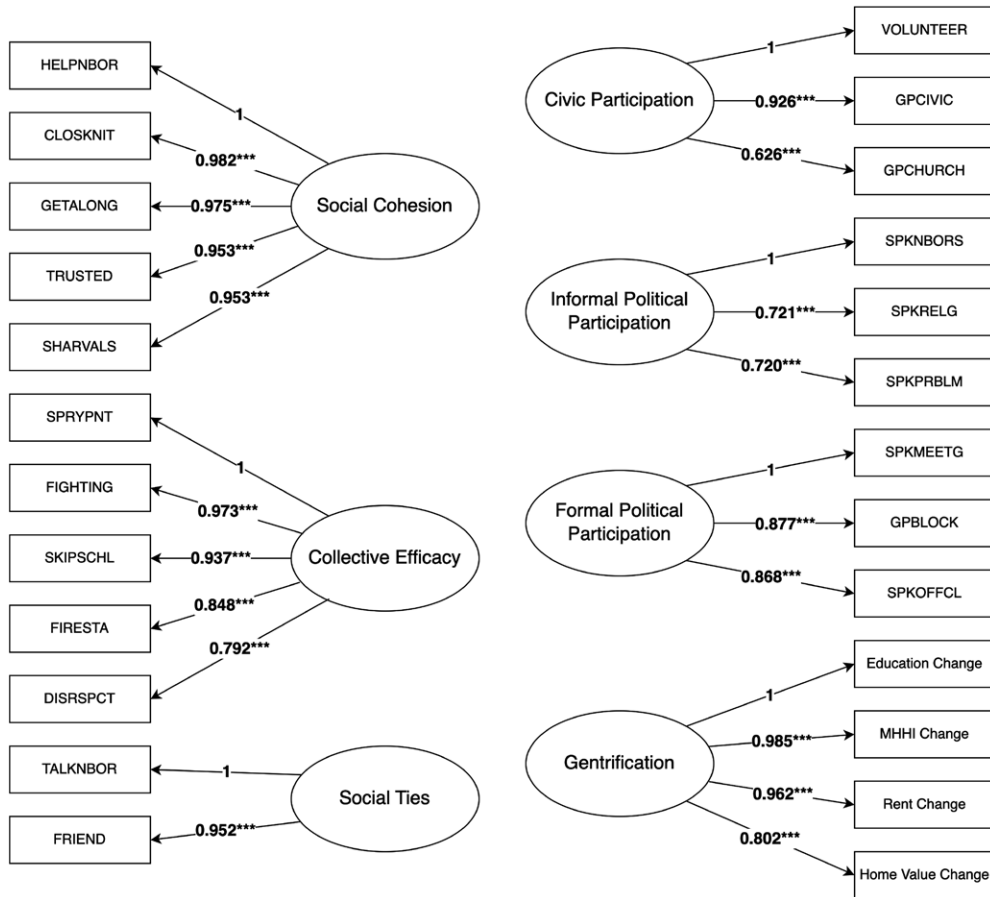


Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Path Diagram Depicting Latent Variable Fit

as one of the most important factors for neighborhood satisfaction and involvement, as homeowners are often thought to be more “invested” in their neighborhoods than renters are (Grinstein-Weiss et al. 2011; Li and Zhang 2021). I therefore include a binary measure of homeownership from the AHS, wherein “1” indicates the respondent owns and “0” indicates they rent or otherwise occupy. I also include a binary measure on whether or not the respondent has a *walking disability*, which could hamper their ability to fully participate in community life.

Various socioeconomic and demographic characteristics are also found to be important indicators (Li and Zhang 2021; Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson 2002). I therefore include a continuous measure of *age* and series of categorical variables for *race* (non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Asian, Latinx, and other) and *sex* (male or female; other options are not provided in the AHS). I measure *household income* as a categorical ordinal variable, dividing respondents into quartiles based on respondents’ self-reported yearly household income as compared to other AHS respondents in the same MSA.⁸ In multi-group regression models based on either race or income, I do not include that corresponding set of control variables.

⁸ At the suggestion of an anonymous reviewer, I also tried running the models with a few additional control variables: respondent’s educational attainment level, the number of children in the household, respondent nativity (i.e., whether or not they were born in the United States), and length of residency. None of these additional variables substantively changed the focal results of the study. Due to the disclosure requirements of the Census Bureau, however, I was unable to release the full model estimates with these variables included.

Analytic Method: Structural Equation Modeling

I use a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach as a general framework for my regression analyses. SEM is an ideal technique for analysis that includes the construction of latent variables, as it combines the logics of both confirmatory factor analysis and regression-style estimation to predict a comprehensive model (Bollen 1989). SEM also allows me to specify several multivariate relationships – therefore, all six of my dependent variables can be estimated in one model. Structural equation models are typically visually represented as path diagrams, rather than as a series of equations. The nodes in each diagram represent variables: ovals depict latent variables, while rectangles are observed variables. Arrows connecting these nodes indicate the relationship that is being estimated.

