

Chapter 50

Gentrification of the City

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Introduction

In 1951, Ruth Glass took up a post as Director of Social Research at University College London. Her sustained intellectual and critical engagement with the postwar upheavals that resulted in the formation of the British welfare state led her to immersion in the writings of Marx and Engels, and encouraged her gradual switch from urban planning to urban sociology. The links between housing and class struggle in London (particularly in Islington, where she lived) became her long-term research interest, and concerns about the accelerating rehabilitation of Victorian lodging houses, tenurial transformation from renting to owning, property price increases, and the displacement of working-class occupiers by middle-class incomers led her to coin the term “gentrification” in 1964. By the time Glass passed away in 1990, gentrification had not only generated a large international literature; it had become a word around which class struggles and urban social movements (fighting for the rights of those at the bottom of the urban class structure in a variety of contexts) could mobilize and gain visibility and political momentum. This remains the case today, and that large literature has now morphed into an immense body of scholarship, one so large that it makes summaries, syntheses, and concise critique a considerable challenge. Consider, for instance, that there have been six special issues of journals on the topic of gentrification since 2003!

As Ruth Glass intended, “gentrification” simply yet very powerfully captures the class inequalities and injustices created by capitalist urban land markets and policies. The rising house expense burden for low-income and working-class households, and the personal catastrophes of displacement, eviction, and homelessness,

are symptoms of a set of institutional arrangements (private property rights and a free market) that favor the creation of urban environments to serve the needs of capital accumulation at the expense of the social needs of home, community, family. Neil Smith (2002: 445) has outlined precisely why it is important to retain an analytical commitment to the critical intent behind Ruth Glass's coinage: "Precisely because the language of gentrification tells the truth about the class shift involved in the 'regeneration' of the city, it has become a dirty word to developers, politicians and financiers."

Over the years there have been numerous deliberate attempts to avoid the language of gentrification completely, and more recently some attempts to gentrify the term itself, putting a positive gloss on a word that was coined to signify a worrying trend, one that raises vital, normative questions about the future of urban places. As Glass went on to say in her famous essay: "London ... may acquire a rare complaint ... [It] may soon be faced with an *embarras de richesses* in her central area – and this will prove to be a problem, too" (Glass 1964: 29).

Gentrification commonly occurs in urban areas where prior disinvestment in the urban infrastructure creates opportunities for profitable redevelopment, where the needs and concerns of business and policy elites are met at the expense of urban residents affected by work instability, unemployment, and stigmatization. It also occurs in those societies where a loss of manufacturing employment and an increase in service employment has led to expansion in the amount of middle-class professionals with a disposition towards central city living and an associated rejection of suburbia. Considerable time, energy, and ink have been consumed arguing over whether it is the quest for profit or the expansion of the middle classes that offers the best explanation of gentrification. Initially a reflection of exciting theoretical and ideological contests, it is argued here that this is now a stale, turgid debate, despite some attempts to persevere with it (Hamnett 2003; Butler 2007). But whilst it would be analytically tedious to spend this chapter immersed in this debate, it would be disrespectful and politically questionable to ignore it completely. Therefore, this chapter offers both a *temperature check* and a *prognosis* – a condensed, introductory, and critical glimpse of the literature for newcomers to the topic, together with some thoughts on where gentrification research might go if the literature is to be of increasing political salience or consequence. In particular I want to argue that a commitment to viewing the most serious consequence of gentrification – displacement – "from below" (i.e. in the terms of those who experience it) is essential if critical scholarship on gentrification is to overthrow the mainstream scholarship that does nothing more than parrot and perpetuate the status quo (widening class inequality in cities) with so much appeal to the media and to neoliberal policy elites.

