

'A Literal Necessity to be Re-Placed': A Rejoinder to the Gentrification Debate

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Abstract

This rejoinder begins and ends with some remarks on the gentrification strategies taking place in post-Katrina New Orleans, and responds to and builds on the commentaries by outlining, first, how the eviction of critical perspectives from gentrification research has continued, second, how displacement must be understood as multifaceted and contextual, and third, how urban researchers have become seduced by the rewards of claiming 'policy relevance'. It concludes by offering some thoughts on the state of resistance to gentrification, and how much more research is needed not just on working-class experiences of gentrification, but on how people fight for their right to place in the gentrifying city.

[T]o deprive people of their territory, their community or their home, would seem at first sight to be a heinous act of injustice. It would be like taking away any other source of basic need-satisfaction, on which people depend absolutely . . . But this experience is not simply deprivation: there is *a literal necessity to be re-placed*. People who have lost their place, for one reason and another, must be provided with or find another. There is no question about it. People need it. They just do (Smith, 1994: 152, emphasis added).

On the morning of 20 December 2007, New Orleans City Council voted in favour of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) HOPE VI¹ plan to demolish over 4,500 public housing units damaged by the floodwaters that followed Hurricane Katrina, and replace them with 'mixed-income' housing. Locked out of their homes for more than two years, many residents of these housing units (along with activists that constitute the city's *Coalition to Stop the Demolition*) arrived at New Orleans City Hall to make their views clear to city officials, only to find themselves locked out of the meeting where the voting was taking place. Behind the residents stood horse-mounted police, and behind the large metal gates keeping them out of the building were many more heavily armed officers. Duncan Plaza, adjacent to City Hall, has for some time now been a significant homeless encampment for many people displaced by the 2005 tragedy, and many Plaza residents came over to show their support for the protestors' cause. In desperation at being refused admittance, the expanding group shook and broke the gates, and the police reacted with pepper spray, stun guns and batons, quickly beating back anyone near the entrance, including several female senior citizens. According to the police, 15 arrests were made, nine people were injured, four of whom were taken to hospital, although unofficial statements suggest these numbers were far higher.²

Thanks to Sophie Bond, Neil Brenner, Win Curran, Mark Davidson, Kathe Newman, Kate Swanson, Justus Uitermark, Alan Walks and Elvin Wyly for their constructive feedback on an earlier draft.

1 Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere.

2 For extensive coverage, including photo and video footage, visit <http://neworleans.indymedia.org/>. See also <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/Americas/7156364.stm>

A vastly different American urban landscape is being created by HOPE VI, an aggressive state-sponsored gentrification strategy that has led to the large-scale displacement of predominantly black working-class people from central city neighbourhoods across the country (Hammel, 2006), gutting cities of a vital political base in the process (Lowenstein and Loury, 2008). It is legitimized via the 'neoliberal newspeak' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001) of poverty 'deconcentration' (see Crump, 2002; Goetz, 2003) and creating 'mixed-income communities' on the same site, underwritten by the policy presumption that the labour and consumption practices of middle-class 'role models' will either rub off on the supposedly idle 'underclass' rollocking in their 'concentrated poverty', or will prove so alienating to them that they will leave the city (probably the desired policy outcome). HOPE VI (and New Orleans City Council) in fact treats the urban poor as parasites³ — requiring a (middle-class) host to survive and doomed to failure without it — and continues the policy and scholarly tradition of ignoring the structural and institutional factors behind the problems of marginalized communities. Gentrification sweeps the 'badly behaved' urban poor from sight, and in the case of New Orleans is becoming the official post-Katrina reconstruction strategy. It is connected to efforts to create a new global city on the Gulf Coast, housing and catering primarily to Richard Florida's creative class (Hurricane Richard, still raging today, hit the city just before Katrina, where he was invited to keynote at a civic attempt to re-brand the city the 'Port of Cool'), and welcoming even more tourists than before (Fox Gotham, 2007). Most troubling of all, 'mixed-income' gentrification, American style, is proving highly influential in urban policy research circles in the UK. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation recently had a 'Mixed-Income Communities' research programme, and commissioned a scholar from the Brookings Institution to compare US and UK policies on 'mixing' (Berube, 2005), and the ensuing report, in addition to recommending HOPE VI⁴ as 'best practice' and arguing that 'neighbourhood change is inevitable' (*ibid.*: 48), concluded that 'the pursuit of mixed communities must be tailored to local market conditions' (*ibid.*: 54).

