

GENTRIFICATION



Definition:

A takeover of the land, housing, business, culture and public space of a community in order to attract and serve the interests of upper-income residents and displace working class and low-income residents, especially residents of color.

What's causing gentrification?

Even though we often see gentrification as a local issue, it is important not to forget that communities around the country and world are going through the same process not because the local elites all decided to do the same thing at the same time but because gentrification is deeply tied to national and international economic and cultural changes.

- **Deindustrialization** – The eroding of the economic base of urban working class communities as jobs get shipped overseas and unions are weakened paves the way for gentrification
- **Real Estate Speculation** – When the stock market slowed in the 90's, many investors took their money out of stocks and put it into real estate speculation, seeing land as a more reliable investment
- **Globalization** – Big cities play a more important part than ever in the global economy. That's because all the major decisions about investment and global economies are made in the boardrooms of corporations in "global cities." As these global cities have become the command centers for global capital, more and more major corporations (especially finance corporations) and their upper-income workers have re-located to urban centers.
- **Scaling back government** – Another important part of gentrification is the cutting of health care, welfare, and other important services from city and county budgets. Whether for reasons of "fiscal discipline" or "efficiency," everywhere health clinics, hospitals, housing, and other social services are being closed or privatized, taking away what little safety net exists for the people left behind by capitalism.

Stage 1: Disinvestment and Criminalization

- Landlords let buildings run down
- Press focuses on crime and “blight” in an area
- Police allow crime to flourish in some areas but protect others
- Locally-owned businesses lose support and close up
- The area is declared “blighted” by media and politicians
- The culture of area residents is attacked in the media and by politicians – people are “lazy,” “bad elements,” there is a “culture of poverty,” etc.

Stage 2: “Re-vitalization”

- New unaffordable housing starts going up
- Big chain stores and businesses start moving in
- Police harassment and brutality increases, especially for youth of color
- Lot’s of unaffordable “affordable housing” starts getting built to create “mix-income communities”
- Condo conversions happen everywhere
- Industrial zoning is changed to residential or commercial
- Culture is commercialized and distorted to please new residents while displacing the people who made culture alive in the community

Stage 3: Displacement

- Public and subsidized housing gets torn down
- Taxes sky-rocket for homeowners and many are forced out
- Landlords kick out tenants to convert their apartments to condos
- Rental housing becomes scarce
- Vouchers flood the market and make landlords raise rents
- Market-rate renters are forced out by rising rents
- Any remaining small businesses can’t compete with new chain stores and close up
- Most residents are eventually pushed to less desirable communities, into the suburbs, or onto the streets
- The few token residents who get to stay get their pictures on glossy brochures about what a nice “mix-income” community the neighborhood has become or get to work at museums commemorating the culture that used to characterize the neighborhood

Strategies of Resistance

Ultimately, gentrification is tied into global, national and local processes and we have to fight it at all three levels to have a long-term effect.

- **Locally**
 - Fight back zoning changes designed for developers instead of community
 - Pressure alderman to create a community advisory board on development with power to approve or deny new developments
 - Pressure alderman to force developers to set-aside units for low-income
 - Organize tenants to stop demolition of public and subsidized housing
 - Organize tenants to stop deterioration and disinvestment by slumlords
 - Fight for a stronger city affordable housing set-aside policy

- Educate home-owners on available options (like senior tax-freeze, how to avoid bad loans, etc.)
 - Get land and housing off of the speculative market and into the hands of the community – community land trust, co-ops, etc.
 - Fight to save important community services
 - Organize small businesses to fight for more resources and support instead of allowing in big chains
 - Defend important community cultural spaces from developers
 - Counter-attack in the media by getting out stories of community support networks, hard-working residents being displaced, struggling businesses, importance of key cultural sites, etc
 - Educate our communities about how race and racism is used to attack and divide us to make gentrification possible
 - Frame our fights as fights for Human Rights
- **Nationally**
 - Fight for “winnable” housing policy changes - bigger housing budgets, an end to demolition and privatization of housing, the right of purchase, permanent funding not subject to annual appropriations, etc.
 - Start bringing up and fighting for “the impossible” so we can shift the playing field – more public housing, controls on real estate speculation, reparations from developers, permanent public ownership of land
 - Join together to win important strategic battles – ex. Stopping the demolition of public housing in New Orleans
 - Join together to launch a national public relations campaign exposing gentrification for what it really is and proposing alternatives
- **Globally**
 - Participate in the struggles against trade agreements and financial institutions that further corporate globalization
 - Link up with other people’s movements resisting neoliberalism and globalization
 - Educate our members about global struggles
 - Fight to get the U.S. to sign on to key Human Rights treaties – like the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
 - Launch international campaigns to target institutions and corporations that are both gentrifying our communities and exploiting the Third World

RESOURCES:

Coalition to Protect Public Housing – (312) 280-2298 – www.cpph.org

Leading the fight city-wide against the demolition of public housing. Connected nationally and internationally through the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign.

Southside Together Organizing for Power (STOP) – (773) 753-9674 – stopchicago.org

Contact us for more information on any of the material in here, but especially for assistance on organizing subsidized housing complexes.

UIC Voorhees Center - (312) 996-2151 - <http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/>

Leading academic institution locally for information and early warning research about gentrification.

Pilsen Alliance (312) 243-5447 / 5440

One of the leading Chicago anti-gentrification groups, with lots of experience especially around zoning issues as well as transportation

Right to the City Alliance – www.righttothecity.org

New national alliance trying to connect and educate groups that are fighting gentrification on both a local, national and international level

West Humboldt Park Community Land Trust – (773) 342-0036

<http://www.whpdevelopmentcouncil.org/CLT/index.htm>

The only local example of a community land trust, worth talking to to find out how they did it and what it takes.

Humboldt Park Participatory Democracy Project – 773-342-8023

http://www.prcc-chgo.org/prcc_confronting_gentrification.htm

Contact for info on community councils overseeing development.

Blocks Together - 773-276-2194 - <http://www.blockstogether.org/>

Contact for information on the role of TIFs in gentrification and connecting education and youth criminalization to issues of gentrification and displacement.

National Training and Information Center– www.ntic-us.org – (312) 243-3035

Good source of info and organizing support on predatory lending, home-owner issues, vouchers and public housing. More focused on short-term issues than long-term systems but still very helpful.

Sergeant Shriver Poverty Law Center – www.povertylaw.org – 312-263-3830

Can help get maps of where the subsidized housing in your area is located and when the contract expiration dates are and provides legal representation to save housing.

Metropolitan Tenants Organization – www.tenants-rights.org – (773) 292-4980

Can help with basic tenants rights training

National Alliance of HUD Tenants – www.saveourhomes.org - (617) 267-9564

For questions on policy related to subsidized housing

Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign – www.economichumanrights.org

Leading a national movement of the poor to end poverty.

More community land trust information:

<http://www.iceclt.org/clt/>

More information:

http://www.spa.ucla.edu/up/webfiles/Right_to_the_City.pdf

This report on gentrification in Los Angeles is an excellent tool for understanding gentrification and the options available for resisting it.

<http://www.wiretapmag.org/rights/43269/>

An article about the Right to the City Alliance