

Selected, Edited, and with Issue Framing Material by:

Raymond D'Angelo, *St. Joseph's College, Brooklyn*

and

Herbert Douglas, *Rowan University*

ISSUE



Is Gentrification Another Form of Segregation?

YES: Jeremiah Moss, "On Spike Lee and Hyper-Gentrification," *Jeremiah's Vanishing New York* (March 5, 2014)

NO: Justin Davidson, "Is Gentrification All Bad?" *New York Magazine* (February 2, 2014)

Learning Outcomes

After reading this issue, you will be able to:

- Properly conceptualize gentrification as a social phenomenon.
- Develop a critical understanding of the demographic factors that influence the critique of gentrification and its impact.
- Exhibit a sophisticated understanding of the potential impact of gentrification within urban America.
- Manifest a proper understanding of how gentrification is reflective of more generalized social mobility within the United States.
- Critically examine the nature and content of segregation within American life.
- Develop a meaningful comprehension of the responses of minority communities to gentrification.
- Understand how urban land use practices and policies have facilitated gentrification and its consequences.

ISSUE SUMMARY

YES: Jeremiah Moss, an urban-based writer, views gentrification as a destructive process through which African Americans and others are displaced by affluent whites. He is concerned that communities with a rich culture and stability are experiencing a significant uprooting of their homes and communities due to gentrification.

NO: Justin Davidson, a writer for *New York Magazine*, sees many positive outcomes that result from gentrification. Among these are economic development, neighborhood revitalization, and improvements in standards of living.

The 1960s brought significant attention to the impact of urban renewal projects upon the stability and functional integrity of minority communities within urban America. It is beyond dispute that these projects resulted in the dismemberment of these communities and a loss of stability and a decline in the quality of life. Also, the social capital within these communities is often devalued. These developments are informing a heightened concern with the impact of gentrification upon these communities.

In this issue we will examine the reality of gentrification within urban America and its social impact.

Critical to our analysis is an attempt to understand whether gentrification contributes to the racial and/or class-based segregation that is a persistent characteristic of American culture.

Gentrification is a reality of American urban life and is reflective of the social mobility that is experienced within society. One major concern with gentrification is the tendency of this process to result in the displacement of low-income populations, especially people of color, within these communities by mostly affluent white newcomers. What is the fate of the displaced residents of these urban communities? Do they end up moving to higher density

YES

Jeremiah Moss

On Spike Lee & Hyper-Gentrification

In order to even begin exploring the city's other options, New Yorkers first have to stop deluding themselves into believing that today's hyper-gentrification is the same old thing. We all have to stop saying, "New York always changes, so this is normal." This is not normal. This is state sponsored, corporate driven, turbo charged, far flung, and impossible to stop in its current form.

Last week, filmmaker Spike Lee spoke to an audience of students at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute. During the Q&A, one student asked if he thought gentrification had its good sides. Spike launched into a powerful defense of his home neighborhood, Fort Greene, against the incursion of affluent white people. He recalled his childhood, when the garbage wasn't picked up every day and the police weren't out making the streets safe. He asked, "Why does it take an influx of white New Yorkers in the South Bronx, in Harlem, in Bed-Stuy, in Crown Heights for the facilities to get better?" An excellent and important question.

As the audience member tried to argue with him, interrupting to say, "Can I talk about something?" Spike turned up the heat, railing against what he called "the motherfuckin' Christopher Columbus Syndrome," in which newcomers, usually whites, believe they've "discovered" a new neighborhood, as if nothing and no one had been there before them, a common occurrence in the city today. Part of the syndrome includes complaining about the traditions of the people who preceded you. For example, as Lee pointed out, a group of African-American drummers have played in a circle in Harlem's Marcus Garvey Park every weekend since 1969. Their presence helped to keep the park safe. Then a luxury condo opened nearby. In 2008, the newcomers—"most of them young white professionals," according to the *New York Times*—started complaining about the drums. They called the police and circulated racist e-mails "advocating violence against the musicians." The drummers agreed to move away from their traditional spot, and Marcus Garvey Park, named after the black nationalist in 1973, was rechristened by realtors and newcomers with its original nineteenth-century name, Mount Morris Park.

