

# Gentrification, the issue of today life

Government



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Ever since the 1960s, there has been an influx of high-income populations moving into urban areas from the suburbs. This phenomenon was coined 'gentrification' by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe "the movement of upscale (mostly white) settlers into rundown (mostly minority) neighborhoods" (Hampson). Proposition 555 has stated that in order to increase government funding and provide citizens a better life with a cleaner environment and safer community, the process of gentrification would require the destruction of some old and unsafe houses. Since then, this policy has received mixed reception from all walks of life.

Protagonists, on one side, consider gentrification as the solution to current hard urban issues. Antagonists, on the other side, believe that it causes severe poor-displacement. Debates seem to be endless, yet the whole society is changing due to the great impact of gentrification: luxury condos replacing once deteriorating houses, streets becoming cleaner, and crime rates declining significantly, thus, consolidating my strong support for Proposition 555. To begin with, the first and foremost upside of gentrification is economic improvements in the neighborhood because it boosts up the use of urban land and attracts more business investments.

Brooklyn and the Bronx, two of the five boroughs of New York City, are two typical examples. Urban renewal in Brooklyn, also known as 'brownstoning', has encouraged a huge wave of investment: \$300 million from the city and \$3.5 billion from private investors (Browdie). While the former has been invested in Brooklyn Bridge Park's construction, the latter has yielded "7.8 million square feet of new residential, retail and commercial space, including

26 apartment complexes, four hotels, and a glassy shopping complex” (Browdie).

In regards to the Bronx, the gentrifying process has brought to the region a new appearance. The notorious neighborhood, which used to be considered off limits to investors due to commercial waste, crimes, and violence, has become “ a diamond in the rough, being discovered” (Magistro). Today, the Bronx has numerous remarkable attractions like the Bronx Zoo—one of the world’s largest metropolitan zoos, the New York Botanical Garden, Wave Hill, excellent subway service, retail strip malls, and affluent bedroom communities (Magistro).

In South Bronx, Majora Carter, a famous urban revitalization strategist says that the removal of Sheridan Expressway and construction of Lafayette Avenue has made this area appeal to stakeholders for parkland, affordable housing and local economic development (Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto). Once urban land is in use, it signals huge economic improvements, especially in the tourism industry, job developments, and real estate. Recent studies conducted by Rutgers University have found that in New Jersey, historic preservation, part of the state gentrification policies, has significantly profited the state’s tourism.

Besides 2, 316 jobs created annually in this industry, New Jersey has earned \$15 million in state and local taxes, \$16 million in GDP, and \$432 million for the economy (Listokin and Lahr). Moreover, in restructured neighborhoods, new projects associated with job training have emerged to meet the investors’ demands. For example, the South Bronx community is running the Bronx Ecological Stewardship Training project to “ seed the area with green

collar jobs” in the fields of ecological restorations so that its people will be qualified for these well-paying jobs (Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto).

As a result of being employed, a person gains a greater opportunity of sustainable income and will tend to purchase a house to settle into family life. In other words, gentrification is an impetus to the local economy because it stimulates the use of urban lands, opens more job opportunities, and encourages real estate. Along with economic improvements, a great number of social achievements have been accomplished due to gentrification, especially in community-safety increase. Prior to redevelopment, low-income areas had to cope with a lot of crimes and violence such as gang shootings, drugs dealings and prostitution.

However, gentrification has improved the people’s safety significantly. For example, according to Betty Baye, a columnist of The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky, New York was once appalled by a Dominican group of gangsters named Jheri Curls: They traded tons of cocaine and shot anyone complaining about their illegal business. She calls gentrification as “ a new gang in town,” ousting the Jheri Curl from their old stomping grounds. The openings of “ amenities as river views, parks, large rooms and convenience to public transportation [...have replaced... grand old buildings that long were the domain of poor folks on rent control, buildings that are being reborn as luxury co-ops and condos,” Baye explains. Sharing her views, researchers from the Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts Amherst, add that the building of new amenities prevents up to 45 percent of homicides and another 60 percent of robberies (Papachristos, Smith, Scherer, and

Fugiero 225). Accordingly, gentrifying the neighborhoods helps lessen crimes, providing their residents with a safer community.

In addition to economic and social achievements, gentrification also brings environmental justice to the redeveloped neighborhoods. Prior to renewal, people living around these areas encountered many health problems because of pollution and contamination issues that accumulated for many years. South Bronx, for example, used to be a location for the city's commercial waste in sewage treatment and the food industry's byproducts. Carter says a black person has a greater chance of being forced to live in an air-polluted area or within a walking distance of chemical facility in comparison with a white person (Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto).

