A POCKET GUIDE TO GENTRIFICATION

Illustrated By: Juliana Widsdom

GENTRIFICATION AS DISPLACEMENT:
A SPOTLIGHT ON PHILADELPHIA

A PERSONAL NOTE

This project was born out of watching Philadelphia change rapidly as I have spent the last few years walking our city's streets and re-forming my own identity as a Philadelphian.

I was raised in the Philadelphia suburbs but spent much of my free time with my grandparents and parents in West Philly, South Philly, and Center City. I intentionally chose to return to West Philly, the neighborhood where my great-great grandparents settled after fleeing persecution in Russia as Jewish refugees in the early 1900s. Five generations of women in my family have lived in this neighborhood, from my great-great grandmother Ida, great grandma Bell, my grandmother Geraldine, and my mom Melissa. I know that the story of American city planning and its racist policies can be told through the experience of my family's history living in West Philly and their move to the suburbs. Yet, I have deep roots in this neighborhood and I walk the same streets of the women who raised me and passed down cultural and religious identity. My presence in this community space is a complex story.

As a white resident of West Philly, I am acutely aware of the role I play in gentrification of my own neighborhood. This guide is a small part of my efforts to address my role in this. I know that I currently reside in a part of the city that is historically Black and has not had the proper investment it deserves from the city until it began to gentrify, often because of its proximity to large Ivy League and healthcare institutions. I hope this guide can serve as a common resource for communities like West Philly, to use to have conversations about what gentrification is, its impact, and how communities in the midst of gentrification can address it and center, preserve, and celebrate the unique culture and assets of those communities. This project is a little love letter to Philadelphia; our city of brotherly love, sisterly affection, and sibling comaraderie. I love you Philly.

-Anneke Kat

Great Grandma Bell, Grandma Geraldine, Baby Me, My Mama Melissa

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INTRODUCTION

This pocket guide takes a critical look at that gentrification is, the historical events which created the conditions for it to flourish, and who it harms. It argues that gentrification creates key conditions to displace community residents who are vulnerable or marginalized by society in some way. It is by no means a comprehensive overview and does not offer strong economic analysis or cover the experience of loss of land of indigenous communities. What this guide does hold is a critique of gentrification with a critical eye to capitalism and the racism embedded in American culture and institutions. Hopefully this guide serves as an introduction to think more deeply about changing neighborhood landscapes. The tools included in this guide can provide some common language to this complex issue, encourage self-reflection, and stir up community engagement in any urban space.

The main question to hold while reading this guide and as you dive into this issue is, "Who is the neighborhood development and change for?"

WHAT IS GENTRIFICATION?

The term "gentrification" was first developed and used by a German Jewish born sociologist named Ruth Glass in late 1940s to describe the process of how the poor were squeezed out of parts of London so that wealthy and exclusive areas of the city could be created.[1] Glass studied sociology and focused on city planning in England starting in the late 1930s and felt strongly that the purpose of her research was to "influence government policy and bring about social change."[2] Ruth's original definition still sums up gentrification quite well, because it is essentially describing the conditions of displacement by pushing out of low-income/ "poor" city residents who often hold marginalized identities (race, class, immigration status, sexual orientation, ect) to make room for richer and often whiter city residents. So in the spirit of Ruth's work, let's dive into just what gentrification is here, in the urban United States.

The term "gentrification" can be seen as a political one, used in a negative way, to label the changes happening in a community. It can be seen as "too critical" of investment in neighborhoods that are often driven by capitalist or profit-based goals which will benefit just a few individuals. When gentrification is understood as a process that is inherently rooted in capitalism and the unequal treatment of neighborhoods and the marginalized groups in those areas, it is easier to understand it's harm on communities and begin to identify durable solutions to its impact.[3]

WHY IS GENTRIFICATION HAPPENING?

Wages have not increased at the same rate as the cost of living in the United States, and people are seeking out more affordable places to live.[3] Even people who earn relatively "middle class" wages have trouble finding housing they can afford. Many cities offer housing that is within their budget. Cities and their surrounding suburbs are often where many jobs are located, so for people seeking affordable housing close to their employment, it feels like a logical choice. As local city or municipal governments try to encourage people to move to their city, they begin to invest more money into potential "attractive" or "up and coming" neighborhoods by improving roads, public transportation services, beautifying public spaces or parks, and increasing policing.[5]

