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Beyond the Storefronts

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Beyond the Storefronts

The story of East Harlem is insulated within its boundaries of the Harlem River and 96th Street (north and south respectively) and the East River to 5th Avenue (east and west respectively). It is a story which can be seen on the graffiti written on brick walls of buildings and the gated storefronts, bodegas, mixture of tenements and public housing projects, and often cheap and authentic ethnic cuisine. The history of East Harlem is a complex one. East Harlem was primarily farmland until 1880 with the expansion of elevated railroad tracks on Third Avenue and Fourth Avenue (now known as Park Avenue).¹ This expansion led to the building of cheap tenement housing and a rapid increase of immigrants. At this time, East Harlem was a predominately Italian neighborhood with a large Eastern European presence. Puerto Ricans also began to settle into East Harlem following the Spanish-American War in 1898 when the United States began its acquisition and control of Puerto Rico. The Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917 gave Puerto Ricans United States citizenship which dramatically changed the relationship between both territories. Arguably, the monumental act changed the landscape of East Harlem; during that year, nearly 11,000 Puerto Ricans emigrated from Puerto Rico to the United States.² The emigration in 1917 was more than the previous seven years combined.³ With the increase in

² Russel Sharman, The Tenants of East Harlem (Los Angeles: University of California, 2006), 51.
³ Ibid.
Italians, Eastern Europeans, Puerto Ricans, and Blacks, ethnic stores began to support and supply their diverse constituents.  

Throughout the 1920’s, and 1930’s there was an economic decline which caused a “dis-investment” of East Harlem. The dis-investment sparked attention which led to the construction of public housing projects by the New York City Housing Authority. The housing projects created a divide between the various ethnic groups which is artfully detailed in Piri Thomas’ autobiography, *Down These Mean Streets*. During the 1940’s East Harlem became known as Spanish Harlem and *El Barrio* with its large population of Puerto Ricans. Italians and Eastern Europeans dispersed throughout New York City and Blacks were pushed to Central Harlem and West Harlem which is now known as Washington Heights and is a predominately Dominican neighborhood.

In recent years, gentrification has had the ability to radically change the landscape of Spanish Harlem due to an increase in both public and private sector attempts to revitalize the aging and long ignored area. It is the purpose of this paper to evaluate the positive and negative effects of gentrification as they apply to El Barrio. To do this several key questions must be asked. Who are the gentrifiers? Who are the winners and the losers? What promises were made to East Harlem residents? Were these promises fulfilled? What do the ‘native’ residents fear most? What do residents enjoy about gentrification? The research methods employed in order to answer these questions began with general scholarly material regarding gentrification. Then interviews of Spanish Harlem residents were conducted in addition to the evaluation of newspapers, books, pictures, and blogs specifically relating to gentrification in East Harlem.

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4 Throughout this paper, Blacks will be referred to in order to encompass those who identify as Caribbean, Haitian, and African-American.


6 Ibid.
Combined, these sources will help to get a comprehensive view of perceptions and concerns of area residents. However, due to the limited number of interviews performed, it is important to note that the views expressed in the interviews are in no way representative of all residents. Instead, these interviews seek to provide contradictions and highlights and also seek to reveal the complexities of information already known within the scholarship of gentrification in Harlem.

Gentrification: General Background

The term ‘gentrification’ is a fairly new word used in academia. Coined in 1964 by Ruth Glass, it was used to describe the changes she noticed in her neighborhood:

One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes, upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages—two rooms up and two down—have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Large Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period—which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation—have been upgraded once again. Nowadays, many of these houses are being subdivided in costly flats or ‘houselets’ (in terms of the new real estate snob jargon). The current social status and value if such dwellings are frequently in inverse relation to their size, and in any case enormously inflated by comparison with previous levels in their neighborhoods. Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district, it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced, and the whole social character of the district is changed.\(^7\)

Reviewing the original use of the term gentrification is important because it reveals several factors. First, Glass is referring only to residential gentrification. The evolution in meaning, which will be described in detail later, has allowed gentrification to apply to commercial districts and entire communities. Glass defines gentrification as requiring individuals of higher economic classes to enter into working class neighborhoods. Secondly, there is a requirement that the neighborhood housing be updated and revitalized. Implicitly, gentrification also involves a change in culture. This is shown in the progression in language from “flats” to “houselets.”

