Guest editorial

Gentrification research: new directions and critical scholarship
In early 2000, partly out of frustration with the lack of on-line information about gentrification and mostly sensing a real opportunity to disseminate academic knowledge on a matter of public interest to a wide audience, Gentrification Web (http://members.lycos.co.uk/gentrification) was launched. Designed and written by Tom Slater with input from Loretta Lees, and other faculty members and graduate students in the Department of Geography at King's College London, the website attempted to put decades of academic research on gentrification into accessible terms, supported by photographs, references, and links to other websites which touch on the subject. For about six months nobody in cyberspace took much notice. But gradually, e-mails began to arrive: some expressing appreciation; some asking for more information; some telling stories about gentrification in their part of the world; and others sending attachments documenting local struggles over gentrification through photographs, flyers, and protest art. The website has become a popular resource on what many might view as an obscure academic topic. A website allows for a two-way exchange of knowledge: it educates and informs the public, who then educate and inform the architect(s) of the website. Gentrification Web has been and continues to be a very useful source of secondary information.

If there has been one trend above all others in the correspondence received, it has been the e-mails of support and requests for information from community activists, enraged tenants, leftist journalists, and sympathetic onlookers who appreciate the largely critical introductory perspective taken by the website. For these browsers gentrification is a serious issue in their lives that is nothing but an injustice, an upheaval, a threat to the vitality of urban neighbourhoods. It has been most gratifying to know that the words and images on the website have been of some use to those engaged in the fight against gentrification—where else, other than in the usual journals, books, conferences, and sporadic journalistic outlets, can the principal findings of gentrification research be disseminated? However, gratification has not come without a sour taste, for these e-mails have been arriving at the very same time that the politics of gentrification research have shifted away from radical, critical accounts to the somewhat centrist accounts of two strands of gentrification inquiry: first, work which investigates the constitution and practices of middle-class gentrifiers, and, second, more introspective work which concentrates on the definition and meaning of the term. Both of these strands demand brief scrutiny, given the very real problems facing low-income tenants and their advocates in gentrifying neighbourhoods in advanced capitalist cities. It should be noted here that the purpose of this editorial is *not* to vilify or slander the impressive scholarship that has emerged in recent years, but rather to expose what has been left behind: a concern with the working class and/or low-income communities which are at best severely disrupted by gentrification and at worst eliminated by it.

The middle classes, definitional malaise, and the neglected effects of gentrification
Why have so many researchers undertaken investigations into the emergence, life, and times of middle-class gentrifiers?[1] A cynic may argue that this is because researchers

[1] For example, see Bondi (1999), Bridge (2001; 2003), Butler and Robson (2001; 2003), Caulfield (1994), Hamnett (2003), Karsten (2003), Podmore (1998), Rofe (2003), Robson and Butler (2001).

are often gentrifiers themselves, and researching others like themselves may open a window into their own lives (or tell them something about a prospective neighbourhood of choice), whilst an informed, supportive critic may argue that the only way to gain a complete understanding of the causes of gentrification is to trace the movements and aspirations of the gentry. Class is the undercurrent in the study of gentrification (Hamnett, 1991; Smith N, 1992; Wyly and Hammel, 1999), and rightly so. But what about the consequences of class transformation? Ten years ago Jan van Weesep (1994) argued that we need to focus on the effects—not the causes—of gentrification, and that one way to do this is through the lens of urban policy, or in his words, "to put the gentrification debate into policy perspective" (page 74). There is no question that van Weesep's call drew numerous responses, and it could be argued that he changed the course of the gentrification debate, as exemplified by the emphasis on the role of policy in so much recent and current research (for example, Badcock, 2001; Hackworth, 2002; Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Lees, 2003a, 2003b; Slater, 2004; Smith and DeFilippis, 1999; Wyly and Hammel, 1999; 2001; plus many of the papers in the special issue of *Urban Studies* 2003). Yet the true nature of the consequences of gentrification for people living in the neighbourhoods experiencing it (or in adjacent neighbourhoods) is an issue on which there has been almost total silence. In short, academic inquiry into neighbourhood change has looked at the role of urban policy in harnessing the aspirations of middle-class professionals at the expense of looking at the role of urban policy in causing immense hardship for people with nowhere else to go in booming property markets reshaped by neoliberal regulatory regimes. A focus on the practices of the middle-class gentrifiers and how their practices are facilitated by urban policy does not tell us anything about what policy-driven gentrification does to communities that fear the widely acknowledged disruptions brought about by public and/or private reinvestment. Middle-class gentrifiers are only one part of a much larger story.

