Tracking Racialized Gentrification-Induced Displacement of Indigenous African American Residents

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The disproportionate racial impact of gentrification-induced displacement is becoming more of a topic of debate because of the growing evidence and continued outcry of institutional and systemic racism from communities of color. The lack of research in tracking displacement requires new approaches to studying gentrification to address the challenges of investigating the impact on communities of color. In addition to studying the economic, political, and socially motivated reasons for gentrification, the application of a racism-centered framework can shed light on the role of white hegemony in community and urban development policies and practices. Social work researchers can significantly contribute to the body of literature regarding the impact of gentrification-induced displacement of African American residents by applying one of the many social work frameworks in research. Understanding the disproportionate racial impact of displacement on indigenous residents can inform social policies regarding community development strategies and propose interventions to mitigate the impact.

Keywords: communities of color; urban communities; urban social work; their social and economic inequities; housing costs; housing issues

Gentrification is a politically charged term that elicits emotional accusations of displacement, forced relocation, and colonialism from housing advocates, community activists, and community-based organizations on the one side and a defensive response justifying urban renewal, community revitalization, and community development by investors, developers, and government entities on the other side. However, some residents living in communities where decades-long disinvestment and decline have occurred voiced support for gentrification by asking, "When is gentrification coming to my neighbourhood?" (Resident, 2019).

The varied responses to the phenomenon of gentrification are due to the lack of a universally accepted definition of what gentrification is and what impact gentrification has on communities and residents. The term *gentrification* was coined by British Sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) to explain the influx of higher-income people and businesses into low-income communities, resulting in increased

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home and property values and the eventual displacement of indigenous residents due to the consequential unaffordability of rising housing and rental prices.

Gentrification is conceptually defined as a process in which middle- and upper-income people acquire deteriorating and undervalued properties in poorer urban communities, physically improving their property to increase its value, transforming the community to represent the lifestyle of the new residents, and eventually displacing existing residents who can no longer afford to live or move into the community (Brummett & Reed, 2019; Cocola-Gant, 2019; Hyra, 2016; Lei & Hwang, 2018; Lim et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 2019; Slater, 2009; Smith, 1979; Thurber et al., 2019). In this definition of gentrification, the focus is placed on middle- and upper-income residents, also referred to as gentrifiers, moving into low-income communities. The new incoming residents often represent the same ethnic and class grouping, while the displaced indigenous residents represent another ethnic and class grouping, portraying a power struggle between groups delineated by the intersection of race and class (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996).

The Encyclopedia of Housing defines gentrification as "the process by which central urban neighbourhoods that have undergone disinvestment and economic decline experience a reversal, reinvestment, and the in-migration of a relatively well-off, middle- and upper-middle-class population" (van Vliet, 1998). This definition of gentrification implies that the reason for community transformation is a cyclical economic process that is evolutionary. In other words, during the lifespan of a community, there is a cycle of decline and revitalization that organically occurs as a natural process of community development.

Another definition of gentrification is "the replacement of low-income, inner-city working-class residents by middle or upper-class households, either through the market for existing housing or demolition to make way for new upscale housing construction" (Hammel & Wyly, 1996). This definition of gentrification suggests that community change is inevitably based on market-driven forces that create the need for the construction of market-rate housing. The development of market-rate housing requires the acquisition of below-market-rate properties, which are then developed and sold at prices that exceed the average value of properties in the community. Eventually, average property values increase, often to a point of unaffordability for the indigenous residents, forcing them to find affordable housing in other communities.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL MOTIVATORS OF GENTRIFICATION

Gentrification and displacement have been characterized as being driven by the economic principles of supply and demand or production and consumption (Lees, 2000). Some studies define gentrification as the transformation of working class to middle class (Slater, 2009), the improvement of services and amenities (Brummett & Reed, 2019), the product of land and housing market forces (Smith, 1979), and the influx of higher-income people to lower-income neighborhoods (Hyra, 2016; Lei & Hwang, 2018).

The consumer sovereignty theory is used to explain gentrification within an economic framework and the result of consumer preference. The "Back to the City Movement" was coined to characterize the in-migration of higher-income white

professionals to low-income communities that are in close geographic proximity to resurging city centers (Smith, 1979).

