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## Gentrification in New York City

In recent years, gentrification has become an important and dangerous issue because it transforms urban neighborhoods across New York City, altering the city's physical landscapes and affordable communities. The rich cultural heritage and social bonds are being transformed by redevelopment projects, and the arrival of wealthier residents. However, gentrification is often viewed as a sign of economic progress due to the improvement of local services and infrastructures, but the negative impacts on low-income residents outweigh the benefits. This so-called “economic progress” hides a very disturbing conflict that is impacting millions of low-income residents across the country, especially in New York City, due to the rise in housing costs and displacement. This ongoing issue is creating deep social, emotional, and psychological harm to people in New York.



Recent studies done by Stephen Sheppard, a professor of economics at Williams College, argues in his article “Why Gentrification Is a Problem” that gentrification destroys communities long before physical displacement occurs. His studies argue that

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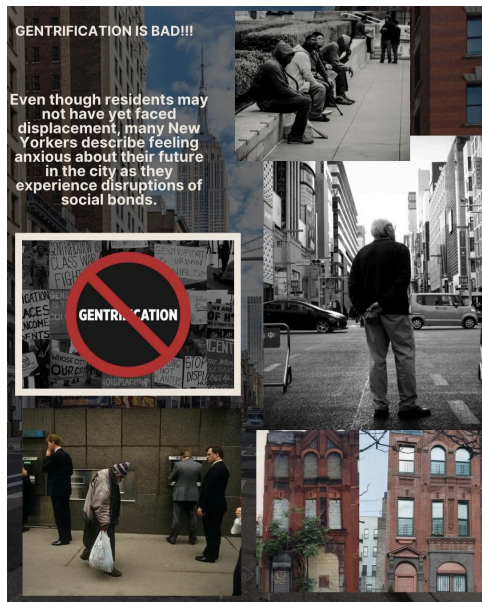
“The mere threat of losing one’s home creates feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and alienation among long-term residents” (Sheppard 3–4). As a result, longtime residents start to become worried about being forced out of the neighborhood; they stop feeling secure. This uncertainty makes them less motivated to involve in community events because they may not be living in this neighborhood to see the benefits of their efforts. As less and less people participate in these social events, the community starts fading away.

This psychological disengagement is very crucial, yet it's one effect of gentrification that is ignored. Even before families are displaced, the threat of removal can damage their relationship to the community. This makes residents stop participating in neighborhood activities or investing emotionally in a place they no longer feel secure in. This sense of uncertainty dismantles individuals and their well-being. What once was a close and proud community becomes destroyed as people begin to see their homes and neighborhoods as temporary. According to Sheppard’s observation, gentrification is not simply an economic issue; rather, it is a social and psychological issue that disrupts human relationships and trust upon which communities depend.

These insights described above regarding gentrification and its psychological impacts clearly reflect on residents in New York City. Residents who are living in gentrifying neighborhoods such as Harlem are facing shifts in social and mental problems due to the expensive housing costs and fancy developments that start to replace the older affordable buildings, leading to the psychological pressures on many of these residents. Even though residents may not have yet faced displacement, many New Yorkers describe feeling anxious about their future in the city as they experience disruptions of social bonds. As claimed by H.

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Shellae Versey's 2018 study, "A Tale of Two Harlems: Gentrification, Social Capital, and



Aging in Place," published in *Social Science & Medicine* vol. 214. H. Shellae Versey is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at Fordham University who conducted interviews with older African American residents in Central Harlem and found that gentrification weakened social ties and disrupted community relationships. The study demonstrated social changes and contributions to feelings of alienation, insecurity, and lack of community engagement among long-term residents.

As Versey (2018) explains, "These processes comprise a gentrifying context that endangers existing social spaces, shrinks pools of available housing, and excludes long-term residents from acquiring homeownership/rental opportunities. Within this frame, long-term residents can feel 'pushed out' or akin to..." (Versey 1-11). In other words, even without physical displacements, gentrification can alter the social relationships as well as the mental state of these residents by making them feel alienated and disconnected from their own community. This study by Versey emphasizes the unequal nature of neighborhood change. Versey depicts that the wealthy residents living in neighborhoods such as Harlem benefit from improved services and new developments, while the long-term residents, like the older Black residents, encounter exclusion and uncertainty. This explains how gentrification can result in unfairness of social and racial inequalities within the same neighborhood.

