Responding to Gentrification in Atlanta: A Report from the Neighborhoods

Summer 2004
Leslie Martin, Ph.D.
Boise State University
Department of Sociology
1910 University Drive.
Boise, ID 83725
LeslieMartin@boisestate.edu

INTRODUCTION

After spending the better part of two years attending community meetings and talking with residents, business people, church leaders, and others deeply involved in the life of Atlanta's changing neighborhoods, I have learned a great deal about how the process of gentrification is unfolding in Atlanta. In the course of these conversations and interviews, I gained insight into the intensely personal *and* political responses to this process.

Gentrification is defined by academics as the process in which working-class communities are converted to middle-class residential areas. Gentrification is a process that arouses many different responses from people, depending upon their viewpoints (as a new resident, a long-time resident, a land-owner, a renter, and so on), and their key values. Thus, there is no clear consensus among those who experience it or those who study it as to whether it is "good" or "bad."

While this project was at its core an academic undertaking, designed to contribute to ongoing scholarly debate, I also wanted to be able to identify and share what practices, approaches, and strategies seem promising in helping diverse residents of changing communities continue to live together. In pursuing this, while reducing tension and conflict in neighborhoods is uppermost in my thoughts, I focus also on the key importance of reducing the displacement and marginalization of long-time residents of gentrifying communities.

With these goals in mind, this document is a first attempt to share back with the many of you who helped me, or expressed interest in this project, some of what I have learned from you and your fellow neighborhood activists. I am positive that I have learned more from you all than you will learn in this report; but perhaps seeing the ideas of you and your neighbors in writing will provide additional inspiration to work through the issues of changing communities.

In the pages that follow I take you through some of the promising strategies I have noted in several Atlanta neighborhoods. To maintain confidentiality of those who spoke with me, I will not identify either individuals or their neighborhoods by name. First I provide an introduction to the academic literature on gentrification, to provide you with the same background I have used. Next I discuss efforts to address issues of physical displacement arising from gentrification. Finally, I turn to efforts to address political displacement – the loss of political, social, cultural influence in a neighborhood.

Feel free to use any part of this document for whatever purpose suits you – or to not use it at all. There is no way to adequately thank you for your assistance, but this is a beginning, and I hope you find it interesting --- or even better, helpful. This is still a work in progress, and I *welcome* feedback from you, at any time. I am on the opposite side of the U.S. now, but can be reached by email (LeslieMartin@boisestate.edu), phone (208-426-3243), or US mail (Leslie Martin, Department of Sociology, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, ID 83725-1945).

LITERATURE REVIEW ON GENTRIFICATION

Popular press accounts of gentrification frequently describe this process as the work of intrepid individuals who decide to move into decaying neighborhoods, frequently in pursuit of architectural uniqueness and proximity to the central business district, and who inspire a renaissance in the community (Cauley 2000, 2001; McCosh 2001; Raines 2000; Smith 1996). This form of urban revitalization receives academic attention as well, and researchers have generated a significant body of theoretical and empirical work on the existence and extent of gentrification. Some of this work focuses on the results of gentrification as well, especially the displacement of prior residents from their homes and/or neighborhoods (Anderson 1990; Kennedy and Leonard 2001).

Definition and Extent

Gentrification usually entails changes in the physical environment of a neighborhood, the social make-up of its residents, the economic value of the area, and sometimes changes the culture of the community (Hamnett 1984, 1991). This phenomenon began in the late 1960s in large urban centers in the US and Europe, and became more widespread in the 1970s and 1980s (Berry 1985; Hamnett 1984; Zukin 1987). Many original analysts believed this to be an anomaly of the time period, and limited only to the largest cities (Berry 1985; Hamnett 1984; Wyley and Hammel 1998). However, gentrification continued in the 1990s and 2000s and has appeared in numerous cities beyond New York, Philadelphia, and London (Butler 1997; Mele 1995; Wyley and Hammel 1998).

Researchers typically identify gentrification by examining characteristics of residents and buildings in a given geographic area, and by charting changes in these characteristics over time (Smith et al. 1994). Gentrifying neighborhoods must have experienced a period of

3

disinvestment, or decline, prior to experiencing a change in any of a number of socioeconomic or sociodemographic indicators (Hamnett 1991; Smith et al. 1994). An increase in population, average income, average level of educational attainment, house values and rents, home ownership rates, rehabilitation activity, new mortgages, and in professional or managerial occupations in the geographic area all indicate gentrification processes are underway (Hamnett 1991; Smith et al. 1994; Wyley and Hammel 1998). For example, between 1980 and 1990 the East Village of New York City experienced a 20% increase in population, and between 1980 and 1985, average sales price of buildings in the same area increased by almost 9 times (Abu-Lughod 1994; Smith et al 1994). Gentrification sometimes involves a change in the racial or ethnic makeup of a community as well, but it is fundamentally a change in the class structure of a community, as poor white neighborhoods can be renovated by middle-class whites, and as middle-class blacks also participate in gentrification, although in smaller numbers (Gentrification Task Force 2001; Hamnett 1984). While national figures on the extent of gentrification are difficult to come by, contemporary U.S. case studies of gentrification include a range of cities with neighborhoods currently undergoing gentrification, such as Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland, Oakland, and Washington, DC (Kennedy and Leonard 2001).