I would like to extend my thanks to all six scholars who have provided thoughtful commentaries on my essay (hereafter *Eviction*), and I offer this rejoinder in the spirit of constructive engagement and political commitment. As the violent confrontation in New Orleans shows, much is still the matter with gentrification, and it matters much that scholarship takes notice. Contrary to Lance Freeman's view, for those fighting for their homes, for their right to live in New Orleans, *for their literal necessity to be re-placed*, on the gentrification front the world *does* cleave neatly into 'greedy capitalists' promoting the process and community activists resisting it.

The eviction continues

Freeman claims that I do 'not persuasively show that the scholarly literature on gentrification has indeed become less critical', and also that most of the articles I cite in *Eviction* are 'rather neutral in their description of gentrification'. Upon close examination of these claims, and of his recently published book on gentrification (Freeman, 2006), it is clear that Freeman is becoming such an apologist for the process that it is not surprising he would see less intense apologies as 'neutral'. Furthermore, given the portrait of neoliberalism he paints in his book, his critique is to be expected:

- 3 I am most grateful to a very talented undergraduate at Bristol, Dominic Wright, for this observation. Despite the fact that these 'parasites' have survived without the middle classes, the implication from policy is that they are now entirely dependent on the social and cultural practices of their hosts.
- 4 On HOPE VI, Berube acknowledged the fact that the policy does not guarantee original residents a 'right to return' to the redeveloped community, but offered this perspective: 'Because most projects are redeveloped at lower densities, and involve a reduction in public housing units, such a right would be impractical' (2005: 42).

There is nothing in the broad package of policies called neoliberal . . . that precludes setting aside resources for the poor. If the goal is to make the spaces that some of the poor inhabit more livable, it would seem the neoliberal policy regime has the potential to accomplish this goal (*ibid.*: 204).

If Freeman and any others remain unconvinced about the eviction of critical perspectives, I refer them to the publication of the most recent collection of articles on gentrification, a special issue of *Environment and Planning A* (2007, vol. 39, issue 1) entitled 'Extending gentrification', which is something of a triumph for the strengthening pro-gentrification movement. The guest editorial argues that gentrification research has 'a similar historical biography' to *Star Trek* (Smith and Butler, 2007: 2), and even inserts *Star Trek's* (in)famous split infinitive into its title: 'Conceptualising the sociospatial diversity of gentrification: "to boldly go" into contemporary gentrified spaces, the "final frontier"?' Not only does this title cast aside critical insights that demonstrate how 'frontier' rhetoric legitimises gentrification and 'justifies monstrous incivility in the heart of the city' (Smith, 1996: 18), the editors' summary of the special issue leaves readers with the impression that gentrification is not even a focus for politicization:

Broadly speaking, we would argue that gentrification has now become a customary tool for bringing together a range of relations (economic, social, and cultural) across a wide variety of sociospatial contexts . . . [G]entrification . . . has also put on some 'middle-aged spread', and perhaps lost the academic bite that exemplified the lively exchanges of the 1980s and 1990s (Smith and Butler, 2007: 7).