My analytic models use indicators contained within the 2013 AHS, 2000 Decennial Census, and 2009–2013 ACS as either observed variables or as indicators that make up the aforementioned community life and gentrification latent variables. I analyze my conceptual models using the *lavaan* package in R (Rosseel 2012). All of my models utilize diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) regression estimators, which are standard for SEM models that use ordinal variables, and tend to be more accurate than maximum likelihood estimators (Li 2016). The *lavaan* package also allows for multi-group SEM analysis, in which a path model is tested simultaneously among multiple groups within a sample, allowing for comparison of path relationships among the groups (Jöreskog 1971; Sorböm 1974).⁹

FINDINGS

Descriptive Results

I begin my analysis by looking more in depth at the dependent and independent variables that make up my analytic structural equation models. First, to ensure that my measurement model of six latent variables fits the data well, I performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Figure 1 presents a path diagram depicting the variable relationships and factor loading coefficients for each latent variable and its exogenous components, predicted using the full sample of ~17,500 respondents from lower-income urban neighborhoods. As is typical within CFA model estimation, the first path coefficient for each latent variable is fixed at 1; for the others, a value closer to 1 indicates an observed item that is more closely related to the latent variable and first item. For this and each subsequent model I also report a series of statistics related to fit. All models fall well within standard acceptable ranges. For graphic simplicity, I do not include error depictions alongside each observed variable.

Overall, Figure 1 demonstrates a strong measurement model, with all observed variables significantly predicted by the latent constructs. Guiding authors typically suggest that factor loadings should reach at least 0.5 for interpretation purposes, though greater than 0.7 is preferable and ideal (Stevens 2009). All path coefficients reach this first threshold, and all but one reach the second. Given these affirming results, I move forward into analytic regression with this latent variable measurement model.

After observing how the observed survey items fit the latent variable constructs within the data, I also wanted to get a sense of the relationship among the six dependent socio-political variables. To this end, I used the *lavaan* package to estimate the implied latent variable correlations based on the measurement model depicted in Figure 1. Using the *corrplot* package in R, I arranged the model-implied correlations for the six socio-political latent variables into a matrix, depicted in Figure 2. This visual makes it apparent that there are two distinct clusters of variables. The first cluster, depicted in the upper left-hand corner of Figure 2, demonstrates strong correlation among social experience variables – particularly, respondents' perceptions of social cohesion and collective efficacy. The second cluster, in the bottom right-hand corner of Figure 2, demonstrates that the three forms of neighborhood participation (civic, informal political, and formal political) are closely correlated. Social ties moderately correlates with all other latent variables, and therefore does not fall clearly into one cluster

⁹ I also considered using a multilevel SEM approach, with respondents nested within either census tracts or metropolitan areas. However, diagnostic statistics on these models, such as the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), demonstrated a lack of justification for a multilevel approach.

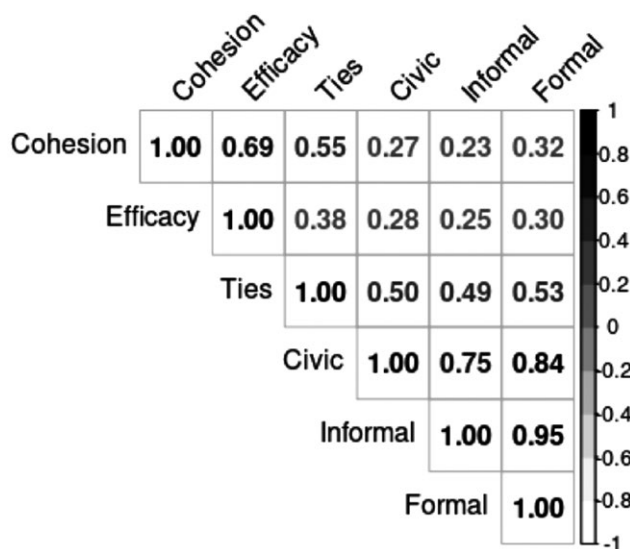


Figure 2. Correlation Matrix of Model-Implied Values Among Latent Socio-Political Variables, $N = \sim 17,500$

or the other. Conceptually, I place it within the “social environment” category rather than the “political participation” category. Given these clusters, when assessing the overall relationship between gentrification and social environment (i.e., parsing between the social displacement vs. social amenity perspectives), I look to coefficients related to cohesion, efficacy, and ties. When assessing the overall relationship between gentrification and political participation (i.e., political displacement vs. political mobilization perspectives), I look to coefficients related to civic, informal, and formal participation.