Part of this problem is methodological, and we still see few discussions of methodology in researching gentrification. The middle-class gentrifiers are much easier to find and arguably much easier to interview than any other 'agents' in the gentrification process. For example, displaced tenants, or those living under the threat of eviction and/or displacement, are very difficult to track down, policymakers often skirt around the 'dirty word' of gentrification (Smith N, 1996), and developers, landlords, and realtors are often churlish towards academic investigators (especially if 'gentrification' is mentioned), so it is easier to conduct research into the lives of the middle class because most of us researching the process are middle class or are surrounded by middle-class people daily and can thus play the empathy card! But if one takes the trouble to find and listen to the people most at risk of displacement, or talk to those who represent their interests, or even stomach the prospect of talking to those whose decisions often lead to gentrification, the picture of the process becomes less rosy, more complex, more unsettling—and more accurate. Imagine the richness of gentrification research if we had the same volume of research into the dilemmas facing low-income tenants as we have on the experiences and desires of middle-class movers and shakers! With notable exceptions (Betancur, 2002; Smith N, 1996; 2002; Smith and DeFilippis, 1999; Wyly and Hammel, 2001) the voices of those critical of gentrification appear somewhat lonely in recent years. Surely it is time now for new research into the unsavoury consequences of gentrification to match the remarkable theoretical and methodological sophistication we have seen on the constitution and reproduction of middle-class gentrifiers?

On the issue of defining gentrification, while Peter Marcuse (1999) is right to argue that how gentrification is evaluated depends a great deal on how it is defined, is it really necessary to see continued squabbles over 'what is gentrification?' given the

extraordinary depth and progression of so much gentrification scholarship since Ruth Glass coined the term in 1964? Speak to any gentrification researcher and they will no doubt tell you that journal referees insist on a clear definition of the process before research findings are put forward. This is essential for theoretical and empirical coherence; yet is it essential for epistemology to see entire articles or significant proportions of articles deliberating the definition of the term? Let us be clear: the extent and meaning of gentrification have changed remarkably since 1964, but how? First, the widening *extent* of gentrification is clear from an examination of the litera- ture. Once an unexpected empirical phenomenon confined to the largest 'world cities' such as London, New York, and Toronto, it has now been observed in cities further down the urban hierarchy, such as Bristol (Lambert and Boddy, 2002), Glasgow (Atkinson, 2003), Milwaukee (Kenny, 1995), Detroit (Wyly and Hammel, 1999; 2001), and Halifax (Ley, 1996). The expansion of gentrification has also been witnessed in the cities where the process was first observed—for example, in London, many parts of Hackney have gentrified (Butler, 1997), and Brixton is now gentrifying (Butler and Robson, 2001); and in New York, we have seen gentrification spread to neighbour- hoods in Brooklyn and Queens which escaped early gentrification in the 1960s and 1970s (Hackworth, 2001; 2002).