No one is quite sure who Mr. Morris was, but you can bet he was a white man.

Said Spike, "I'm for democracy and letting everybody live, but you gotta have some respect. You can't just come in when people have a culture that's been laid down for generations, and you come in and now shit gotta change because you're here? Get the fuck outta here. Can't do that!" He went on to cite the problems of sky-high rents, increased competition to get into good schools, and the real-estate industry's questionable habit of changing the names of neighborhoods to make them more marketable.

What Spike said is true, facts and observations that have been pointed out and discussed for years in major newspapers and in blogs like mine. In the 2000s, Brooklyn changed rapidly and dramatically. The Bloomberg administration rezoned the borough from top to bottom, giving taxpayer subsidies to developers so they could fill it with luxury towers and turn tenements into condominiums. Rents skyrocketed, pushing out long-time residents. Many white people moved in to neighborhoods that had been predominantly black for decades and more. Fort Greene boasted a thriving African-American community as early as the 1840s, and by 1870 the neighborhood was home to more than half of Brooklyn's black population. By 2000, 93% of Fort Greene was made up of people of color. That soon changed—and fast. A researcher from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute showed a huge influx of whites flooding into zip codes 11205 and 11206, which cover sections of Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Bed-Stuy, and Williamsburg. Between the years 2000 and 2010, the white share of those areas increased by nearly 30%, qualifying them as some of the "fastest-gentrifying neighborhoods in the United States."

Many of those incoming whites, members of the middle and affluent classes, often celebrated their "discovery" of a "new" neighborhood in blogs and newspapers. Once moved in, some immediately started complaining about the people who had been there before them, regardless of race, but not regardless of class. In another example of the widespread trend, in Carroll Gardens the newcomers complained to the city about the smell of roasting coffee

at D'Amico's, an Italian-American café that had been fragrantly roasting beans since 1948. Thanks to the complaints, the D'Amico family came under investigation by the city's DEP and, with the threat of closure, were forced to spend money on upgrades to their antique machinery. Said one local to Gothamist about the changing neighborhood demographic, "Saturday afternoon on Court Street now looks like a J. Crew runway. With strollers," a statement that conjures up an image of white privilege, affluence, and leisure, similar to Spike Lee's description of Fort Greene Park, "It's like the motherfuckin' Westminster Dog Show."

Spike was right on his main points, but many people didn't like it. His speech had been recorded and disseminated on the Internet, where the backlash was immediate. People didn't like that he was angry and had used the word "fuck" several times in what was now being called his "rant." They called him "arrogant," a word that has "uppity" as one of its synonyms. They didn't like that he, like television's George and Louise Jefferson before him, had "moved on up" to the East Side, to a deluxe apartment in the sky, as the song goes. He was a wealthy hypocrite, people argued. He had too many multi-million-dollar properties. He had abandoned Brooklyn, and didn't deserve to defend it. In an op-ed for the Daily News, Errol Louis made some good points about Spike's own role in the gentrification of Fort Greene, including his flipping of several properties and the marketing of a rather tacky "Absolut Brooklyn" vodka. There were definitely some conflicts there that Spike did not address, and should have; however, that omission does not fully explain the violent backlash he received, and the fierce pro-gentrification cries that swirled around him. After all, plenty of other financially successful New York artists have railed against gentrification—David Byrne of Talking Heads, whose net worth is \$45 million, even used the word "fuck" in his rant against the rich—and they didn't get such backlash. But they weren't black people expressing anger about white people.

As the online comment threads about Spike Lee lengthened, growing more contentious, the conversation began to crack. The neoliberal façade that hides the true face of today's brand of gentrification fell away like a veil. Several people began to make statements like (I'm paraphrasing here): "I'm white and I helped make the neighborhood nicer," and "White people were here first," and "Black people pushed out the white people and now the whites are just coming back," as well as, "I'm white and I'll live wherever I want." Said another (not paraphrasing), "Making a neighborhood that was once nice, nice again is not gentrification. It's restoration."