Next, I turn to descriptive analysis of the independent variable of interest: the continuous, latent variable measure of gentrification. On a neighborhood level, what forms of change is my measure capturing, and how does it compare to other common or well-regarded gentrification measures in the literature? To answer these questions, I use the *lavaan* package to estimate the model-implied gentrification scores for the 24,773 urban and low-income census tracts that meet the criteria outlined in the Methods section above. For ease of comparison, I then split these tracts into terciles based on the gentrification score, creating the three groups depicted in Table 1.

Foremost, Table 1 demonstrates that my measure of gentrification is capturing what it is intended to capture: tracts with higher gentrification scores generally experienced more marked changes in several demographic and housing indicators between the years 2000 and 2013. These changes match well a working definition of gentrification as a process of capital investment (represented by rising rents and home values) as well as the in-migration of relatively high-status individuals (represented by rising proportions of college-educated residents and household incomes). Different values of the measure indicate differing degrees of socioeconomic change; tracts with the highest scores underwent the most intensive gentrification processes.

Something that becomes apparent in Table 1, however, is that all categories of tracts experience some form of change, including tracts that have experienced declining incomes. In a binary measure of gentrification, all tracts that do not meet the threshold of “gentrifying” would be classified simply as “non-gentrifying,” regardless of changes that may be occurring in said tract (i.e., urban decline or socioeconomic ascent that is relatively minor and therefore doesn’t meet the threshold). My measure places all tracts on single scale without setting categorical thresholds, thereby accounting for the degree of change among the four factors. My interpretations will reflect this: instead of comparing respondents in “gentrifying” and “non-gentrifying” tracts, I instead refer to the degree of gentrification-related changes that the respondent has experienced. Though this a different measurement approach from many other studies, it is in line with previous continuous measurements that use gentrification indexes made up of several factors (i.e., Golash-Boza et al. 2023; Zapatka and Beck 2021).

Table 1. Descriptive Values of Neighborhood Change across Levels of Gentrification

	Gentrification Score Group		
	Bottom Tercile	Middle Tercile	Top Tercile
Mean Change in Percentage of Residents with a Bachelor's Degree, 2000-2013	0.11%	3.46%	8.52%
Mean Change in Median Household Income, 2000-2013	-\$12,570.34	-\$5,287.31	\$2,309.75
Mean Change in Median Home Value, 2000-2013	\$26,507.63	\$42,471.46	\$68,615.68
Mean Change in Median Gross Rent, 2000-2013	\$43.74	\$105.24	\$200.95
Percentage of Tracts with >60% White Population, 2000	45.20%	42.54%	38.17%
Percentage of Tracts with >60% Black Population, 2000	12.55%	16.83%	17.95%
Percentage of Tracts with >60% Latinx Population, 2000	10.66%	11.94%	13.35%
Percentage of Tracts with No Clear Racial Majority, 2000	31.34%	28.28%	30.23%
Mean Change in Percentage of White Residents within Mostly White Tracts, 2000-2013	-11.61%	-9.13%	-6.58%
Mean Change in Percentage of White Residents within Mostly Black Tracts, 2000-2013	-2.22%	0.07%	4.19%
Mean Change in Percentage of White Residents within Mostly Latinx Tracts, 2000-2013	-3.45%	-2.50%	1.27%

Note: *N* = 24,773 census tracts; all dollar values adjusted for inflation to 2013

Still, I sought to further compare my measure to several other existing ones (Freeman 2005; Ding et al. 2016; Lee and Perkins 2023), just to ensure that mine is not off-base from previous conceptions. In Figure 3, I present four exemplar maps of New York City (minus Staten Island), each of which depicts tract gentrification status from 2000–2013 according to different measures. With some variation, all measures, including my own, tend to identify similar broad areas of more intensive gentrification – for instance, a broad swath of Brooklyn and Upper Manhattan / the South Bronx. The map that uses my measure, in the bottom right of Figure 3, is colored according to the terciles depicted in Table 1. A strength of this measure is that – like Lee and Perkins (2023) – it can depict gradation in the intensity of gentrification, whereas the top two maps can only distinguish between “gentrifying” and “not gentrifying.”

Given that my findings also focus on the racial dynamics of gentrification, I also add some descriptive context on neighborhood racial make-up and change to Table 1. Interestingly, we can observe that mostly Black and Latinx tracts are over-represented within the most intensely gentrifying group, while mostly white tracts are under-represented (mixed tracts with no clear racial majority are fairly evenly spread across all three groups). This perhaps reflects the trend of white influx, which scholars identify to have grown significantly after the year 2000 (Freeman and Cai 2015; Hyra 2017; Sutton 2020). Indeed, we can observe in the bottom rows of Table 1 that in neighborhoods of color, as the gentrification score increases across tercile groups, so too does the growth in percentage of white residents. As a general trend, lower-income white neighborhoods became less white over time – but least so in ones that are more intensely gentrifying.