Investors will also notice this trend of movement and begin investing in building or remodeling housing to profit on the need for housing for new residents with increased spending capacity. Finally, American cities often have older, more historic homes that appeal to the style preferences of new residents.[6]
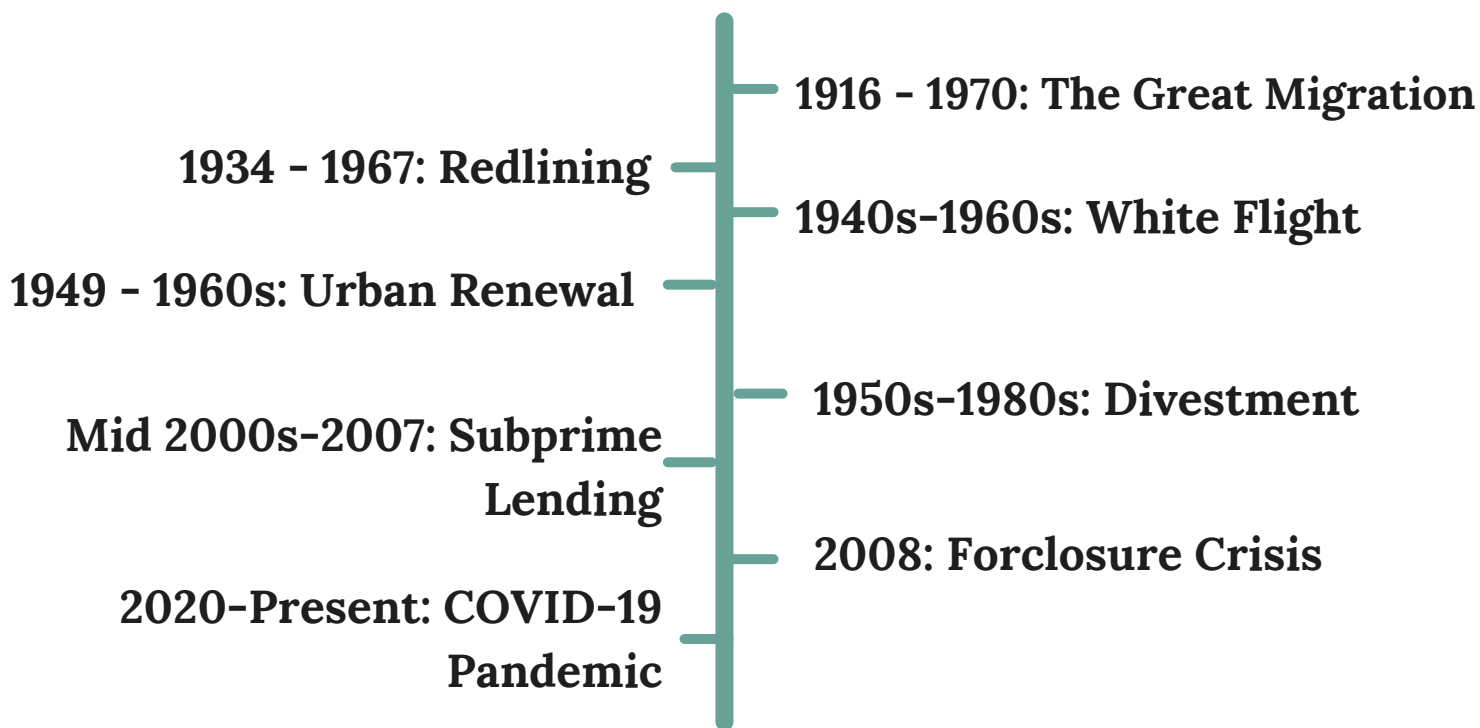
How did we get here? It's important to understand some of the big historical events and the legacy of racism in institutions, policies, and laws that led up to this moment.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

How America's History of Racial and Economic Inequality Led to Gentrification

Just as gentrification is a complex issue and the outcome of many different factors and circumstances, so are the historical events which created the perfect climate for this type of development and displacement to exist. Below are just a few key events, legislation, and historical movements which provide key context and background information to how gentrification has found its place in the fabric of changing urban spaces. This overview will demonstrate just how the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the drive for suburban expansion helped craft what we are experiencing in many urban neighborhoods today.

Timeline

1916 - 1970: The Great Migration

1934 - 1967: Redlining

1940s-1960s: White Flight

1949 - 1960s: Urban Renewal

1950s-1980s: Divestment

Mid 2000s-2007: Subprime Lending

2008: Forclosure Crisis

2020-Present: COVID-19 Pandemic

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Great Migration 1916 - 1970

The Great Migration describes the movement of approximately 6 million Black Americans from the south into northern and western cities during the 20th century. In 1900, 20% of Black Americans lived in cities and by 1970, 80% of Black Americans lived in cities. Similarly, in 1910 90% of Black Americans lived in the South, and by 1970 that number was down to 53% of Black Americans in the south, 40% in the north, and 7% in the west.[7] Most were fleeing a combination of racist violence, segregation, and economic depression as agricultural production declined, while many northern cities had increased industrial employment opportunities due to World War I and World War II production needs.[8]

Redlining 1934 - 1967

Redlining describes the phenomenon of lenders refusing to provide or insure mortgages in or near African-American neighborhoods, starting in 1934 when the Federal Housing Administration was founded. Maps of neighborhoods were literally marked with red lines, delineating where federally subsidized and insured mortgages for white Americans would be provided, and where those benefits would not be provided. Redlining caused de facto segregation in northern and western cities, barred African Americans from depression and World War I and II era social services and benefits for veterans, made homeownership nearly impossible for Black families, and caused African American neighborhoods to be overpriced and overcrowded due to the limited supply of available housing.[9] The Fair Housing Act of 1968 officially ended redlining, but did not provide compensation for decades of racist and exclusionary policies. Many Black Americans experienced racist violence, housing discrimination, and economic abuse in the northern and western cities they moved to.[10][11]

White Flight 1940s-1960s

Between 1940 and 1970, as 4 million Black Americans moved into northern and western cities, the proportion of white Americans in those metropolitan areas dropped from approximately two-thirds to one-third. For every Black American that moved into a metropolitan area, 2 white Americans left. This flight was due to overlapping racist and economic implications. In the suburbs, white Americans could take advantage of federal incentives for home-ownership and maintain well-funded segregated school systems.[12]