For these authors, gentrification is now not something which has genuine political purchase, nor something that has real (and often terrifying) meaning for marginal urban communities; it is rather something we can use to fuse together a rather abstract set of economic, social and cultural relations wherever we choose. Of the eleven articles in the special issue, *only one* (Uitermark *et al.*, 2007⁵) adopts a consistently critical perspective on the process. A number of the articles go so far as to argue against using the term 'gentrification' when the findings presented suggest it is entirely appropriate. For example, a study of demographic change in Bologna (Buzar *et al.*, 2007) demonstrates trends of young professional in-migration to the inner city, but then argues that these trends 'cannot be subsumed under the notion of gentrification because they do not involve major housing renovation' (*ibid.*: 64). The authors prefer another word, 'reurbanization', stripping the process they are describing of its social class character, meaning and implications. A similar argument comes from an article by Martin Boddy (2007), looking at luxury new-build housing developments in Bristol:

The conclusion must be that the concept [gentrification] has been stretched beyond the point at which it has continued usefulness and distinction . . . The occupiers of these new residential developments are from relatively better off strata, provision of affordable housing has been limited, and developments have had little if any positive impact on deprived neighbourhoods . . . It does not help, however, to define them under the banner of gentrification (*ibid.*: 103).

In both these studies⁶ the 'residentialisation' of the urban core by the middle classes is treated as a broadly positive trend, given a glossy finish through frequent appeals to 'diversity', and therefore has to be better than the 'alternative' of middle-class out-

5 This is an excellent analysis of gentrification as a state strategy in the Netherlands that demonstrates how it undermines *its own stated goal* of enhancing social cohesion.

6 Both articles insist that gentrification as a concept should go no further than the fine empirical details of Ruth Glass's original identification of the process in Islington in 1964 — an argument that conveniently ignores her critical perspective on class transformation. Particularly astonishing is that Boddy once co-edited a very influential book called *Local Socialism?* (Boddy and Fudge, 1984) where class conflict took centre-stage in a fascinating analysis of labour municipal councils in the UK.

migration.⁷ Furthermore, we are told that there are lessons for policy (the funders of the research and the presumed audience for these conclusions) in the form of ‘managing’ these trends (an issue I will touch upon shortly).

Hamnett and Whitelegg (2007: 122) round off their article on loft conversions in Clerkenwell, London by claiming that they have uncovered ‘a clear example of gentrification without displacement’, but *in the same sentence* say that there are ‘growing feelings of relative deprivation on the part of existing residents who have seen traditional working men’s cafes and pubs replaced by swish restaurants, wine bars, kitchen shops, and florists’.⁸ Why would these two scholars not see this ‘replacement’ as *displacement*? Chris Allen is probably correct in his commentary to attribute the continuing eviction of critical perspectives to ‘an epistemic ignorance born of the privilege that the academic nobility enjoy’. I was also struck by his remark that:

the academic nobility would struggle to contain their disbelief if one were to suggest that we must do something to stop gentrification because *somebody* wrote an anti-gentrification slogan on a wall . . . because the author of the slogan would not be a social scientist and therefore an ill-informed speculator.

When this is placed alongside Freeman’s dismissal of the comments posted on my website as providing an ‘incomplete’ picture of the process, ignoring the ‘totality of gentrification’, Allen’s words become even more powerful.

Kate Shaw perceptively remarks that ‘people do see what they want to see’. This is exemplified by the hugely influential (in neoliberal urban policy and right-wing blogger circles) study by Jacob Vigdor (2002), cited by Freeman as part of his ongoing attempt to show that gentrification can be a collective urban good. Vigdor’s contribution, as Freeman reminds us, is entitled ‘Does gentrification harm the poor?’ — probably the most stunning example of an economist asking a rhetorical question since Cutler and Glaeser’s (1997) ‘Are ghettos good or bad?’. Vigdor’s conclusion — one he seems almost desperate to reach — is that gentrification in Boston does not harm ‘many’ low-income people, and may well benefit most of them. Typical of the positivist garb of quantitative policy-driven research using government housing databases, Vigdor (2002: 161) dismisses qualitative evidence of gentrification causing harm in the same city as

