GENTRIFICATION OF THE CITY

Edited by
Neil Smith and Peter Williams

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Preface

This book seeks to present alternatives to the mainstream dis-
cussions of gentrification. It does not present a single coherent
vision of the causes, effects and experiences of gentrification, but a
number of different views that do not always coincide. What the
authors have in common is the attempt to escape a naive empiricism
which has dominated much mainstream research, as well as the
conviction that questions of social class lie at the heart of this issue.
With one exception, the chapters are original, unpublished contri-
butions.

In the several years it has taken to compile this collection, a
number of people have helped us. We would like to thank the
authors who have had little choice but to be patient when trans-
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have been. Our greatest debt is to Linda Cranor who criticized the
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Finally, Tetsuji Uchiyama drew the maps in Chapter 8 with great
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We are indebted to the editors of the *Urban Lawyer*, published by
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form the piece by LeGates and Hartman (Ch. 9). This originally
appeared in the *Urban Lawyer* **31** (1982).

NEIL SMITH and PETER WILLIAMS

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Alternatives to orthodoxy: invitation to a debate

NEIL SMITH and PETER WILLIAMS

On definitions

More than 20 years have passed since the term "gentrification" was first used. Originating in Britain, gentrification has become a popular concept in the United States, where its terminological debut in established dictionaries was an unheralded but nonetheless significant event. According to the *American Heritage* dictionary of 1982, gentrification is the "restoration of deteriorated urban property especially in working-class neighborhoods by the middle and upper classes." In similar vein, the *Oxford American* dictionary of two years earlier contains the following definition: "movement of middle class families into urban areas causing property values to increase and having secondary effect of driving out poorer families."

It is remarkable how quickly this quite specific definition of a new process has become institutionalized. The explanation probably lies in the speed with which gentrification has proceeded in the urban landscape, and its high visibility in the popular press as well as academic circles. Even more remarkable is the fact that in a society and in a period when class analysis is widely held to be an historical or geographical anomaly – a holdover from the 19th century or quaintly Old World – these dictionary definitions embrace a class analysis of gentrification without the least hint of squeamishness. The temptation to dilute the phraseology must have been considerable, but perhaps the most remarkable thing of all is that with the process itself developing rapidly, these highly innovative definitions may already be outdated.

As the terminology suggests, "gentrification" connotes a process which operates in the residential housing market. It refers to the rehabilitation of working-class and derelict housing and the consequent transformation of an area into a middle-class neighborhood.

Much of the early research focused on immediate empirical questions: Where is the process occurring? How widespread is it? Who are the gentrifiers (their age, race, income, life-style, occupation)? This empirical documentation marked a first phase of research into a newly emerging process. With few exceptions, the focus was on the gentrifying middle class, not the displaced working class, and on the gentrifying neighborhood, not the location and fate of displacees. Although often detached in tone, much of this early empirical work represented an uncritical celebration of the process and was at times indistinguishable from the fiscal boosterism which permeated treatments of gentrification in the popular and parochial press, especially in the United States. As such the emphasis was on effects rather than causes; the causes were generally taken for granted, but the effects were hailed by many as a timely answer to inner-city decay, and research was often oriented toward extrapolation of statistical trends and public-policy prescriptions. This empirical phase still dominates the North American literature (James 1977, Laska & Spain 1980, Schill & Nathan 1983, Gale 1984).

A second phase of research, with its origins in Britain, emerged in the late 1970s. This work emphasizes causation over effect, theoretical analysis over statistical documentation. This second phase of research tended to see gentrification not as a unique and isolated process but as integral to the broader spheres of the housing and urban land markets. Several authors attempted to explain the phenomenon in terms of public and private policies toward housing (Hamnett 1973, Williams 1976, 1978, Kendig 1979). This led, in turn, to further theoretical attempts to explain gentrification (Smith 1979a, Berry 1980b, Ley 1980) and to set it in the context of uneven development and the massive restructuring of urban space and urban land uses that is currently under way (Holcomb & Beauregard 1981, Smith 1982, Anderson *et al.* 1983). Sufficient of this work has been done to allow for the recent appearance of two comprehensive and critical reviews of theoretical work on gentrification (Hamnett 1984a, Rose 1984). If some of this latter work was necessarily theoretical to the virtual exclusion of empirical analysis, the pendulum is now swinging back, and the present volume presents essays that incorporate the theoretical work of recent years and attempt to deepen our understanding of the causes of the process.