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
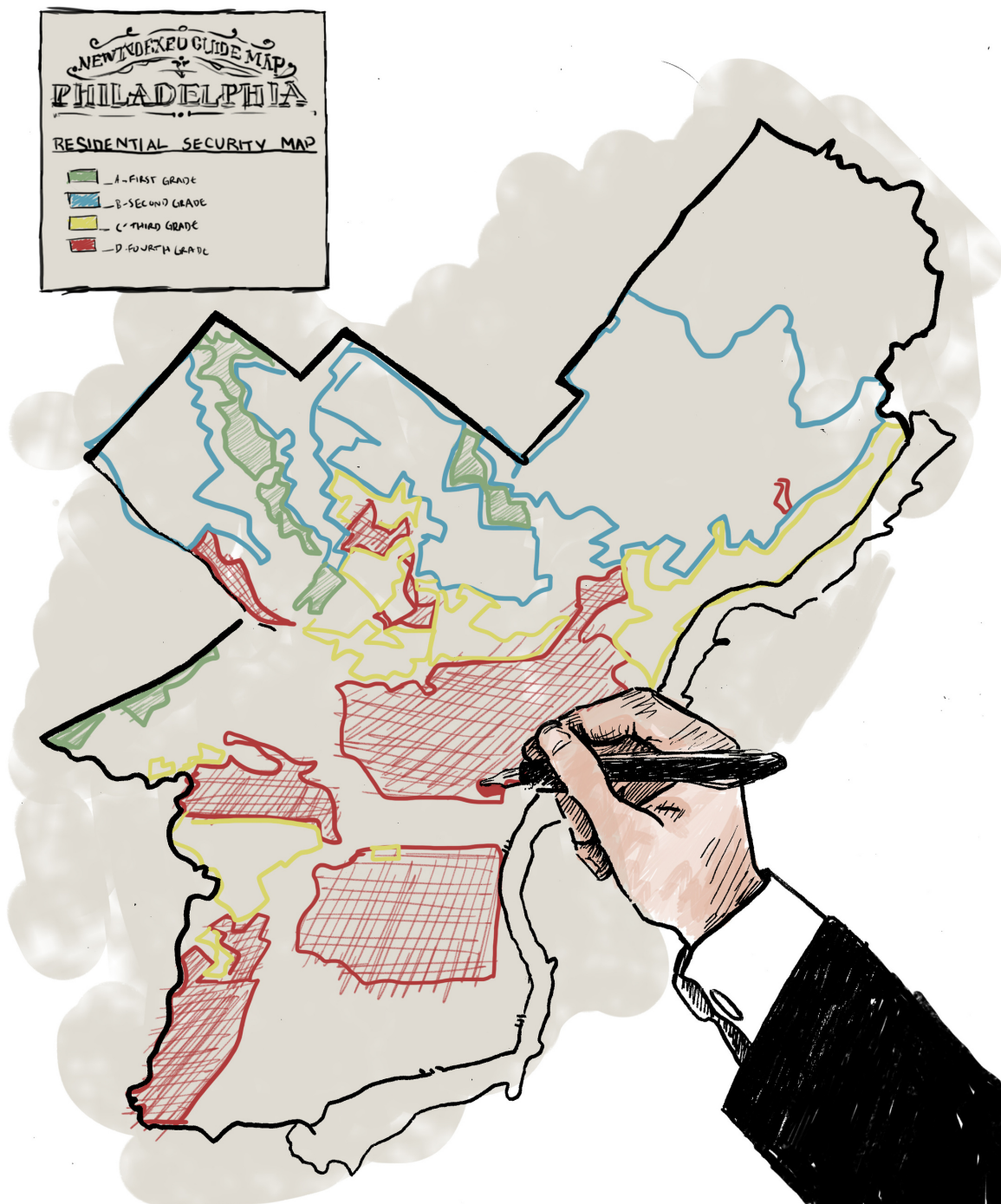
Illustrated By: Juliana Widsdom

Cartoon based off the Homeowners Loan Corporation Map from 1937.

Areas in red indicate neighborhoods where investment and mortgage lending was discouraged or prevented.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Urban Renewal 1949- 1960s

Urban renewal is the process of privately owned properties in a designated area being claimed by the government through eminent domain, the area being demolished, and then sold to private developers for other uses. The Federal Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 provided financial incentives for demolishing low-income urban areas and selling the land for private development.[13][14] The most common example of urban renewal in America is the federal highway system, funded by the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act, which disproportionately displaced Black communities in their construction, and then disconnected them from more affluent white neighborhoods.[15] As essayist James Baldwin said in 1963, "urban renewal... means negro removal."[16]

Divestment 1950s- 1980s

Following the White Flight and corresponding suburbanization of America in the post-World War II era, many major US cities lost population, which cut their tax bases and left less revenue for the city to spend. As a result, predominately Black and lower income neighborhoods in cities had less social services and a higher tax burden, and these neighborhoods were denied access to loans and insurance.[17] The inability to get insurance for homes and cuts to public services like firehouses caused an epidemic of fires in American cities that homeowners were unable to financially recover from.[18] The South Bronx is considered a case study for this pattern of disinvestment and displacement.[19] The neighborhoods ravaged by fires and abandoned buildings from disinvestment became classified as "blighted" by cities, which allowed state and local governments to condemn the properties, claim them with eminent domain, and then sell to private developers.[20]

Subprime Lending 2000s -2007

Subprime lending is the term for issuing loans to borrowers who may have difficulty maintaining a repayment schedule, and as a result come with higher interests rates, poor quality collateral, and less favorable terms.[21] In the early and mid 2000s, many subprime loans were issued to first-time homebuyers to obtain mortgages, increasing the demand and price for housing. Starting around 2007 a significant amount of subprime borrowers began defaulting on their mortgages, creating a ripple effect that lowered the demand for housing, cratered housing prices, and left borrowers with mortgages that cost more than the value of their homes.[22]

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Forclosure Crisis 2008

Over 3.8 million homes were foreclosed on from 2007 – 2010 as a historic amount of borrowers defaulted on their subprime mortgages.[23] Black communities had a disproportionate number of subprime loans and suffered from a correspondingly disproportionate amount of foreclosures when the Great Recession hit.[24] The disproportionate impact of the Great Recession on Black households widened the wealth gap between white and Black households to 20:1; in 2009 the median white household's net worth was $113,149, while the median Black household's net worth was $5,677.[25] Foreclosures of Black and lower income households of all races opened up opportunities for developers and wealthier individuals to buy homes at discounted prices in areas that lend themselves well to the gentrification process.