While both terms describe the same type of home, the latter implies an air of arrogance and high class. Another factor including in gentrification is that the working class ‘natives’ are displaced. Yet, Glass describes gentrification as a process. Since, gentrification is a process, I argue that displacement is not necessary when gentrification is in its beginning stages.

Since Glass’ inception of the word, many definitions of gentrification have been employed. One modern definition comes from Chris Hamnett, a scholar on the issue:

_Simultaneously a physical, economic, social, and cultural phenomenon. Gentrification commonly involves the invasion by middle-class or higher-income groups of previously working-class neighbourhoods or multi-occupied ‘twilight areas’ and the replacement or displacement of many of the original occupants. It involves the physical renovation or rehabilitation of what was frequently a highly deteriorated housing stock and its upgrading to meet the requirements of its new owners. In the process, housing in the areas affected, both renovated and unrenovated, undergoes a significant price appreciation. Such a process of neighbourhood transition commonly involve a degree of tenure transformation from renting to owning._

Through this definition we see a reflection of Glass’ original use. An important distinction, however, is that Hamnett’s definition includes cultural changes explicitly and includes social changes. It is the culmination of physical, economic, social, and cultural exchanges that will be explored within the context of Spanish Harlem.

**Gentrification in Context: Spanish Harlem**

The word ‘gentrification’ has been and will continue to be a politically charged word. As seen by the definitions above they involve “invasion.” When the New York Times describes gentrification they often use scare tactics such as “Harlem’s Hedge Against Gentrification,” or

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“Barrio Life is Vanishing.”\textsuperscript{9,10} Images of gentrification are also negative. One cartoon displays whites moving out of the cities into the suburbs when minorities move in. As minorities move into the suburbs, whites move back to the city and say, “it worked.”\textsuperscript{11} Another cartoon from the \textit{New Yorker}, although never published, depicts a \textit{Home and Garden} magazine with gentrification being the special issue. Within the magazine are titles such as “What Your Cockroaches Think of Your Fancy Kitchen,” “Four Tricks to Hiding Your Wealth from Less Fortunate Neighbors,” and “Crackheads or Vagrants in Your Hallway—Readers Voice Their Preference.”\textsuperscript{12} A flier, found online, depicts radical ways to fight gentrification which include making yuppies feel unwelcome, undermine public surveillance, graffiti, litter, vandalize, squat, befriend local homeless people, shop at local business, avoid buying from chain stores, and hold greedy and unethical real estate agents, developers, and politicians accountable. Although some of these depictions are satirical, when the images are combined viewers get a sense of adversity and negative stigma attached to gentrification. Due to the invocation of negative feelings as portrayed in cartoons and the news, it is a secondary aim to evaluate this negativity in light of East Harlem residents.

\textbf{Crime and Gentrification}

One benefit usually stated to ease the fears of gentrification is that it will reduce crime. In nearly every personal interview, the participant included reduction of crime as a positive byproduct of gentrification. One resident, named Jonathan explained that before gentrification


East Harlem was, “Dark. Not in a racial sense but in a safety sense. When I would come home from work, I would have to always watch my back on every block. Now, with those expensive new homes, I don’t have to.”\textsuperscript{13}

These claims, however, are largely unevaluated. Several theories of crime espouse that gentrification will reduce crimes for several reasons. First, an increase in higher income families and homes within a poorer community would seek to decrease crime because, generally, higher income communities tend to have less crime than lower income communities. Secondly, gentrification would encourage “long-time incumbents of the neighborhood” to take part in the revitalization of the community and this would decrease crimes such as graffiti and vandalism.\textsuperscript{14} Lastly, the new residents of the community, due to fear, would institute neighborhood watch patrols.\textsuperscript{15} However, opposing theorists contend that the higher income individuals become easy targets since “crime is a battle between the haves and have-nots.”\textsuperscript{16}