Finally, before turning to analytic regression results, I report some descriptive statistics on the independent control variables included in the models below. Most of these variables are categorical, and so I provide approximate frequencies for each in Table 2. Because my sample is limited only to relatively low-income, “gentrifiable” census tracts, more respondents fall into the lower quartiles in terms of



Figure 3. Comparative Maps of New York City (Except Staten Island), Depicting the Extent of Gentrification from 2000–2013 by Different Measures

income, and are less likely to be homeowners. The only continuous control variable within the model is respondent age. Within my dataset, the mean age is 49.3 years old, and the median is 48.

Assessing Gentrification and Community Life

Having assessed the measurement model of latent variables to confirm that it fits the data well, I turn now to include this model in SEM regression analysis. In Figure 4, I present a path analysis depiction of the primary model with all control variables included. For graphic simplicity and due to Census Bureau disclosure constraints, I do not report the path coefficients among observed variables and

Table 2. Approximate Frequencies for Independent Control Variables

Variable	Category	Number	Percent
Race	White	~8,000	45.7%
	Black	~4,300	24.6%
	Latinx	~3,700	21.1%
	Asian	~700	4.0%
	Other	~550	3.1%
Income Quartile	Lowest	~6,300	36.0%
	Mid-Low	~5,200	29.7%
	Mid-High	~3,700	21.1%
	Highest	~2,200	12.6%
Disability Status	Disability	~1,800	10.3%
	No Disability	~15,500	88.6%
Homeownership	Homeowner	~7,600	43.4%
	Renter / Other	~9,800	56.0%
Sex	Male	~8,000	45.7%
	Female	~9,400	53.7%
N		~17,500	

Note: Due to approximations required by the Census Bureau, category frequencies will not equal 17,500 and percentages will not equal 100%

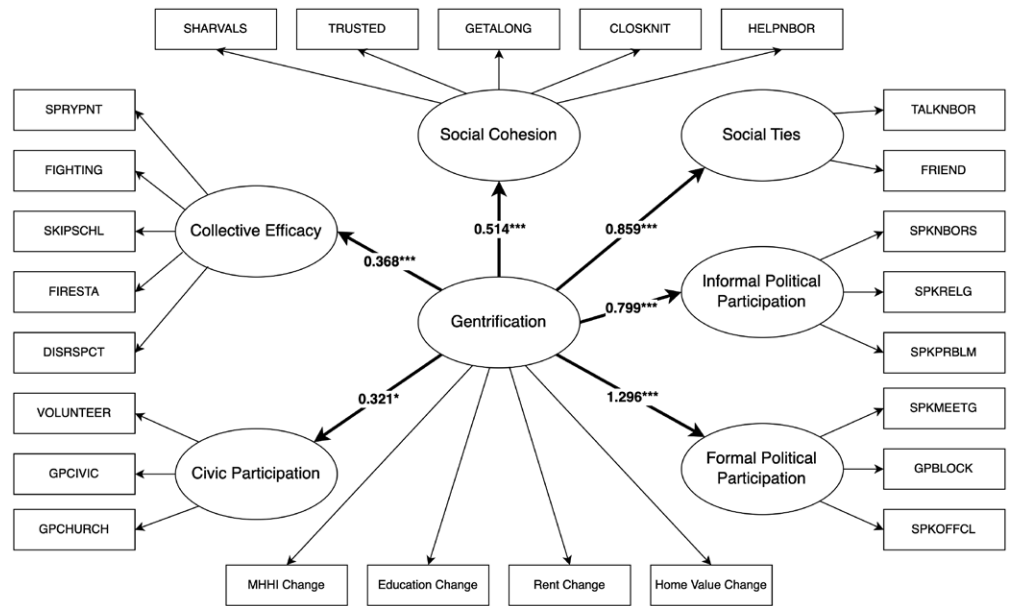


Figure 4. Structural Equation Model with Full Sample and Control Variables

their latent predictors. These figures do not substantively change – in either strength or significance – from the measurement model in Figure 1 across any of the models below. Also, in the path analysis depiction in Figure 4 I do not include control variable paths and coefficients – this would result in a diagram that is far too complicated to easily identify results. Instead, I include all path coefficients, along with their standard errors, in Table 3.