Invitation to a Debate

The title of this [section](#) matches that of the first edited collection on the topic published in 1986, edited by Neil Smith and Peter Williams. Whilst every chapter in the collection has become a classic in its own right, particular conceptual insights can be gained from reading the editors' eloquent introduction, especially when placed in the context of how the literature has unfolded since the mid-1980s. In

recent years there has been considerable disagreement over how to define gentrification; in short, whether gentrification should refer only to the residential rehabilitation described by Ruth Glass, or whether it refers to a much more large-scale production of urban space for middle-class consumers, involving *inter alia* “new-build” developments on vacant land (Davidson and Lees 2005). It is unfortunate that those insisting that we go no further than the fine details of Ruth Glass original definition (Boddy 2007) did not consult the words of Smith and Williams written over 20 years ago:

If we look back at the attempted definitions of gentrification, it should be clear that we are concerned with a process much broader than merely residential rehabilitation ... [A]s the process has continued, it has become increasingly apparent that residential rehabilitation is only one facet ... of a more profound economic, social, and spatial restructuring. In reality, residential gentrification is integrally linked to the redevelopment of urban waterfronts for recreational and other functions, the decline of remaining inner-city manufacturing facilities, the rise of hotel and convention complexes and central-city office developments, as well as the emergence of modern “trendy” retail and restaurant districts ... Gentrification is a visible spatial component of this social transformation. A highly dynamic process, it is not amenable to overly restrictive definitions. (Smith and Williams 1986: 3)

It is also worth noting the account provided by Saskia Sassen in a book that was influential well beyond the field of gentrification:

Gentrification was initially understood as the rehabilitation of decaying and low-income housing by middle-class outsiders in central cities. In the late 1970s a broader conceptualization of the process began to emerge, and by the early 1980s new scholarship had developed a far broader meaning of gentrification, linking it with processes of spatial, economic and social restructuring. (Sassen 1991: 255)

To label as anything other than gentrification the construction of upmarket housing aimed at young professionals in or on formerly working-class industrial spaces (for example, vacant dockyards or warehouses), and to use a term like “revitalization” or “regeneration” to characterize the implosion of low-income public housing projects in favor of mixed-income developments, is analytically erroneous and politically conservative. Kate Shaw provides an especially helpful and vivid account of what gentrification is today when she calls it

a generalised middle-class restructuring of place, encompassing the entire transformation from low-status neighbourhoods to upper-middle-class playgrounds. Gentrifiers’ residences are no longer just renovated houses but newly built townhouses and high-rise apartments. Their workplaces are as likely to be new downtown or docklands office developments as warehouse studios. Gentrification extends to retail and commercial precincts, and can be seen in rural and coastal townships as well as cities ... Designer shops, art galleries, bars and restaurants form the background to a landscape of people in semi-public space (tables on the footpath they must pay to occupy) watching the passing parade and sipping chardonnay from a boutique winery, beer from a microbrewery, coffee from organic beans grown in the developing country *du jour*. (Shaw 2008: 2)

In terms of sheer geographical scale we are dealing with a quite different urban phenomenon than what was observed in the 1960s (Lees *et al.* 2008: 128–61). As implied in my introduction, where Ruth Glass does remain important and relevant is less in the empirical details of 1960s Islington, and more in her critical perspective on class transformation, and her deep commitment to social justice.

Following their claim that gentrification was an intrinsic part of something much larger than residential rehabilitation, Smith and Williams offered readers an “invitation to a debate,” or more accurately a set of debates, that ran through the pages of the book. They set out five related themes that occupied the analytical attention of the book’s contributing authors, where differences of opinion were clear. Three in particular have come to dominate the ensuing literature:

- 1 Production-side versus consumption-side explanations.
- 2 Is there a “new middle-class” and what is its role?
- 3 What are the costs of gentrification today and in the future?

Almost a quarter of century later it is instructive to wed social and epistemological critique and consider the nature and extent of knowledge on each of these three themes as the gentrification process has unfolded in different societies. Due to space limitations I cannot cover here all the important themes in gentrification inquiry,¹ so the rest of this chapter thus offers readers a fresh invitation to the gentrification debates in an attempt to provide a solid point of departure for further intellectual engagement. I will conclude with some comments on where gentrification research might go if it is to be of political salience and analytical coherence.