A study has evaluated these claims by looking at 14 different cities undergoing gentrification. The study concluded that gentrification has a minor effect in reducing personal crimes such as homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. However, the study also suggests that gentrification has no effect on property crimes such as burglary, theft, and auto theft but states that in some cities crime may serve “as a feedback mechanism to deter the stability of the gentrification process.”\textsuperscript{17}

A closer look into New York City and Spanish Harlem reveals that empirically, throughout the course of the past 19 years, New York City has seen a dramatic decrease in crime.

\textsuperscript{13}Personal Interview.
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid, p.198
Since 1990 the city has seen a 79.76 percent decrease in crime.\textsuperscript{18} The New York Police Department’s 25\textsuperscript{th} Precinct, which patrols East Harlem, has only seen a 71.79 percent decrease over the same period. These numbers are significant because it shows that either 1) gentrification has no effect on crime, or 2) gentrification has slowed the decrease of crime in the area which would account for the 7.97 percentage point difference between the city’s decrease in crime and East Harlem’s decrease in crime. These statistics raise several important questions. Why do native residents attach the citywide trend of a decrease in overall crime to gentrification? Why do residents feel safer when gentrification occurs in their neighborhood? Does it matter who the gentrifiers are?

These questions are vital to the understanding of residents’ views on gentrification and may leave more questions than answers. Jonathan and other participants who were interviewed believed that gentrification decreased crime and felt safer. In Spanish Harlem, gentrifiers are primarily white. Would it be different if gentrifiers were black? I believe so. Professor Randall Kennedy discusses the issue of blackness and its relation to criminality in his book \textit{Race, Crime, and the Law}; while Kennedy refers specifically to blacks, his thought process can be applied to all racial minorities.\textsuperscript{19} Minorities have always disproportionately been associated with crime and are regarded “in general with heightened suspicion.”\textsuperscript{20} These feelings are not just limited to whites. Jesse Jackson, a black activist, shared the same sentiment when he remarked, “‘there is nothing more painful for me at this stage in my life, than to walk down the street and hear footsteps and start to think about robbery and then look around and see it’s somebody white and feel relived.’”\textsuperscript{21} Jackson’s sentiment raises several important issues. First, it shows that the

\textsuperscript{18} NYPD Office of the Chief Department, \textit{Crime Statistics}, New York City.
\textsuperscript{19} For the purposes of this argument, racial minorities will refer to blacks and Hispanics.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
implicit connection between minority and crime is not limited to only whites. In fact, it is a stereotype perpetuated within minority groups. This systemic problem is transparent within East Harlem. Residents may attribute a safer environment not because crime has actually gone down, but rather, as a result of a lighter complexion entering into their neighborhood. The distinction between whites and blacks does create some tension.

Throughout my interviews I began see a power dynamic develop. The residents who participated began to use language which separated themselves (native residents) from the new residents. This idea of “us versus them” creates a separation between the two groups, one being the dominating group while the other is the subordinate group. Here in El Barrio, the “us” refers to the longstanding residents while the “them” refers to the gentrifiers.

An example of this can be seen from an interview done by Professor Lance Freeman, in his book, *There Goes the ‘Hood*, when he is speaking to a Harlem Resident. The resident states that, “If they’re paying A certain amount of money they wanna live in ‘luxury,’ you know. They don’t wanna pay like $350 to $500,000 for a brownstone and down the block there’s trash or abandoned buildings…but I’m sure she doesn’t have broken sidewalks, or homeless people sitting down in front of her building. That is the type of thing they’re doing.”22 Here in this example, the native resident describes that the dynamic exists due to class differences. Within that quote, the resident subscribes to a positive trend relationship between class and power. Long time residents feel that when an individual has the ability to purchase a home for half a million dollars, that individual also has more power than a resident with a lower class status receiving government assistance. This is seen through the resident’s perception that income

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level has the power to buy new sidewalks and police enforcement to keep vagrants away from the gentrifier’s property.