COVID-19 Pandemic 2019 - Present

While local and federal policies have delayed an immediate housing crisis, an estimated 30-40 million Americans would be evicted if foreclosure and eviction moratoriums are ended.[26] BIPOC (Black/Indigenous People of Color) communities have been disproportionately impacted economically by the pandemic and rent at higher rates than white families, leaving them particularly vulnerable to displacement and homelessness.[27] If the last housing crisis in the mid-2000s has taught us anything, the economic instability, eviction crisis, and recession of this era will widen the gap of equity in access to housing or maintaining homes and communities in neighborhoods vulnerable to displacement.

WHAT DOES GENTRIFICATION LOOK LIKE?

How can you tell if gentrification is happening around you? You may already be aware of this but lacked a name for the trend. Below is a short list of general characteristics of gentrification compiled by the Urban Displacement Project:

- <u>Real estate speculation</u> where investors are "flipping" houses for a high profit, developers rehabbing older homes or building expensive housing that is out of character with the architecture of the community, and landlords who raise their rents and seek higher paying tenants. [28]
- <u>Increased investment</u> or "nicer" neighborhood amenities like public transportation, parks, improved roads/sidewalks, etc. [29]
- <u>Change in land use</u> that may look like industrial spaces or abandoned plots turning into restaurants, apartments, storefronts, or office buildings. [30]
- <u>Community character or cultural-feel changes</u> like the demographic of people in the neighborhood starting to change. In the United States this often means wealthier whiter people. Community businesses that were previously run by community members may be replaces by businesses who cater to these newer residents. [31]

In many cities around the USA, gentrification sounds like sudden and constant construction. All of a sudden there are stores and restaurants offering expensive and niche goods. There might be a certain type of apartment building or house that signals gentrification in your neighborhood. In Philadelphia, it looks like this, with newer, poorly constructed condos, interspersed between existing older homes:
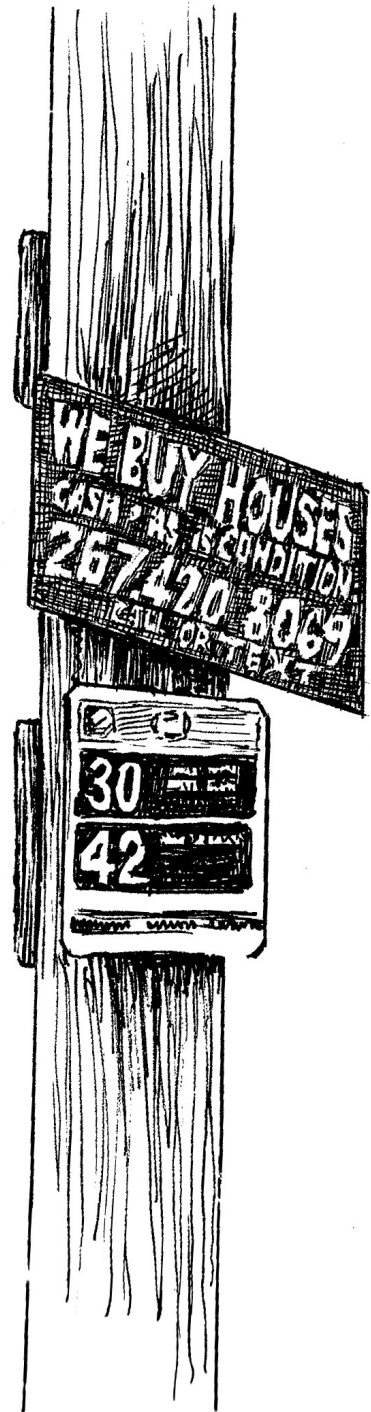

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As the global community looks to address climate change and many companies market their products as "green" or "environmentally friendly," cities are doing the same thing by building new "green" buildings, installing solar panels, adding fancier green spaces or parks, all in the name of addressing climate change. These new additions to the city landscape may seem fancy, exciting, and a step in the right direction, but these projects can also serve as another way to push our long time marginalized residents. This is often referred to as "low-carbon gentrification." [32]

WHAT DOES GENTRIFICATION LOOK LIKE?

In neighborhoods located on the edge of where gentrification has already had an impact there may be overt signs of investors or people looking to take advantage of the recent "economic success" of the surround areas. This could look like signs posted on light posts offering to buy houses for cash or "in any condition." These are predatory investors looking for people in desperate economic situations who will sell their homes at very undervalued price. They are then often renovated and resold for a large profit margin.

Reflection Break:
Have you noticed any of these characteristics in your own neighborhood? What about neighborhoods you have visited or go to often?

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GENTRIFICATION AS DISPLACEMENT

What is Lost? What is the Impact?

Gentrification can have an impact on various aspects of the lives of residents in a neighborhood. Many of the characteristics listed above are positive changes. Nice parks, new housing, improved access to transportation, and new shops are all ways gentrification can seemingly have a positive impact at first glance.