- 7 They are in distinguished company. Step forward eminent urban sociologist Douglas Massey (2002: 174–5): ‘I have always thought that complaints about gentrification are fundamentally hypocritical. On the one hand, liberal urban specialists rail against the suburbanization of America and the abandonment of the cities by the nation’s whites. On the other hand, when a very few and highly selected whites buck the trend and stake a claim in the city, they are berated as opportunists and decried for gentrifying the inner city. But liberals can’t have it both ways. If the middle and upper classes are to remain in the city to shore up the tax base and play leadership roles in civic affairs, they have to live somewhere. Another element in the hypocrisy pertains to the recent fascination of social scientists with the concentration of poverty . . . [H]ow can it be remedied without the presence of middle-class and affluent households in places also inhabited by the poor?’ That the author of several profoundly important studies of the interaction between race and class in the American metropolis would enter the vacuous policy territory of the ‘false choice’ between disinvestment and poverty, on the one hand, and gentrification and displacement on the other (see DeFilippis, 2004: 89), is deeply disappointing.
- 8 Peter Marcuse (1985: 207) is particularly insightful on displacement: ‘When a family sees the neighbourhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighbourhood, when the stores they patronise are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the area less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement already is severe. Its actuality is only a matter of time. Families living under these circumstances may move as soon as they can, rather than wait for the inevitable; nonetheless they are displaced’. More recently, the work of Davidson (2007) on indirect displacement near the new-build developments along the Thames in London, and Curran (2004; 2007) on industrial displacement in Williamsburg, Brooklyn challenges the opaque analytical lenses that view displacement simply as landlords evicting tenants.

'anecdotal'. As an indication of how Vigdor, like much of the pro-gentrification lobby, deliberately guts the concept of its inherent class character, the section of his essay attempting to answer the question 'What is gentrification?' *does not even mention the word 'class'*; indeed, that word appears only twice (preceded by middle and upper) in an essay stretching to 40 pages. The commentaries of Watt, Allen and Wacquant explore with much eloquence the invisibility in urban research of the working class in particular, which has such serious implications for how we understand cities and the class injustice within them. As Newman and Wyly (2006: 25) report, Vigdor's work (and now Freeman's) 'has rapidly jumped out of the obscure scholarly cloister to influence policy debates that have been ripped out of context . . . [and] used to dismiss concerns about a wide range of market-oriented urban policies'.

Like many among the 'new urban right' (Peck, 2006), proponents of gentrification like to portray themselves as lonely voices of reason. But the suggestion that there can be 'positive gentrification'⁹ fails to appreciate that 'gentrification' was designed to capture and challenge the neighbourhood expression of class inequality. Of course gentrification can be positive — for gentrifiers, city managers and particularly the owners of capital. Freeman calls for a more 'nuanced' picture of gentrification (but is the *USA Today* feature on Freeman's work — 'Gentrification a boost for everyone' — nuanced?), citing studies that show how it can be a positive experience for working-class people too. However, careful inspection is needed of the 'working-class', 'low-income', 'indigenous' or 'long-term' study participants whose opinions lead to these calls for nuance. Freeman mentions Sullivan's (2007) finding from Portland, Oregon where 'most residents' in two gentrifying neighbourhoods there 'like how their neighbourhoods have changed'. But on closer inspection of Sullivan's survey participants, this is hardly surprising: a significant number were actually white, college educated, in their thirties, *new arrivals in the neighbourhood* and owned their own homes. Indeed, Freeman's own (2006) conclusions, purportedly based on the opinions of those most at risk gentrification, can be called into question once it is recognized that some of his study participants in Harlem and Clinton Hill were college educated (37% of them), homeowners (half of the Clinton Hill interviewees) and recent arrivals in the neighbourhoods. If we are searching for 'nuance', then it is worth spending a little more time recruiting study participants who genuinely do stand to be harmed, or have been harmed, by gentrification.

Understanding displacement

I woke up this morning, I looked next door —
 There was one family living where there once were four.
 I got the gentrifi-, gentrification blues.
 I wonder where my neighbors went 'cause I
 Know I'll soon be moving there too.