The photo serves as a visual example of the resident’s belief that income allows gentrifiers to be free of vagrants and have clean and safe streets.

Another explanation for the derivation of this power dynamic may exist due to a disruption of the status quo and fear. The fear emanates from a loss of power and a change from Puerto Ricans as a majority to being a numeric minority in a land where Puerto Ricans dominated the area previously. This dynamic, while important, does not seem to be a remarkable sentiment among East Harlem residents. Perhaps, their power dynamic mentality is subconscious or is secondary to other concerns.

**Culture, Housing, and Gentrification**

One such primary concern is gentrification’s effect on culture. A major symbol of culture in Spanish Harlem is La Marqueta. La Marqueta, located underneath the Park Avenue
Metro North Railroad began with a few pushcart vendors during the 1920’s. In the market’s
prime during the 1950’s and 1960’s, there were hundreds of carts stretching a five block length
from 111th Street to 116th Street which sold items such as music records, fresh fruits and
vegetables, and religious paraphernalia. A large fire and decline has left all but one block of the
market closed, dilapidated, and shut down. In 2003, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg
promised to revive the once popular market and vowed to “have committed nearly $3 million for
the revival, and ‘we're working with several banks' and other potential financing sources for the
$18 million more needed to rebuild a five-block market, said Elizabeth Colon, executive director
of the nonprofit East Harlem Business Capital Corporation. A spokeswoman for the city’s
Economic Development Corporation, Janel Patterson, said, 'We feel the project is moving along
and they have gotten sufficient commitments of funding and tenant interest.'”

These promises are largely unrealized today nearly eight years later. One resident,
Amanda Cruz, stated that she hoped gentrification would increase political attention in the area.
While promises for improvements have been made, residents like Amanda see no difference. La
Marqueta’s only major change is the store front that is now remodeled with an automatic sliding
door and a repainted exterior. The interior still remains empty with very few vendors although
Puerto Ricans can still obtain fresh fish, produce, and religious items to practice Santeria. The
decline of La Marqueta began in the 1970’s, long before gentrification became an issue in
Spanish Harlem. La Marqueta is emblematic of the deterioration of culture that some residents
feel and this loss is only highlighted and heightened by gentrification. For some, this may

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17, 2010).

reinforce the aforementioned power dynamic and serve as a constant reminder that the status quo no longer exists.

East Harlem, known for its limitless supply of authentic food faces another dilemma. Small family owned business are left with a choice to leave their businesses as-is and serve the community they always have, or, they may upgrade their existing facilities to cater to the new area residents. This dilemma can be seen throughout Spanish Harlem where there is a mix between longstanding restaurants which have not changed, and restaurants which have, at the minimum, changed their facade. Some residents note that restaurants may also change their price and authenticity of their food. These are two very important issues. An increase in price and a decrease in authenticity serves to suggest a change in the public the restaurant seeks to serve. This is significant because it displays the issue of further alienating the residents who are long time consumers of these products. For restaurant owners, however, it may mean an opportunity to increase profitability during difficult economic times. Satisfying both long time consumers and a need for increased profits are competing interests and a problem some residents feel will not be solved.

Commercial gentrification occurs in other ways. On 101st and First Avenue, below Riverview Apartments are several retail spaces. One such space was a bodega which had been a stable to the community (Riverview Apartments and surrounding low income housing complexes) for years. When the owner of the retail space demanded more money, the bodega was forced to close because it could not meet that burden. After about a year of the space remaining vacant, it is now home to Dave’s Gourmet. This new store’s title and inclusion of gourmet food displays that it caters to a different public. Native residents have been forced to
find a new bodega and for many that may be inconvenient and far away, while the new affluent public now can enjoy having a small gourmet deli near their home. The photo to the left depicts the bodega now turned into a gourmet deli and its transition of catering to a new public.