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. Even into the late 1970s, this particular definition of gentrification *vis-à-vis* redevelopment may have made some sense. But as the process has continued, it has

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become increasingly apparent that residential rehabilitation is only one facet (if a highly publicized and highly visible one) 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. Underlying all of these changes in the urban landscape are specific economic, social and political forces that are responsible for a major reshaping of advanced capitalist societies: there is a restructured industrial base, a shift to service employment and a consequent transformation of the working class, and indeed of the class structure in general; and there are shifts in state intervention and political ideology aimed at the privatization of consumption and service provision. Gentrification is a visible spatial component of this social transformation. A highly dynamic process, it is not amenable to overly restrictive definitions; rather than risk constraining our understanding of this developing process by imposing definitional order, we should strive to consider the broad range of processes that contribute to this restructuring, and to understand the links between seemingly separate processes.

Invitation to a debate

Capital and class are recurrent themes that run throughout this collection. All of the authors look to capital and class, albeit in different ways, in an effort to understand the causes and effects of gentrification. Although this implies a commonality of perspective at a very general level, a perspective quite antithetical to the empiricist tradition mentioned earlier, it should become obvious very quickly to the reader that there are fundamental disagreements and debates (both explicit and implicit) between the authors in this collection. This we perceive as the best way forward in gentrification research today. If the barrenness of the empiricist tradition quickly became obvious, the limitations of more abstract theoretical analyses are also clear. What is necessary today, more than anything else, is a statement and clarification of the theoretical issues in the gentrification debate and an active engagement of contrasting theoretical propositions with empirical data. This collection is offered as a preliminary contribution to this process.

The debates and differences in the following pages are not so simple and untangled that they can adequately be separated into a

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list. Nonetheless, because only some causes of the debates are made explicit, we feel that it will be useful here to lay out some of the major themes of the discussions involved. Five issues are readily identifiable:

(a) Production-side versus consumption-side explanations.
(b) The question of the emergence of a "post-industrial" city.
(c) The relative importance of social structure *vis-à-vis* individual agency in the gentrification process.
(d) Is there a "new middle class" and what is its role?
(e) What are the costs of gentrification today and in the future?

It is apparent that these questions are closely related and that there are clear patterns of response to the issues taken as a whole. Someone who emphasizes consumption-side explanations, for example, is likely to take one position rather than another in some of the succeeding questions. But before looking at the larger pattern, let us first examine these questions in order.

Production-side versus consumption-side explanations

The explanations taken for granted in the empiricist tradition were for the most part consumption-side explanations (e.g. Laska & Spain 1980). They isolated a number of factors including life-style changes, preference patterns, and simple descriptions of demographic change. The implicit assumption behind these explanations was that of consumer sovereignty in the land and housing markets; the changing urban patterns were the expression of changed consumption choices among certain sections of the middle class. Against this, several authors have emphasized the role of institutional agents and of capital, rather than consumers, in sculpting the urban landscape. Gentrification, according to this perspective, results from the private and public investment of capital in certain land uses, its devaluation through use and disinvestment, and the resulting opportunity for profitable reinvestment that is thereby created.

Whereas the empiricist tradition has never seriously entertained explanations involving more than lip service to a simplistic consumption-side argument, others have developed a more sophisticated argument which retains a certain primacy for consumption, while fitting gentrification within a broader framework of social, demographic and cultural change. This usually involves an analysis of changes in family structure, the increased participation of women in the labor force, and the expansion of an educated middle class. Thus, in Chapter 3, Beauregard deals with a number of production-

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and consumption-side factors but stresses that an explanation must begin with an account of how the gentrifiers come to exist as a social group. Smith, on the other hand, in Chapter 2, focuses in the first place upon how gentrifiable properties (relatively inexpensive properties on potentially expensive land) come to exist in specific geographical areas.

Elements of this discussion suffuse most of the other chapters, but perhaps the most important point here is that whatever the differing emphases, few are arguing an exclusively production-based or consumption-based argument. Smith does attempt to outline the significance of consumption-side forces, and production-side considerations are central to Beauregard's argument. Most of the other authors also attempt to balance these two perspectives. The ideas presented here are in no way final but should be seen as contributions to a debate in which the ground has moved very rapidly, even in the last five years.