Verse from the song 'Gentrification blues', by Judith Levine and Laura Liben (quoted in Hartman *et al.*, 1982: 159).

Displacement is covered by all six commentaries to varying degrees, a testament to a continuing controversy in gentrification research. But a major upheaval has occurred with respect to academic inquiry into displacement. In today's political climate we now see displacement *disputed and denied* rather than documented and deliberated as it was in the 1980s. Consider, for instance, the same special issue of *Environment and Planning A* mentioned above, which reaches its celebratory apex with an essay by Tim Butler

9 In the laissez-faire context in which gentrification takes place, it is difficult to see 'positive gentrification' as anything other than a contradiction in terms.

(2007) entitled 'For gentrification?'¹⁰ Excoriating radical gentrification researchers for their 'Bush-like stubbornness', Butler (2007: 162) asserts that 'gentrification needs to decouple itself from its original association with the deindustrialisation of metropolitan centres . . . and from its associations with working-class displacement'. To be sure, London's transformation into a post-industrial, bourgeois emporium in the aftermath of the Fordist-Keynsian era has been dramatic and widespread, and one would probably be hard pressed to find classic Ruth Glass-style displacement anymore (not that Butler has looked). But as Paul Watt's pugnacious critique of Butler and Robson's (2003) and Hamnett's (2003) studies of London's gentrification informs us (and as Wacquant's concise elaboration of the shrivelling, splintering and dispersal of the working class in advanced capitalist cities reminds us¹¹) treating the working class as phantoms leaves a gaping theoretical and epistemological vacuum that is filled by demonic behavioural caricatures such as 'underclass', and the latest in the UK, the 'chav'.¹² Sam Miller (2007), a writer and community organizer in the Bronx who in the past three years has organized homeless people to fight for changes to New York City housing policy, takes this ghostliness of the working class in gentrification research even further:

Gentrification is itself something of a ghost — trivialized by the mainstream media, ignored by government, distorted in academia as 'impossible to quantify', or obfuscated by policymakers . . . Because the 'audience' for gentrification is always the poor, people of colour, immigrants, working class seniors, and combinations of the above, the realities of gentrification are usually 'invisible' to those who shape the public's understanding of the issues (*ibid.*: .6).

It is revealing here to turn to Butler's (2002: 4) definition of gentrification: 'a [middle-class] "coping" strategy by a generation which . . . is reacting not only to changed social and economic circumstances but also against its own familial upbringing'. By not focusing his analytical lens on another coping strategy — that deployed by working-class people who are caught between the scissors of a hyper-inflated property market, on the one hand, and a chronic lack of affordable/social housing on the other — Butler is able to treat gentrification as something far removed from the disruptive process the term was designed to capture. Those who insist on displacement in all its forms and on questions of class injustice as crucial to understanding gentrification are apparently undertaking 'rather restrictive' (2007: 162) analyses — an accusation that does nothing other than *constrict* an urgent research agenda.

It is encouraging that Kate Shaw picked up on my points about Peter Marcuse's (1985) under-researched identification of *exclusionary displacement*, which seems to have resonance with the Melbourne experience. I would expect exclusionary displacement to be a growing trend in all advanced capitalist cities where gentrification is very advanced. A glance at some impressive scholarship from the Global South shows a different, disturbing pattern emerging — the 'classic' direct displacement of the early waves of gentrification in say, London, New York and Sydney is now happening on a massive scale in cities such as Quito (Swanson, 2007) and Shanghai (He, 2007). Neil Smith points to the unprecedented scale of gentrification happening in Shanghai, Mumbai (see Whitehead and More, 2007) and Beijing — these are the new epicentres of gentrification-induced displacement, often blatant and passed off there as a common urban good, and the places where those who dispute and deny displacement everywhere (an argument as ageographical as it is analytically defective) would feel highly uncomfortable. A key point I tried to make in *Eviction*, as Newman and Wyly (2006) have demonstrated so brilliantly in New York City, is that *asking people about their*

10 Irony was clearly intended, but after reading the essay, erasing the question mark from the title would make it a more accurate representation of the essay's content.