These statements, and so many others like them, reveal the hidden heart of what urban studies scholar and gentrification expert Neil Smith called the revanchist city. Revanche is French for revenge.

The Revanchist City

In an interview I did with Smith in 2011, just before his untimely death, he explained what he called the "third wave" of gentrification, or "gentrification generalized," which is nothing like gentrification of the past. Starting in the 1990s, he said, "Gentrification became a systematic attempt to remake the central city, to take it back from the working class, from minorities, from homeless people, from immigrants who, in the minds of those who decamped to the suburbs, had stolen the city from its rightful white middle-class owners. What began as a seemingly quaint rediscovery of the drama and edginess of the new urban 'frontier' became in the 1990s broad-based market driven policy."

This policy is undeniably infused with racism and classism. A revanchist policy, bent on revenge, this "take back" of the city is an act of aggression, colonizing and terraforming as it goes, fabricating entire new environments on the bulldozed rubble of the old. And these new environments are not meant for everyone. They are expressly created for the city's newest and most deep-pocketed residents—the children and grandchildren of the white-flight suburbanites who have come back to reclaim and restore what they've been told is their birthright. After all, these neighborhoods once belonged to moneyed whites.

Smith continued, "Almost without exception, the new housing, new restaurants, new artistic venues, new entertainment locales—not to mention the new jobs on Wall Street—are all aimed at a social class quite different from those who populated the Lower East Side or the West Side, Harlem, or neighborhood Brooklyn in the 1960s. Bloomberg's rezoning of, at latest count, 104 neighborhoods has been the central weapon in this assault, but it was built on Giuliani's explicit revanchism—his revenge against the street—the public, cultural lever that wedged the systematic class retake into place."

...

It's difficult to remember exactly when it was that I first understood, when it really hit me, that the city I knew was vanishing at an alarming rate. . . . It seemed impossible that so many fixtures of the city weren't actually permanent, and that so many could fall at once.

...

A Sociopathic Process

Hyper-gentrification is everything that [Neil] Smith described, and much more. Constructed and driven by people, it has a personality—though it may be more accurate to say it has a personality disorder. Through the people who celebrate it, we can hear the voice of hyper-gentrification.

After the Spike Lee episode, the *Daily News* interviewed a few residents of Fort Greene under the headline "Brooklyn Residents Don't Appreciate Spike Lee's Rants on Gentrification." They talked to one 25-year-old woman out walking her English springer spaniel, a dog she'd named Hudson, presumably after the river. A farm-to-table restaurant owner with a history in interior design and fashion, she had moved to Fort Greene from the Hamptons just a month earlier. She told the paper, "I don't see a negative to cleaning up a neighborhood. . . . I think it's a creative bunch of people doing interesting things. It's all good intentions." Had she never heard about the road to Hell and its paving stones? Another young woman out walking her miniature poodle said, "people have the right to live wherever they want to live." And a third young woman (none of the neighborhood people quoted were men, long-term residents, people over 34, or, apparently, African-American), a jewelry designer and dog walker from Toronto, agreed that the perks of gentrification far outweigh the drawbacks. "I benefit from it," she said. "I can have a decent cup of coffee."

. . . But it is striking that each of the three quotes come off as laced with self-centeredness, remorselessness, and what appears to be total disregard for the larger issue and how it negatively impacts the lives of their neighbors. I wonder if it's defensiveness, borne from guilt, or if there's no contrition there at all. Statements such as these are not limited to one newspaper article. Far from being outliers, they are voices in a larger chorus. As a blogger, I've been hearing them for years, in reader comments on my own blog, on other New York blogs, and in countless newspaper and magazine articles. "Bulldoze the housing projects and dump the poor in the river," they say. Here's another one: "If you want affordable housing, move to Bronx. Move to Staten Island, hell move to Kentucky. The sooner these poor bottom-barrel leeches are banished from Manhattan, the better." And one more: "Ew, NYC was gross back then. The natives nearly destroyed the city. Now, thanks to the influx of cleaner people, the city is glamorous again!"