Consumption-side and production-side theories attempt to explain gentrification by focusing on the behavior, motivation, and profile of the middle-class gentrifiers seeking to locate in central city neighborhoods. Production-side theory conceptualizes gentrification as the need to produce space as communities experience urban renewal (Cocola-Gant, 2019).

Neil Smith's (1979) rent-gap theory postulates that gentrification occurs when the value of property and land in inner city communities depreciates to the point that developers can reflect a wide gap between its potential capitalization and the costs to purchase. Once the property is redeveloped and sold for a profit, it is considered "capitalized" and the community is "recycled" (Smith, 1979).

Cocola-Gant (2019) makes the argument that gentrification is a process of "social exclusion" resulting from the displacement of low-income residents by higher-income groups. Hence, the intersection of class and race should be considered in the study of the mechanisms and motivating factors of gentrification. The National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC) report (Richardson et al., 2019) specifically indicates that gentrification "terminally" excludes primarily African Americans from affordable housing opportunities in the areas that have been improved through new investor-residents.

Social motivators characterizing gentrification include a theory of neighborhood lifestyle preferences, which refers to the desirability of millennials to live in urban locations previously vacated by "white flight" and "urban renewal." Neighborhood lifestyle preferences posit that millennials are less likely to harbor racial and ethnic animosity than previous generations and become the driving force behind gentrification and the displacement of indigenous residents. Locational preferences are also considered motivators for gentrification because of a desire by gentrifiers for a shorter commute and the convenience of living closer to downtown city centers with cultural and entertainment amenities (Richardson et al., 2019; Smith, 1979).

Lees (2000) further indicates that researchers have presented an "Emancipatory City Thesis," which is a form of quasi-gentrification or what Caulfield (1994) coins as "marginal gentrification." According to this thesis, Caulfield (1994) postulates that movement into city centers by young liberal-leaning intellectuals and artistically inclined gentrifiers who are more tolerant and accepting of diversity allows for a "liberating experience" for both the gentrifiers and the indigenous population (Mendez, 2013). The emancipatory city thesis suggests that social conflicts are mitigated by the ability of a cultural, ethnic, and economic diversity to co-exist in the same geographic space while maintaining distinct identities (Mendez, 2013).

British Sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) coined the term *gentrification* as a class conflict, a competition between the gentry and the peasantry, the haves, and the have-nots, the rich and the poor. While class conflict is a common thread in every definition of gentrification, the phenomenon in North America has evolved into an intersectional conflict of class and race, resulting in the intended or unintended disproportionate displacement of indigenous communities of color. It is reasonable to assert that, based on extant studies, gentrification is an economically motivated

phenomenon that has a disproportionate racial impact of displacing indigenous residents of color.

The phenomenon of gentrification also reflects the aspects of Karl Marx's conflict theory. During the rise of capitalism in Europe, Marx observed the competition for resources between the ruling class, the Bourgeoisie, and the working class, the Proletariat. Marx suggests that society is in a continuous conflict for control of the resources between two parties and that the ruling party, those in control of the resources, will dominate and control the other party. According to Marx, the constant conflict for resources ultimately leads to a change in the power dynamic between the two parties (Collins, 2009; Day & Schiele, 2013; Payne, 2016).

Within the context of competition for resources between two opposing groups, gentrification can be appropriately analyzed within Marx's conflict theory, but the disproportionate racial impact caused by the actions of one homogenous ethnic group imposing themselves on another homogeneous ethnic group necessitates the expansion of Marx's conflict theory to include the social construct of race.

The limitation of Marx's conflict theory is that it does not account for social struggles that exist in addition to the class struggle. The traditional Marxian model falters in the face of ethnic, racial, and religious divisions, and political parties that do not coincide with economic groupings, as well as the phenomenon of social mobility (Collins, 2009). Marxist explanation of racial oppression claims that it arises from the need of capitalist societies to maintain an impoverished population available to take low-wage jobs (Payne, 2016). Consequently, Marxian conflict theory has been traditionally defined exclusively as a class struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor.