11 See also his analysis of the process of 'decomposition of traditional working-class territories' in Europe and 'implosion of the black ghetto' in the US (Wacquant, 2007).

12 McDowell (2006) elaborates the discourse: 'the lumpish youthful proletariat in shopping malls distinguishable by their clothes and jewellery'.

experiences of displacement is just as important as asking how many people have been displaced (the latter a question that has led to considerable methodological frustration). As Deborah Hart (1988: 616) wrote 20 years ago in a memorable essay on displacement in Cape Town, its toll upon individual lives and emotions is abysmal:

The inconvenience occasioned by the physical wrenching of people from long-time homes pales in the face of more prolonged and damaging psychological distress. Oral evidence, literary accounts, and almost two decades of newspaper reporting unite in their testimony to the fear, humiliation, bitterness and anger that accompanied the displacement. Not least among the consequences was fragmentation of the identity and heritage of a particular community which had profound implications for its social, political, and cultural expression.

Freeman does highlight a vitally important question raised by the work of Mary Patillo (2007) (but see Taylor, 2003, for an equally riveting account of black gentrification): ‘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 neighbourhoods?’. But was gentrification really *sparked* by black gentrifiers, or by a political–economic context that allows some black people to become gentrifiers, whilst others remain poor (or become poorer)? Or by a context that forces them to become gentrifiers of poor black neighbourhoods because of the extra economic and emotional costs of entering into a white upscale neighbourhood? There may indeed be gentrifiers trying to help non-gentrifiers, but there are still winners and losers: a black landlord evicting a black tenant is still an eviction. Critical ethnographic work which has analysed the gentrification of black ghettos, such as Michelle Boyd’s (2005) work in Bronzeville, Chicago, reveals a place smothered by the *illusion* that gentrification is happening in the interests of — and with the approval of — the poor black residents it threatens to displace. In studies of gentrification and the intersections of race and class, the racial identities of those involved must not distract attention from structural inequalities in society, of which gentrification is the neighbourhood expression.

‘Statecraft’ and gentrification

Loïc Wacquant argues that gentrification researchers must ‘restore the primacy of the political’ and give pride of place to the state as generator of sociospatial inequality in the dualizing metropolis. He may be encouraged to note that my own earlier work (e.g. Slater 2004; 2005) tried to do that, and the sparse critical literature of recent years (e.g. Smith, 1996; Wily and Hammel, 1999; Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Curran, 2004; Newman and Ashton, 2004) does in fact explore ‘the crucial role of the state in producing not only space but the space of consumers and producers of housing’. But much more could indeed be done. A striking trend associated with the eviction of critical perspectives is that many researchers have turned away from deep investigations into the ‘statecraft’ behind gentrification that characterized much research of the 1980s,¹³ and instead dived headfirst into conservative work focusing on *the primacy of policy*. Today, claiming policy relevance by using the *language* of policy and offering thoughts on how to ‘manage’ gentrification has proved irresistible to many:

If . . . gentrification is becoming a widespread trend that represents the future of many cities, we should be thinking about how to manage the process to help us achieve a more equitable and just society (Freeman, 2006: 186).

13 Wacquant is correct to note that much of the Smith–Ley debates ignored the role of the state, but the same cannot be said of the authors of the original theses. Lees, Slater and Wily (2007) summarize their work, but take, for instance, Neil Smith’s (1979: 28) classic article on Society Hill, Philadelphia: ‘The state had both a *political* role in realizing Society Hill, and an *economic* role in helping to produce this new urban space’.

A sign of the times is the ‘primer on gentrification and policy choices’ by Kennedy and Leonard (2001), aimed at community organizations and policymakers, which concludes that gentrification is ‘a very complex process with complex consequences that can be good, bad, or even good and bad’ and that the ‘challenge for city, private sector and neighborhood leaders, and for policymakers at the regional and national levels is . . . to strive to *manage* the circumstances to promote equitable development’ (*ibid.*: 24, emphasis added). Not surprisingly, this primer has found its way into the reference lists of many published studies of gentrification since 2001.