Production-side versus consumption-side explanations

As is clear following a careful read of the entire Smith and Williams collection, the production-side versus consumption-side explanation was a heated and fast-moving debate by the mid-1980s, even if, as the editors quite rightly stated, “few are arguing an exclusively production-based or consumption-based argument” (Smith and Williams 1986: 5). But what are those arguments? To cut a long story as short as possible, it is absolutely vital to register that *both* arguments emerged in reaction to the obfuscations of 1970s neoclassical economists’ take on gentrification as a natural, inevitable market adjustment process, something to be celebrated as part of an apparent middle-class return to the central city from suburbia (Lipton 1977; Wheaton 1977; Kern 1981; LeRoy and Sonstelie 1983; Schill and Nathan 1983). Those prioritizing a production perspective rejected the neoclassical view that gentrification was an expression of the changed consumption choices among certain sections of the middle class, and instead emphasized the role of capital and its institutional agents (public and private) in creating gentrifiable spaces (Smith 1979; Clark 1987; Engels 1994; Hammel 1999). Gentrification through a production lens explains the process as a consequence of the uneven investment of capital in certain land uses, its devaluation through use and systematic disinvestment, and the opportunities for profitable reinvestment created by these capital flows. The most important and influential theory in this tradition is Neil Smith’s (1979) rent-gap thesis, as provocative and convincing today as it was when it was first elaborated.² Those

explaining gentrification from a consumption perspective reacted to simplistic neo-classical accounts of demographic changes and lifestyle preferences by illustrating how changes in the industrial and occupational structure of advanced capitalist cities, occurring as they did at a time of significant social and cultural upheaval (post-1968), produced an expanding pool of gentrifiers with a disposition towards central-city living, and an associated rejection of suburbia for the blandness and monotony it symbolized (Ley 1986; Hamnett 1991; Butler 1997).³ Arguably the most important analyses in this tradition have come from the pen of David Ley, worked into his *magnum opus* in 1996 that thoroughly explored gentrification in six Canadian cities, a book particularly memorable and admirable for exemplary fusion of quantitative measures with qualitative accounts.

A very influential survey of the literature by Chris Hamnett (1991) portrayed Neil Smith and David Ley as polar opposites and the *de facto* representatives of mutually exclusive production and consumption explanations respectively, and ensured that a generation of scholars saw gentrification in stark binary terms of production or consumption, supply or demand, structure or agency, economics or culture. Whilst Hamnett's article had its strengths, especially in outlining why academic interest in gentrification is so intense, its legacy was obstructive. I have argued elsewhere (Slater 2006) that the production-consumption (or Smith–Ley) debate in gentrification research is the most overdrawn and misrepresented contest in the history of urban studies. Both analysts are not nearly as one-sided in the explanation of gentrification as many newcomers to the topic might think. To argue that David Ley ignored economic transformation in Canadian cities in his work is nothing short of preposterous, and the same can be said for any writing which gives the impression that Neil Smith ignored the cultural aspects of gentrification in his writings on New York's gentrification. Despite crucial interventions suggesting ways to work through competing theoretical tensions (Clark 1992; Lees 1994), analytical energy was sapped by irritating dualisms and irksome squabbling about whether it was Smith or Ley who had the most convincing explanation. By the mid- to late 1990s, many researchers lost interest (see Bondi 1999), and now any essay pressing the same dualisms should be treated with the utmost suspicion. A solid explanation of gentrification in any context must recognize the importance of production and consumption factors, and how they work together to result in neighborhood expressions of class inequality (Ley 2003). It does not matter whether production or consumption is viewed as more important in driving gentrification, so long as neither is completely ignored. Most important of all, writing on gentrification must not get caught up in what is now an old debate. If it must be revisited, it is essential to consult the original essays of those associated with competing explanations, in order to guard against further misrepresentation and theoretical confusion.

Is there a "new middle-class" and what is its role?

The changing class structure of capitalist societies has for several decades been a major research theme in urban sociology, where the debate essentially boils down to the longitudinal *character* of the class structure (how many people fit into certain pre-defined class categories), and to a lesser extent how class struggles and class differences are reconfigured and redefined in the context of wider macroeconomic,

social and cultural transformations (see Butler and Watt 2007, for an excellent summary). In the context of gentrification research, when Smith and Williams (1986) noted an emerging concern with a “new middle class” and pointed out that a number of chapters in their collection “touch on this issue” (p. 7), they could not have foreseen the astonishing mushrooming of scholarship examining the growth, life, and times of the gentrifying middle classes that we have seen since the mid-1990s. This scholarship emerged for two reasons; first, to probe far deeper than the sweeping neoclassical generalizations that gentrification is a natural outcome of shifts in the trade-offs between accessibility and space that make central city locations more attractive for wealthier households; and second, as a challenge to Marxist political-economic explanations that were seen to focus narrowly on cycles of investment and fluctuations of urban land rent, to the neglect of human agency. As Damaris Rose memorably put it,