Second, in recent years we have been seeing new debate over the *meaning* and expansion of the term gentrification. Researchers now argue that the new middle-class recolonisation of rural locations (Phillips, 1993; 2002; Smith D, 2002; Smith and Phillips, 2001) and the construction of new-build luxury housing developments in city centres (Smith A, 1989; Davidson and Lees, under review) are forms of 'gentrification'. Despite the fact that gentrification is renowned as an explicitly urban(e) and central city set of processes, it is perhaps hard to disavow many of the arguments made by Martin Phillips and Darren Smith. Yet few, if any, urban commentators have systematically debated these arguments about rural gentrification [demonstrating the uneasy and increasingly untenable separation of rural and urban geography in an increasingly urbanised world (see Amin and Thrift, 2002)]. The question of whether new-build developments in city centres can be considered to be gentrification has, however, been taken up by Christine Lambert and Martin Boddy (2002) who have argued:

> "we would question whether the sort of new housing development and conversion described in Bristol and other second tier UK cities, or indeed the development of London's Docklands can, in fact, still be characterised as 'gentrification'...'[G]entrifi- cation', as originally coined, referred primarily to a rather different type of 'new middle class', buying up older, often 'historic' individual housing units and renovating and restoring them for their own use—and in the process driving up property values and driving out former, typically lower income working class residents....We would conclude...that to describe these processes as gentrification is stretching the term and what it set out to describe too far" (page 20).

For Lambert and Boddy, any reference to 'gentrification' must remain firmly in tune with Glass's coinage of the term. But in making these claims the authors ignore Adrian Smith's (1989) work on new-build gentrification in London's Docklands, Damaris Rose's work on 'infill' housing gentrification in Montreal (Germain and Rose, 2000; Rose, 2002), not to mention Blair Badcock's (2001) updating of his long- term investigations of the state-led, new-build gentrification of inner Adelaide. Lambert and Boddy's work would no doubt also bother Neil Smith (1996), who feels that a distinction between the rehabilitation of existing (inhabited) stock and new construction or the conversion of derelict stock is "no longer useful", and argues to the contrary that gentrification has departed from Glass's description, and now refers to a much broader phenomenon:

"How, in the large context of changing social geographies, are we to distinguish adequately between the rehabilitation of nineteenth-century housing, the construction of new condominium towers, the opening of festival markets to attract local and not so local tourists, the proliferation of wine bars—and boutiques for everything—and the construction of modern and postmodern office buildings employing thousands of professionals, all looking for a place to live?...Gentrification is no longer about a narrow and quixotic oddity in the housing market but has become the leading residential edge of a much larger endeavour: the class remake of the central urban landscape" (page 39).

Smith is correct to argue that contemporary gentrification cannot be viewed strictly through the lens of Ruth Glass; things have moved on since 1964! (see Davidson and Lees, under review). Rather, the most important aspect of her work that we should register is her critical emphasis on class transformation. Whether gentrification is urban, suburban, or rural, new-build or the renovation of existing stock, it refers, as its *gentri*-suffixes attest, to nothing more or less than *the class dimensions of neighbourhood change*—in short, not simply changes in the housing stock, but changes in housing class.

When defining gentrification, there is also the issue of displacement, "when pressures on the housing market from affluent groups create inflated rents and prices which can push out the low paid or unpaid over time" (Atkinson, 2000, page 307), versus replacement, where "working-class homeowners [take] advantage of the rise of property values to retire, sell out and move to the suburbs or beyond", leading to "a process of slow replacement of a group which is contracting by one which is growing" (Hamnett, 2002, pages 25 – 27). Chris Hamnett (2003) has recently argued that displacement has been negligible in London since 1961 because of a shrinking working class being replaced (not displaced) by an expanding middle class. This argument reflects just how far the gentrification debate has shifted away from a concern with the displacement of working-class residents. Displacement was a key feature of early research on gentrification, in terms of how it was defined (Grier and Grier, 1980), 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; Nelson, 1988). Many of the articles in seminal collections on gentrification such as Shirley Laska and Daphne Spain's (1980) *Back to the City*, John Palen and Bruce London's (1984) *Gentrification, Displacement and Neighbourhood Revitalization* and Neil Smith and Peter Williams's (1986) *Gentrification of the City* were concerned with displacement and, indeed, more 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. There was also recognition that there are many levels of displacement, from the social displacement described by Michael Chernoff (1980) to the industrial displacement caused by the attraction to 'loft living' (Zukin, 1982).