This initial model reveals positive, statistically significant associations between neighborhood gentrification and both satisfaction with the social environment and local political participation. Among

Table 3. Full Regression Estimates from Full Sample Structural Equation Model (Figure 4)

	Dependent Variable					
	Cohesion	Efficacy	Ties	Civic	Informal	Formal
Gentrification	0.514*** (0.102)	0.368*** (0.101)	0.859*** (0.111)	0.321* (0.13)	0.799*** (0.156)	1.296*** (0.151)
Race: Black	-0.140*** (0.018)	-0.067*** (0.018)	-0.134*** (0.02)	0.216*** (0.023)	0.276*** (0.027)	0.190*** (0.026)
Race: Asian	-0.019 (0.039)	-0.140*** (0.038)	-0.187*** (0.039)	-0.249*** (0.048)	-0.282*** (0.063)	-0.25*** (0.058)
Race: Latinx	0.005 (0.019)	-0.052** (0.019)	-0.035 (0.021)	-0.206*** (0.025)	-0.126*** (0.031)	-0.238*** (0.03)
Race: Other	-0.149*** (0.04)	-0.074 (0.039)	-0.059 (0.043)	0.068 (0.05)	0.104 (0.059)	0.019 (0.058)
Mid-Low Income	0.041* (0.018)	0.052** (0.018)	0.011 (0.02)	0.14*** (0.023)	-0.033 (0.029)	0.036 (0.027)
Mid-High Income	0.113*** (0.021)	0.133*** (0.021)	0.041 (0.022)	0.268*** (0.026)	0.065* (0.032)	0.206*** (0.03)
High Income	0.186*** (0.026)	0.233*** (0.026)	0.165*** (0.027)	0.489*** (0.031)	0.178*** (0.038)	0.402*** (0.035)
Age	0.008*** (0.00)	0.005*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.001)	0.005*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	0.01*** (0.001)
Disability	-0.069** (0.024)	-0.081** (0.024)	-0.035 (0.027)	-0.096** (0.032)	0.032 (0.036)	-0.033 (0.034)
Homeowner	0.218*** (0.017)	0.212*** (0.017)	0.265*** (0.018)	0.269*** (0.021)	0.327*** (0.025)	0.437*** (0.024)
Female	-0.053*** (0.015)	-0.001 (0.015)	-0.021 (0.016)	0.118*** (0.018)	0.004 (0.022)	0.072** (0.021)
CFI	0.987					
TLI	0.992					
RMSEA	0.035					
SRMR	0.041					

Note: N = ~17,500; reference category for race is white, for income is low income, for disability is 'no,' for homeowner is renter, and for sex is male; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

all urban respondents from lower-income neighborhoods, therefore, we can observe initial evidence for the social amenity and political mobilization hypotheses. As neighborhood gentrification intensifies, respondents' assessments of the social environment tend to grow more positive, and they tend to engage more with local civic, social, and political life. Here, gentrification appears to be most closely associated with respondents' political participation, both formal and informal, along with their formation of social ties.

In terms of control variables (see Table 3), most patterns align with findings in previous literature. Generally, Black respondents (and in certain regards, other racial minorities as well), those with lower household incomes, and those with disabilities tend to have more negative assessments of the neighborhood social environment. This should generally be attributed to racist, classist, and ableist structural biases in the formation of urban environments, like racial segregation and concurrent disinvestment in neighborhoods of color. Asian, Latinx, and lower-income households are also less likely to participate in local affairs than their white and/or higher-income peers. The exception to this pattern is that Black respondents are *more* likely than white respondents to be involved in civic organizations and political activism. Respondents also tend to participate more and are more satisfied with the social environment as they grow older, and homeowners demonstrate clearly higher levels of satisfaction and participation over renters in all categories, as expected. Sex has minor bearing on some factors – for instance, women are more likely to participate in civic and formal political organizations

and less likely to view their neighborhoods as cohesive. These control variable results generally hold across the multi-group models in the section below.

Differences across Racial, Income and Residency Length Groups

The general trends presented in the previous section depict relationships among all respondents in lower-income urban neighborhoods. As reviewed, however, scholars often express particular concern for certain vulnerable populations, such as low-income residents, long-timers, and racial minorities, and how they fare in gentrifying settings. In this section, therefore, I use multi-group SEM to split respondents based on these three categories, and observe how the associations differ.

I begin with race, examining residents grouped according to self-reported racial identity. Figure 5 depicts a series of path diagrams, each representing the focal relationships and regression path coefficients for one racial group. For ease of comparison, these results are also shown in Table 4. Model fit statistics are reported under the figure. Control variables are included in this model, save for race as this is instead used as grouping criteria. Due to space constraints, I do not report control variable coefficients as they are largely similar to those in Figure 4 and Table 3. Once again, I have simplified the graphic representation of the path diagram by removing the measurement model paths among latent variables and their observed variable predictors. These have not changed from Figures 1 and 4.