Collins (2009) notes that neoclassical economics, which focuses on the determination of goods, outputs, and income distributions in markets through supply and demand, is unable to associate the basic economic theories of supply and demand with the point of view of a conflict perspective. According to Collins (2009), Marx's conflict theory evades the issue of social and racial stratification which maintains economic structures and fails to address the inherent privilege and power one group has over another because of that stratification (Collins, 2009).

Glass (1964) seminal framing of gentrification as a class conflict is accentuated by terms used in an article in *The London Journal* by Hamnett and Williams (1980). Glass referred to gentrification in London's inner cities as being "invaded by middle class," "working class occupiers are displaced," and "exclusively reserved for selected higher-class strata" (Hamnett & Williams, 1980).

Hamnett and Williams (1980) also used the term *colonization* when referring to gentrification, a reference to the "transfer of a population to a new territory" (Department of Philosophy, Stanford University, 2006). The use of the term *colonization* implies a coordinated effort to control resources by those in power. Zimmer (2020) used the term *colonialism* in association with gentrification to convey the disproportionate racial impact on minority residents. The history of displacement of indigenous populations in the United States gives credibility to community activists' accusations of colonialism. The disproportionate impact of gentrification-induced displacement on communities of color should mandate

attention to the intersectional nature of class and race as a variable in gentrification research.

Intersectionality of Race and Class

The intersectionality of race and class regarding gentrification and the disproportionate racial impact of displacement must be included in research studies when examining the social and economic theories seeking to explain gentrification. The racialization of gentrification also requires the application of sociological theories such as conflict theory with an expanded application to include race and class as a factor in understanding the struggle for resources between two groups.

The term *intersectionality* was introduced in a 1980 paper by Columbia Law Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how the discrimination and oppression of black women were distinctly different from the discrimination and oppression that middle-class white women experienced during the feminist movement (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2019). Collins, 1990 expanded on the concept to develop intersectionality, or intersectional theory, which suggests that race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other characteristics cannot be separated (Carbado et al., 2013; Gillborn, 2015).

The social construct of race and the stereotypical assumption of a corresponding social status associated with a racial identity also create an intersectionality (Moore-Berg & Karpinski, 2018) that should not be minimized when examining the phenomenon of gentrification and the disproportionate displacement of minority residents. According to Moore-Berg and Karpinski (2018), the intersection of race and social class impacts inter- and intra-group perceptions that produce prejudicial and discriminatory behavior from one group toward another. The debate regarding the disproportionate impact of gentrification-induced displacement on minority residents reveals the struggle between diametrically opposite racial and class groupings. The gentrifiers represent the affluent new white residents moving into low-income communities and the displaced are minority low-income residents.

The disproportionate racial impact of gentrification-induced displacement is becoming more of a topic of debate because of the growing evidence and continued outcry of institutional and systemic racism from communities of color. The lack of research in tracking displacement requires new approaches to the study of gentrification to address the challenges of investigating the impact on communities of color. In addition to studying the geospatial, economic, political, and socially motivated reasons for gentrification, the application of a racism-centered framework can shed light on the role of white hegemony (Schiele, 2020) in community and urban development policies and practices.

Racialized Gentrification

In an NCRC report, Richardson et al. (2019) identified 16 U.S. cities with high levels of African American displacement resulting from gentrification. Three major U.S. cities, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York City experienced gentrification-induced displacement of a combined 47,000 African American residents between 1990 and 2010. The NCRC report also reports that between

the years 2000 and 2013, 110,935 African American residents have been displaced nationally (Richardson et al., 2019). Yet, there continue to be vehement debates about the significance of displacement and claims that there is a lack of empirical evidence (Easton et al., 2020).

Debates and studies about gentrification do not currently focus on the issue of race because it is difficult to prove that race or racism is a factor influencing wealthier white people to purchase undervalued property in majority–minority low-income neighborhoods. The argument countering racism as a factor in gentrification and displacement is that America is a society that encourages and supports investment ventures for profitable gain and is foundational to capitalism. The study of gentrification and displacement from a capitalistic perspective focuses the research on geospatial, economic, and political processes of community development and urban renewal and ignores the social toll that is placed upon displaced residents.