“gentrifiers” are not the mere bearers of a process determined independently of them. Their constitution, as certain types of workers and as people, is as crucial an element in the production of gentrification as is the production of the dwellings they occupy. (Rose 1984: 56)

A rare point of agreement among analysts of gentrification is that *class* should be the central focus (Wyly and Hammel 2001). The overwhelming research response has been to investigate the growth and behavior of the middle classes, and particularly *why* they are seeking to locate in previously disinvested neighborhoods. Over the years there has been increasing theoretical sophistication in research undertaken in many different countries that seeks to understand middle-class gentrifiers – a very diverse, ambivalent group that cannot be reduced to popular slanders of “yuppies,” not least because the negative connotations of that term are at odds with the “marginal” economic position of some gentrifiers (Rose 1984), and the left-liberal politics that many gentrifiers demonstrate at the ballot box (Ley 1994). Furthermore, even so-called “yuppies” have limited choices in the housing market.

Probably the most sophisticated attempts to understand the practices of gentrifiers have come from those who have drawn upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu in his classic book *Distinction* (1984), particularly his concern with understanding and explaining the middle class *habitus*.⁴ In a striking study of the “loft living” movement in Montreal, Podmore (1998) argues that the gentrified district is nothing short of the spatial expression of a new middle-class *habitus*. Butler with Robson (2003) use this theoretical approach to develop the notion of a “metropolitan *habitus*” in London, drawing on fieldwork in six very different neighborhoods and relating middle-class fractions to various forms of capital (with particular emphasis on social capital). Bridge (2006: 65) interprets their work as even “suggesting a series of mini-habitus,” but in his own work (Bridge 2001a) has argued that the *habitus* concept, derived from what he sees as Bourdieu’s passive and oversocialized view of human action, means that it needs to be wedded to rational action theory if we are to interpret why gentrifiers invest their cultural, social, and economic capital in areas considered to be “risky” by investors and real-estate agents. This is in fact the underlying research question of all those analysts who are uneasy with both neoclassical and Marxist explanations of gentrification: why do gentrifiers seek to

locate in areas that have been subjected to disinvestment and are affected by territorial stigmatization? Furthermore, since much available evidence reveals that gentrifiers view living in the central city as “a mark of distinction in the constitution of an identity separate from the constellation of place and identity shaped by the suburbs” (Ley 1996: 211), some researchers have directed their attention to how this social distinction marked out on the streets of gentrifying neighborhoods. This strand of inquiry investigates what has become known as the *gentrification aesthetic* (Bridge 2001b), an effort to reveal the aesthetic strategies that gentrifiers (and those who produce space for them) employ to distinguish themselves from other social class groups. A classic essay in the Smith and Williams collection by Jager (1986) on Victorian landscapes in gentrifying Melbourne built upon the pioneering work of Zukin (1982) on loft development in lower Manhattan to pave the way for subsequent investigations that sought to explain the economic valorization of the gentrification aesthetic, or the ways in which places once deemed hip, authentic, trendy, and subversive quickly become appropriated, manufactured, and mass-produced kitsch for higher-earning groups (Mills 1988; Ley 2003).

Class is not the only axis of difference towards which researchers have focused their attention. Since the early 1980s, coinciding somewhat with the advent of both postmodernism and the cultural turn in the social sciences, considerable analytical energy has been expended towards the intersections of fine-grained class positions with other dimensions of difference, such as gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity. There is no space here for a lengthy summary,⁵ other than to point out that some of this work has become extremely influential; Castells (1983) on gay gentrification in the Castro in San Francisco and Rothenberg (1995) on lesbians creating social spaces in Park Slope, New York City; Rose's pathbreaking (1984) article on gentrification as an outcome of professional women seeking support networks and opportunities unavailable in the suburbs; Bondi (1991) and Warde (1991) on gentrification as an expression of professional women responding to changing structures of patriarchy; Taylor (2003) on black gentrification in Harlem, New York City; and Pattillo's (2007) ethnographic portrait of the black middle class resettling in Chicago's South Side. Whilst there is much to admire in work that retains a spirit of social critique in interpreting the residential peregrinations of different types of gentrifier (Talja Blokland's eloquent 2003 study of a Rotterdam neighborhood being an exemplar of this spirit), my own view is that this area of research, as well as being somewhat saturated, has become less critical in recent years, anchored in thinly veiled empathetic sentiments for middle-class gentrifiers that serve to blot out any other human agents involved in the process (Butler 2007), such as those “producing space for progressively more affluent users,” as Hackworth (2002) terms it, and, crucially, working-class groups on the receiving end of urban policies that favor middle-class settlement at the expense of housing affordability.