Displacement is vital to an understanding of gentrification, in terms both of retaining definitional coherence and of retaining a critical perspective on the process. Given the fact that many political administrations now avoid using the term 'gentrification', preferring class-neutral terms such as 'urban regeneration', 'urban sustainability', and 'urban renaissance', that effectively deflect criticism and resistance (Lees, 2003a), it seems of paramount importance to remind ourselves that gentrification is a transformation "fundamentally rooted in class" (Wyly and Hammel, 1999, page 716). Each class transformation carries with it the likelihood of displacement, either direct or

indirect (see Davidson and Lees, under review), and resuscitating research on this is of epistemological and political importance.

So, in summary, we are seeing a new geography of gentrification, new forms of gentrification, such as 'rural', 'suburban', 'new build', 'super' (Lees, 2003c), and so forth, and interjections questioning displacement (Freeman and Braconi, 2002; Hamnett, 2003; Vigdor, 2002), but when we synthesise the recent scholarship, how can we think of gentrification as anything else but the production of space for—and consumption by—a more affluent and very different incoming population? In spite of all the definitional squabbles, we can still recognise gentrification when we see it, or as a flyer distributed in San Francisco's Mission District in 2000 said, "Something Smells Like Gentrification Around Here!" Elvin Wyly and Daniel Hammel (2001) have pointed out that gentrification research in earlier decades was often tautological and stuck in a definitional quagmire because what was meant by 'gentrification' "eluded broad consensus, and inspired considerable disagreement over the magnitude and relevance of a turnaround in the inner city" (page 213). To avoid falling into the same trap again, we need less definitional deliberation and more critical, progressive scholarship to match the quality of the scholarship which focuses on middle-class *habituses* extracted from Bourdieu's seemingly bottomless conceptual vault (see Bridge, 2001; Butler and Robson, 2001; Ley, 2003).

The theme issue
The papers in this theme issue present the results of theoretically informed empirical investigations into gentrification in both US and Canadian contexts. Perhaps unusually for a grouping together of gentrification scholarship, the authors share the same perspective on the process: its ability to cause disruption and upheaval to neighbourhoods which do not welcome policy-driven reinvestment with open arms. Gentrification is presented in each paper as an injustice, something to be fought and contested. In some of the papers, the voices and interests of the middle class are replaced (displaced?!) by the voices and interests of the working class, and a different picture of neighbourhood change emerges which is unsettling and politically salient at this disturbing time of the relentless march of neoliberal urban policy. Explanations of gentrification in this issue are less concerned with the practices of the middle classes and more concerned with the institutional and structural mechanisms which create the spaces for them; spaces currently occupied by working classes. This is vital at a time when stealth forms of gentrification have worked their way into planning manifestos, regeneration proposals, and private market initiatives to maximise profits from residential turnover.

Kathe Newman and Philip Ashton kick off this special issue with a paper that demonstrates how the gentrification wave fanning out of New York City in all directions has been lapping at the shores of a city where reinvestment was almost unthinkable to those who know it well: Newark, New Jersey. Exploring the deeply divided and tense neighbourhood of West Side Park, Newman and Ashton are attentive to the critical role of neoliberal urban policy in tandem with private investors and local nonprofit housing actors, and show how a public–private alliance is sending a neighbourhood on a reinvestment path—yet in the context of continuing disinvestment. In particular, these authors show how federal government initiatives to 'deconcentrate' poverty through the promotion of mixed-income developments and the facilitation of home-ownership have filtered down to programmes run by the state of New Jersey, the city of Newark, and community development corporations in neighbourhoods. The result not only highlights the importance of geographical scale in understanding the roots and implications of policy formulation, but is a sign of the neoliberal times: community 'revitalisation' requires public funds and community organisation energies to direct and