The question of the emergence of a "post-industrial" city

The appearance of gentrification in the urban landscape has been linked by some theorists to the emergence of a so-called "post-industrial society." David Ley in particular has advanced this idea, attempting explicitly to view gentrification and contemporary urban restructuring as a hallmark of what Daniel Bell has dubbed post-industrial society (Bell 1973, Sternlieb & Hughes 1976, Ley 1980, 1982a). Bell attempted to extrapolate present changes in the social, economic and political structure of Western society into the future, and sought to encapsulate this historical development as the emergence of post-industrial society. The decline of industrial production and employment and the rapid growth of the so-called service sector along with information-oriented employment are only one aspect of this larger transformation, according to Bell. In the context of the city, Ley has argued that, with the development of post-industrial society, the rationale behind the allocation of urban land to different uses is altered. Priorities are reversed; whatever the importance of production-based land use allocation in the industrial city, it is consumption factors, taste and a certain esthetic, as well as political forces, which come to dominate today. Not only is gentrification the product of certain sets of consumption choices, but it represents an historically new phase in urban development and the primacy of consumption over production. It also represents, for Ley, the political victory of reform politicians over established interests and the construction of a "reform landscape."

Bell's work was motivated in part by a desire to provide an

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alternative historical account of societal development to that offered by marxist theorists. This is equally true of proponents of the "post-industrial city" thesis. Thus the debate on this question is closely related to that about production-side and consumption-side explanations. Marxist writers have tended to stress the production-side explanations and the role of capital, privately as well as publicly mediated, in fashioning the urban landscape. Thus in pointing to the superficial misreading of real changes in advanced capitalist society, implicit in the "post-industrial" thesis, Walker and Greenberg (1982a,b) stress the functionality of reform movements and the new consumption ethic for capital. After Sayer (1982), they view the "post-industrial city" as a chaotic concept. This debate emerges in the present book with the chapter by Cybriwsky, Ley and Western (Ch. 6) and that by Jager (Ch. 5) presenting elements of the post-industrial city thesis. Chapter 2, along with Chapter 7 by Hamnett and Randolph, focus on the importance of capital investment in urban restructuring, and consider the changing forms taken by capital in the context of gentrification.

The relative importance of social structure and individual agency in the gentrification process

The arguments here feed directly into the now fashionable question of the relationship between "structure and agency." Drawing heavily on the work of Anthony Giddens, a number of social scientists in the early 1980s were concerned to explore societal questions in terms of "structure and agency" (Giddens 1981). Again, this trend emerged and became fashionable partly in reaction to marxist theories, but also in reaction to liberal political conceptions. Giddens attempted a complex and not always coherent blend of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, but the applications of his work have been rather more prosaic. If marxist theory seemed to depend too much on structural explanations of societal change, and was even on occasion equated with structuralism (Duncan & Ley 1982), liberal political theory was thought to depend too heavily on the action and behavior of human individuals. Simply put, the structure and agency paradigm assumes that although there are certainly social structures that guide and inhibit social action, it is individual human beings who perform social acts and thereby make and change the social structures.

The debate over structure and agency is only beginning. Whether it represents a viable new framework for research or an unsustainable attempt to integrate two irreconcilable traditions remains to be

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seen. In this volume we present three essays which employ elements of the structure and agency framework. Namely Chapters 3 and 4, by Beauregard and Williams respectively, seek to capture the complexities of the gentrification process as a set of varied responses to a changing social and economic environment. In some respects, the chapter by Cybriwsky, Ley, and Western puts these ideas into practice. The authors view gentrification as having larger societal causes, but focus very much on individual and group actors and attempt to blend these in a comparative study of neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Vancouver.

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

Gentrification is widely identified with the supposed emergence of a new middle class, because the process seems to bring with it the concentration of trendy restaurants, boutiques, clubs and other recreation and retail facilities that are frequented by the "new young professionals." The question of a "new middle class" is widely debated in left-wing circles. The class structure of capitalist society has changed throughout the 20th century and this has led to numerous formulations on the new class structure (Walker 1979). If Barbara and John Ehrenreich (1979) argue that a new professional–managerial class has nudged the working class and the ruling class into far smaller niches, Eric Olin Wright (1979) prefers to talk about "contradictory class relations." The debate at this level is less over whether any change has taken place but rather about the character of the changing class structure and, in some cases, about the effects of these changes on traditional conceptions of class difference and class struggle. Thus Callinicos (1983) attempts to demonstrate that although there has certainly been a rapid growth of white-collar employment in service and administrative activities, most of these new employees are properly considered working class; though certainly not blue collar, they are still obligated to sell their labor power for a wage.