Upon a closer look, gentrification impacts communities in a negative way as well. This guide primarily focuses on how gentrification creates the perfect set of conditions for the displacement of community residents who most often are lower income, communities of color, or are immigrants. Not only does gentrification lead to the displacement of people, it can also serve as the catalyst for small businesses, religious communities, or other institutions to be displaced or close as well.

The negative impact of gentrification affects the most marginalized groups of residents in that community first and foremost. Research has proven that gentrification does lead to the displacement of marginalized community members and has a variety of negative effects on individuals' wellbeing. In the United States, a person's zip code may be one of the best indicators as to what their quality of life will be like.[33]

There are a few forms of displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods.

Direct Displacement: This happens when residents cannot afford their housing because of rising costs. They may experience lease non-renewals, evictions, or property taken by eminent domain. Sometimes the physical condition of homes deteriorates to a point that it is no longer livable and investors wait for residents to leave or abandon the property for redevelopment opportunities.[34]

Note: These events may often happens in lower income neighborhoods but it becomes a contributing factor to gentrification when it happens in a community where there is new real estate development and a noticeable increase in wealthier residents.

GENTRIFICATION AS DISPLACEMENT

What is Lost? What is the Impact?

Indirect Displacement (or Exclusionary Displacement): **This form of displacement refers to what happens once low income residents move out. The homes they vacate become too expensive for other low income residents to live in because the rent rates are increased or because home prices have also increased. Sometimes discriminatory practices are used such as refusing to accept government housing vouchers.[35]**

Cultural Displacement: **This third and final form of displacement may often be very visible. Businesses, services and institutions change to serve newer residents, the character of the neighborhood chances (style of housing, visible community members, community events change, police are called more often, ect). Remaining or original community members may feel a sense of disconnections or dislocation from the community.[36]**

After providing a sense of some of the types of displacement gentrification produces, let's focus on the impact on the community members who are displaced. These community members are most likely to be displaced to even lower-income neighborhoods.[37] This movement and disruption in their lives can have a profoundly negative impact.

Displacement can have the following negative impacts:

Evictions: **When rents and housing prices increase to profit off of, and meet the demand of the changing community demographics, evictions increase. Additionally, during times of economic downturn, people struggle to pay their mortgages or property taxes because of loss of income. Studies have shown that Black and Hispanic/Latinx renters experience these evictions in greater numbers than white renters. [38]**

Education: **For children and adolescents who are displaced or experience frequent moves experience disruptions in their educational success and lower their test scores.[39]**

GENTRIFICATION AS DISPLACEMENT

What is Lost? What is the Impact?

Health: Displacement and eviction was found to increase an adult's chance of experiencing depression by 20%. [40] While the impact on children was found to indicate "higher levels of behavioral and emotional problems; increased teenage pregnancy rates; accelerated initiation of illicit drug use; adolescent depression; and reduced continuity of healthcare"[41]

Political Disempowerment: As residents become more disconnected from their original communities, they have less political power as voting blocks. Communities interests that would normally drive community organizing are less likely to happen, leading to less advocacy before, during and after elections.[42]

Impact on Surround Neighborhoods: Studies have shown that when residents are displaced to worse-off neighborhoods, it can increase the poverty conditions of that community and prevent residents' economic mobility. [43]

HOW TO COMBAT GENTRIFICATION

At this point in the guide, you may be asking yourself, is all investment or neighborhood improvement/investment bad? The answer is no. But the central question remains, who is it for? When the answer becomes "newer, wealthier residents," then it's time to interrogate what is going on. There is no one simple strategy to tackle gentrification. This guide has hopefully shown that it is a complex issue that involves the impact of capitalism, racism and how that intersects with housing development, urban planning and public policies. Below are a few ways to start thinking about addressing the issue.

HOW TO COMBAT GENTRIFICATION

Some Proactive Measures Are:

- Identify neighborhoods that are susceptible to displacement through gentrification, are already gentrifying and connect with the groups of residents who will feel that impact the most. Cities and advocacy groups/organizations can tailor responses on a hyper-local level to ensure there is impact. For example, strategies to assist renters may be different than strategies to assist homeowners. [44]

- Here are 5 suggested identifiers for vulnerability:[45]
  - Renters
  - Low-income households
  - Residents of color
  - Households headed by individuals without a college degree
  - Families with children who live at or below the poverty line

- Cities should identify neighborhoods vulnerable to displacement or experiencing displacement before large infrastructure projects or economic development projects– gentrification is much harder to stop once it has started. [46]

- Some cities have enacted a "right of return" or similar policies aimed at assisting displaced former residents of gentrified neighborhoods access housing in those communities. [47]

Whiles these suggestions are powerful, they require a level of proactive community cooperation and local political will power that may feel unrealistic. Economic gains and the success of developers, landlords, and businesses often over-ride the work and investment it takes to utilize these types of solutions. Should city governments take notice and implement this type of awareness and community care, it would also require the assistance of experts who can create sustainable solutions tailored to the housing needs, zoning laws, and economic development goals of a city.

City governments and communities usually find themselves in the tough spot of addressing gentrification and its displacement after it has already begun. Many of the examples provided in the case study below about Philadelphia are examples of this reactive approaches to address gentrification. A truly impactful approach will need to be tailored to the specific needs and complex issues facing communities on a hyper-local level, this is why it is hard to suggest approaches in this short overview.

GENTRIFICATION IN PHILADELPHIA

Growth & Change, But For Who?

Have you noticed the hastily built condos and apartments, new "trendy" stores popping up, and the constant hum of construction and road work. If you live in Philadelphia, you have probably encountered it some spaces like West Philly, Brewerytown, Point Breeze, North Philly, Strawberry Mansion and Kensington. In this flashy explosion of construction and building boom, who is all this of this for? You might already know the answer to that question by now.