maintain private reinvestment and, as a consequence, gentrification is just beginning to rear its head. Interestingly, in a neighbourhood which continues to experience severe disinvestment and abandonment, the authors' identification of gentrification endorses the claims of many scholars that the scale of the process is penetrating further than previously imaginable (Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Lees, 2000; Slater, 2002) and prompts new questions about the tension between investment and disinvestment, especially the impact on the very low-income residents of West Side Park. In addition to the specifics of their account, it is worth mentioning that their paper is an example of how qualitative and quantitative methods can be usefully combined, rather than needlessly divorced, to present a story of complex, impending neighbourhood transformation.

David Wilson, Jared Wouters, and Dennis Grammenos focus on the surprisingly neglected area of resistance to gentrification in a paper on the neighbourhood of Pilsen in Chicago's Lower West Side. Since the mid-1980s Pilsen has been under intense gentrification pressures which must be seen in the context of Chicago's remarkable postindustrial transformation in the wake of the failure of liberal Keynesianism. One of the few neighbourhoods in central Chicago left to gentrify, it is a prime target for developers seeking profits from its devalorised streets, and firmly in the radar of civic leaders seeking to brand and sell Chicago to harness global capital. Through an examination of the three competing, colliding discourses of neighbourhood change in Pilsen, (one constructed by developers in favour of gentrification, one by a community organisation wanting to protect Pilsen for existing residents, one by a coalition of actors wanting to gentrify the neighbourhood along the lines of its ethnic heritage) Wilson, Wouters, and Grammenos demonstrate the power of narratives of decline and renewal, and how what they term discursive 'utterances' have material manifestations in the streets of the neighbourhood. Weighing up these utterances, the authors argue that the 'protection of Pilsen discourse' is currently winning because working-class Mexican residents of the neighbourhood have been scripted by the producers of the discourse as proud and territorially tied, and those wishing to profit from Pilsen have been scripted as neighbourhood villains. Furthermore, drawing on the classic work of Henri Lefebvre on representations of space, the authors point out that space is never far away from these scriptings, augmenting the 'protect Pilsen discourse' with form and meaning, cementing strong attachments to place which deflect and shun attempts to change Pilsen's socioeconomic status and ultimately its entire identity.

A concern with discourse also informs the work of Tom Slater, who undertakes a comparative analysis of gentrification in Toronto and New York City and engages with the dominant academic discourses to have emerged from gentrification research in both cities (and, more broadly, in both countries) (see Lees, 2000; Slater, 2002). Canadian city gentrification, especially the gentrification of Toronto, has often been portrayed as having emancipatory potential, bringing different social classes together to foster understanding and tolerance—something influenced by the long-running promotion of social mix in Canadian urban planning and policy. However, looking at the recent gentrification of the neighbourhood of South Parkdale, Toronto, Slater argues that the powerful alliance of neoliberal provincial and municipal policies has led to a situation which is far from emancipatory, as a vulnerable group of deinstitutionalised psychiatric patients are being forced out by the policy-led redesignation of the neighbourhood as a space for families and middle-class professionals. By way of contrast, US city gentrification, especially the gentrification of New York City, has often been portrayed as 'revanchist', a process of revenge against the working class perceived by political leaders and much of their electorate as having 'stolen' neighbourhoods from them. Slater investigates the gentrification of the Lower Park Slope neighbourhood in Brooklyn and focuses on the efforts of a nonprofit community

organisation to resist the displacement of low-income Hispanic tenants, and illustrates that the actions of realtors and landlords, facilitated by a lack of rent regulation in much of the neighbourhood's housing stock, constitute the true enemy in the eyes of this organisation. Revanchism is less prevalent because the middle classes in the neighbourhood are concerned about the displacement of their neighbours, and many support the actions of the community organisation. Although Slater does not reject the validity of the arguments of the architects of these academic discourses, he concludes that the discourses have the power to gild important general and contextual factors in the gentrification process. This paper contributes to the emerging understanding of the 'geography of gentrification' (Lees, 2000; Ley, 1996).