While often referred to as a "back to the city" movement, gentrification has not been a movement of suburbanites relocating into inner city neighborhoods. Rather, gentrifiers typically come from established, middle class neighborhoods in the same city, or relocate from another urban area (Clay 1980; London and Palen 1984; Smith 1979). Gentrification is instead a "stay in the city" movement, which is a new phenomenon following decades of steady suburbanization of middle class city dwellers (Clay 1980; Hamnett 1991; Smith 1979). The phenomenon to be explained, then, is why people who would more typically move out of cities have not done so,

and why those who would "normally" occupy middle class neighborhoods are now choosing to live in working-class or low-income urban communities.

Causes of Gentrification

Explanations of gentrification draw from either demand-side arguments that explain the rise of a group of gentrifiers (Berry 1985; Butler 1997; Hamnett 1984; Ley 1981), or from supply-side arguments that highlight the creation of gentrifiable neighborhoods (Hamnett 1984; Smith 1979, 1996).

Demand-side explanations rely upon a mixture of demographic, economic, and cultural factors to explain the rise of gentrification, through the rise of a class of people who want to live in inner city neighborhoods (Berry 1985; Butler 1997; Hamnett 1984; Laska and Spain 1979). The key mechanism behind all of these explanations is the supremacy of consumer preferences in driving gentrification (Rose 1994; Smith 1979; Wittberg 1992). The maturation of the baby boom cohort at the same time that the average age of marriage and the average age of first child increased created a large group of people who did not need to be concerned about the quality of city schools and playgrounds (Clay 1980; Wyley and Hammel 1998). Gentrifying households are smaller; as people choose to live alone, middle-class women are more likely to head their own households, and couples choose to remain childless for longer (London et al. 1986).

Changes in both the labor and housing markets contribute to the demand for gentrification. The "restructuring of social and economic relations of production which have occurred since the late 1970s" (Butler 1997:35), especially the shift from a manufacturing-based economy to one based on information services, has created a new urban class of white collar professionals, whose occupational position and consumption patterns distinguish them from the middle class that preceded them in the manufacturing era. The new middle class can be defined

5

on the basis of their consumption patterns: choosing to consume cultural products in cities, and choosing to invest in property in central city neighborhoods (Berry 1985; Butler 1997; Hamnett 1991; Ley 1981; Rose 1984). Increasing housing prices in the suburbs, coupled with increasing costs in time and money of commuting from the suburbs, create financial incentives for this new managerial class to stay within the city (Berry 1985; Laska and Spain 1979). Demographic and economic factors set the stage for the emergence of a class of gentrifiers, but changes in cultural tastes, driven by popular culture trends, savvy advertising and salesmanship of developers, or other forces, explains how the desires of this new class become focused on central city housing (Hamnett 1991; London et al. 1986; Zukin 1982, 1987).

Demand-side explanations receive a great deal of empirical support but are also critiqued as being primarily descriptive of gentrifiers and gentrifying neighborhoods, without uncovering underlying dynamics that lead to gentrification (Rose 1984; Smith 1979). In contrast, supply-side explanations of gentrification shift our attention from the behaviors and choices of individuals in the urban real estate market to the actions of powerful actors that shape urban real estate markets. The predominant supply-side explanation focuses on gentrification as one consequence of the uneven development of central cities (London et al 1986; Rose 1994; Smith 1979). This explanation of gentrification draws heavily from Marxist urban theory, and suggests, "the 'correct' place to begin theorizing about this process is with the production of the commodities of gentrified dwellings" (Rose 1994:49).

The uneven development argument relates the current process of gentrification, over the past 30-40 years, to historical trends in urban development. Beginning with the post-World War II era, realtors, developers, lenders, and other actors involved in the land market disinvested in central cities and central city neighborhoods, to the advantage of suburban development (Smith

1996; Zukin 1982). Federal and local governments contributed to this hemorrhage of capital and population through subsidies of highway construction, and through urban renewal projects that rent the fabric of urban neighborhoods (Gans 1962; Sumka 1980). While suburbs boomed with residential, commercial and industrial construction, central city neighborhoods suffered from a lack of available capital to maintain and renovate properties, accomplished primarily through redlining of these communities (Smith 1996; Zukin 1982).

In the next stage in this cycle of disinvestment and reinvestment, investors and developers turn back to central cities for investment potential as suburban prices escalate and opportunities for huge profits in the suburbs diminish (Hamnett 1991; Smith 1979, 1996). Central city real estate becomes attractive at this stage because of what Neil Smith refers to as the "rent gap" (Smith 1979, 1996). There is a gap between the current price or rent for central city land and the *potential* rent or price of this land – based on its proximity to the central business district and other amenities, such as architectural appeal. At this point developers will either invest in the areas themselves or become willing to lend to middle-class households willing to move into these communities (Smith 1979, 1996; Wittberg 1992). Local and national governments assist in this phase of the cycle through congenial zoning laws, tax breaks for developers, and other financial incentives for investment in the central city (Wittberg 1992; Zukin 1982). Both capitalists and state actors reap the benefits of the underdevelopment and subsequent redevelopment of central cities.

Empirical support for supply-side arguments comes from analysis of investment in neighborhoods that have gentrified (Friedenfels 1992; Mele 1994; Sites 1994; Smith et al. 1994). The uneven development explanation of gentrification has been faulted for ambiguity: how large must the rent gap be before developers begin to redevelop in an area? If a city has several

underdeveloped inner city neighborhoods, how do developers decide which communities should be gentrified? This is why critics suggest demand-side explanations should be taken seriously – as they may explain the specific shape of gentrification within a cycle of disinvestment and reinvestment in urban areas (Hamnett 1984, 1991; Rose 1984). The existence of the rent gap explains why gentrification occurs, the historical analysis of disinvestment helps explain where gentrification occurs, and demand-side explanations explain the shape that gentrification takes in a given place and time (Hamnett 1991; Smith 1979; Zukin 1987).