First it is important to point out who are the original stewards of the land that is now known at Philadelphia. For over 10,000 years the Lenape people were caretakers of this land.[48] Over the last 250+ years members of this community have been forced off their land, dispersed across the country and some Lenape people still remain in the region.[49] Conversations around gentrification can often center around who should maintain access to land and community, it is essential to learn about the history of and current experiences of the Lenape people when actively addressing who has access to the city's land and resources.

Philadelphia is the nation's 6th largest city, yet is the poorest city in the United States with a steady "deep poverty" rate of 27%, making this large population low-income residents vulnerable to displacement and without access to increased affordable housing.[50] This is incredibly important because much of the debate around gentrification in Philadelphia focuses on housing and the lack of affordable housing amidst a development boom. The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia identified a 20% drop in affordable housing between 2000-2014, a percentage that continues to increase.[51]

Philadelphia's historical experience with segregation divestment and ultimately gentrification closely mirrors that of the timeline outlined earlier in this guide. The imprint of segregation is still highly visible in this city. Now gentrification has begun to displace residents from historically Black neighborhoods, changing their cultural gifts and displacing its residents and their history.

Among American cities, Philadelphia has a high rate of gentrification.[52] With large numbers of neighborhoods experiencing gentrification and residents displaced, Philadelphia ranks among the worst cities for displacement of Black residents. [53] In North South, and West Philadelphia the Black population has dropped by 22%-35% in just two decades.[54] Understanding gentrification through an understanding institutional racism, anti-blackness and white supremacy is essential in a city that is predominantly Black, and with more than 2/3 of the city identifying as non-white.[55]

GENTRIFICATION IN PHILADELPHIA

One policy that has been seen as a catalyst to gentrification in the city in the last decade is the 10-Year Property Tax Abatement. This policy benefits developers building newly constructed properties. They do not need to pay property taxes for a decade while charging high prices or rents for newly constructed homes or commercial buildings. This occurs most often in gentrifying neighborhoods while neighboring home or property owners see their property taxes rise because of improvements made in their communities. [56] The Abatement also decreases the amount of tax money the city can utilize to fund essential services. In just 2020 alone, the city lost $109 million in property tax income to the Abatement. [57]

Philadelphia as a city continues to be vulnerable to gentrification and has already experienced its impact on a large scale with entire neighborhoods' demographics, business, culture and architecture transformed. Gentrification will continue to deeply impact and displace communities if not more aptly addressed. Below I have outline a few ways some key players in the city have approached addressing the displacement which occurs as a result of gentrification.

ADDRESSING GENTRIFICATION IN PHILADELPHIA: LOCAL GOVERNMENT

While the City Council of Philadelphia has taken some small legislative steps to address the Tax Abetment, gradually decreasing the abetment rate to new participants over a ten-year span. Other city government offices are offering programs to assist resident homeowners in addressing the impact of gentrification. [58] Let's explore a few of these programs and their impact.

Longtime Owner Occupant Program (LOOP): This program assists homeowners who have lived in their properties for over 10 years, experienced very high increases in property taxes owed to the city, and meet low-income eligibility requirements.[59] The program lowers their property tax rates by 50%, ensuring that they can potentially afford to stay in their homes as gentrification causes property values and taxes to rise around them.

The Senior Freeze Program: Similarly, this program is based on age and income level and "freezes" the property tax rates for senior citizens so they have a predicable bill rate each year.[60] This is helpful for ensuring older, longtime residents can stay in their communities while living on fixed incomes.

More than 29,000 Philadelphians have enrolled in these programs (17,500 senior citizens) in 2019. Together these residents accessed $21 million in tax property relief. [61]

ADDRESSING GENTRIFICATION IN PHILADELPHIA: LOCAL GOVERNMENT

<u>Owner Occupied Payment Agreement (OOPA):</u> This program assists homeowners on paying late property taxes based on their income needs. Often back-owned property taxes, particularly as they increase, can contribute to residents losing their homes.[62] Currently 13,161 home owners are working with the city on over $86 million in late tax payments are under assistance. [63]

While these programs are certainly helpful to long time or older community member to stay in their homes, they only address the impacts of gentrification after they happen. These programs are just a few of the ways City Government entities are addressing gentrification's impact, but they are not very proactive in preventing it. Additionally, there are very few protections or supportive programs for renters.

ADDRESSING GENTRIFICATION IN PHILADELPHIA: ORGANIZATIONS

Unbound by the constraints of government, nonprofit organizations are able to operate in collaboration or in support of communities and residents vulnerable to, or experiencing gentrification. Below are two examples of organizations operating in gentrifying Philadelphia neighborhoods who are support community members and small businesses to remain in their communities.

<u>New Kensington Community Develop Corporation (NKCDC):</u> This community development corporation (CDC) offers a variety of supportive housing, commercial and community services to residents and businesses in Kensington and its surrounding neighborhoods. NKCDC assists local small businesses owners in accessing grant funding, finical counseling, and other types of support to ensure that business owners are successful and can stay in their local communities.[64] Together with a coalition of other CDCs in Philadelphia, NKCDC developed a guide to equitable development policies for development in Philadelphia informed by the needs and knowledge of community members.[65] It tackles everything from creating of affordable housing, to creating opportunities for neighborhood business districts and job creation, to addressing blight and vacant lots or homes.[66] This document also focuses specifically on displacement of residents and what threats and impacts are. This policy guide is incredibly comprehensive while offering information and suggestions which may fit into more mainstream development goals or projects already.