Another example of commercial gentrification has occurred on 117th Street and Pleasant Avenue. In July 2010, Target and Costco opened its doors in Spanish Harlem. This caused a big debate, according to Northhattan, an online news blog. Some say that these chain stores have benefitted the community because both Target and Costco seek to hire individuals from the area. This employment can be vital to some given the economic downturn. Others believe that the chain stores are inherently bad because they will put smaller stores on Third Avenue out of business. One small store owner remarked that he had “seen sales go down in the aftermath of the recent opening” of Target and Costco. The consumers of Costco and Target are not only Spanish Harlem residents but also residents from around Manhattan. After observing the stores for 45 minutes, it becomes evident that El Barrio’s residents do enjoy this type of commercialized gentrification.

26 Ibid
On the contrary, gentrification’s facilitators will create a need and desire for new types of cuisine and facilities. With the introduction of varying food cuisines such as Italian restaurants and different places of worship, such as synagogues, some residents may believe that this is adding to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the neighborhood.\(^{27}\) Traditionally, we have homogenized the word ethnic into meaning a relationship of culture in relation to restaurants, music, etc. applying only to marginalized groups. Historically, ethnicity has been used to as a way to promote racial hierarchy through the thought process “that ethnicity is a matter of choice.”\(^{28}\) Those who cannot erase their foreign roots are subjugated to white supremacy.\(^{29}\) However, in the manner the Jonathan uses the word we see that the word ‘ethnic’ refers to all people living within the community regardless of race and ethnicity. He seeks to include everyone, even those who can erase their foreign roots.

What is most interesting about my interview with Jonathan is the dichotomy and separation between holding onto culture while increasing diversity. When asked, “Do you think that Spanish Harlem will ever lose its culture?” He responded with, “No. It was originally Spanish Harlem—always will be. There will always be Puerto Ricans [in Spanish Harlem] unless they make it unaffordable for everyone. But there will always be projects. A lot of people may say that we have to reclaim the neighborhood but that is just with a lack of knowledge.”\(^{30}\) Here, we see that Jonathan believes that the culture of East Harlem will never change despite the increase in other cultures moving into the neighborhood. His perception may derive from a belief that Spanish culture will never dissipate because Puerto Ricans will always hold a majority. But the numbers do not match that perception. During a 15 year period, from 1990 to

\(^{27}\) Personal Interview
\(^{28}\) Henry Yu, *Keywords For American Cultural Studies* (New York: New York University, 2007), 103-8.
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) Personal Interview
2005, there has been a decrease of 2,664 Puerto Ricans living in East Harlem. While that number may not sound astounding, Puerto Ricans “now make up about 35.3 percent of the neighborhood’s population, down from 39.4 percent in 1990.”\(^{31}\) Like Jonathan, Carmen Vasquez, a “public relations manager for Hope Community Inc., a private, nonprofit real estate and cultural organization in the neighborhood, said that the concentration of public housing and other low-income apartment units in East Harlem would keep the Puerto Rican population stable for now.”\(^{32}\)

What is not being discussed is the loss East Harlem’s name and identity of Spanish Harlem and El Barrio. One article by the New York Times denotes changes in nicknames for East Harlem. Some believe in extending the Upper East Side to include Spanish Harlem while others may call East Harlem the Upper Upper East Side. Others name changes include Upper Yorkville and SpaHa, which serves a shorter version of Spanish Harlem but can also be dubbed as a pun for SoHo. Such changes in names have been seen before as explained earlier by Ruth Glass when she stated that houses known as flats were now endeared as ‘houslets’ which she described as a term “of the new real estate snob jargon.”\(^{33}\)

In discussing the aforementioned real estate snob jargon, the issue of housing and displacement arises. For nearly all definitions of gentrification, there is a clause which describes displacement as a necessary byproduct of the process. In as early as 1985, we see that developers have purchased vacant lots and have built apartment buildings, brownstones, or


\(^{32}\) Ibid.