As depicted above, gentrification doesn't just reshape the physical and social aspects of

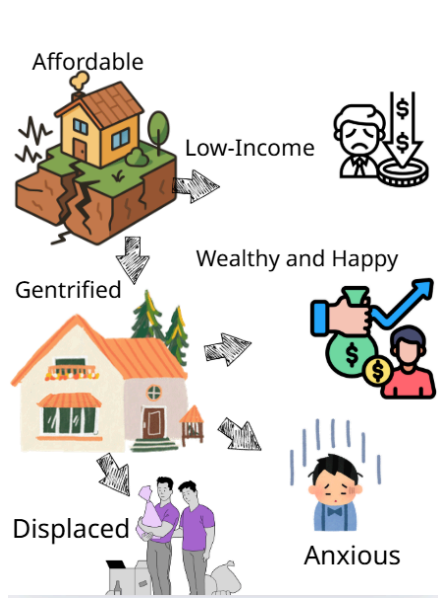
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a community, but it also creates a sense of exclusion and inequality among residents in a neighborhood. For instance, in gentrifying communities, residents often face a dual economy, where new shop owners and houses are only catered to new wealthy residents, excluding the lower-income residents with limited affordable options. A 2023 PLOS ONE study, “Can changing neighborhoods influence mental health? An ecological analysis of gentrification and neighborhood-level serious psychological distress—New York City, 2002–2015” by Alroy et al. Most of the authors from the study are affiliated with Montclair State University, Department of Public Health. They analyzed that in New York City’s hypergentrifying neighborhoods, residents are facing serious psychological distress. In Alroy et al.’s study, they categorized the impacts of mental distress by race/ethnicity and depicted how there is unfairness. In rapidly changing neighborhoods, Alroy et al. found that serious psychological distress decreased dramatically among White residents, dropping from “8.1% to 2.3%” (Alroy et al.). However, in these same neighborhoods, distress levels among Black residents remained “stable” or even slightly increased, rising from “4.6% to 6.9%” ((Alroy et al.). For Latino residents, psychological distress also showed no real improvements, declining only slightly from “11.9% to 10.4%.” These findings highlight that the mental health benefits associated with neighborhood change are not shared equally across racial groups. It shows that the transformations occurring in the community, such as rising rents and demographic turnover, are all associated with unequal mental health outcomes. For long-term, lower-income residents, who are often Black or Latino, gentrification does not provide any benefits, especially the mental health benefits that are sometimes seen among wealthier newcomers.

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Instead, it creates ongoing psychological distress as the community ties weaken and the stability of their neighborhood becomes uncertain.

In my personal experience, I have witnessed these effects in my own neighborhood of Rockaway in Queens. Rockaway is considered one of New York City’s hypergentrifying neighborhoods, probably because of its beaches and oceanfront locations, which attract new residents, particularly from Manhattan. Every day I wake up and watch my own community being fundamentally altered by this so-called “progress.” It infuriates me when the wealthy newcomers shift the demographic, social, and economic structure of our community. Yes, some view this cause as a positive development, as it introduces new businesses and improved housing. However, these small improvements often undermine the larger, more damaging



impacts that gentrification has on long-term, low-income residents. While the changes bring in new businesses, such as supermarkets, these shops are often overpriced, making it difficult for lower and middle-class residents like us to afford everyday necessities. In these communities, certain stores are priced for only the wealthy newcomers who are able to meet the prices that are imposed, ignoring the existing long-term and low-income residents who are not very wealthy.

Gentrification in New York City is often viewed as a simple sign of progress that improves infrastructure and public services, but these improvements primarily serve the needs

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and interests of wealthier newcomers. While the city becomes more developed physically, it also brings psychological, social, and cultural costs to low-income residents. The studies conducted by Sheppard, Versey, and Alroy demonstrate that gentrification's harms can go far beyond physical displacement. It alienates people from their communities, weakens social bonds, destroys all the history, and most importantly, it creates mental health disorders. It also introduces expensive businesses, and an increased cost of living that makes it impossible for many long-term residents to enjoy this so-called "progress." The effects of gentrification result in deep inequalities within a community, where only the wealthy White newcomers benefit more than the low-income Black and Latino residents. This is where the problem comes, because if something were to be called progress then I think it should always benefit everyone in the community rather than only one certain race. True progress should prioritize inclusion and affordability for residents from all types of backgrounds.

If New York city is really committed to developing and advancing neighborhoods, then these implemented progresses must be centered around current residents without causing any harm to their communities. These long-term, low-income residents have been living in these neighborhoods for years, like these are their homes. Gentrification should not mean altering and removing communities, rather it should create a place where everyone is loved and cared for. We as a city should take proper action to create policies that protect affordable housing, keep the cultural identity of residents, and ensure equal access to local resources, whether you're Black, Latino or White. But if we fail to create regulations that serve low-income residents and residents of all sorts of backgrounds, everyone will end up facing consequences of unfairness, psychological distress and weakening of social relationships, like

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we saw in communities like Rockaway, Harlem and many more.

Works Cited

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