Elvin Wyly and Daniel Hammel expand on their earlier research into the geography of gentrification within the United States (see Wyly and Hammel, 1999; 2000; 2001) with a paper exploring the unhappy interplay of gentrification, discriminatory mortgage lending, and neoliberal urban policy in twenty-three large US cities. In doing so they fill two voids in the gentrification literature: one methodological, as comparative analyses using a rich, expansive database (which they have built on the foundation of deep local knowledge of all these cities) to form sophisticated models of neighbourhood transformation are nonexistent; and the other geographical, for little empirically grounded material has appeared to instruct us on the ways in which the gentrification process, an intraurban phenomenon, may have important interurban commonalities and/or variances. In keeping with the spirit of this theme issue, Wyly and Hammel's concern is less with what is causing gentrification and more with the consequences of reinvestment, particularly with reference to patterns of class and racial segregation which are never far from major theoretical statements on urban change in the United States. Launching a major challenge to neoclassical economists who argue that competitive urban land markets eliminate discrimination, they demonstrate that the competition on which gentrification thrives has in fact exacerbated discrimination, especially in cities which experienced severe disinvestment during earlier decades of macroeconomic shock and then 1980s municipal negligence under Reagan's New Federalism. Segregation along the axes of class and race is underwritten by the never-ending story of institutional discrimination on the part of mortgage lenders and property insurance companies who steer capital towards neighbourhoods experiencing an influx of white middle-class residents. In sum, Wyly and Hammel's findings offer a stern jolt to the views of sceptics who view gentrification's insignificant empirical magnitude as a reason not to research it, for they demonstrate how the process offers a lens through which we can view important metropolitan dynamics under the current era of 'roll-out' public–private neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

A critical concern with the march of neoliberal urban policy is the undercurrent of the work of Winifred Curran in the final paper of this issue. Pursuing a new direction in gentrification research, she focuses on the neighbourhood of Williamsburg in Brooklyn, New York City, to cover the neglected terrain of the displacement of industry and work under gentrification. A central part of Curran's work is to expose how manufacturing has been constructed as obsolete when it is still a vital livelihood for over a quarter of a million people in New York City, and gentrification is part of a strategy to render manufacturing and blue-collar labour as things of the past. Writing from a robust political-economy approach, Curran demonstrates how falsely constructed industrial obsolescence paves the way for capital to penetrate a neighbourhood which largely escaped the earlier rounds of reinvestment in New York City. Williamsburg is not yet 'postindustrial', but the vignettes drawn from Curran's interviews with small-scale business owners and their workers under the threat of eviction show that the intention of neoliberal governance and real-estate companies is to make the neighbourhood 'hip'

and 'hot' and to fabricate, romanticise, and sell its industrial 'past' at the expense of those whose livelihoods depend on its industrial present. The result is tremendous pressure on unionised labour, the increasing informalisation of blue-collar work, and the continued displacement and degradation of anything that does not fit into the gentrification strategy that has transformed inner-city New York since its neoliberal reemergence in the mid-1990s.

In sum, this theme issue is an attempt to catch up with the theoretical sophistication displayed in accounts of the causes of gentrification, particularly those accounts dealing with the practices of the middle class, by focusing on the worrying effects of the process induced by rampant neoliberal urban policy. Definitional deliberations are sidelined in favour of richly detailed case studies that document the serious upheavals to neighbourhoods experiencing or threatened by waves of reinvestment that are not geared to people already living in those neighbourhoods. The great challenge for the current and future generation of gentrification researchers is to describe, explain, and most importantly respond to and challenge reinvestment that is geared only to the incoming middle class rather than to extant social groups. We hope that the papers in this theme issue provide food for thought with respect to how this can be achieved.

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