Immediately apparent is that, for the most part, white respondents report the closest association between gentrification and the social environment variables overall. The Black racial group retains a strong relationship with social ties only, and all significant associations disappear among Latinx residents. Racial minority groups, therefore, do not report higher levels of cohesion or efficacy as gentrification intensifies – even though their white peers do. Positive associations among gentrification and



Figure 5. Multi-Group Structural Equation Model by Respondent Racial Self-Categorization

Table 4. Focal Regression Estimates from Multi-Group Model by Respondent Racial Self-Categorization (Figure 5)

Dependent Variable	Racial Group		
	White N = ~8,000	Black N = ~4,300	Latinx N = ~3,700
Social Cohesion	0.669***	0.365	0.380
Collective Efficacy	0.619***	-0.095	0.315
Social Ties	1.022***	1.013***	0.259
Civic Participation	0.270	0.329	0.547
Informal Political Participation	0.917***	0.698*	0.907*
Formal Political Participation	2.042***	1.213***	1.407***

Note: independent variable is Gentrification; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

informal and formal forms of political participation, however, can be observed across all racial groups. Both of these associations are strongest among white residents, but hold generally across Black and Latinx groups as well.

Next, I turn to income level, dividing respondents into four quartile groups based on yearly household income, as compared to other respondents in the same MSA. Again, control variables are included but not reported here, save for income level as this is instead used as grouping criteria. Figure 6 and Table 5 provide the results for focal relationships only. For most dependent variables, the strongest positive associations with gentrification generally appear among the two lower-income groups. Save for social ties and formal participation, significant relationships entirely disappear among the highest earners.

This is surprising – based on previous theory, we might expect gentrification to be *least* well-received among poorer individuals. There is a possibility that the grouping is capturing lower-income (but still higher-social status) gentrifiers. However, grouping by education level instead of income failed to yield substantive results. What I propose is that understanding these findings requires an expansion of focus. Neighborhood inequality – solidified over many years of municipal practice and uneven development – structures the urban environment such that working-class areas have, generally, lower levels of social cohesion and community participation. This holds up in my data as well: estimated latent variable values for all six socio-political indicators are much lower among those in lower-income neighborhoods, as compared to those in higher-income neighborhoods. Therefore, it could be that gentrification has less of a positive impact on social life among higher-income respondents because their satisfaction and participation are already relatively high.

Finally, I group respondents by length of residency, using an MSA-relative quartile approach similar to the income groups. Figure 7 and Table 6 provide the results for focal relationships, with controls again included in the model but not reported here. Here, the results align more closely with what we might expect. It is the newest residents – those who have lived in their dwellings for the shortest periods of time – who report the strongest positive associations with gentrification in terms of social environment. These relationships are generally much weaker among the more long-term residency groups (though positive associations still exist for the longest-term residents). The gentrification process often involves the addition of commercial and recreational amenities that cater toward in-movers; therefore, it makes sense that we would see positive evaluations from this group – and to a lesser extent among long-time residents.

In terms of political participation, we find something of the opposite. The association between gentrification and informal means of neighborhood problem-solving is strongest among the longer-tenured residents, and there is no relationship at all among the shortest-tenured. A significant relationship with formal participation, however, exists among all groups – a pattern that is strongest among the second-longest group, but is nonetheless fairly strong across the board. We therefore observe a consistent association: as gentrification intensifies, residents become more politically active and engaged. Informal participation, which happens among neighbors, may be easier for those who have