What are the costs of gentrification today and in the future?

Displacement from home and neighbourhood can be a shattering experience. At worst it leads to homelessness, at best it impairs a sense of community. Public policy should, by general agreement, minimize displacement. Yet a variety of public policies, particularly those concerned with gentrification, seem to foster it. (Marcuse 1985: 931)

Two chapters in Smith and Williams focused directly on the question of displacement, a reflection of what was a lively debate in the early 1980s, and the subject of highly sophisticated inquiries that have not lost their (varying) political bite with the passage of time. Many of the articles in early collections on gentrification such as Laska and Spain (1980), Schill and Nathan (1983), and Palen and London (1984) were concerned with displacement and much greater attention was paid to the effects of gentrification on the working class than to the characteristics of the new middle class that was moving in. Although there was not necessarily agreement on the severity and extent of the problem (Sumka 1979), displacement was undoubtedly a major theme, in terms of how it was defined (Grier and Grier 1978), how it was measured (Schill and Nathan 1983), and how it was central to a rounded understanding of the entire process (LeGates and Hartman 1986; Marcuse 1985; Nelson 1988).

Concerns over displacement reached their apex in a remarkable publication written for community organizations and their advocates, but one that turned out to be far more wide-reaching in scope and influence. *Displacement: How to Fight It* (Hartman *et al.* 1982) was perhaps the key publication that emerged as part of the San Francisco-based “Anti-Displacement Project,” a national campaign to protect affordable housing occupants from the displacement pressures of profiteering reinvestment in America’s cities during the 1970s.⁶ The Anti-Displacement Project derived much of its energy from a monumental early 1970s struggle over the construction of San Francisco’s Yerba Buena Center, a substantial convention, performing arts and public space complex in that city’s South of Market area. To create Yerba Buena, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency displaced over 4,000 poor elderly tenants from single room occupancy hotels (SROs) in South of Market, in a particularly brazen case of what Hartman (1974) appropriately called “land grab.” Something of the experience of displacement was later captured in retrospect by Hartman with poignant eloquence:

For many pensioners, accustomed to forty-dollar- and fifty-dollar-per-month rents, relocation was a terrifying experience ... For older people in particular, personal friendships are perhaps the most important aspect of day-to-day life. Loss of familiar faces in the streets and in the hotel lobbies, of people to talk to, eat, drink, and play cards with is a severe shock. Similarly, the loss of stores, restaurants, and other commercial institutions can rob people of an important basis of stability, a place to obtain credit, to meet friends. (Hartman 2002: 66)

The situation was abysmal, but the fight against the callous obliteration of a working-class quarter of San Francisco, led by a tenants’ organization with the support of nonprofit legal organizations, saw some impressive gains. After protracted litigation battles, half the units torn down in South of Market were replaced, and subsidized for permanent low-rent occupancy by federal and state sources and the city’s hotel tax, with the tenants’ organization acting as developers and managers of much of the new housing. The slogan of the social movement against Yerba Buena said it all: “We Won’t Move.”

