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Spring 2024

Gentrification: Colonialism In Plain Sight?

The significance of gentrification and its complications.

Abstract

The main focus of this research paper is to not only bring awareness to what gentrification represents but the history of it. Where it came from plus how and why it was implemented. I will dig deep on how gentrification was brought to be. Not only that but I will bring up reference points from scholars that have attended Oxford University, Harvard University, and directors of high profile economic organizations. Overall, this paper will consist of three topics intertwining colonialism and gentrification. These three topics are economic exploitation, cultural hegemony, & social disruption. As well as gentrification you do see these three involved with colonialism. At first glance gentrification is sought to be a horrible thing but a lot could be said as to how beneficial it can be. That is the sole purpose of this research I have acquired for this paper. Not only that but I'd like to bring awareness of the consequences of this choice of method that is constantly used. Just as there are lots of benefits from gentrification there are lots of cons.

Terms

Economic Exploitation: The theft of economic power in all class-based societies

Cultural Hegemony: The dominance of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who shape the culture of that society

Social Disruption: The analyzation of social life in a community setting

Gentrification: The process of renovating a lower class out of a community and replacing it with a higher class of housing, opportunity, and establishments

Colonialism: The practice of acquiring political control over another country bringing in residents and exploiting the area economically

Gentrification is a process in which the government tries to develop a lower class community and upgrade the resources around it, so it may become a middle class community. In London during the 1960's a German- British sociologist by the name of Ruth Glass, invented what we know today as gentrification. According to the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, "The gentrification process is usually the result of increasing attraction to an area by people of wealth spilling over from neighboring cities, towns, or neighborhoods" (Richardson). Gentrification is a common topic for urban planning whenever there is a community with a low income rate, housing, etc. The government is able to set up much better resources in the area but since the community is in such a poor environment, there is no balance.

The income from the retail establishments of stores nearby are put into the cities in need of it so that resources are properly put in sync. According to The Washington Post, "It implies the arrival of selfish developers, investors and corporate chains replacing locally owned, independent businesses — and a flood of well-off white people who inevitably push out the poor black and brown people who were there before" (Van Tol). People are forced out of their community due to affordability. Gentrification is a process in which people can sometimes be afraid to grasp. Some people may not know of it, may not know how it works or even the benefits and harms that come from it. I believe the idea behind gentrification is a beautiful thing but the actuality of it being done the right way is very slim.

The people that have to move due to rent being raised usually end up back in high poverty rated communities. To elaborate I'd like to mention another quote from The Washington Post stating, "Yes, gentrification often pushes people out of their neighborhoods. The analysis, by researchers at the organization lead by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, found that at least 135,000 black and Hispanic residents were displaced from their neighborhoods during the period we studied" (Van Tol). The outcome of it is usually horrific in some way that affects the people in the community or the economy. The community that gentrification has to take place in is minority ruled, so even though the city is doing a good thing, families are run out of their homes because rent raises when gentrification takes place.

Gentrification is a common theme for urban planning. According to the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, "The gentrification process is usually the result of increasing attraction to an area by people of wealth spilling over from neighboring cities, towns, or neighborhoods" (Richardson). Basically, whenever there is a community with a low income rate, housing, etc. It may not seem up to par to be equivalent to a middle class society.

The government sets up much better resources in areas that are gentrified or undergoing the process to be gentrified but since the community is in such a poor environment there is no balance. It's almost as if the people of certain communities are set up for failure. With rent rising due to the gentrification process the minorities are beaten both ways. The price of living becomes too much to handle as well as establishments being placed with prices never seen in the community before. Also, according to the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, "This poor city is surrounded by the temples of the new American economy that has, in nearly every way imaginable, passed it by" (Richardson). One can't get a job at these new resources that are being built and have to deal with rent rising at the same time. That's why in the bay area you see a lot of people who commute. It saves the cost of living.