Consequences of gentrification

The consequences of gentrification, whether seen as positive or negative, occur on three levels: the level of individuals residing in, or moving into, a gentrifying neighborhood; the neighborhood level; and the city level (Sumka 1980). Gentrification researchers and urban residents are divided on whether or not this process is beneficial to the individuals, communities and cities in which it occurs, with supply-side theorists generally taking a dimmer view of gentrification outcomes (Kennedy and Leonard 2001).

On an individual level, gentrification may impact residents through increasing their ability to profit from their property and/or through displacement from their homes. For both prior home-owning residents and in-moving homebuyers, the upgrading of their neighborhood results in increased property values (Berry 1985; DeGiovanni 1984; Kennedy and Leonard 2001). This may allow prior residents to sell their homes and move to another neighborhood, to attain financing to renovate or add on to their homes, to pursue other financial opportunities through increased equity in their homes (DeGiovanni 1984). In-movers may reap the same benefits of increasing property values, but empirical work shows that those moving in typically

8

have had access to capital prior to moving into a gentrifying neighborhood (Clay 1980; but see also Rose 1994).

The negative impacts of gentrification upon residents are more likely to fall upon renters in the community (Berry 1985; DeGiovanni 1984; Gentrification Task Force 2001). While home owners on a fixed income, such as the elderly, may sometimes experience the down side of property value increases – increased property taxes – there are more often programs in place to brace these home owners against this financial shock (Gentrification Task Force 2001; Kennedy and Leonard 2001). Renters, on the other hand, are unprotected in most parts of the country from rent increases, which may force them to move (DeGiovanni 1984; Kennedy and Leonard 2001). The question of the extent of such displacement is very contentious, and there are no firm figures, due partially to methodological issues surrounding defining who has been displaced due to gentrification as opposed to moving for other reasons (Hartman 1979; Sumka 1979). However, the reality of displacement, regardless of its extent, is enough to keep it at the forefront of debates around gentrification and at the forefront of attempts to manage gentrification in communities (Kennedy and Leonard 2001; Sumka 1980).

Gentrification may result in the rebirth of communities: rehabilitating houses, renewing street life, encouraging new commercial ventures, bringing new political life into the community, and creating a sense of proud neighborhood identity that may have been lost in prior years (Chernoff 1980; Levy and Cybriwsky 1980; Smith 1996). Gentrification typically also lowers crime rates and increases the quality of public services to the neighborhood (Laska and Spain 1979). Scholars documenting urban decline of the past 50 years have called for just these types of changes in urban community life (Jacobs 1961; Wilson 1996). Further, these changes directly contradict the negative aspects associated with underclass inner city communities: especially the

presence of healthy financial and social institutions and the creation of social networks (Wilson 1987, 1996). In these terms, gentrification has a positive effect on the community, if the goal is to revitalize the community for its own sake (Menahem 1994). Historic preservation movements in old neighborhoods frequently pursue the goal of returning the physical environment to a former state of glory (Cybriwsky et al 1986; Smith 1996).

Critical observers have suggested, however, that this renovation of the community ignores the community that existed prior to gentrification, and in fact, often destroys the prior community (Chernoff 1980; Levy and Cybriwsky 1980; Smith and LeFaivre 1984). The renovation of houses and renewal of shopping districts may come at the expense of prior home owners, and previous small shopkeepers, whose goods are not up to the standards of new residents, but who had served the neighborhood when in decline. Case studies document the change in neighborhood politics that occurs under gentrification. Long-time residents are frequently active in their neighborhoods through local churches, block clubs, civic organizations, and other social and fraternal organizations. Political displacement occurs when they become outvoted or outnumbered by new residents within their organizations, or through the creation of new homeowners' organizations dominated by new residents (Auger 1979; Chernoff 1980; Fishman 1983; Levy and Cybriwski 1980). Chernoff (1980) describes this process in which prior residents and business owners may not physically leave the community, but they lose their former power and prestige. Consequences of gentrification on the individual level are in many ways easier to calculate and quantify than effects at the neighborhood level, but the effects on the community are important as well.

Perceived consequences at the city level are also mixed. City leaders hailed gentrification from its beginning as the rebirth of the city, the antidote to both the suburban drain

10

of population and capital from cities and the crisis of poverty in urban neighborhoods (Berry

1985; De Giovanni 1984). Where urban renewal and model cities could not revitalize urban

areas, this private market revitalization succeeds in bringing middle class people into poor

neighborhoods (DeGiovanni 1984). As this "stay in the city" movement progresses, the city

property tax base prospers, and the attractiveness of these neighborhoods and the city in general

attracts more people into these once marginal neighborhoods within the city or into the city

generally (Berry 1985; Clay 1980; De Giovanni 1984).

Two potential downsides of gentrification arise for cities. One is the increased demand

for public services, such as trash collection, police services, code enforcement, while

gentrification also brings a potential reduction in demand for services for low-to-moderate

income residents, such as subsidies for housing, school meals, and health care. Another

drawback of gentrification for cities is the decreased availability of affordable housing. New

residents may bring new demands with them and relatively more political clout to have these

needs met (Berry 1985; Laska and Spain 1979). However, this concern may be counteracted by

the deconcentration of poverty that gentrification brings, which may lead to a decreased demand

for some public and social services (Kennedy and Leonard 2001). Of a greater concern,

however, is the effect of gentrification on the stock of affordable housing. In most urban areas,

affordable housing is concentrated in poor communities (Smith and LeFaivre 1984). When

gentrification begins in earnest, rental properties are taken off the market, and they are either

converted into owner occupied property or renovated and rented as luxury units (Zukin 1987).