A number of the chapters touch on this issue, but perhaps the most explicit and innovative is the essay by Jager who attempts to read the rise of the new middle class and their societal niche from the architecture of their gentrified residences. This essay is an original interpretation of the class-based esthetics of gentrification and the way in which gentrification itself contributes to the social constitution of the new middle class. It has clear links with the arguments of Ley concerning a reform landscape, although Jager focuses on the architectural rather than metropolitan scale. This theme is also developed by Williams (Ch. 4) who seeks to understand gentrifi-

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cation as a class-based process reflecting and reinforcing the recon-
stitution of class structure in advanced capitalist societies.

If the lines of this debate are not yet well established, its impli-
cations are nonetheless important. Where Callinicos sees a large but
transformed working class, André Gorz (1982) has bid "farewell to
the working class," seeing instead the origins of a "post-industrial
socialism." "Post-industrial socialism" is the subtitle to Gorz's
book, and this makes immediately clear the links between the
argument over the "new middle class" and the argument, referred
to earlier, concerning post-industrialism. The importance of this
debate is not just that we try to understand the class anatomy of
contemporary society, but that action geared toward profound
social change can only succeed if it is premised on an accurate
understanding of that society and the social forces capable of
creating change. In the context of gentrification, this debate has a
clear prescriptive relevance. Whether one encourages or opposes the
process depends among other things upon how one sees the class
configurations. If one opposes gentrification, against whom is
community activism oriented, and whom is it meant to mobilize?
The authors of this collection are mostly opposed to gentrification,
but there is little or no agreement on the strategy and tactics of
opposition. Although these questions have been raised in various of
the chapters that follow, they remain by and large open to debate.

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

Echoing the conservative wisdom about gentrification, Sternlieb
and Ford (1979: 97) assert that "the problems of displacement of less
advantaged citizens in a declining city are relatively small." This was
also the official position of the US Department of Housing and
Urban Development (1979; see also Hartman 1979; Sumka 1979),
but no matter how conservative or conventional, this assertion was
rarely backed up by data. The essential vision here is that gentrifi-
cation is a small scale but welcome reversal of previous decay; in the
form of abandonment, this decay continues and is responsible for a
far greater amount of displacement.

Chapters 8 and 9 confront this orthodoxy concerning the signifi-
cance, or rather insignificance, of gentrification and the dis-
placement it involves. Peter Marcuse shows that far from being
separate processes, abandonment and gentrification are part of a
single economic transformation in the urban land market, and that
the result for working-class displacees is the same whether dis-
placement is inspired by abandonment or by gentrification. He
offers tentative estimates on the annual extent of displacement in

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New York City. LeGates and Hartman, in the following chapter, provide painstaking empirical evidence of the extent of gentrification-caused displacement in the United States. This chapter represents one of the most exhaustive surveys of information on the effects of gentrification upon the working class.

The final essay in the collection looks to the future and evaluates more directly how long term and extensive the process is likely to be. This exercise in cautious forecasting does not represent the quantitative extrapolation of present empirical data into an otherwise unchanging future. Rather we attempt to base our view of the future upon the qualitative analyses of forces, causes and actors that make up preceding chapters. Further, we attempt to situate gentrification and urban restructuring in the broader international and geographical context of economic crisis, a new international division of labor, deindustrialization, the changing function of the city, the role of the state, the changing political arena, and so forth. Finally, we take up explicitly the question of strategies and tactics in opposition to gentrification.

This brief survey of debates and disagreements is necessarily short and oversimplified. We want to emphasize the differences as a way of pressuring future research to confront some of these issues, but we have not attempted a comprehensive coverage of all the extant debate. Thus we have not mentioned at all the claim that gentrification represents a back-to-the-city movement from the suburbs. The data on this is now sufficiently substantial that the idea of a back-to-the-city movement survives only in the popular press. But beyond these debates, which should be more or less obvious to the reader, there is also a level of agreement about contemporary changes in the central and inner city, and it is to this that we now turn.