The benefits and harms of gentrification go tit for tat. The structure in which gentrification was made was to bring a lower class community up to standards of a middle class community. The people in the community should have better resources and opportunities to get on the path they need to be on to better their current state. According to The New York Times, "The old-school gentrification of the 20th century, while harmful, wasn't all bad. It made streets safer, created jobs and brought fresh vegetables to the corner store" (Henry). Earlier in time, gentrification was an all around benefit. People would barely be run out of their hometowns as well as crime rate, and poverty rates going down. So you can most likely guarantee people are not going to run out, and or miss out on job opportunities etc.

So, the idea behind the concept of gentrification may be fine, it's just that the results don't go accordingly all the time. Gentrification can be for a good cause and a bad effect at the same time. People miss out on better job opportunities because they have to be able to provide rent. This causes a shift for the people in the community who are

already in a situation where they struggle to pay the rent. The job that they have is aligned to how they pay their rent so if rent rises an extra job will have to come into play or extra shift hours would be needed. At the same time, it is also a great thing because now people in this community are able to rely on better resources being built around them. It's just that the government has made it more difficult for the people in communities to do so.

I've touched base on gentrification and the effects it has on people but what about the gentrifiers themselves? Are they considered villains? I wouldn't consider gentrifiers as bad people or villains at all. In fact, most people are under the impression that gentrification consists of European Americans but in reality there are a lot of colored gentrifiers moving into other low income neighborhoods of color. I'd like to make a personal connection due to the fact that I have witnessed and have been a gentrifier myself. I never knew I was under gentrification in my jurisdiction. Due to that my mother and I would commute from East Palo Alto California to Stockton California. In fact, not only was my mother and I doing this but I had many friends in elementary and middle school whose parents did the same thing. I thought that it was the norm of people in poverty to be honest. Growing up I had to move quite a few times due to rent being too expensive. Whole time I was going from city to city because of gentrification.

Now, a journalist by the name of John O'Sullivan described gentrification as the right to "overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions" (Sullivan). Since the 1980's gentrification has been labeled as a metaphor of colonialism. I never thought much of colonialism but when you go over the definition of it, one can see the similarities between the two. Colonialism is a policy or practice which acquires full or partial control over another country, placing settlers, and exploiting it economically. When I think of colonialism I think of gentrification as well just on a much smaller scale. I say this because according to a journal written by Johnathan Wharton out of Oxford university, "Gentrification not only usurps local and economic power to newer and often wealthier residents, there are also implied class and racial components attached to it as well" (Wharton). This speaks volumes to me because before race and class are explained as key components, all I could think of are the local institutes being seized by wealthier chains of command. In a sense this is partially gentrification

because although nothing is taken illegally, people and companies are moved by force due to affordability issues with constant rent changes.

Colonialism according to the National Geographic states, “It occurs when one nation subjugates another, conquering its population and exploiting it, often while forcing its own language and cultural values upon its people” (Blakemore). At one point a vast amount of the world’s nations were colonized by Europeans. So, some of the key areas where colonialism has had a profound influence include economic exploitation, cultural hegemony, and social disruption. These three beneficiaries attest to how similar gentrification and colonialism are. I’d like to include the fact that gentrification was implemented after colonialism as well. Is gentrification just colonialism on a much smaller scale? To figure out how similar the two are, I’d like to understand if and how gentrification includes the three beneficiaries I mentioned.

Is gentrification for economic gain?

According to Dr. Rachel Meltzer the chair of Harvard’s Urban Economics Graduate School of Design & Pooya Ghorbani a Principal Economist at the New York State Division of Housing states, “Gentrification has brought economic prosperity to places that had not witnessed it in some time. It also has presented challenges to those who could not afford to sustain the rising rents and costs of living that tend to accompany gentrification” (Meltzer, Ghorbani). They also mentioned that since the 1970-90’s many urban areas have experienced drastic comebacks. Not to mention the war on drugs which took a turn on the U.S when president Richard Nixon was in office. According to the leadership conference on civil and human rights, “Nixon Declared a War on Drugs, telling Congress that drug addiction had become “a national emergency” and that drug abuse was now “public enemy number one.” Following this announcement, Nixon began proposing strict measures for drug-related crimes, including mandatory minimum sentences for both drug possession and distribution” (Pascual). From 1980 to about 2000 there were 50,000 to 400,000 drug related cases in low income neighborhoods. Change was very much needed and many cases of gentrification took place because of this. So, yes this very much so is an economic gain gentrification provides. Gentrification was created to redevelop urban communities that previously became economically depressed. Due to

that problem the demographic undergoes a new development, property increases, which ultimately attracts residents and consumers.