There has also been widespread purchasing of abandoned buildings and luxury condos.\textsuperscript{34} These measures, I believe, have largely lessened the impact of gentrification. Since, for the most part, buildings have not been taken over by more affluent individuals, displacement is minor. This is contrasted with the negative images of gentrification discussed earlier where displacement is portrayed as the agent that forces “working class folks and students [to] get run out of their neighborhood by rising rents, evictions, demolitions, and heavy-handed cops.”\textsuperscript{35} It is important to note that these events do happen but on a smaller scale than what is portrayed by the media. The New York Times, in an article written in 2007, describes that “in recent years, rising rents have caused many Puerto Ricans to leave for more affordable Hudson Valley towns, or for cities like Allentown and Bethlehem in Pennsylvania and Stamford and Bridgeport in Connecticut.”

In evaluating these claims it is important to understand that rents generally do rise after the terms of a lease are expired. The question that naturally follows and becomes, why then, do rising rents become attached to gentrification? In response to that question there are several possible explanations. One is that while rents constantly rise, the changes that occur in their neighborhood happen simultaneously. This combination may create the feeling of gentrification being synonymous with the rising rents. Another explanation may be due to the economy. While many working class and government assisted people fail to receive increases in pay and subsidies due to the economic recession, rent prices still increase and East Harlem residents are forced to find the difference. Finding the difference may foster fear of displacement which then,


in turn, becomes associated with gentrification. In this example, gentrification becomes a scapegoat.

But certainly such fears do become fruition. One interview led to meet Rosie Fernandez, an older woman who had lived and raised three children in the same three bedroom apartment for nearly thirty years. Now called Riverview Crossing, located on 101st Street and First Avenue, the complex offers one, two, and three bedroom apartments. Rosie described how one day, she was given a notice that she was to be moved from her three bedroom apartment to a one bedroom, third floor walkup. She recalls “crying for days” because not only was she was leaving an apartment filled with fond memories of her children growing up, but also because she only had a week to move out. She described that Riverview Crossing was once a public housing and rent controlled complex that had been relinquished from the New York City Housing Authority and given to a private developer. As she began to describe the changes in her area, she stated that she first noticed a park and baseball field which had now been the home of a CVS and Pay Half below, with a luxury apartment complex, called “The Aspen,” above.

She then began to describe the changes within her own apartment complex. First benches in the front of the complex were removed to prevent people from hanging out and talking. Then they changed the name from Metro North to Riverview Apartments. Then there was the addition of security and flowerbeds where the benches once stood. While the developers may have tried to change the name, “it will always be Metro North to me,” Rosie stated quite affirmatively.

Posing as a potential buyer, I decided to find out if this was in fact true. I was able to find out that indeed, Riverview Apartments were owned by a private developer who now would rent out Rosie’s three bedroom apartment for over $3000 per month. The sales representative

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36 Personal Interview.
37 Ibid.
boasted about the apartment having one and a half baths, granite countertops, 24 hour security and that most apartments had a terrace. Through this depiction of the apartment, again we see the description of “real estate snob jargon.”  

What is most interesting about this example is that developers were able to change the culture of an entire housing complex. Balconies have transformed into first rate terraces overlooking the courtyards. A once tight knit complex where residents talked and socialized during the summer had seemingly disappeared under the flowerbeds where benches used to be. Even the name of the complex is foreign to its long time apartment renters. This is the story for which gentrification receives its negative connotations. While I seek not to diminish this story, because indeed it is important, it is seemingly not widespread. But what it does call into question is Jonathan’s statement, “It was originally Spanish Harlem—always will be. There will always be Puerto Ricans… [in Spanish Harlem because] there will always be projects.”

Riverview Apartments displays the power of government and private companies to completely change this perception. New York Housing Authority’s decision to relinquish control of one housing complex may foster fears of resident’s in other public housing where they believed they were safe.