<u>Women's Community Revitalization Project (WCRP):</u> In 2006 WCRP founded the Community Justice Land Trust with a coalition of community organizations/partners in Eastern North Philadelphia.

The aim was to address the rising cost of housing, unaffordable new housing, and to gain control over abandoned properties or vacant lots in the community. The Land Trust remains accountable to city residents and community organizations. It acquires land through purchase or gifts and holds the land in a trust, offering long-term affordable leases to businesses, community gardens or affordable housing. The Trust can also sell properties to community members at affordable rates, selling the home but maintaining trust ownership of the land to ensure it remains affordable. When a family moves, they are able to sell the home at an affordable price to another family.[67] This community-centered model ensure that communities regain control over land and ensures the affordability of housing for community residents.

Both of these examples are utilizing strategies that are both addressing gentrification after it occurs, but are offering more community-driven approaches. They are just a small sample of the diverse community work happening in the city.

ADDRESSING GENTRIFICATION IN PHILADELPHIA: GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

Philadelphia has a rich landscape and history of grassroots community led movements, organizing, and mutual aid. This is even more visible since the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and the uprisings for racial justice in the summer of 2020. The discussion around gentrification and it's impacts of displacement and disinvestment to low-income and historically Black neighborhoods has been at the center of these visible grassroots efforts and conversations.

Dox Thrash House: Dox Thrash was a well-known Black artist who lived and worked in Philadelphia's historic Sharswood neighborhood and his prints are famous for documenting everyday Black life starting in the 1930s. Sharswood was once a hub for Black economy, arts, theater and activism in Philadelphia starting in the 1920s after the Great Migration. Since its golden era, the area experienced divestment/abandonment and is now experiencing gentrification. Both long time Black residents and historical landmarks are threatened with displacement from the community. A group of local community activists and artist have organized a campaign to fund the purchase and rehabilitation of Dox Thrash's home. This community funded project will preserve this significant historical landmark and become a space for the public to learn about Thrash's and Sharwood's history, become a hub to support local entrepreneurship, and revitalize a struggling block. The project hopes to set an example of responsible development in the Sharwood neighborhood.[68]

ADDRESSING GENTRIFICATION IN PHILADELPHIA: GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

OccupyPHA & Protest Encampments for Housing Access: For four months during the summer and fall of 2020, two encampments of individuals without homes sprung up in the downtown museum district area of Philadelphia. Aided by many community groups and activists, these encampments located themselves near or in front of the offices of the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA), a federally funded housing agency, to protest the affordable housing crisis in the city. They also demanded access to more affordable housing and community ownership over abandoned houses owned by the agency. PHA insisted that these individuals could not jump the waitlist of several thousand people awaiting access to housing through their institution. This tense situation between the encampment residents and city and government agencies inspired clashes with police and protests.[69]After many months of negations and organized efforts, the OccupyPHA activists and encampment residents reached an agreement to transfer 50 abandoned properties owned by PHA to a community land trust. Additionally, PHA would fund the rehabilitation of 8 homes for encampment residents to live in, training those individuals in partnership with the Building and Construction Trades Council, to work on the homes. The land trust will be governed by a board and managed by formerly homeless tenants. In the meantime, many of the encampment residents were also connected to services and temporary housing as well. [70]

This is just a brief snapshot of the vast diversity of ways Philadelphia community members, institutions, and government bodies are engaging in how gentrification is unfolding in the city and how it may be addressed. Access to safe and affordable housing, preventing displacement and preserving and celebrating the historical of marginalized communities are all issues central to how Philadelphia is experiencing gentrification.

The impact of gentrification is a central part of conversations and efforts focused on systemic racism, improving economic equity, and addressing climate change in the city of Philadelphia. If you're a Philadelphian, do a little research about your own neighborhood and how gentrification is impacting your community or neighbors. There are many organizations, projects, and activists engaged in this work. Below are some tools to begin in engaging around this conversation, whether you live in Philadelphia or not.

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION GUIDE

Tools for Self-Reflection & Community Conversation

Illustrated By: Juliana Widsdom

- **Map Making Activity**
- **Gentrification Community Conversation Guide**
- **Advocacy Reflection & Action**

MAP MAKING ACTIVITY

This activity can be done individually or as a group. This activity requires paper, pen/pencil and makers/crayons/colored pencils.

Step 1: Start off by making a list of places near your home that are important to you or that you visit on a regular basis.

Think about:

- **Stores/Restaurants**
- **Friends or family you may visit**
- **Neighbors you know**
- **Places of Worship**
- **School/University**
- **Library/ Recreation center/Gym**
- **Parks/Green spaces**
- **Historic Landmarks**

Write what you think of easily! That's your list.

Step 2: Look at your list. How does it make you feel?

Write 3-5 things you are grateful based on your list. Example: I am grateful that my close friends live 3 blocks away. I am grateful to have a park near my home so I can enjoy the old trees in different seasons.

Step 3: Get creative! (if you want to) Grab some paper, a pen/pencil, or art supplies if you want to. Draw out a simple map of the spaces. You don't need to be a fancy artist; it can be as simple or elaborate/colorful as you want.

Step 4: Here is the hard part. Take a pen or marker and slowly cross off 5 of your favorite places on your map. That store you liked? Well they went out business and now are a restaurant selling food you don't enjoy. The food cart by the park? That's gone too. Your local neighborhood school? It closed to due budget cuts a few years ago and now it's being turned into loft apartments! You get he idea. Now cross off 2 more.