The significance of cultural hegemony

Next, I am going to talk about cultural hegemony and how it correlates with gentrification. Cultural hegemony is when one culture establishes dominance over others. This is often achieved through economic or political power. Does that sound familiar? The Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci reflected on the concept of cultural hegemony on numerous occasions. He detailed that the ideology of cultural hegemony was Karl Marx's theory that the dominant ideology of society reflects the beliefs and interests of the ruling class. According to the former Director of Healthcare Economics at Optum, Ashley Crossman states, "Gramsci argued that consent to the rule of the dominant group is achieved by the spread of ideologies—beliefs, assumptions, and values—through social institutions such as schools, churches, courts, and the media, among others" (Crossman). These are all essential institutions that are valued in society still to this day. Schools, churches, and many more organizations that play a key role in how society works. Eventually they are all determined whether or not they need to be improved. Positive cultural hegemony can be installed under a situation where the dominant culture, all the beliefs, & organizations utilize the perspectives of the oppressed. Not so much downplay or disregard anything people in the community put forward to better the community.

The correlation between Social Disruption & Gentrification

Lastly, we have social disruption and how it correlates with gentrification. One thing that is very common amongst gentrifiers is understanding to coexist in their new neighborhood. Living in a new neighborhood brings new cultural backgrounds, and different lifestyles. According to *Gentrification and the impacts of displacement on public housing tenants* written by Alan Morris, "Interviewees spoke of deep sadness and anxiety at the thought of leaving what they considered a unique and genuine community. Residents who had moved told of their isolation and melancholy at having lost their local social network. The research shows that the human cost of policies and not revenue should always be the central consideration" (Morris). When gentrification takes place we think of the new establishments being built such as apartments, homes, and organizations. We never talk about the people forced out due to affordability. Think about

living in one low income neighborhood and then being forced to move to another one. That's when loss of cultural identity starts to take place. Those who have deep ties to an area may have this sense of feeling.

Overall I believe the information I have acquired about gentrification is just like colonialism but on a much smaller scale. Gentrification is a process not everyone is a fan of. Like I mentioned on the first page, gentrification is a process intended for a good cause but is just done in the wrong manner. Just like positive cultural hegemony there should be positive gentrification. Instead of forcing residents out because of rent, how about there be programs helping them find a place similar to the situation they were just in. Not just anyone but if anything is signed off on a new location that is planned to be gentrified, the people who signed off should sign a new document exclaiming how residents will be helped finding a new place to call home. Doing this would help with the three beneficiaries I mentioned earlier in the text.

To conclude this paper I'd like to mention that the information I displayed throughout the text elucidates that the process of colonialism & gentrification is based around urban planning. All through urban planning economic exploitation, cultural hegemony, and social disruption can be seen throughout the process of both gentrification and colonialism. Economic exploitation is exposed through gentrification because prosperity in places that have never seen it are then exposed to it. We then have cultural hegemony which is cultural dominance over another. We generally see this when the new residents that are placed in an area that is getting gentrified. From there this may or may not create social disruption. Social disruption and gentrification go hand to hand due to the fact that it widens social inequality, displaces residents, and alters neighborhoods. The characteristics of neighborhoods change when gentrification takes place. Colonialism and gentrification both require massive transformations when all three beneficiaries are involved.

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LOC #6 : Demonstrate the ability to accomplish communicative goals (self-efficacy)

LOC #9: Influence public discourse

LOC #8 : Utilize communication to embrace difference

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