Displacement: How to Fight It began with these words, as much an exposé of the dubious language of urban planning and policy (and neoclassical land theory) as a rallying cry to community activists:

Moving people involuntarily from their homes or neighborhoods is wrong. Regardless of whether it results from government or private market action, forced displacement is characteristically a case of people without the economic and political power to resist being pushed out by people with greater resources and power, people who think they have a “better” use for a certain building, piece of land, or neighborhood. The pushers benefit. The pushees do not. The Anti-Displacement Project also regards it as fundamentally wrong to allow removal of housing units from the low-moderate income stock, for any purpose, without requiring at least a one-for-one replacement. Demolition, conversion, or “upgrade” rehab of vacant private or publicly owned lower-rent housing should be just as vigorously opposed as when those units are occupied. (Hartman *et al.* 1982: 4–5, emphasis in the original)

Rereading these stirring words nearly three decades on, in the context of the latest round of research on displacement that has emerged from the United States (after a protracted period of dormancy), one cannot help be struck by the contrasts. In that latest round, three quantitative studies of displacement have become very high profile: by Vigdor (2002) in Boston, by Freeman and Braconi (2004) in New York City, and a national study by three urban economists (McKinnish *et al.* 2008). These studies analyzed data on household mobility drawn from various government housing databases and found that low-income and lesser-educated households exit gentrifying neighborhoods at significantly lower rates than comparable households in non-gentrifying neighborhoods. The conclusion of each study was that critics of gentrification have got it all wrong, for large-scale displacement is negligible and gentrification has a positive side that should be encouraged by urban policy, as it brings better services and amenities to neighborhoods affected for so long by disinvestment. Newman and Wyly explain the impact of these studies:

The new evidence on gentrification and displacement ... 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 of privatization, home-ownership, “social mix” and dispersal strategies designed to break up the concentrated poverty that has been taken as the shorthand explanation for all that ails the disinvested inner city. If displacement is not a problem, many are saying, then regeneration (or whatever else the process is called) is fine too. Perhaps it will even give some poor people the benefits of a middle-class neighborhood without requiring them to move to a middle-class community. (Newman and Wyly 2006: 25)

Elsewhere (Slater 2006; 2009) I have advanced a step-by-step methodical critique of these studies, which are analytically defective when considered alongside Peter Marcuse’s (1985) conceptual clarity on the four distinct forms of displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods: direct last-resident displacement, direct chain displacement, exclusionary displacement, and displacement pressure (see Slater 2009 for a detailed elaboration of each). It is no coincidence that those who have been pressing the view that displacement is negligible and that gentrification is not as troubling as the extensive literature suggests have all missed Marcuse. When conceptual verification is brought to bear on the declamatory discourse of the media reaction to this scholarship,⁷ claims that gentrification is a panacea for abandonment and

class/ethnic segregation become deeply problematic. Furthermore, the magnitude of dislocation taking place on the new frontiers of gentrification and displacement in the global south such as in Shanghai (He 2007), Quito (Swanson 2007), and Mumbai (Whitehead and More 2007) offers compelling evidence for an argument that intellectual and moral concerns over displacement must not dissipate at precisely the moment they are urgently needed on both scientific and political grounds. It is only by uncovering the mechanisms that create different forms of displacement can any attempt to legitimize or naturalize housing turbulence at the bottom of the urban class structure (e.g. Hamnett 2008) be effectively refuted.

Conclusion: From “Policy Relevance” to Relevant Politics

In this essay I have attempted to bring the reader up to date on the state of play with respect to three crucial areas of inquiry in gentrification research. This leaves us with an obvious question, appropriate for a conclusion: where do we go from here? The answer depends largely on whether one adopts a critical or a mainstream approach to urban studies (for an outline of the differences between these approaches, see Brenner *et al.* 2009). If one adopts the former approach (from a starting point of being opposed to gentrification), a careful analytical indictment of the mainstream research output (typified by scholarship concluding that gentrification is acceptable if it is “managed” by policy) is necessary but not sufficient. Such an indictment needs to be coupled with further research that seeks to document displacement⁸ (in any or all of its forms) “from below,” in the sobering terms of those who experience it. The absence of qualitative accounts of displacement is striking and shocking when juxtaposed with quantitative measures, or with all those accounts of the trials and tribulations of the new middle class. It is the civic duty of critical urbanists to understand and intuitively sympathize with those whose problems they examine. If the pain, bitterness and even the humiliation that come with being forced out of one’s home is not a central component of in critical studies of gentrification, then it is unlikely that critical studies will make much difference. Critical researchers must be with, and ultimately stand with, those whose problems they analyse, describe, and explain.⁹