The academic disciplines most often researching gentrification and displacement are from the schools of urban planning, public policy, city planning, geography, economics, and the Federal Reserve Bank. Few scholars studying gentrification and displacement are from the school of social work. The most prominent scholars who have researched and continue to research gentrification are Herbert Marcuse, a German-American sociologist associated with the Frankfurt School of critical theory (Marcuse, 1986), Neil Smith, Professor of Anthropology and Geography (Smith, 1979), Professor Loretta Lees, Urban Geographer (Lees, 2000), Professor Derek Hyra, Public Administration and Policy (Hyra, 2016), Professor Rowland Atkinson, Urban Studies and Planning (Atkinson, 2003), and A. Cocola-Gant, Geography and Spatial Planning (Cocola-Gant, 2019). These researchers and schools of discipline are focused on the mechanics of gentrification and displacement as an urban, geographical, spatial, economic, and public policy phenomenon. Research by social work scholars will focus on the impact of gentrification and displacement on residents most vulnerable to the socio-economic changes influenced by the mechanics of gentrification and displacement (NASW Delegate Assembly, 2017).

Social work researchers can significantly contribute to the body of literature regarding the impact of gentrification-induced displacement of indigenous African American residents by applying one of the many social work frameworks in research. Understanding the disproportionate racial impact of displacement on indigenous residents can raise awareness and inform social policies regarding community and urban development strategies and propose interventions to mitigate the impact (Lee, 2022).

However, the challenge of including race and/or racism as a critical variable in social work research must also be overcome. Social work frameworks utilized in social work research have historically focused on class, gender, and state-centered perspectives as the predominant conceptual lens through which social phenomenon is studied (Schiele, 2020). According to Schiele (2020), race and racism is considered as a subcategory of the traditional class, gender, and state-centered perspectives that predominate the development and enactment of social welfare policy and reflect the ethnocentricity of White America.

Given the history of America as it pertains to racial privilege and the control and distribution of resources, evidence of coordinated and sustained racial inequality continues to exist in the social, political, and economic arenas of American society. Patterns of African American displacement are replete in America's history. From the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, in which Africans were forcibly removed from their homeland, enslaved, and relocated to North American slave plantations, people of African descent were displaced (Brown, 2021). During the institution of American slavery, people of African descent were considered inferior human beings and subjected to an era of overt violence and racism (Schiele, 2020), displaced from plantation to plantation, region to region, and state to state as property of White plantation owners (Brown, 2021). In southern states, the era of Jim and Jane Crow legal segregation and discrimination witnessed governmentally sanctioned racism, lynching's, mob violence against African Americans (Schiele, 2020), the destruction of African American neighborhoods such as cities in Tulsa and Rosewood, segregated schools, inferior public services, poor healthcare, and the fundamental denial of the rights and privileges afforded to White citizens (Brown, 2021; Schiele, 2020), ultimately forcing thousands of African Americans to migrate to northern cities and displaced from their southern homes and communities.

The government sponsored G.I. Bill, which was racially biased and benefited predominately White World War II veterans (Katznelson, 2005), provided federal funds to pay for education, buy homes, and start businesses, creating the greatest period of prosperity evidenced by a new majority White middle class, suburban enclaves, and business successes. However, the distribution of these funds was racially prejudiced and excluded African American soldiers who fought the same war (Katznelson, 2005). This new middle class initiated a period of "White Flight" from city-center communities to suburban areas in which resources, tax revenues, services, and products followed, creating "ghettos" ripe for government intervention, and the eventual displacement of African Americans (Brown, 2021).

Brown (2021) refers to a period of "The Great Urban Displacements" when African American neighborhoods were disrupted by government policies of slum clearance, urban renewal (Negro Removal Program), and highway construction through African American neighborhoods. These policies cleared the path for the displacement African American residents and the eventual influx of White wealthier residents, the phenomenon of gentrification.