As gentrification has changed, as the city has changed, so have the people doing the gentrifying. Thinking back to the first bunch in the 1960s, those early brownstoners, I wonder: Is this how they talked? Is this how they felt? New

York magazine interviewed several of them in 1969. They were middle-class whites, mostly, and certainly had some sense of entitlement, but it wasn't expressed with callousness. When asked about their feelings for their new neighborhood, whether in Brooklyn or Manhattan, they talked about how much they enjoyed the cultural mix. No one mentioned a wish for decent coffee. No one proclaimed a right to live there. One woman said she was proud to live on a block that was "half black-owned and half white-owned and hoping it stays that way." They talked of melting pots and not wanting to live in a "white, middle-class ghetto." One brownstoner in the decrepit old East Village said he didn't want the neighborhood to get fixed up too much, or else it would become "a big whitewashed playpen of young people." He explained, "People are still living side by side. For us, that's what this brownstone thing is all about."

Of course, in part thanks to people like this, the East Village did become a whitewashed playpen for young people, brownstone Brooklyn did get so fixed up it turned into a white middle-class ghetto, and people of different classes and ethnicities did not live side by side forever. I don't think of the early brownstoners as heroes, and their sentiments are problematic in their own way, but they do seem more humane, more empathic, than their counterparts today.

Hyper-gentrification, born from gentrification, is bigger, faster, and meaner than its parent. It's also sicker, a sociopathic system with no compassion. If hyper-gentrification were a person, it would be a malevolent psychopath—aggressive and remorseless, with a reckless disregard for others and an aptitude for deception. It exploits people, uses cruelty to gain power, and exhibits poor impulse control. It's no big leap to imagine that the real human beings, the power players pulling the strings of hyper-gentrification might suffer from psychopathy and other failures of empathy. The politicians, developers, bankers, and corporate CEOs who have banded together to create the new New York are all in Machiavellian professions that generally score high on scales of narcissism and sociopathy. What kind of psychic environment have they created for the city?

Choose Your Monster: The False Dichotomy

Part of the hyper-gentrifiers' strategy has been to foster an environment of fear, frightening New Yorkers into accepting hyper-gentrification as a social good, a necessity if we want to stay safe and avoid the descent into 1970s-style urban decay. The bad old days, they tell us, are right around the corner. Republican mayoral candidate

Joe Lhota didn't even try to sugarcoat it when he aired a controversial television commercial in the fall of 2013 that threatened, "Bill de Blasio's recklessly dangerous agenda on crime will take us back to this . . ." followed by images of 1970s and 80s New York: graffiti-covered subways, rioters throwing Molotov cocktails, XXX movie theaters, dead homeless people, police cars flipped upside-down like stranded turtles. Lhota's scare tactic didn't work to sway the voters, but many New Yorkers remain duped into believing the false dichotomy that we have only two choices: unfettered gentrification or rampant crime. We do have other options.

What if gentrification had been left alone, never adopted by the government and its corporate cronies, not shot up with steroids, allowed to develop at its own pace, in its own way? It's hard to imagine that brand of gentrification—still regulated, not infused with global capital, not juiced on a revanchist rage to take back the city—and maybe it's too idealistic to try. I suspect we would still have

gentrification and the problems that come with it, but without government-corporate partnerships directing its growth, it would surely be a smaller, more manageable beast.

In order to even begin exploring the city's other options, New Yorkers first have to stop deluding themselves into believing that today's hyper-gentrification is the same old thing. We all have to stop saying, "New York always changes, so this is normal." This is not normal. This is state sponsored, corporate driven, turbo charged, far flung, and impossible to stop in its current form. Hyper-gentrification is the Thing That Ate New York, the Blob, the choose your monster-movie metaphor, an ever-growing, ever-devouring beast that will not be satisfied until there's nothing left.

JEREMIAH MOSS is a writer and blogger based in New York City. His blog, *Jeremiah's Vanishing New York*, provides discourse on the rapidly changing built environment of New York.



Justin Davidson



Is Gentrification All Bad?