Society and space

Traditional 20th-century urban theory has generally maintained a strict separation between the spatial and social dimensions of urban process and form. This very distinction between process and form expresses the separation of social and spatial. An early exception to this norm came with the human-ecology tradition of Park, Burgess and others, according to which the patterns of human settlement in urban areas could be understood in terms of concepts and processes borrowed from biology and ecology. The theoretical justification for this naturalistic analogy was never clear, and however dubious this tradition seems in retrospect, its adherents

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were making some attempt at reconciling space and society (Park 1936).

In the 1950s and 1960s, another tradition emerged. In what came to be called spatial economics or regional science, a number of researchers attempted to "spatialize" neoclassical economic theory and thereby develop an analysis of the urban land market, the journey to work, the spatial structure of the housing market, and location theory in general (Isard 1956, Alonso 1960, Muth 1961, Kain 1962).[1] The limitations of this approach soon became apparent, however. In the first place, the basic theory is rigidly aspatial, and its application could produce only very general spatial insights. Society and space were brought into the same arena, with the emergence of regional science, but in so far as the basic neoclassical assumptions were not challenged the level of integration was minimal. Second, the social and political uprisings of the 1960s demonstrated vividly the narrowness of a purely economic location theory, at least on the urban scale. The 1960s highlighted the role of white flight, state-financed and planned urban renewal and housing policies, the destruction of black neighborhoods, and so forth.

Third, and most important, the neoclassical analysis is ahistorical, treating as eternal certain economic categories that applied only in the period of emerging industrial capitalism. Thus, to take just the most obvious illustration, Alonso's (1960) theory of the urban land market provides an explanation for the spatial structure not of London or Boston in the late 20th century, but of Manchester and Chicago in the 19th. It is a suitable explanation for the concentric ring model developed on the basis of empirical evidence by the Chicago School. As regards the advent of gentrification and the nascent reversal of this empirical pattern, the neoclassical tradition is stranded. Only by analytical contortions that would strain the credibility of the theory (see, for example, Schill & Nathan 1983) could this analysis of the urban land market possibly be made to explain the present restructuring of urban space (Smith 1982, Hamnett 1984a, Williams 1984a).

Frustration with the neoclassical approach in turn led to a more direct search for an integration of society and space (Harvey 1973). In association with the social uprisings of the 1960s also, the focus of this search was moved substantially to the left. Researchers surveyed vast literatures in search of some kind of theory of contemporary society, the idea being that only if we understood the way in which the society functions and develops would we be able to comprehend the way in which it creates its urban areas. If only a few completed the intellectual sojourn to Marx, many others were drawn in that direction. Marx's theory of capitalist society offered

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the possibility of a closer integration of space and society, allowing some researchers to examine gentrification as one aspect of the geography of capitalism.

The search for appropriate social theory did not necessitate a marxist destination. As we have seen from the above discussion, some authors favored the theory of post-industrial society, some preferred an institutional approach or urban managerialism, and still others have settled more recently on an agency–structure framework. Regardless of the complexion of the social theory, however, all of these researchers have tried to fashion a more sophisticated integration of space and society than was hitherto available. There is therefore unanimity in the view that – far from being an isolated phenomenon, however interesting it may be – gentrification is the expression in the urban landscape of deeper social processes and social change. Further, there is probably also unanimity in the view that gentrification, as an urban spatial process, contributes to the social determination and differentiation of class. The debates and disagreements apparent in this book begin from this foundation of agreement.

We have outlined the substance and direction of this book. Let us now briefly review its organization. We began with an introductory chapter reviewing the debates around gentrification and highlighting five main strands of argument: production versus consumption; the post-industrial city; structure and agency; the new middle class; and the impact and future of gentrification. In reviewing these arguments we located the contributions in this volume, thus exposing the tensions and conflicts which exist between the contributors. While we wished to expose these differences and engender debate which may resolve them, we would also stress their uniform rejection of simplistic empirical research.

The introductory chapter leads the reader into the body of the volume. The contributions have been arranged in an order which moves from chapters which, on balance, emphasize theoretical argument through to chapters which give greater weight to empirical evidence. There is no clear boundary, however, and each chapter contributes substantially to the debates, theoretical and empirical.

On balance the United States receives the closest attention but, as well as direct contributions on Australia, Britain and Canada, the scope of most of the chapters is international. This, plus the substantive attention to theory, means that the contributions are highly complementary, with issues raised in one chapter being taken up and developed in another. It should be stressed that each was written independently and there has been no attempt to edit out conflict and disagreement.

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