This leads to a "…general problem…of *housing* rather than *household* dislocation (Zukin

1987:136, emphasis in original)." When gentrification first began in the late 1960s and early

1970s, when urban areas were quite depressed, few expressed concern about the supply of

affordable housing. However, as gentrification has continued and become a significant factor in several neighborhoods within cities, this concern takes center stage (Gentrification Task Force 2001; Menahem 1994).

Clearly, no simple consensus emerges about the effects of gentrification and whether it is a desirable process. Given this lack of consensus, gentrification has not always been a peaceful process. Many of the earliest instances of gentrification (i.e., Inman Park in Atlanta, Society Hill in Philadelphia, and Capitol Hill in Washington DC) did not arouse any open antipathy from the prior residents of the neighborhood, neighborhood activists, or affordable housing advocates (Beard 1981;Cybriwsky et al 1986). However, in some neighborhoods residents did react, and more recently, impacted communities have begun to speak of "managing gentrification," seeking to control the effects of gentrification on their neighborhoods and cities (Kennedy and Leonard 2001).

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS PHYSICAL DISPLACEMENT

Physical displacement, residents moving out of a community due to housing price increases or decreases in available housing stock, is the most commonly discussed negative outcome of gentrification. Concern about physical displacement has been voiced in Atlanta by a range of political and community leaders, and many neighborhood activists and organizations have attempted to find a way to ensure that long-time residents of limited income can remain in the community. Three primary strategies to maintain long-time residents in their households and neighborhoods emerged from Atlanta neighborhoods. (Please also see publications from the Brookings Institute and the Urban Institute for more information on strategies attempted across the nation. www.urbaninstitute.org)

A. Property Tax Abatement, Homeowners Exemption

Finding ways to cushion the blow of increasing property taxes has been a politically popular strategy for managing gentrification. The stated goal of such a strategy is to protect elderly homeowners with fixed incomes from rapid increases in assessments through freezing property taxes at a certain level for targeted homeowners. Atlanta's mayoral candidates have supported this solution, differing primarily on how to determine who should be qualified: based on age, income, length of time in the home, etc. Such a strategy would be implemented across the city, rather than at the neighborhood level.

At the neighborhood level, several neighborhood organizations have been proactive in helping residents, especially elderly residents, avoid dramatic jumps in property tax bills. Some communities have worked with citywide organizations to appeal property tax assessments (see Fair Assessments for Intown Neighborhoods – F.A.I.R. – for more information). This has been very helpful to a number of individual long-time homeowners in gentrifying neighborhoods.

In another community the neighborhood organization (mostly new residents) engaged in a time-intensive effort to research which homeowners in their neighborhood had not filed for the homeowners tax exemption. Filing for this credit dramatically reduces owners' property tax bills. Once they found this information they gave it to the City Council members' office to take action. By so doing, they tried not to violate the privacy of their neighbors, but sought to help them reduce their property tax bills.

Finally, several neighborhood organizations and local churches have sponsored educational seminars. In these seminars, geared towards senior citizens and others with limited incomes, emphasis is placed on learning how to reduce property taxes, or how to budget for this

increasingly large bill. These seminars have met with varying degrees of success and have attracted both large and small audiences.

Property tax related efforts have been cost saving for many residents of gentrifying communities, and may help keep long-time elderly homeowners in their homes. However, these programs have not – on their own – been effective at promoting communication between diverse members of the neighborhood. Although these strategies have all been made in the interests of preserving neighborhood stability and harmony, they have not always been received in this manner. Further, without strong city leadership to make more sweeping changes in property tax regulations, such efforts are helpful, but only stopgap measures. These strategies are good "first steps."

B. Elderly Home Repair Programs

Several neighborhoods in Atlanta have made good use of funds available from the City of Atlanta, Dekalb County, and some non-profit organizations to provide home repairs for senior residents with fixed incomes (See the Community Housing Resource Center for more information at www.chrcatlanta.org). Such repairs have been as "minor" as painting the outside of homes and have been as major as significant repairs to crucial home systems like plumbing, electrical, and roof repairs. There is typically a limit to the cost of repairs, and there are qualifications homeowners must meet to participate in the program. Such programs have been best coordinated by community development corporations, which are not present in every gentrifying neighborhood. (However, community activists in neighborhoods without such home repair programs may want to talk further with organizations running such programs, to investigate the feasibility of becoming involved in this effort.)

Home repair programs for seniors and those with limited incomes provide benefits on multiple levels. Homeowners without access to repair funds may be forced to let their homes deteriorate. This decline may not only decrease the attractiveness of the home (perhaps an important consideration to their neighbors), but may increase utility bills through inefficient heating, cooling, or water systems. Further, for some residents this deterioration may advance to the point where it is no longer safe for them to remain in their home. Finally, homeowners on fixed incomes may become targets for sub-prime or predatory lenders, who make loans to them for home repairs at interest rates and terms that are almost impossible to pay back. These scenarios may lead a resident to leave their home even though they do not want to. Home repair programs can help prevent these changes.

Home repair programs may be effective in gentrifying neighborhoods in other less concrete, but quite important ways. In talking with people who administer such programs in several Atlanta communities, it became clear that they saw themselves as the eyes and ears of the neighborhood, as a sort of social glue for the fabric of the community. To effectively run such a program, homeowners in need of help must be identified. During the process of meeting and talking with as many residents as possible, so as to identify potential program participants, they came to know many residents, old and new, and developed relationships with many of these neighbors. This process combats another concern that arises with gentrification. With the in-movement and out-movement of residents, it becomes harder to residents to know each other, to foster the sense of neighborliness that makes an area a "community." When the transitional nature of a neighborhood is compounded by demographic differences between residents, getting to know each other becomes even more difficult. While building relationships and trust will be explored in more detail in the discussion of political displacement, it is important to

acknowledge that the home repair program appears to offer a window of opportunity for learning more about neighbors and fellow residents.