Gentrification: New Yorkers can sense it immediately. It plumes out of Darling Coffee, on Broadway and 207th Street, and mingles with the live jazz coming from the Garden Café next door. Down the block, at Dichter Pharmacy, it's visible on the shelf of Melissa & Doug toys. An algae bloom of affluence is spreading across the city, invading the turf of artists and ironworkers, forming new habitats for wealthy vegans.

It's an ugly word, a term of outrage. Public Advocate Letitia James sounded the bugle against it in her inauguration speech on New Year's Day: "We live in a gilded age of inequality where decrepit homeless shelters and housing developments stand in the neglected shadow of gleaming multimillion-dollar condos," she cried, making it clear that she would love to fix up the first two and slam the brakes on the third. In this moral universe, gentrification is the social equivalent of secondhand smoke, drifting across class lines.

Yet gentrification can be either a toxin or a balm. There's the fast-moving, invasive variety nourished by ever-rising prices per square foot; then there's a more natural, humane kind that takes decades to mature and lives on a diet of optimism and local pride. It can be difficult to tell the two apart. "The things that low-income people think are nice are the same as what wealthy people want," says Nancy Biberman, who runs the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation in the Bronx. Communities fight for basic upgrades in quality of life, and when they're successful, their food options and well-kept streets attract neighbors (and developers). It also works the other way: Richer, more entitled parents can lift up weak schools, says Biberman. "They're more aggressive, and they empower other parents."

Gentrification doesn't need to be something that one group inflicts on another; often it's the result of aspirations everybody shares. All over the city, a small army of the earnest toils away, patiently trying to sluice some of the elitist taint off neighborhoods as they grow richer. When you're trying to make a poor neighborhood into a nicer place to live, the prospect of turning it into a racially and economically mixed area with thriving

stores is not a threat but a fantasy. As the cost of basic city life keeps rising, it's more important than ever to reclaim a form of urban improvement from its malignant offshoots. A nice neighborhood should be not a luxury but an urban right.

...

"I'm a corner druggist," says Manny Ramirez, the stocky, genial owner of Dichter Pharmacy. You can feel the pleasure he gets from pronouncing the phrase—the same retro jolt he gets from saying *stickball*, *soda shop*, and *candy store*. But he is hardly living in the past. He's a canny businessman, Inwood-born and bilingual in English and Spanish, who has known some of his customers from his own childhood and keeps his antennae tuned to the tastes of those he hasn't even met. Keenly conscious of his low-income neighborhood, he undersells the chain stores on basics like Tylenol and keeps the prices of most items at his lunch counter below \$5. But he also stocks expensive lotions, organic moisturizers, and those Melissa & Doug toys. "Now we have people who will buy that stuff," he says, sounding a little amused. "The idea of a new group of people with disposable income is excellent."

...

Ramirez's optimistic realism contrasts with a common perception of neighborhoods that remain unchanged for generations—at least until the gentrifiers roar in. A few areas where the change is that stark do exist, but far more typical are enclaves that each dominant ethnic group cedes to the next. Of course Inwood is changing; it always was. Right now, it's a neighborhood of immigrants. Nearly half of its residents were born abroad, most in the Dominican Republic. Yet that "old Inwood" isn't the one Ramirez grew up in. The year he was born, 1968, a TV station in Ireland aired a documentary, *Goodbye to Glocamorra*, which chronicled a neighborhood that could have passed for a city in County Mayo. "Five years ago, these apartment buildings were Irish to the last man, woman, and child," the narrator says mournfully. "Today, their defenses have begun to crumble. The first Puerto

Davidson, Justin. "Is Gentrification All Bad?" From *New York Magazine*, February 2, 2014. Copyright © 2014 by New York Media LLC. Reprinted by permission.

Ricans have moved in. The first Negroes have moved in. And more will certainly follow."

