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Deconstructing Gentrification Paper

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"Rich communities can lobby for all sorts of planning improvements, but many poor neighborhoods fight planning interventions they would otherwise embrace out of a very real fear that any enhancement will trigger displacement" (Stein 2019, 40). Neighborhood improvement and displacement are part of the cycle of gentrification; however, the dynamics of gentrification can't be fully understood without realizing the influences and operations of cultural dynamics within cities. Neighborhoods of color are seen as having less capital than white neighborhoods but nevertheless are viewed as 'authentic' and therefore desirable, leading to gentrification's displacement and "social death" of people of color.

Typically, society emphasizes economic capital. It's the best and most valuable form of wealth someone could have. On average, however, it's white people who have the most economic capital and are therefore better off when society prioritizes economic capital. This results in neighborhoods with majority people of color being labeled as underfunded, underdeveloped, or dangerous. However, there are other kinds of capital, which are often disregarded despite the "cultural wealth" they help foster (Yosso and Garcia 2007, 154). Cultural wealth is the "array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (154). Yosso and Garcia (2007) discuss six other kinds of capital – aspirational, linguistic, social, navigational, familial, and resistant. Yosso and Garcia (2007) describe aspiration capital as "the ability to

maintain hopes and dreams for the future"; linguistic capital as "the ability to communicate through visual art, music, or poetry"; social capital as "networks of people and community resources"; navigational capital as "skills in maneuvering through social institutions … not created with Communities of Color in mind"; familial capital as the "cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition … [that] expands the concept of family to include a broader understanding of kinship"; and resistant capital as the "knowledges and skills [that] foster[] through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (158; 160; 161; 162; 164; 166). These alternative types of capital build cultural wealth within neighborhoods that get ignored and dismissed as unimportant in the face of the potential economic capital that gentrification brings.

However, the cultural wealth and community culture found in neighborhoods of color creates a sense of 'authenticity' that helps attract gentrification. "Authenticity inherently involves value and how people value a particular place … The desire for authenticity is about the look, but not the feel of a particular neighbourhood," (Summers 2021, 118; 123). Early gentrifiers, or as Summers (2021) refers to them 'social homesteaders', like both the aesthetics of a community's cultural wealth and the lower price of real estate in the area, thus they move in. However, "[m]obility is a privilege that is attached to whiteness, so it is those that possess whiteness who are more likely to call a neighborhood authentic or boast its 'authentic' qualities as desirable" (119). So as white people more in because they like the 'aesthetics' of a neighborhood, they raise prices of that area, displacing the original inhabitants, people of color. But the new residents still want that same look as the original neighborhood, even while displacing many of the original residents of the area, in order to feel safer among mostly upper-income, new white residents.

They want it to still appear the same on the surface because "[u]rban should not look suburban but can feel suburban in its visual representation of safety" (123).

As a result, "authenticity ends up being a performance, and a chosen lifestyle, as well as an instrument of displacement" (124). 'Social homesteaders', or "gentrifiers who want to maintain a piece of the past as representing the social or cultural heyday of the neighbourhood", construct allusions to the neighborhood's history (123). One example of this that Summers (2021) talks about is the Apollo building, named for the Apollo Theatre in Washington D.C.'s H Street, a historically Black commercial district before gentrification took hold. The Apollo building's name references the neighborhood's history and the surface aesthetics that gentrifiers are trying to recreate while still maintaining their new 'whiteness' and 'safety' of suburban life. Another way that gentrified neighborhoods try to keep the aesthetics of the original neighborhood is through "the creation of festival markets", which mainly benefits tourists and developers (Stein 2019, 60). Or, as seen during a tour of Five Points, naming new luxury apartment developments after historic black leaders in the neighborhood.

It might seem that the "renovated spaces are a vast improvement over what was there before" (Bohlen 2022, para. 26). Improved or renovated buildings, new green spaces, better public transport or other public services all on the surface are good things. But as Stein (2019) quotes preservationist Micheal Henry Adams from Harlem saying, "'You see, I told you they didn't plant those trees for us,'" (40). As these renovations take place, white people that have the monetary ability move freely into these areas and further increase real estate prices. This pushes the neighborhood's original inhabitants out of the area because they can't afford it. The documentary "Priced Out: Portland's History of Segregation and Redlining" (2020), told the story of Nicki, a black woman. She worked to get her neighborhood cleaned up. As the

neighborhood got safer, more and more white people moved it. The video ends with her being pushed out of her home because it's gotten too expensive. Nicki wants to stay in her home and benefit from all the improvements she has worked hard for, but she can't afford to. Nicki talks about how her new white neighbors don't acknowledge her like her old neighbors would have. People of color are ostracized and 'priced out' of their homes and communities as gentrification takes hold.

This results in 'social death'. According to Bruton (2023), 'social death' is "the exclusion of people or groups within a society because of changing social dynamics, which is often cause by economic vulnerability and/or racial hierarchy" (4). As gentrification dismisses the culture wealth that people of color's neighborhoods have except to appropriate that culture into an aesthetic that raises property prices, people of color are ostracized within their own neighborhoods by new wealthier white neighbors and displaced due to the rising property prices, leading to a social death of the original community and community members. 'Social death' further "describe[s] modes of social segregation and a loss of social connectedness through a loss of community identity (9).

An example of this is the case study of New Village and Murphey Manor (Fraser et al. 2012). Murphey Manor was a HOPE VI development and New Village was built across from it to further create mixed income living. However, the people living in New Village looked down on those living in Murphey Manor, othering them, "a process of defining an 'us' or community through the construction of a constitutive exterior that is positioned as inferior" (535). New Village would put candy out for trick-or-treaters at the entrance to their neighborhood so that Murphey Manor residents wouldn't come into 'their' space. New Village residents saw themselves as better than Murphey Manor and therefore as an example. Despite claims that they

were trying to build connections with people in Murphey Manor, in reality they weren't. Gentrification, regardless of implementations of projects like HOPE VI, still results in a 'social death' for the communities living there originally.

The process of gentrification relies on the assumption that poor neighborhoods of color have less capital than others, seeing the rich cultural wealth of these neighborhoods solely as a marketable tool to create an 'authentic' aesthetic that's desirable to white folks. The influx of white people moving to the neighborhood increases property prices and ostracizes the neighborhood's original residents, leading to the 'social death' of people of color and their eventual displacement. Bruton (2023) provides a local example of this displacement in Five Points, Denver, CO. In 1930, over 90% of African Americans living in Denver were in Five Points, but in 2016, only 12.76% of the neighborhood's population was African American (5; 8). While this original concentration was caused and upheld by redlining, the displacement of African Americans from Five Points demonstrates the cultural dynamics of gentrification.

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