Neil Smith is at his trenchant best when discussing policy relevance in the UK, and Wacquant outlines the growing heteronomy of urban research guided by the policy priorities of city rulers. In the UK, the impetus to make research ‘policy relevant’ does not *come from* the social sciences; it comes from the policymaking *view of* the social sciences, leading to a peculiar situation where research funds tend to flow to researchers who convincingly propose that the ‘evidence’ produced by their research will be ‘relevant’ to a mysterious group of ‘end users’ (people who will supposedly benefit from any new policies that result from the evidence presented). But sadly, the neoliberal catchphrase ‘evidence-based decision making’ is more often than not *decision-based evidence making*;¹⁴ politicians rarely consult social research unless it supports the policies they want to pursue, with the consequences outlined by Martyn Hammersley (2005: 328):

[T]he way to ensure that one’s research has an impact is to tell policymakers and practitioners what they are already thinking, so that they can then claim that what they are proposing is research-based.

Enter into scholarship the alliterative garble of revitalization, renaissance, regeneration, renewal, redevelopment, rejuvenation, restructuring, reurbanization and residentialisation — terms that bolster a neoliberal narrative of competitive progress (Tickell and Peck, 2003) that carves the path for stealth gentrification (Wyly and Hammel, 2001). Critical gentrification research has become a casualty of the institutional context in which social scientific inquiry is taking place. The engine driving the new ‘statecrafting’ of gentrification is the tightening structural and functional relationship between the rise of policy-driven urban inquiry as a *fait accompli* and the emergence of *formerly radical, upwardly mobile professors* (frumps¹⁵), or ‘gentrification’s new best friends’, as Smith calls them. But as Eric Clark (2005: 257) has put it, the ‘remarkable turnaround in radical political sensibilities’ in the study of gentrification is also ‘not unrelated to more general trends in social science’.

Conclusion: fighting gentrification

Neil Smith’s account of the critical gentrification researchers being incarcerated by the German state reveals the frightening challenges ahead for scholars and activists who do see the injustice of gentrification and displacement, and want to do something about it. Resistance to gentrification has declined because the rolling out of the (‘zero tolerance’)

14 Thanks to Rob Penfold for this brilliant, astute wordplay.

15 This phrasing is Dan Hammel’s, but I use it here to describe a powerful group who fashioned their reputations within the paradigm shift triggered by Harvey, Castells and Lefebvre, who now find themselves under intense pressure from university managers to secure research funding for their departments. Apparently they neither have the time, the analytic fortitude, nor the political will to challenge the neoliberalization of higher education of which they are both cause and symptom; instead, they put together ‘cutting-edge’ urban research centres offering policy consultancy.

police and penal state¹⁶ has made boisterous challenges and protests extremely difficult to launch, but also declined in tandem with the ‘shrivelling, splintering and dispersal’ (Wacquant) of the working class, and the displacement of activists from the central city (Hackworth and Smith, 2001). Furthermore, the devolution of social welfare functions from the national to the city scale, and the growing tendency of city governments to contract with nonprofits, charities and community development corporations, means that *more and more community activists are doing the work of the local state*, and cannot therefore risk protesting as much as in previous decades (Newman and Lake, 2006).

Yet caution must be taken when commenting on the significant decline of 1970s- and 1980s-style resistance, as this can so easily be used to justify the process, accompanied by rhetoric such as ‘Nobody is objecting to what is going on here’.¹⁷ The lack of overt conflict over space does not mean that gentrification is somehow ‘softer’ or less feared by low-income and working-class people. Today the struggles remain on the creative/destructive edge of gentrification (New Orleans, for example, and as Smith points out, in mega-project sites such as Beijing and London), however muted they might be in some places and however different in form from one place to the next. The struggles themselves appear to transform with the process, but we know very little about these struggles, and how they reflect (or detach from) the changing nature of urban social movements (e.g. Meyer, 2003; 2006), or whether or not a ‘global urban strategy’ (Smith, 2002) is being met by a global urban struggle. If we are to restore a critical agenda, it would seem of paramount importance to study how and at what spatial scales people fight for their right to place, or their right to be re-placed.¹⁸