As a result, diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and asthma have plagued the community for many years and damaged the future generation (Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto). In other words, in non-gentrified neighborhoods, along with economic and social degradation, environmental injustice also drives these communities into even worse situations. However, once gentrification policies are implemented, the people's health can greatly improve: air gets cleaner, water turns fresher and the environment becomes healthier and greener.

In South Bronx, its inhabitants witnessed the inauguration of Hunts Point Riverside Park, the first waterfront park that the community had had in more than 60 years (Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto). Therefore, it is understandable that gentrification provides a boost to environmental quality. Advocates of anti-gentrification usually argue that urban renewal is a one-sided benefit—profiting the white while harming the poor. Nonetheless, <https://assignbuster.com/gentrification-the-issue-of-today-life/>

studies conducted by Lance Freeman, an assistant professor of urban planning at Columbia University, suggest that there is merely a slight connection between urban renewal and displacement (Hampson).

He says that in gentrified neighborhoods, the chance of a poor being dislocated is only 0.5% greater in comparison with a non-gentrified one (Hampson). Freeman believes that “although higher costs sometimes force poor residents to leave gentrif[ied] neighborhoods, other changes—more jobs, safer streets, better trash pickup—encourage them to stay” (Hampson). Besides coming to the same conclusion, researchers at the University of Pittsburgh and Duke University, also show that black householders with high school degrees account for 33% of the total neighborhood income, 13% greater than that of white householders (Kiviat). In conclusion, as urban planner Duany says, gentrification has proved to be “the rising tide that lifts all boats” because it provides an effective solution to the economy, social issues, as well as environmental justice that benefit all social classes. However, there are always two sides of a coin, and the story of gentrification is not an exception. The biggest issue of gentrification, as many antagonists believe, is the poor displacement.

It is obvious that as a city is redeveloped and attracts more investors, housing prices will soar, making it difficult for old residents to manage to get by. Research conducted by Newman and Wyly of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies shows that residents of a gentrified city, especially seniors, find it hard to live when housing prices increase while their incomes stay (4). In the long run, this produces “exclusionary displacement,” “a

process in which neighborhoods become off-limits, forcing lower-income residents to look elsewhere for housing” (1, 2).

Adding to the housing burdens, other negative elements such as landlord harassment, evictions, and daily expenses drive former inhabitants out of their neighborhoods. So what is the solution to the problem? To answer this question, it is worthwhile to first acknowledge that gentrification is a natural process, meaning there is no way to stand against it, especially on the poor side. Sadly speaking, gentrification remains a dirty word to some people as it sounds—its origin dates back from the word “ gentry,” meaning a “ noble person. Baye explains that gentrification “ may seem to some as nothing but the inevitable circle of life” because many of the upper settlers (mostly white) claim that those gentrified neighborhoods are their “ rightful inheritance,” left for the colored by their predecessors as they fled to the suburbs. Looking negatively at urban renewal, it benefits the white folks; they havemoney, and thus, have the rights to demand higher services. Looking positively at urban renewal, these folks are doing good things after all, “ for there is nothing more unhealthy for a city than a monoculture ofpoverty” (Duany).

This leaves the only question: Can we gentrify the right way? Fortunately, there are numerous solutions that have been proposed by strategists, urban planners and experts in the field. To solve housing problem, New York has built a shelter system to support displaced residents (Newman and Wyly). Moreover, Duany insists that in order to avoid overpricing, urban renewal needs to be built as a long-term policy, tested and modified many times to fit

the particular neighborhood so that it doesn't negatively affect the community.

Carter has come up with a model called the triple bottom line that seems to be a solution for the long run. She explains that her model can produce sustainable development because it " has the potential to create positive returns from all concerned: developers, government and the community where [the] projects go up" (Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto). In addition, I propose the use of government power on taxing: The local government can weigh the impact of gentrification through data, statistics and surveys so that it can modify the tax base imposed on every household.

No matter what solutions are proposed, there seems to be a general consensus among experts about the role of government: It can act as a peace broker to reconcile any hostility provoked by the misunderstanding between the rich and the poor. In summary, Proposition 555, whose process is to rebuild the old, unsafe towns and cities, is a good process for neighborhood residents who want to have better lives. Although gentrification sometime causes the poor to be displaced due to housing burdens and expenses, its benefits assist in solving urban issues.

It provides a stimulus to the economy through the use of urban lands for business purposes, a safer society by clearing gang violence and a healthier environment by building public parks. To overcome its downsides, a number of useful and practical ideas have been brought about by many experts, ranging from shelter systems and tax modification to government regulation. The fight in favor of urban renewal, as Carter says, is the fight that " we have nothing to lose and everything to gain" (Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto).

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