These fears are not comforted by Mayor Bloomberg’s Plan NYC. Plan NYC is essentially Bloomberg’s citywide strategy which seeks to increase green space, modify transportation, and increase housing. Under the housing expansion goal, Bloomberg seeks to make it affordable for New Yorkers. To solidify this thought in the public, Bloomberg has launched a campaign with signs on construction sites which read “Affordable Housing For New Yorkers.” This campaign, however, is only a smokescreen. Housing developers are only

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39 Personal Interview.
required to allocate 10% of their units to low income individuals, although some do more. Will East Harlem residents be forced into other boroughs or outside the city limits? It is a question too early to tell and one that should be investigated in several years.

While in the case of Spanish Harlem, we see that the gentrifiers are primarily white. The next question to answer is how Puerto Ricans feel about the interaction between themselves and their new neighbors. It is an interesting sight to see on 125th Street and Second Avenue near the Wagner Project Buildings. Wagner is comprised of about six, fifteen story buildings where all the residents receive government aid. Across the street is a recently completed luxury condo building. The demarcation between the two structures and classes is distinct. All of the residents interviewed did not mind having white neighbors. Sandra Lee, a student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, added that “it must be weird and awkward for them,” as she laughed. When I replied “why,” she stated because they aren’t used to seeing minorities and poverty on their doorstep. Lee’s statement brings about an important question: How will whites deal with poverty in their neighborhood? The Odyssey House, offers treatment (both mandated by courts and voluntary commitment) for substance abuse, mental illness, and homelessness for both adolescents and adults. This treatment facility is only two blocks away from luxury condos in East Harlem. It will be interesting to see whether the program changes its location or if money is given to update the existing facility. Another interesting topic is whether displaced individuals, like Rosie, harbor negative feelings towards whites; during a follow-up phone interview, Rosie explained that she did not. This was surprising given that whites were the gentrifiers and agents of change in her neighborhood. Rosie felt that it did not matter what ethnicity her upper-class neighbors were. Instead, she focused on government and a lack of representation. She described

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what she thought to be a struggle of class and that those who had more money yielded more political power and affirms her belief that it doesn’t matter if she votes. This again, discusses and reinforces the correlation between the power dynamic and “us versus them” mentality.

Conclusions

In total, we see that gentrification has affected El Barrio in several ways. We have noticed that residents believe that gentrification has decreased crime in their community. We also see that there is a simultaneous loss and gain of culture and that these attachments are dependent on who is being interviewed. Commercialized gentrification has also created a diversity of change. In some instances, we see that bodegas may be extinguished in order for gourmet stores to cater to new and more affluent publics. Additionally, in the case of Costco and Target, commercial gentrification gives residents access to products and stores they normally would not have the opportunity to enjoy. Lastly, we notice that gentrification has the ability to drastically change people’s living situation. But out of all of these factors and attributes, we see that, generally, gentrification is regarded as good and residents of Spanish Harlem welcome such changes. This is in stark contradiction to the cartoons, images, and newspaper titles discussed earlier in this project. Why then, do we attach gentrification as being wholly negative? Some might blame the media for unfair and unbalanced reporting while others may say we often focus on the negative. In Herman Melville’s short story Bill Budd, Sailor he writes “who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet ends and the orange tint begins? Distinctly we see the difference of the colors, but where exactly does the one first blindingly enter into the other?” So with gentrification. Gentrification manifests a variety of issues which on their own can be separated but when looking at the whole picture creates a problem in doing so. Revitalization of Harlem involves not only issues with class, but also of race, power, politics, culture, and
diversity. These problems are often exemplified when asking who being served during a given situation.

While I cannot propose a resolution to the disparities written herein, I can propose how to continually evaluate these problems. Because gentrification is an ongoing process, surveys and interviews should be done every few years so that if there are any changes in resident feelings, it can be observed. Also, more participants should be interviewed. This would provide researchers with the necessary archive to obtain a representative sample of East Harlem residents. With a more representative sample, researchers and readers would be able to get a better sample of East Harlem residents. In retrospect, I would also seek to show residents whom I interview the negative images and cartoons on gentrification. After showing them, I would then ask if they identified with any of the issues raised and if so what issues. Completing all of the above recommendations would improve the project itself and the longevity of its results.
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