Thus, although home repair programs are limited in the number of residents they can help, and are geared only towards homeowners who meet criteria of income eligibility, they can act to both limit physical displacement and to foster communication among residents.

C. Housing Construction/Renovation

The most intensive "solution" to the problem of physical displacement is the creation and provision of affordable housing for marginalized community residents. Several Atlanta communities that have experienced gentrification in the past 25 years have pursued this option in a variety of ways. Some neighborhood organizations (usually community development corporations) have rehabilitated rental housing for residents, others have created co-operative housing for residents, still others have renovated or constructed homes for purchase by current residents and others. New forms of sustainable affordable housing production are being explored constantly (see the Urban Institute for research on nationwide efforts to address housing affordability issues).

While housing production has great potential for most effectively keeping long-time residents housed and cushioning the loss of affordable housing that accompanies gentrification, it is a difficult solution to implement. This solution seems to require the presence of a professional organization coordinating the effort (community development corporation or equivalent body). Residents of one neighborhood in Atlanta attempted to pursue this route without a great deal of professional expertise, with only limited success. Further, housing production efforts are very expensive and become more so in gentrifying neighborhoods with escalating land costs. To be successful, housing producers must have the support of funders, and the support of both city and

national policy directives to thrive. Several community development corporations in Atlanta at the present time have been very successful, and have benefited from a policy environment favoring non-profit provision of housing, rather than government intervention in the low-income housing market. Some earlier efforts to accomplish similar goals suffered from a policy environment that was not as conducive to their strategies.

Housing production strategies also need the support of the neighborhood to be effective. This support cannot be taken for granted, as some types of housing are more likely to garner support than others. Housing developers find it more difficult to gain support from funders and neighbors for rental housing. Some residents in gentrifying neighborhoods in Atlanta have expressed concern about being seen as the "dumping ground" for less desirable land uses, such as subsidized housing or rehab or assisted living facilities. On occasion these concerns may generalize to rental housing in general. Good design and communication with residents has helped limit neighborhood opposition to these types of land uses. Such efforts are greatly facilitated when residents agree with the goal of maintaining diversity in the community – especially economic diversity. Much of the research done on sustainable, successful, viable communities indicates that a socioeconomic mix of residents is beneficial (see Jane Jacob's book, The Death and Life of Great American Cities for a colorful and compelling description of this effect).

When pursued effectively, as it has been in several Atlanta communities, this strategy can be very successful. A carefully thought-out strategy of housing production can provide for the housing needs of a diversity of residents, enabling renters as well as senior home owners (the primary group targeted by the two previously mentioned strategies) to remain in the community, and permitting low-income households as well as moderate and middle-income households to

thrive in the community. The difficulties of this strategy indicate that it is not easily transferable to all communities concerned about the loss of affordable housing or potential physical displacement.

Physical displacement is the most visible, most dramatic potential negative consequence of gentrification. To lose one's home, either through property tax increases or the conversion of a rental unit to a condominium, can be very traumatic for individual households. When physical displacement occurs on a wider scale, the loss of housing units, especially affordable housing units, can have an effect on the city's housing market. However, it is important to acknowledge that by no means are all those who leave communities during gentrification experiencing involuntary displacement. Many residents are able to sell property in changing neighborhoods for a larger price than they would have ever imagined, and are able to use this newfound wealth in ways that positively affect their lives. Other residents simply choose to move on as they see the community changing. Further, although neighborhoods may be fairly stable over a period of time, Americans have become increasingly transient, and some degree of neighborhood in- and out-migration is to be expected.

However, it is key to keep in mind the goal of *voluntary* movement into and out of the neighborhood. The most vulnerable residents in a neighborhood, renters and people with limited incomes, are those least able to exercise housing choice. These residents may in all likelihood feel very strong ties to the community or to their neighbors, but they are the least able to protect themselves from changes in the local housing market. This situation is especially exacerbated in communities of color, who have only in the past 50 years had legal freedom of choice in housing markets. The strategies identified here, property tax abatement, home repairs and housing production, serve to help long-time residents and residents with limited economic resources to

18

remain in their communities. Such solutions, when effective, help maintain vibrant, diverse communities.

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS POLITICAL DISPLACEMENT

Long-time neighborhood residents are frequently active in their neighborhoods through local churches, block clubs, civic organizations, and other social and fraternal organizations. Political displacement occurs when they stop participating in the political life of the neighborhood, whether because they have become outvoted or outnumbered by new residents within their organizations, or through the creation of new homeowners' organizations dominated by new residents. Most of the long-time residents I spoke with expressed greatest concern, anxiety and grief about political displacement. Their dislocation from participation and decision-making in community affairs contributes to their sense of community disruption, and their loss of a sense of neighborhood belonging and ownership. A focus on political displacement may contribute to both our understanding of reasons for conflict and hostility in gentrifying communities, and to understanding why some long-time residents may move even when not physically displaced, if they've lost a sense of community.

Residents of gentrifying neighborhoods in Atlanta have sought to minimize or reverse the political marginalization of long-time residents through a variety of methods, including concerted efforts to preserve and emphasize inclusive neighborhood history, efforts to recruit and train long-time residents for positions of leadership in the community, and attempts to rebuild the trust that is often fractured in communities undergoing significant demographic change.