Ramirez was one of those Puerto Ricans, and he grew up acutely conscious of his bifurcated world. "I was too Spanish for the white community and too white for the Spanish community," he recalls. When he was 10, his family moved from the mostly Hispanic east side of Broadway to the still whitish west side. In the early nineties, he moved to a New Jersey suburb. But Ramirez kept roots in the neighborhood, commuting to work for the district Rite Aid office and attending Good Shepherd. One day, he heard the checkout girls at a Dominican bakery grumbling in Spanish about how the neighborhood was changing. "I remembered when I was a kid and the white people were talking about the neighborhood changing—only they were speaking English." Same complaint, different language.

Nothing symbolizes the abyss between plenty and deprivation more than their physical proximity. The rapid gilding of Brooklyn has, in places, produced a grotesque companionship of vintage-clothing boutiques and Goodwill stores. Even as Bedford-Stuyvesant real estate approaches Manhattan prices, nearly a third of its residents—47 percent of its children—live below the poverty line. The neighborhood remains a bastion of unemployment, public assistance, and crime, moated by great ramparts of public housing. The old inner-city anxieties—that poor people who know only other poor people are more likely to remain that way—have not disappeared. Only now, instead of being stranded in sprawling ghettos, the poor are confined to islands of deprivation, encircled by oceans of prosperity.

Yet those Dickensian juxtapositions are actually a sign of a city that is doing something right. Subsidized housing helps preserve neighborhoods from a uniform wash of affluence. Chelsea and the Upper West Side—two of the wealthiest districts in the nation—still make room for low-income residents in nycha projects. "Those are neighborhoods where gentrification has been meaningfully tempered," says Brooklyn city councilman Brad Lander, a staunchly progressive ally of Bill de Blasio's. And all over the city, developers reap tax benefits by erecting luxury buildings and earmarking 20 percent of the apartments for renters who pay far less than their neighbors. A group of visiting developers from Mumbai was thunderstruck by that custom: They couldn't imagine why well-off New Yorkers would voluntarily share their enclaves with the poor.

That principle forms the foundation of nonprofit community-building groups all over the country and

motivates private do-gooder developers like Jonathan Rose. "Can you create models of gentrification in which the benefits are spread out through the community?" Rose asks. The key, he says, is to make sure that residents and shopkeepers in low-income neighborhoods have equity and a political voice—before a real-estate surge. African-American residents of Bed-Stuy who managed to cling to their brownstones through the misery of the sixties, the heroin and crack years, and the devastating epidemic of foreclosures can finally reap the benefit that any longtime homeowner takes for granted: selling the house for a profit. "Development can be a positive force," Rose says.

Grannum is unapologetic about trying to bring a better life to Bed-Stuy's poor by attracting the very outsiders who are supposedly making things worse. "We need affluent and middle-income people," he insists. "We need a healthy community, and we need services that are first-rate. I just came from a meeting, and someone said, 'Go to Seventh Avenue in Park Slope and recruit some of those stores!' And I tell them: Businesses don't bring affluence; they follow affluence."

Who does the gentrifying, how, and how quickly—these variables separate an organically evolving neighborhood from one that is ruthlessly replaced. A trickle of impecunious artists hungry for space and light is one thing; a flood of lawyers with a hankering to renovate is quite another. The difference may be just a matter of time—but when it comes to gentrification, time is all.

Leveraging the moneyed art world to provide low-cost housing in a creative community seems like the perfect revitalization project. It promotes stability, fosters local culture, recycles unused real estate, and brings in philanthropic dollars rather than predatory investors. Artspace's website makes the link between creativity and urban improvements plain: "Artists are good for communities. The arts create jobs and draw tourists and visitors. Arts activities make neighborhoods livelier, safer, and more attractive."

Artists are like most people: They think gentrification is fine so long as it stops with them. They are pioneers, all-accepting enthusiasts, and they wish to change nothing about their new home turf (although a halfway decent tapas place would be nice). The next arrivals, though, will be numerous and crass. Interlopers will ruin everything. As

artists migrate across the boroughs, from the East Village to Williamsburg, Red Hook, Bushwick, and Mott Haven, surfing a wave of rising rents, they are simultaneously victims and perpetrators of gentrification.