The creation of racial real-estate covenants that enshrined governmentally sanctioned redlining, maintained residential segregation, prevented the accumulation of wealth, and prevented African Americans from buying homes in White neighborhoods ensured residential segregation and contributed to the wealth gap between White and African American citizens (Pietila, 2010). African American residential neighborhoods received inequitable municipal services, denied access to low-interest home improvement loans, and were extorted with subprime lending products, all ingredients for decades-long deterioration in the values of properties, the draining of community resources, and the destabilization of entire neighborhoods (Brown, 2021; Pietila, 2010). These policies and practices set the stage for investors to acquire properties for pennies on the dollar, who would then improve the condition of the property and neighborhood, driving up values to a point of

unaffordability for indigenous residents and ultimately forcing those residents to be displaced, hence the phenomenon of gentrification (Brummett & Reed, 2019; Cocola-Gant, 2019; Hyra, 2016; Lei & Hwang, 2018; Lim et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 2019; Slater, 2009; Smith, 1979; Thurber et al., 2019).

The history of race relations in American society validates the inclusion of race as a factor in the study of gentrification-induced displacement. Tracking of gentrification-induced displacement would not only affirm that displacement occurs, and to what degree displacement occurs but also reveal whether the displacement is the continuation of historical patterns of White hegemony. Research from Bobo and Hutchings (1996) suggests that hostility between racial groups does not only occur because of a competition for material resources but exists because of the historical social order perpetuated by a collective perception that one group is entitled over another group.

Bobo and Hutchings (1996) reference a "Simple Self-Interest Model" that proposes that the tension between two racial groups is the result of a fundamental desire for economic, social, and political interests. The changing nature of a community where there is a noticeable shift in the racial demographic from a majority–minority community to a majority-white community can cause the minority ethnic group to feel threatened by the imposing group (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). Changes in political representation and issues affecting residents can also contribute to social and political clashes that create additional tensions and hostilities between two racially homogeneous groups (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Moore-Berg & Karpinski, 2018; Thompson-Fullilove, 2001).

Tracking Gentrification-Induced Displacement

Recent research acknowledges that gentrification-induced displacement exists; however, the ability to enumerate the extent of displacement is difficult for a multiplicity of reasons (Easton et al., 2020). One of the challenges in tracking displacement is attributed to the difficulty in identifying which neighborhoods are experiencing gentrification compared to non-gentrifying neighborhoods experiencing normal residential mobility. Another reason that tracking of displacement is hindered is the presumption that displaced residents are difficult to locate because of moving to other communities or because of an unwillingness to cooperate by participating in interviews or surveys due to embarrassment or anger of being displaced. And yet another reason suggested as a hindrance to tracking displacement is the problem with data, which is usually outdated census tract or survey information completed over a 10-year period (Easton et al., 2020). The issue then is not whether gentrification-induced displacement occurs, but whether intentional research to track gentrification-induced displacement will occur to determine the measurable degree to which it does occur.

There is also agreement among some researchers that gentrification-induced displacement has a psychosocial impact on indigenous residents beyond the changes in neighborhood income, increase property values and rents, and the change in types of services and products offered in the gentrifying community (Easton et al., 2020; Thompson-Fullilove, 2001).

Some researchers agree that gentrification-induced displacement occurs and that it has a psychosocial impact on displaced indigenous residents (Atkinson, 2015, ;

Easton et al., 2020; Thompson-Fullilove, 2001), which should compel intentional research on displacement regardless of the statistical extent to which it occurs. The lack of tracking ignores displacement as a variable in the analysis of gentrification's impact on residents. The research gap in the study of gentrification-induced displacement then disregards the impact on indigenous residents and erroneously suggests that nice surroundings resulting from the influx of new resources will improve the quality of life for everyone in the community (Grandpre, 2021).