A. Emphasis on Inclusive Neighborhood History

To instill a sense of community pride and bring together diverse residents, some neighborhood activists emphasize the history of their community through festivals, newsletters, signage, and oral history projects. This strategy is used very effectively in one neighborhood in Atlanta that makes a point to discuss not only the historic founding of the neighborhood, but to celebrate all aspects of the long history of the community. In so doing, they demonstrate the value, respect, and esteem they hold for residents who helped shape the community, even during years that when the neighborhood was experiencing physical decline. Whenever there is a community festival or gathering, senior residents of the neighborhood are honored for their role in the community. Further, new residents are encouraged both by the neighborhood organization and by other neighborhood activists to meet long-time residents, especially senior citizens in the neighborhood. In this way, they aim to pass along history of the neighborhood both formally (through ceremonies and celebrations) and informally (through new friendships).

The use of neighborhood history is important in gentrifying neighborhoods for several reasons. One reason that was often emphasized by people I spoke with is the importance of letting new residents know that there was a vital history and community present before they arrived. In so doing, new residents come to learn more about what the community and the neighborhood organizations were like before they moved in; what they tried to do, what obstacles they may have faced, rather than quickly asking why some things in the neighborhood are not fixed, or are not as they would like. Providing this information and creating this atmosphere of respect for new as well as long-time residents may help prevent the development of negative views of each other. Stereotypes of new residents as arrogant and long-time

residents as lazy or ineffective are common in gentrifying communities, and contribute to the decline in neighborliness and trust found there.

Further, maintaining this emphasis on inclusive neighborhood history, and encouraging recognition of this history by all keeps long-time residents involved in the neighborhood. In the course of my conversations with new and long-time residents I heard many times the lament that the speaker, or one of their friends or family, stopped participating in the life of the community. They came to feel that their contributions were not considered relevant or important by their new neighbors. In contrast, in the community where inclusive history is strongly emphasized, both long-time and new neighbors felt incentives to participate in neighborhood events, to use neighborhood resources, and to participate politically in neighborhood decision-making.

The use of community history as an organizing tool is not an inherently positive strategy; it does not necessarily prevent political displacement. It can serve to either unite diverse residents, or it can provide residents a view of a more homogenous, and possibly more comfortable past. Many gentrifying communities in Atlanta were once white neighborhoods that experienced white flight and a transition to African American residents, before gentrification brought another racial transition. In these areas an appeal to history may allow white gentrifiers to focus on the white roots of the community, skipping over the more recent neighborhood history experienced by long-time residents, usually African American residents. Thus some appeals to exploring the history of gentrifying neighborhoods serve to further undermine the already precarious political standing of long-time residents, as new residents search for a white past.

Thus, the use of inclusive neighborhood histories can be seen as an effective strategy to maintain a sense of value and honor in long-time residents, and as a way to show new residents

that the community existed and thrived prior to their arrival. If such an effort is not consciously designed to achieve these ends, however, an appeal to neighborhood history can serve to do the opposite: heightening the divide between new and long-time residents, and allowing newcomers to choose to embrace the history they find valuable, no matter how long ago it occurred.

B. Active Recruitment and Training of Long-time Residents for Community Leadership

Research on gentrifying neighborhoods has shown "…the fact that once a neighborhood begins to gentrify, the neighborhood organization also gentrifies" (Cordova 1991:36). The changing leadership of neighborhood organizations is one way to identify political displacement. Defending against this changing of the guard is another promising strategy to minimize the potential political dislocation of long-time residents.

In some communities, this political inclusion occurs in a basic way – ensuring some representation of African American or long-time residents in the organization in order to appear legitimate to outside observers. This inclusion is certainly better than no concern about representation, but benefits the organization more than long-time residents. A more thorough approach can be seen in tentative efforts begun in 2003 in one neighborhood to conduct outreach to long-time residents on an individual basis. Neighborhood activists created a subcommittee of the neighborhood organization to actively introduce themselves to neighbors and give them information about the neighborhood organization. They also planned to approach local churches and PTAs to meet long-time residents where they are; to discover their interests, and hopefully boost their involvement in the neighborhood organization.

In another Atlanta neighborhood the neighborhood organization has taken an extremely proactive stance in recruiting and training long-time residents for positions of leadership. This is done consciously as a means to make sure that long-time residents stay involved and invested,

and to prevent a "take-over" of the neighborhood organization by a new group of people. Current leaders of neighborhood organizations selectively recruit long-time residents for positions of leadership. Interested new residents are encouraged to participate in neighborhood events, organizations, and politics; but are discouraged from seeking leadership positions until they have served the neighborhood organization in other capacities, and have developed greater familiarity with the community. Long-time and new residents who become active in the neighborhood organization also receive leadership training. Such training focuses on models of community empowerment, development and decision-making. Trainings also include activities and training for youth in the neighborhood, so they can take over leadership when they get older. This active recruitment and training approach creates the organizational and leadership skills that enable leadership to be transferred without a loss of momentum, and keeps long-time residents politically involved and invested in the community.

The strategy of active recruitment of long-time residents into leadership positions may seem to fly in the face of the grassroots democracy approach of neighborhood organizations. However, the alternative selection mechanisms operating in many other communities are to either select as leaders anyone who will volunteer, or the trend towards choosing leaders whose professional expertise (as urban planners, lawyers, government employers) is assumed to transfer into effective leadership of neighborhood organizations. The first of these may make for too-rapid turnover in goals and projects of the organization, and the second is also contrary to the vision of neighborhood associations as grassroots, layperson dominated democratic organizations. Further, this recruitment and training strategy is well used in the service of maintaining the political inclusion of long-time residents.