Rosado understands these dynamics well, but he believes that a little local involvement can go a long way toward shaping the subtleties of neighborhood change. "You can't stop development and growth, but we'd like to have a say in how that transition takes place." Lurking in that plain statement is the belief that gentrification happens not because a few developers or politicians foist it on an unwilling city but because it's a medicine most people want to take. The trick is to minimize the harmful side effects.

In the popular imagination, gentrification and displacement are virtually synonymous, the input and output of a zero-sum game. One professional couple's \$2 million brownstone renovation in Bedford-Stuyvesant equals three families drifting toward Bayonne in search of barely adequate shelter. And so a sense of grievance and shame permeates virtually all discussions of neighborhood change. Even gentrifiers themselves are convinced they are doing something terrible. Young professionals whose moving trucks keep pulling up to curbs in Bushwick and Astoria carry with them trunkfuls of guilt.

The link between a neighborhood's economic fortunes and the number of people being forced to move away, while anecdotally obvious, is difficult to document. Everyone's heard stories of brutally coercive landlords forcing low-income tenants out of rent-controlled apartments in order to renovate them and triple the rent. But it's difficult to know how often that takes place. Between 2009 and 2011, about 7 percent of New York households—around 200,000 of them—moved within the city in each year. Others left town altogether. Yet we know little about where they went, or why, or whether their decisions were made under duress.

Among experts, a furor continues to swirl over whether gentrification and displacement are conjoined. What qualifies as displacement, anyway? Forcible eviction by a rapacious landlord, obviously, but what about a rent that creeps up while a household's income doesn't? How about the intangible, dispiriting feeling of being out of place, or a young person's knowledge that leaving the family home means living in another borough? Or the displacement that comes when an industry flees, taking its jobs along? These pressures can affect investment bankers and nurses, as well as busboys and the unemployed, and it's not always easy to distinguish coerced departure from a fresh opportunity, or gentrifiers from the displaced.

In 2005, Lance Freeman, a professor of urban planning at Columbia, examined national housing statistics

to see whether low-income residents move more often once their neighborhoods start to gentrify. His conclusion was that they don't. Mobility, he suggested, is a fact of American life, and he could find no evidence to suggest that gentrification intensifies it. Instead, it appears that many low-income renters stay put even as their rents go up. "It may be that households are choosing to stay in these neighborhoods because quality of life is improving: They're more satisfied, but they're dedicating a larger slice of their income to housing," says Ingrid Gould Ellen, co-director of NYU's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy. There is an exception: Poor homeowners who see the value of their properties skyrocket often do cash out. Freeman garnished his findings with caveats and qualifications, but his charged conclusion fueled an outbreak of headlines that have dogged him ever since.

Eight years after he lit the gentrification-is-good-for-everyone match, Freeman sits in his office at Columbia, more resigned than rah-rah about the implications of his work. He doesn't doubt that displacement occurs, but he describes it as an inevitable consequence of capitalism. "If we are going to allow housing to be a market commodity, then we have to live with the downsides, even though we can blunt the negative effects to some extent. It's pretty hard to get around that."

That infuriates the British scholar Tom Slater, who sees Freeman's data studies as largely irrelevant because, he has written, they "cannot capture the struggles low-income and working-class people endure to remain where they are." Freeman waves away the binary rhetoric. "You can't boil gentrification down to good-guy-versus-bad-guy. That makes a good morality play, but life is a lot messier than that." In the days when RFK was helping to launch Restoration, an ideological split divided those who wrote cities off as unlivable relics from those who believed they must be saved. Today, a similar gulf separates those who fear an excess of prosperity from those who worry about the return of blight. Economic flows can be reversed with stunning speed: Gentrification can nudge a neighborhood up the slope; decline can roll it off a cliff. Somewhere along that trajectory of change is a sweet spot, a mixed and humming street that is not quite settled or sanitized, where Old Guard and new arrivals coexist in equilibrium. The game is to make it last.

JUSTIN DAVIDSON is *New York Magazine's* architecture and classical music critic. As a freelance writer he has contributed to many newspapers across the country. In 2002, he won a Pulitzer Prize in criticism.