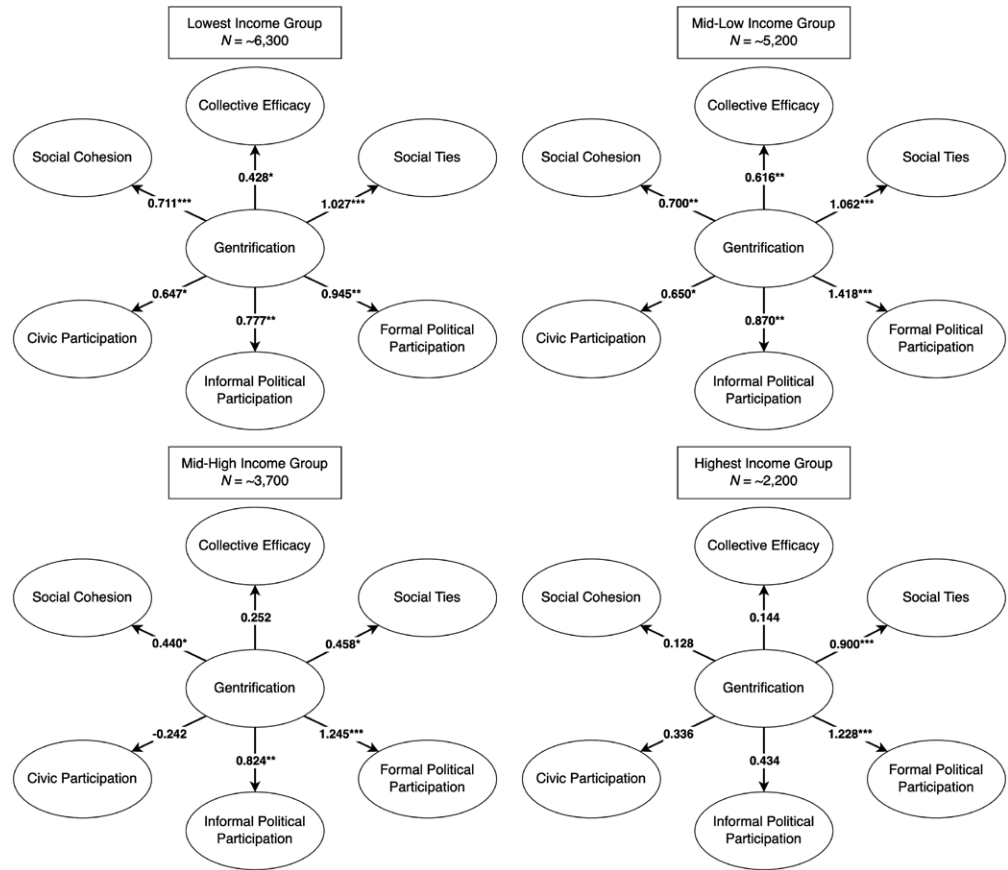


Figure 6. Multi-Group Structural Equation Model by MSA-Relative Household Income Quartile

Table 5. Focal Regression Estimates from Multi-Group Model by MSA-Relative Household Income Quartile (Figure 6)

Dependent Variable	Income Quartile			
	Lowest N = ~6,300	Mid-Low N = ~5,200	Mid-High N = ~3,700	Highest N = ~2,200
Social Cohesion	0.711***	0.700**	0.440*	0.128
Collective Efficacy	0.428*	0.616**	0.252	0.144
Social Ties	1.027***	1.062***	0.458*	0.900***
Civic Participation	0.647*	0.650*	-0.242	0.336
Informal Political Participation	0.777***	0.870**	0.824**	0.434
Formal Political Participation	0.945**	1.418***	1.245***	1.228***

Note: independent variable is Gentrification; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

lived in their homes longer and have had more time to establish relationships, where formal mechanisms might be more accessible to newcomers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Does gentrification represent a social amenity for the communities in which it takes place, or does it lead to social displacement? Politically, do residents engage or disengage when urban change takes place? Using data from the 2013 AHS, I demonstrate that the answers to these questions are complex



Figure 7. Multi-Group Structural Equation Model by MSA-Relative Length of Residency Quartile

Table 6. Focal Regression Estimates from Multi-Group Model by MSA-Relative Length of Residency Quartile (Figure 7)

Dependent Variable	Residency Quartile			
	Longest N = ~3,800	Mid-Long N = ~3,800	Mid-Short N = ~4,600	Shortest N = ~5,200
Social Cohesion	0.545*	0.020	0.499*	0.882***
Collective Efficacy	0.471*	0.287	0.198	0.525**
Social Ties	0.393***	0.727**	1.173***	0.926***
Civic Participation	0.342	0.216	0.502*	0.246
Informal Political Participation	1.091**	0.687*	0.825**	0.314
Formal Political Participation	0.984**	1.486***	1.193***	0.917**

Note: independent variable is Gentrification; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

yet distinctly patterned, split along a number of familiar axes related to social location – and, particularly, race. In this final section, I review my findings, further contextualize them, and point toward remaining questions and areas of debate.

Among all focal respondents, I find some support for the social amenity perspective – and find that lower-income residents tend to report the strongest positive associations between levels of neighborhood cohesion and gentrification. Given previous theoretical insight on the deleterious social impacts of gentrification on working-class communities, this result might strike some as surprising. Instead of

throwing away these previous conceptions, however, I believe that my findings make more sense when contextualized in terms of the detrimental social impacts of neighborhood-level inequality, concentrated poverty, and urban decline. Reflecting the work of scholars such as Wilson (1987) and Sampson (2012), I find that typical rates of social satisfaction are much lower in relatively low-income urban neighborhoods as compared to those in higher-income areas. This could be due to income-based inequities in ability to participate in activities and organizations – wealth generally affords more free time for such things. But these differences could also be attributed to structural and spatial inequalities in institutional investment of community-sustaining institutions. In a helpful schematic, Golash-Boza (2023) points out that in disadvantaged neighborhoods – particularly those that are racially marginalized – resources are invested in carceral responses to social problems, like policing, prisons, and other institutions that shatter a sense of community rather than build it. Meanwhile, whiter and wealthier neighborhoods receive life-sustaining investments in education, community-building, and employment opportunities. Despite ethnographic findings, it therefore becomes less surprising that neighborhoods with higher levels of gentrification – and therefore, perhaps, the recipients of these life-sustaining investments – overall also have higher levels of social satisfaction. These findings suggest that while studies continue to investigate the potential social impacts of gentrification, stagnant poverty and/or urban decline may be more socially deleterious.