C. Efforts to Rebuild Trust

In several Atlanta neighborhoods the process of gentrification has created ill will between new and long-time residents. Among other consequences of this animosity, neighborhood activists have identified lack of trust between the two groups as depressing the political involvement of long-time residents. To counter this division and conflict, several neighborhood organizations are actively trying to rebuild trust between new and long-time residents. The efforts I describe here were just beginning in 2002 and 2003, so it is difficult to assess their effectiveness in counteracting political displacement, but they seem a promising step in a positive direction.

Most neighborhood organizations in gentrifying communities pursue many of the same issues at first: creating strong neighborhood identity, highlighting safety, and protecting property values. Neighborhood organizations in some communities have recently turned their attention as well to education and recreation concerns in the neighborhood. Research demonstrates that most gentrifiers have no immediate need of neighborhood public schools, yet efforts to improve community schools may serve to unify new and long-time residents. The neighborhood association in one community recently established an education committee to work with the local elementary school, gathering and providing school supplies and encouraging neighbors to become volunteer tutors. This effort both addresses concerns that the school is struggling under resource shortages and demonstrates to the wider community that the neighborhood organization cares about the whole community, and the resources shared by the community. The education committee may be an especially powerful trust-building tool, because although many of the gentrifiers are having children now, few are school age; and very few of those school-aged children are enrolled at the local elementary school. Thus, the effort is even more obviously

driven by motives other than self-interest, and should serve to re-build trust between new and long-time residents in the neighborhood.

Efforts to build libraries and parks in other communities could logically also serve as unifying endeavors. However, these movements have been spearheaded by new residents and do not seem to be engaging long-time residents in great numbers. In more than one community library and park efforts have become political landmines, as political figures impugned the motives of new residents in supporting new libraries, parks, and other recreational and educational resources for the neighborhood. Unfortunately, this charged atmosphere has led to the occasional sense that these libraries and parks will serve only the needs of new residents, rather than the needs of long-time residents. In other instances, disagreements between new and long-time residents about appropriate recreational activities for children has led to discord in planning efforts. I highlight these instances where such efforts did not produce increased trust to suggest that support of education and recreation opportunities is not a "quick fix" to political displacement – or lack of trust – in gentrifying neighborhoods, but if done thoughtfully may begin to rebuild missing trust in the community.

As with physical displacement, there is no one simple way to address the concern of political and social marginalization of long-time residents in gentrifying neighborhoods. New residents are generally less likely to experience political displacement, largely because middle-class, well-educated Americans are on average more politically involved than working-class Americans. The political dominance of new residents does not occur because these new neighbors want to displace their long-time resident counterparts. In fact, quite the contrary is often true. Many new residents I spoke with expressed a desire to increase the participation of long-time residents in neighborhood activities, and suggested that the diversity of residents was

as much a draw of the neighborhood as architectural uniqueness. However, inattention to processes and activities that may marginalize long-time residents and a devotion to efficiency of operations rather than participatory processes, may contribute to the political displacement of long-time residents.

Efforts to rebuild trust among neighbors, emphasis on inclusive neighborhood history, and active recruitment and training of leaders among long-time residents are all promising strategies for preventing political displacement of long-time residents. These strategies have the benefit of being fully transferable across communities; they do not require professional staffs or extensive funding. However, the business of building leaders and creating trust in a changing community is complicated. Neighborhood activists interested in pursuing these ideas should be prepared to explore and revise. To be truly effective, as seen in some parts of the Atlanta community, these efforts must be accompanied by a true wish to maintain the political inclusion and importance of long-time residents, as well as new residents.

CONCLUSION

Gentrification brings change and uncertainty to residents in our must vulnerable place, our homes. This uncertainty, experienced by all members of gentrifying communities, can lead to a charged and conflictual atmosphere. What can or should be done to "manage" or shape the effects of gentrification on Atlanta neighborhoods? This question is certainly still up for debate. Many people feel that no efforts are needed, that the "market" processes influencing gentrification will eventually create neighborhood stability, and if people do not feel comfortable in their community, they can move. Others embrace a more radical approach, believing that gentrification should be stopped before it wreaks further changes on neighborhoods and

households. The middle ground is what this small report hopes to address. Many Atlantans see the process of gentrification as inevitable, but believe that organized residents can affect how neighbors experience the process. Thus, efforts to minimize physical and political displacement have been adopted in several communities.

The strategies discussed here are by no means exhaustive. A similar study involving different Atlanta neighborhoods would certainly turn up other suggestions for managing the concerns raised by gentrification. None of these ideas are "one size fits all" solutions to problems of neighborhood change; but they do provide some good ideas on how to work together to create stable neighborhoods valuing both new and long-time residents.

REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, Janet L., ed.1994. *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battles for New York's Lower East Side*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Anderson, Elijah. 1990. *Streetwise: Race, Class and Change in an Urban Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Auger, Deborah. 1979. "The Politics of Revitalization in Gentrifying Neighborhoods: the Case of Boston's South End." *American Planning Association Journal* 45:515-522.

Beard, Rick. 1981. "From Suburb to Defended Neighborhood: Change in Atlanta's Inman Park and Ansley Park, 1980-1990." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

Berry, Brian B.J. 1985. "Islands of Renewal in Seas of Decay" in *The New Urban Reality* edited by Paul Peterson. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.

Butler, Tim. 1997. *Gentrification and the Middle Classes*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.

Cauley, H. M.. 2001. "Apartment of the Week: A & P Lofts." *Atlanta Constitution*. December 30, 39HF.