The authors of *Displacement: How to Fight It* made no secret of their rejection of the neoclassical dictum of “economically optimal” or “highest and best use” of particular land parcels, arguing that competitive bidding for land fails to take into account the fortunes of those who occupy it rather than own it. The deleterious influence of neoclassical land theory on urban policy and planning also led to Chester Hartman’s (1984) call for a “right to stay put.” That essay is a spirited example of what is becoming an endangered species in urban studies – spirited policy critique with a call for urgent reform (as opposed to vague and inconsequential “policy relevance” that characterizes many policy evaluations of “urban regeneration”), seen most clearly in Hartman’s rejection of conventional cost–benefits thinking in housing policy, in favor of an understanding of displacement costs as emotional, psychological, individual and social:

In seeking a new place to live, the displaced tend to move as short a distance as possible, in an effort to retain existing personal, commercial, and institutional ties and

because of the economically and racially biased housing-market constraints they face. What they find usually costs more, has less adequate space, and is of inferior quality. Involuntary residential changes also produce a considerable amount of psychosocial stress, which in its more extreme form has been found analogous to the clinical description of grief. (Hartman 1984: 305–6)

Hartman's blend of the analytical and the political, the intellectual and the emotional, in my view now serves as a touchstone, foreshadowing the insights of the nascent (Lefebvrian) Right to the City movement and of an emerging political philosophy for a "right to place" (Imbroscio 2004). It also foreshadows the insights of one of the more striking studies of displacement to appear in quite some time, written by a medical doctor, Mindy Fullilove, who equates displacement with a clinical condition called root shock (the title of her book):

Root shock, at the level of the local community, be it neighborhood or something else, ruptures bonds, dispersing people to all the directions of the compass. Even if they manage to regroup, they are not sure what to do with one another. People who were near are too far, and people who were far are too near. The elegance of the neighborhood – each person in his social and geographic slot – is destroyed, and even if the neighborhood is rebuilt exactly as it was, it won't work. The restored geography is not enough to repair the many injuries to the mazeway. (Fullilove 2004: 14)

Just as there are valuable theoretical lessons to be learned from critical studies of the formation and constitution of middle-class gentrifiers, so there are from poignant accounts of love and loss in the context of the devastation of displacement.¹⁹

Notes

- 1 A comprehensive critical treatment of a literature over 40 years old can be found in Lees *et al.* (2008).
- 2 The rent gap is the shortfall between the actual economic return from a land parcel given its present use (capitalized ground rent) and the potential return if it were put to its optimal, "highest and best" use (potential ground rent). As the rent gap grows larger, it creates lucrative profit opportunities for developers, investors, and home-buyers.
- 3 Contrary to the "back to the city" rhetoric of the 1970s (see Laska and Spain 1980), most gentrifiers came from other central city neighborhoods, not the suburbs.
- 4 Helpfully defined as "[T]he way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu" (Wacquant 2005: 316).
- 5 A detailed elaboration of this literature can be found in Chapter 3 of Lees *et al.* (2008).
- 6 The obstacles were formidable – this was a time of optimistic "back-to-the-city" pronouncements nationwide, when gentrification was viewed by the media and city officials as a welcome remedy for decades of redlining, disinvestment, and "white flight." Rarely did public discourse focus on what we might call the downside of upscale.
- 7 Take for example the headline in *USA Today*: "Studies: gentrification a boost for everyone" (Hampson 2005), under which coverage of Lance Freeman's (2005) work appeared. *Time Magazine* featured the study by McKinnish *et al.* (2008) under the headline: "Gentrification: not ousting the poor?" (Kiviat 2008).

8 It is telling that the chapter on gentrification written by Chris Hamnett in the first *Companion to the City* did not contain the word “displacement.”

9 I am grateful to Peter Marcuse for this point.

Lees *et al.* (2008) is a comprehensive critical introduction to the literature. The monographs by Smith (1996) and Ley (1996) are essential reading for any serious analyst of gentrification, and read together they provide a rounded theoretical platform for further inquiry. Zukin’s (1982) work on loft living in lower Manhattan is a lesson in historical materialism; Clark’s (1987) classic book is the definitive work on the history, theoretical roots and empirical expression of rent gaps, based on his research in Malmö, Sweden. Butler with Robson (2003) is a comprehensive treatment of the role of the new middle class in London’s gentrification. Hartman *et al.* (1982) is the most important and most comprehensive treatment of urban displacement ever written.

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