Hyra (2016) believes that residential displacement is only one consequence of gentrification and has also identified political and cultural displacement as related elements of community change. Political displacement is characterized by a loss of minority representation in the political infrastructure. The new higher-income residents increase their political representation and take over political institutions, advocating for amenities and services that create a change in neighborhood norms, preferences, and service amenities, effectively causing a cultural displacement (Hyra, 2016; Slater, 2009). Slater (2009) refers to this cultural displacement as "displacement pressure." Low-income families begin to feel the pressure of moving when the community transformation affects transportation patterns; new and different retail outlets replace neighborhood stores and the loss of family and friends who have already moved. Richardson et al. (2019) agree with the analysis of cultural displacement and add a racial and ethnic component by specifically identifying "affluent white gentrifiers" as the ones replacing the incumbent residents.

Political affiliations and cultural identification, while oftentimes racially prejudiced assumptions (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996), are also intersectional considerations when examining gentrification and displacement. African Americans are often assumed to be politically left-leaning and radical, while European Americans are assumed to be either politically moderate or conservative. The political and cultural assumptions of group identity are characterized as a conflict between two opposing groups and reflect Marx's conflict theory previously discussed as a framework for understanding gentrification. The impact of gentrification-induced displacement in which displaced residents experience residential, cultural, political, and racial displacement is referred to by Thompson-Fullilove (2001) as "root shock." The disproportionality of displacement upon minority communities and its' short-term consequences of loss of income, loss of social networks, and psychological trauma lead to a "social paralysis of dispossession" and a "collapse of political action" (Thompson Fullilove, 2001).

Behind the veil of urban renewal (Richardson et al., 2019; Smith, 1979) and community development (Atkinson, 2003; Hyra, 2016; Randell, 2016), and without regard for the impact on the indigenous residents, the lack of research on the disproportionate impact of displacement on people of color reveals patterns of Eurocentric hegemony reflective of past phenomena such as the Negro Removal projects (Atkinson, 2003) and Westward Expansion's removal of indigenous Native Americans (Schiele, 2020; Wharton, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The causes attributed to the phenomenon of gentrification are multifaceted and difficult to isolate or distinguish as either economically or socially motivated. The

economic mechanisms of gentrification are certainly motivated by capitalistic and market-driven opportunities for profit (Brummett & Reed, 2019; Cocola-Gant, 2019; Hyra, 2016; Lees, 2000; Lei & Hwang, 2018; Slater, 2009; Smith, 1979). British Professor of Geography, Loretta Lees (2000) indicates that the "mainstay of the gentrification literature" has historically focused on characterizing gentrification and displacement as being driven by the economic principles of supply and demand or production and consumption (Lees, 2000). Many studies define *gentrification* within an economic framework and utilize terms such as the transformation of working class to middle class (Slater, 2009), improved amenities (Brummett & Reed, 2019), the product of land and housing markets (Smith, 1979), and the influx of higher-income people to lower-income neighborhoods (Hyra, 2016; Lei & Hwang, 2018).

The socially motivated mechanisms of gentrification consist of lifestyle, locational, and generational preferences of new and oftentimes younger residents desirous of living in areas previously vacated by white flight (Atkinson, 2003; Caulfield, 1994; Mendez, 2013; Richardson et al., 2019). Cocola-Gant (2019) makes the argument that gentrification is a process of "social exclusion" resulting from the displacement of low-income residents by higher-income groups. The NCRC report (Richardson et al., 2019) specifically indicates that gentrification "terminally" excludes primarily African Americans from affordable housing opportunities in the areas that have been improved through new investor residents. Consequently, the social motivators influencing gentrification must also consider racism as a factor in the study of gentrification.

The disproportionate impact of gentrification-induced displacement on African American residents should call for an increased sense of responsibility to track displacement in gentrification research. Regardless of whether gentrification and displacement are defined as an economically or socially motivated phenomenon, there is displacement of indigenous residents (Cocola-Gant, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019; Thurber et al., 2019) which should ethically mandate research that tracks those impacted by the displacement.

Social work researchers can significantly contribute to the body of literature regarding the disproportionate impact of gentrification-induced displacement on indigenous African American residents by applying one of the many social work frameworks in research. Considering the history of African American displacement in American society, the application of a racism-centered framework can shine a light on the white racial hegemony that has sustained racial privilege (Schiele, 2020) and inform policies regarding urban renewal strategies to provide interventions that take into consideration the well-being of all the residents.

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