_____. 2000a. "Capitol View Manor: Intown Community A Hidden Jewel for Urban Pioneers:Neighborhood of the Week." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. March 26, p. 8HF.

Chernoff, Michael. 1980. "Social Displacement in a Renovating Neighborhood's Commercial District: Atlanta." In *Back to the City: Issues in Neighborhood Renovation*, edited by Laska and Spain. Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.

Clay, Phillip L. 1980. "The Rediscovery of City neighborhoods: Reinvestment by Long-Term Residents and Newcomers." In *Back to the City: Issues in Neighborhood Renovation*, edited by Laska and Spain. Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.

Cybriwsky, Roman, David Ley and John Western. 1986. "The Political and Social Construction of Revitalized Neighborhoods: Society Hill, Philadelphia, and False Creek, Vancouver" in *Gentrification of the City*, edited by Smith and Williams. Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin.

DeGiovanni, Frank F. 1984. "An Examination of Selected Consequences of Revitalization in Six US Cities" in *Gentrification, Displacement and Neighborhood Revitalization*, edited by Palen and London. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Fishman, Robert G. 1983. "Crisis in Identity: an Urban Ethnography of Neighborhood Revitalization." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, SUNY Buffalo, Buffalo, NY.

Friedenfels, Roxanne. 1992. "Gentrification in Large American Cities from 1970 to 1980." *Research in Urban Sociology* 2:pps.

Gans, Herbert. 1962. *Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans*. New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe.

Gentrification Task Force. 2001. "A City for All: the Report of the Gentrification Task Force to Atlanta City Council, September 17, 2001."

Hamnett, Chris. 1984. "Gentrification and Residential Location Theory: A Review and Assessment." *Geography and the Environment* 6:283-319.

_____. 1991. "The Blind Men and the Elephant: the Explanation of Gentrification." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16:173-189.

Hartman, Chester. 1979. "Comment on 'Neighborhood Revitalization and Displacement: A Review of the Evidence'." *American Planning Association Journal* 45:488-491.

Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *Death and Life Great American Cities*. New York, NY: Random House.

Kennedy, Maureen and Paul Leonard. 2001. "Dealing with Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification and Policy Change." Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Laska, Shirley B. and Daphne Spain. 1979. "Urban Policy and Planning in the Wake of Gentrification: Anticipating Renovators' Demands." *American Planning Association Journal* 45:523-531.

Levy, Paul and Roman Cybriwsky. 1980. "The Hidden Dimension of Class and Culture: Philadelphia." In *Back to the City: Issues in Neighborhood Renovation*, edited by Laska and Spain. Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.

Ley, David. 1981. "Inner-City Revitalization in Canada: a Vancouver Case Study." *Canadian Geographer* 25:124-148.

London, Bruce and J. John Palen. 1984. "Introduction: Some Theoretical and Practical Issues Regarding Inner City Revitalization." In *Gentrification, Displacement, and Neighborhood Revitalization*, edited by J. John Palen and Bruce London. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

London, Bruce, Barrett A. Lee and S. Gregory Lipton. 1986. "The Determinants of Gentrification in the United States: A City-Level Analysis." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 21:369-387.

McCosh, John. 2001. "The AJC Annual Home Sales Report: Urban Pioneers Recasting Old Industrial Zone." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. August 20, 2001: 1A.

Mele, Christopher. 1994. "The Process of Gentrification in Alphabet City" in. *From Urban Village to East Village*, edited by Abu-Lughod. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Menahem, Gila. 1994. "Urban Regimes and Neighborhood Mobilization Against Urban Redevelopment: the Case of an Arab-Jewish Neighborhood in Isreal." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 16:35-50.

Raines, Laura. 2000. "Neighborhood of the Week: Downtown Atlanta: Condos, Lofts Bring Residential Resurgence to Some of City's Oldest Neighborhoods." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, July 16, p.8HF.

Rose, Damaris. 1984. "Rethinking Gentrification: Beyond the Uneven Development of Marxist Urban Theory." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 1:47-74.

Sites, William. 1994. "Public Action: New York City Policy and the Gentrification of the Lower East Side" in *From Urban Village to East Village*, edited by Abu-Lughod. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Smith, Neil. 1979. "Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People." *American Planning Association Journal* 45:538-548.

_____. 1996. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London, England: Routledge.

Smith, Neil, Betsy Duncan and Laura Reid. 1994. "From Disinvestment to Reinvestment: Mapping the Urban "Frontier" in the Lower East Side," in *From Urban Village to East Village*, edited by Abu-Lughod. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Smith, Neil and Michelle LeFaivre. 1984. "A Class Analysis of Gentrification" in *Gentrification, Displacement and Neighborhood Revitalization* edited by Palen and London. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Sumka, Howard J. 1979. "Neighborhood Revitalization and Displacement: A Review of the Evidence." *American Planning Association Journal* 45:480-488.

_____. 1980. "Federal Antidisplacement Policy in a Context of Urban Decline" in *Back to the City: Issues in Neighborhood Renovation*, edited by Laska and Spain. Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.

Wilson, William J. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: the Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, William J. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York, NY: Knopf.

Wittberg, Patricia. 1992. "Perspectives in Gentrification: A Comparative Review of the Literature." *Research in Urban Sociology* 2:17-46.

Wyly, Elvin and Daniel J. Hammel. 1998. "Modeling the Context and Contingency of Gentrification." Journal of Urban Affairs 20:303-326.

Zukin, Sharon. 1982. *Loft Living*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

_____. 1987. "Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core." *Annual Review of Sociology* 13:129-47.