But the social amenity perspective also has limits. The extent to which gentrification serves as a social amenity is tempered according to race (and to a lesser extent, length of residency). It is among white respondents that we find the strongest positive associations between gentrification and social environment. With the exception of social ties among Black respondents, these relationships disappear from statistical significance entirely among racial minority groups. Though the patterns are more complicated, this observation also generally holds as a social benefit for newer residents as opposed to longer-tenured ones. These results beg us to return to a question posed by Danley and Weaver (2018): who are contemporary, gentrified cities built for? Like other scholars, I identify that in gentrifying areas, the needs of long-time residents are not as likely to be prioritized, and amenities are geared more toward the interests of newcomers. It also appears that dominant forms of gentrification reflect the favored aesthetics and norms of interaction of white residents, as scholars such as Summers (2019) and Helmuth (2019) have pointed out. Gentrification can enhance the proliferation of “white space” (Anderson 2015), in which people of color feel alienated by microaggressions and dominant, white-centric forms of interaction. For instance, whiteness is often associated with attempts at spatial control – like calling the police or 311 – that often surveil or otherwise harm neighbors of color (Dahir et al. 2024; Doering 2020; Golash-Boza 2023; Walton 2021).

While I do not find evidence of social displacement in my data, it does appear that there are forms of gentrification-related community-building that people of color are excluded from. Interestingly, among Black respondents specifically, gentrification is associated with increased social ties formation but not with a more positive sense of social cohesion or collective efficacy. This pattern may suggest that gentrification bolsters *interaction* – perhaps having to do with new commercial establishments or decreases in violent crime – but not does not bolster a sense of *community*. Again, this may have to do with racial affect, and feelings of discomfort for Black residents among a newly white-dominant social environment. I find validation for a growing literature that seeks to measure and theorize gentrification as a racialized process, and encourage more work in this field in order to better understand these racially disparate results. In an age of widespread gentrification in settings across the United States – and particularly a noted growth in white influx to neighborhoods of color – it is important to understand who is left out of community development and why. Future work could more specifically parse out the social and political dynamics of co-ethnic gentrification scenarios, as this is beyond my scope here.

My results indicate broad support for the political mobilization perspective. As opposed to the social environment variables, respondents within all social location groups report strong positive associations between gentrification and political participation. As neighborhood gentrification intensifies, residents of all stripes tend to become more involved in local affairs and problem-solving efforts. There are some differences in terms of *how* people participate – for instance, higher-income and shorter-term residents seem to gravitate toward formal means of participation like neighborhood meetings, while lower-income and longer-term residents report more informal means, such as

interpersonal conversation with neighbors. This might reflect the dynamics of who is afforded greater access to certain types of influence. Regardless, the results draw attention to the multi-faceted and diverse ways that everyday people seek to assert agency and maintain control over the broad social forces that shape their environment.

This agency has not received as much attention in the literature on gentrification as the factors that drive and perpetuate gentrification. In a 2016 piece that lays out an agenda for gentrification research, Brown-Saracino highlights several underexplored areas, and dedicates a section to “resistance.” She notes that scholars should aim to produce more work on “everyday actors’ concerns and of interventions they seek to make” (Brown-Saracino 2016:223). More generally, sociology as a discipline often suffers from the same deficit: extensive focus on the structures that shape peoples’ lives and perpetuate inequality, but relatively little focus on how people try to shape these structures in turn. My findings provide validation for such interventions in the literature. I have identified that across contexts and social groups, gentrification is associated with political mobilization. Qualitative research or more fine-grained survey assessments could be used to further identify what this mobilization looks like, its effectiveness, and what residents want from urban change. This will require getting involved with and observing not just the highly vocal and visible activists that sociologists tend to gravitate toward. I show here that many participate in informal, interpersonal ways – requiring us to also think more about how everyday people show up as well (see Golio 2024a).

Sociologists have long maintained concern over the strength of communities, and the trust, belonging, and meaningful social interaction present among those who live in proximity. In this paper, I have investigated these concerns in the context of gentrification, a major phenomenon shaping a large number of American communities. I find, most significantly, that these concerns reflect lines of social demarcation – particularly, in terms of the racialized impact of urban development. I have done this by attempting to bridge a noted methodological divide (Brown-Saracino 2017), taking a largely qualitative concept and modeling it quantitatively. In doing so, I provide a cross-context glimpse into the extent of socio-political impacts related to gentrification, and also a needed lens on stratification across social groups. It is my hope that both scholars and urban practitioners will continue to include these considerations in future work on community, cohesion, and participation.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary material is available online at *Social Problems* (<https://academic.oup.com/socpro>).

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