The public housing residents of New Orleans are engaged in a highly local struggle, but one which does not appear to have the efforts to re-brand New Orleans as a global tourist mecca within its reach. In late 2006, the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP), the official recovery plan for the city, was launched. Teams of nationally recognized architects and urban planners were invited to create plans for each district of the city. One of the teams was a corporation with global influence, *Duany Plater-Zyberk*, headed by the co-founders of the ‘Congress for the New Urbanism’, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. The plan for the district containing the Lower Ninth Ward, one of the poorest and most segregated parts of the city that was particularly hard hit by the flooding, was ‘a series of interconnected and transit-oriented neighbourhoods, *sustainable communities comprised of a diverse mixture of uses, housing types, open space networks, income levels, age and affordability*’ (New Orleans Community Support Foundation, 2007: section 4.3, emphasis added) This is not a plan that welcomes back all former residents. When Duany, the author of the piece I discussed in *Eviction* entitled ‘Three cheers for gentrification’¹⁹ was asked about his role in the UNOP, he replied:

The Gulf Coast offers the rare opportunity to start over from scratch, potentially with quick results . . . For a city to become a city that’s planned, it has to destroy itself; the city literally has to molt. Usually this takes twenty years, but after a hurricane, it takes five years. The people can see the future in their own lifetime (quoted in Pogrebin, 2006: B1).

16 For example, in the US, people are evicted from public housing if a family member has a drug conviction. How can such people fight gentrification if they have been displaced?

17 Martin Boddy (2007: 103–4) more or less reaches this conclusion. He tries to back up his denial of ‘gentrification’ by saying: ‘Nor does political expediency strengthen the case [for the banner of “gentrification”]. . . In the absence of displacement and overt conflict over space . . . new residential development in the UK at least has not provided any real focus for politicisation’.

18 It speaks volumes about the current state of gentrification research that scholars continue to split hairs over Bourdieu’s *Distinction* rather than over his *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market!*

19 Duany’s influence in urban planning discussions worldwide is so great that his writing cannot simply be, as Freeman says, ‘best viewed as a popular polemic in favour of gentrification’. The article in fact appeared in a magazine published by a far right-wing think tank, the *American Enterprise Institute*, which is connected by an ideological pipeline to the White House.

Creating an alternative urban future to this dystopian vision requires a collective effort by scholars to chart and challenge (and chart the challenges to) the neoliberal urban project which lines Duany's pockets, as well as an effort by activists to link up local struggles with global justice movements. Saskia Sassen (1991) long ago pointed to the role of gentrification in efforts to create a global city, and global justice movements would therefore seem to be well equipped to ensure that the spirit of Hartman *et al.*'s (1982) *Displacement: How to Fight It* is reinstated to the terrain currently occupied by *Gentrification: How to Manage It*.

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Resumé

Cette réponse débute et finit par quelques remarques sur les stratégies de la 'gentrification' qui opèrent à la Nouvelle-Orléans depuis Katrina. Entre-temps, elle réagit et ajoute aux commentaires en exposant, d'abord, comment se poursuit l'éviction des perspectives critiques de la recherche sur la 'gentrification', ensuite, comment il faut appréhender le déplacement comme présentant plusieurs facettes et dépendant du contexte et, pour finir, comment les chercheurs urbains ont cédé aux mérites de revendiquer une 'pertinence politique'. En conclusion, elle propose plusieurs réflexions sur l'état de résistance à la 'gentrification' et sur le volume de recherches supplémentaires nécessaire, non seulement sur les expériences de la classe ouvrière, mais aussi sur la manière dont les gens luttent pour leur droit à une place dans une ville en cours de la 'gentrification'.