MAP MAKING ACTIVITY

Step 5: Reflect. How did the crossing off process feel? What would your life feel like without those places?

For those who have experienced gentrification in their neighborhood already, you may find that many of the places you listed are already gone and you already have had to experience or navigate that sense of loss.

What has it felt to watch your community change?
If you're in a group setting, share your maps and your small groups.

FACILITATING A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON GENTRIFICATION: A Suggested Guide

Opening The Conversation

- **Introduce yourself & any other facilitators**
- **State the goals for the gathering. If this is an open community meeting, ask community members what their hopes/goals where in attending the meeting. Write these someplace where everyone can see.**

If you have the time; ask community members to draft guidelines/rules/agreements for their time together. If you have less time, I have provided some below.

- **Respect; listen to and respect all points of view**
- **Curiosity: seek to understand, not to respond to what you just heard someone say. Look for new points of view and for common ground.**
- **Sincerity: speak authentically/honestly about what has personal meaning to you, not about others**
- **Keep it short; share the time, try to listen more**
- **Messiness: expect honest and difficult conversations to be messy sometimes**
- **Respect: keep personal stories in the group, bring your whole attention**
- **"I don't know" is a perfectly good answer!**
- **This is a brave space, not a safe space. We cannot guarantee everyone's emotional safety all the time. We hope you will be brave with us and share and listen to what is new, different, or hard.**

FACILITATING A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON GENTRIFICATION:
A Suggested Guide

If you have the time, open with a brief activity to get to know who is in the room. I provided an activity below but feel free to play a brief game or ice breaker you like!

"Who Am I" Activity

This is a powerful way to demonstrate the complex and diverse identities we all have and how they might influence a conversation or our opinion. This activity can happen with as few or as many people as you want. As participants to get into pairs with someone they don't know or don't know well.

Pass out paper and pens if possible. Offer an introduction to intersectional identities. Here is good resource to brush up on that: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality

- Give everyone about 2 minutes to write down as many identities that they can think of. (Examples: sister, friend, neighbor, athlete, Asian, Muslim, middle class, bisexual, ect)
- Ask participants to count how many identities they thought of. Take a poll of everyone's total.
- Ask the pairs of community member to share their lists with each other. Ask them to reflect on how it felt to come up with the list.

Community Conversation

It is useful to structure your community conversation around a shared experience or educational resource. I would suggest using a video, radio clip, or newspaper article focused on the topic for all participants to engage in. This should take no more than 5-12 minutes to watch/listen to/read. Introduce the resource and name that not everyone has to agree with the content.

Things to consider of participants; literacy level, English proficiency, need to interpretation, familiarity with the topic

Suggested Resource for Philadelphians: WHYY has a series of radio stories and articles
https://whyy.org/series/gentrified-stories-rapidly-changing-philadelphia/

FACILITATING A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON GENTRIFICATION:
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After listening to the clip together, ask everyone to reflect on or write down what stood out to them the most. Then provide 2-3 questions to help guide the conversation if needed. If the group is more than 15 people, split up into smaller groups and designate a facilitator who can ensure the group follows the guidelines. Generally, let the conversation flow for around 15 to 45 minutes.

Closing the Community Conversation

When closing out your time as a group; you may want to consider the following things. If you are deciding collectively as a group if and how you want to do anything together, this could be a great closing discussion.

What is next for our community, neighborhood, group, school, organization, ect?

Are there partnerships that can be formed from this group or it's connections?

What is next for this particular group of community members? Do we want to meet again? For what purpose and who will be our leadership?

What is next for us as individuals?

Should this group of participants decide to collectively act and advocate for community needs and address identified displacement, the structured reflection activity below is a great place to start.

ADVOCACY REFLECTION & ACTION

Use this pyramid to reflect on your own role in addressing any community issue or social justice cause. This reflection tool is inspired by the Mercy Justice Advocacy Approach and also provides a way to think through what knowledge, networks, skills and assets you or a group may hold to address gentrification.

Advocacy Leading to Action

- Protesting
- Lobbying Intervention Meetings
- Letter Writing
- Informed Advocacy

Who Stands with Us?

- Personal /Professional Networks
- Coalitions
- Allies

Advocacy for Whom?
Who is in power and who is being oppressed?
Who's voices should be centered?
On whose terms do we advocate?

Tools For Advocacy
Systems Analysis/Root Cause Analysis   Fact Finding
Deconstructing the Problem   Social Analysis
Reading/Observing   Human Rights Analysis

Self Reflection
Who Am I? What Power Do I Hold? What Do I Need to Learn?

Experience
Listening to People & the Earth

This tool was adapted from the Mercy Justice Advocacy Approach Tool crafted by Aine O'Connor RSM and Angela Read RSM 2015

SUGGESTED RESOURCES
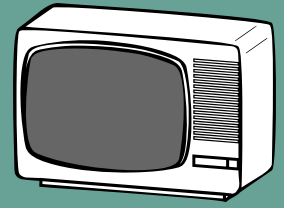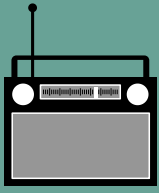
Read

The Color of Law
by Richard Rothstein
Crabgrass Frontier
by Kenneth T. Jackson

The Warmth of Other Suns
by Isabel Wilkerson
The Case for Reparations
by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Explore

Urban Displacement Project

Inequality: Redlining in New Deal

Arial Maps of American Cities: "60 Years of Urban Change"

The Uprooted Project

Listen

Nice White Parents
NY Times Podcast
Neighbors
Community Stories

Gentrified: Stories of A Rapidly Changing Philadelphia
WHYY Selected Radio Stories

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